

New system for rating bureaucrats open to bias: Anand Sharma

The government's new system of rating officers on the basis of a 360-degree approach is opaque and susceptible to bias, manipulation and lacks fairness, a parliamentary standing committee has said. The 360-degree approach is a new multi-source feedback system for performance appraisal of bureaucrats started by the current government for future postings. The system seeks to look beyond the ratings received in appraisal reports written by their bosses. It relies on feedback of juniors and other colleagues for an all-round view. The government has been showcasing the 360-degree approach as one of its major administrative reforms. "... The present 360-degree appraisal system opaque, non-transparent, and subjective. Feedback in this process is obtained informally, making the process susceptible to being manipulated," the Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice said in its report tabled in Rajya Sabha Tuesday.

The report mentions that most central posts of joint-secretary level and upwards go to IAS officers and adds that the majority of top posts should not go to any one service leaving others services out in the Central Staffing Scheme. Since the new 360-degree system hinges on feedback about officers received from people who have worked with them - juniors and peers included- the committee noted that such feedback could lack objectivity.

"Feedback received from subordinates and stakeholders could be biased or lack objectivity, particularly if the officer had to discipline his subordinates or he was unable to meet the unjustified demands of stakeholders," says the report of the multi-party committee headed by Anand Sharma, Congress leader in Rajya Sabha. "Acting on such feedback behind the back of the officer may not be legally tenable particularly if it adversely affects the empanelment prospects of the officer."

The report notes that the 360-degree approach does not have any statutory backing, or supported by any Act. "There is no statutory backing to the scheme to the scheme and it is based on executive instructions only," the report says. The report also mentions the report of the Second Administrative Reforms Commission set up by the UPA-II government to say that the multi-source feedback system was not suitable for India.

"In the context of India, where strong hierarchical structures exist and for historical and social reasons it may not be possible to introduce this system unless concerns of integrity and transparency are addressed," the report says, quoting the administrative reforms commission.

The committee recommended that the empanelment process be more objective, transparent and fair.

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