

IAS Training is Getting an Upgrade under Modi. Global Experts, Nationalism & Corporate Touch

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Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration has roped in experts from World Bank, IMF SARTTAC & revamped study module for IAS trainees to change bureaucratic system.



File photo of a batch of trainee civil servants at the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration, Mussoorie | Representational image | Credit: LBSNAA | Facebook

New Delhi: Reform, perform and transform — these were the focus of Prime Minister Narendra’s Modi’s [address](#) to a new batch of young IAS trainees in March this year. With this message in mind, the Modi government has been incorporating new ideas from the corporate sector to change the “bureaucratic and status quoist system” in the country and has even roped in global experts to train young officers, ThePrint has learnt.

The Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration (LBSNAA), a civil service training institute in Uttarakhand, has brought in domain experts from the World Bank, [IMF SARTTAC](#) (International Monetary Fund-South Asia Regional Training and Technical Assistance Center), Singapore’s Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy (LKY) and Australia’s Carnegie Mellon University, to coach trainee officers. It has also revamped its study modules over the past two years, to instill nationalism in the officers, while focusing on “desiloisation” of the system, sources in the institute told ThePrint.

Trainee officers who have been part of the LBSNAA's new programme and are now posted in their respective state cadres, told ThePrint they had been tasked with tracing freedom fighters in villages where they were sent as a part of their courses.

"The curriculum has changed from what it used to be earlier. Apart from field experts and sports celebrities, the institute also gets faculty members from various international institutes. On our district visits, we are asked to meet family members of people who contributed to the freedom struggle, as every district in India has such families," said an IAS officer from the 2020 batch, who completed the foundation course last year.

The officer added: "We were also trained to handle people with disabilities with sensitivity, there is a short course for that. Under the 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav' programme (Union government's celebration of 75 years of Indian independence), we were assigned to find and list the unsung heroes of India."

A subject by the name of 'Forgotten heroes of India' has been included in the study module and the IAS academy has introduced a programme called 'Sabka Saath', as part of which Padma awardees are invited to the institute for special sessions and lectures. 'Sabka Saath' is modelled on Modi's 'Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas' campaign which symbolises inclusivity, a senior IAS officer, who is also a faculty member at the institute, told The Print.

In a detailed response to ThePrint's questions on the new study modules and the inclusion of experts from global institutes and private organisations as visiting faculty, the office of LBSNAA director Srinivas Katikithala stated, "To ensure that the quality of professional learning is holistic, desiloised, appropriate and of a high order, the Academy through rigorous assessment of training needs, through internal collaborative action with high quality knowledge partners, is curating fresh content."

Even though the new study modules are aimed at "bringing efficiency and building a performance-oriented competitive frame of work", a section of senior officers feel that such programmes will not help officers, who need to learn through experience and not from international academics and policy experts.

"Foreign academics or domain experts from corporate sectors may bring some analytical skills or technical knowledge, but they are not well conversant with rural life, the impoverished social structure. Their public policy is distinctly different from the ones we deal with," K M Chandrasekhar, former cabinet secretary, told ThePrint.

An IAS officer ThePrint spoke to claimed that the LBSNAA used to invite speakers irrespective of their political ideologies but now, speakers who disagree with government policies or ideas the ruling party believes in aren't invited anymore.

Private entities to bring efficiency

Of 12 organisations and institutes LBSNAA has tied up with to curate the study modules for young IAS trainees, at least seven are private organisations, including four international, and three autonomous institutes and thinktanks.

In addition to the global institutes, LBSNAA has also tied up with Gujarat-based **Entrepreneurship Development Institute of India (EDII)** and other autonomous institutes, such as the Institute of Economic Growth (IEG) and the United Service Institution of India.

LBSNAA earlier had senior officers from the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), Indian Forest Service (IFS), Internal Revenue Service (IRS), Indian Police Service (IPS) and those from other civil services, as faculty members and guest lecturers.

Engaging domain experts and senior members from foreign organisations and institutions is the latest addition the IAS academy has made over the years, said the senior IAS officer quoted above, who was also a part of the curriculum restructuring.

Giving examples of the new system, Katikithala's office added, "For instance, courses in macroeconomics are delivered in a co-curated manner by the IMF-SARTTAC (an entity of the International Monetary Fund, supported by the Government of India). Similarly, to be adept in digital governance, certified programmes delivered by Carnegie Mellon University and other such international universities, are also the part of the curriculum."

Bharat-centric, people-centric

The modules are focused on ways of "desiloisation", aimed at drawing officers out of their respective departments and responsibilities and making them work as a team.

Mission Karmayogi, the Union government's programme for capacity building for the civil services, is the foundation around which the modules have been designed, said the IAS officer quoted above.

"The foundation programme is designed to instill values amongst the participants. Mission Karmayogi has signalled a fundamental change in approach, with an overarching emphasis on desiloisation and continuous life-long learning. To adapt to this new mandate of government, the Academy as the principal agency for capacity building amongst the civil services has made many changes to its pedagogy," explained the response ThePrint received from the LBSNAA director's office.

It further stated that the current approach of the academy is "to enhance the learning by making it more experiential, more contextual, more empathetic and bench mark it to established standards".

To support the realisation of the government's "Act East policy", for example, to ensure first-hand experience is imparted to trainees in the hill states and the Northeast, village visits, Himalayan treks and interactions with self-help groups from these areas have been introduced, added the senior faculty member.

Speaking to ThePrint, a second senior IAS officer of the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) said that the changes are becoming "apparent".

“We can see the changes...Earlier the young officers always used to hesitate to join if they were posted in the north-east region or in J&K. But now, we have met young officers who are volunteering,” the officer added.

The institute has started a programme with eminent social workers to make the modules more ‘Bharat-centric’, said the second IAS officer.

“The programme is called Sabka Saath Programme. Padma awardees are invited to share their experiences with the trainees. Further, trainees are encouraged to take up various social and economic development activities by undertaking ODOP (One District One Product) projects, GI (Geographical Indications) Tagging Projects etc. for an empathetic understanding of everyday realities faced by fellow citizens,” he added.

These exercises encourage them to “dive deep into their own memory and experience and identify areas of improvement and consolidate ‘citizen-centricity’ in their thinking”, stated the director’s response, adding: “Thus, through these immersive experiential activities, these budding civil servants are being trained to be people-centric and empathetic.”

Content curation

According to the first senior faculty member, a lot of the content is internally curated, wherever feasible, through collaborative tie-ups with domain organisations such as the National Academy of Audit and Accounts, Shimla, National Police Academy, Hyderabad and so on.

“The content is certified and evaluated rigorously through performance at the Common Foundation Course (for trainee officers at the [LBSNAA](#)). Such evaluation is now part of the overall evaluation of training of all services and would feed into the final seniority list (in the bureaucratic structure) thereby making this activity highly rigorous and disciplined, added the response from the director’s office.

The Neighbourhood Module, a part of the curriculum, has been curated by the Ministry of External Affairs, while the National Security Module has been co-curated by Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA) and the United Service Institute of India (USI). The Financial Management Module has been co-curated by the National Academy of Audit & Accounts, Shimla and the Micro-Economics Module by the Institute of Economic Growth.

The Leadership Module has been curated by the Sardar Patel Leadership Centre, and a special module on supporting entrepreneurs has been co-curated by Entrepreneurship Development Institute of India and inputs of NITI Aayog are being utilised (for the supporting entrepreneurship module).

‘Study modules should focus on local governments’

A section of senior IAS officers, however, does not agree with such an overhaul of training modules for young officers.

A senior IAS officer, who served as director of the institute said, “This looks like turning a system upside down. We used to invite speakers from all spheres of life, irrespective of their political ideologies and their allegiance. Those ideas have now been blocked. The speakers who do not agree with government policies or the ideas that the ruling party believes in, are not invited anymore.”

“Indian institutes like TISS are not involved because a section in the government thinks that TISS is the breeding zone of urban naxals,” the officer claimed.

Chandrasekhar, meanwhile, said that the officers need to visit tribal villages, the extremely poor and backward ones, and the marginal people living on the edge to understand India.

“The Indian administration is a lot more about rural structure where an SDM deals with panchayats, blocks, MLAs and MPs, than the fancy ideas of public policy taught in foreign universities and institutes,” he said.

Another senior IAS officer, who did not want to be named, felt that while global inputs are good for the officers, they also need to understand the municipality and panchayat systems and that in the current curriculum there was no such descriptive module about municipalities.

“Foreign experts used to be invited earlier also, but that was limited. In 2004-05, the institute used to have faculty members from Duke University. Getting global inputs is not wrong, in fact some global scholars do more objective work in public policy and understanding the system than the local ones,” said T R Raghunandan, a retired IAS officer, who is also a visiting faculty member at LBSNAA.

Raghunandan however added: “I think there should be study modules that will help understand local governments, especially the municipalities. Everyone wants to be a part of a smart city project, which does not rely on local inputs and is primarily corporate driven. The municipalities are going from bad to worse.”

(Edited by Poulomi Banerjee)

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