

PRESS RELEASE

High-Level Roundtable on Administrative Reforms: From Vision to Action April 2, 2017, New Delhi

The Bharti Institute of Public Policy, Indian School of Business (ISB), Mohali, organized a High-Level Roundtable on 'Administrative Reforms: From Vision to Action,' on Sunday, April 2, 2017, in Habitat Centre, New Delhi. A first of its kind gathering had following six former Cabinet secretaries to Government of India as panellist: Mr. Naresh Chandra, Mr. Surendra Singh, Mr. TSR Subramanian, Mr. B. K. Chaturvedi, Mr. K. M. Chandrasekhar, and Mr. Ajit Seth.

The main purpose of this Roundtable was to focus on the 'implementation' aspects of administrative reforms and explore why India does not have a robust track record of implementing 'good' ideas on administrative reforms, often in spite of the Government agreeing to do so. In this Roundtable sought to have a moratorium on generating new ideas on administrative reforms (India already has a huge backlog of unimplemented ideas!) and the entire focus was on exploring ways to ramp-up our implementation record for administrative reforms.

The audience had several serving Secretaries and former secretaries to Government of India. In addition, to other senior official of GOI, Mr. Amitabh Kant, CEO, NITI Aayog and Mr. Didar Singh, Secretary General, FICCI, serving and former PSU chiefs, also participated in the Roundtable deliberations moderated by Professor Prajapati Trivedi of Indian School of Business. A standing room audience of 150 consisted largely of well-placed ISB alumni from both public and private sectors.

While this Roundtable is expected to be the first of a series of similar Roundtables in the future involving other stake-holders like politicians as panellists, following main points seem to have emerged from the deliberations:

1. In most instances, it was felt there was no genuine political commitment for administrative reforms. Some of these Commissions were set up to buy time and hope the problem would go away on its own. Some commissions and committees were set up to provide sinecures to politicians.
2. Even when there was political will, often it was not matched by adequate capacity in bureaucracy to implement it. For example, there is a widespread belief that the reform of the Annual Performance Appraisal Report in Central Government has made matters worse.
3. It is generally difficult for patients to heal themselves. Thus, politicians must make use of vast talent pool available outside government to bring about change. Same people who are cause of the problem cannot be expected to fix it.
4. Ideally, they should utilise the talents and experiences of civil servants who have taken leave of

5. Experience with reforms suggests that the most difficult reforms have to be implemented at the beginning of the term of any government. Administrative reforms are the backbone of financial, commercial, social, and economic reforms. Thus, they must be a high priority for any government as they come to office. The success of all other reforms depends on an effective administrative machinery.
6. Administrative reforms should be implemented as part of a larger framework for performance management. Implementing administrative reforms should have consequences - efforts in this area should be rewarded and failure to implement should be punished.
7. The Government must define what 'successful' implementation of administrative reforms means. We must know when to declare victory or defeat.
8. Finally, administrative reforms have to be undertaken in mission mode. We must have evangelising missionaries leading them.