



UPSC Centenary Celebrations ‘Manthan’ Focus on Future-Ready Civil Services, Innovation and Constitutional Values

Chairman Dr. Ajay Kumar Reaffirms Commitment to Merit, Fairness and Equal Opportunity as UPSC Completes 100 Years

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The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) today commenced its two-day centenary celebrations, titled ‘Manthan’, at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi, marking the completion of 100 years of the institution’s journey. The celebrations brought together senior public functionaries and eminent speakers for deliberations on the evolving role of civil services, innovations in public administration and the institutional values that underpin public service.

Addressing the gathering, UPSC Chairman Dr. Ajay Kumar outlined the Commission’s vision for the next phase of its journey through the three guiding principles of Trust, Transparency and Technology. He emphasised that institutions must adapt to changing circumstances while preserving the principles that are fundamental to their constitutional role.

Dr. Ajay Kumar said that the Commission must change what needs to change so that what must never change can be preserved. While technology and examination formats can evolve, the core constitutional principles of merit, fairness and equal opportunity remain enduring.

The Chairman highlighted the scale and diversity of the Commission’s work, noting that UPSC undertakes approximately 250 distinct recruitment processes every year, covering disciplines ranging from engineering, medical and scientific fields to economics and defence. He also highlighted that the UPSC examination calendar is prepared 18 months in advance, reflecting the extensive planning required for its recruitment processes.

Looking ahead, Dr. Ajay Kumar outlined several initiatives aimed at strengthening the recruitment ecosystem. These include the proposed establishment of a Centre of Excellence to facilitate collaboration and sharing of best practices with State Public Service Commissions. He also referred to the partnership with NALSAR, Hyderabad, for preparation of a compendium of 100 landmark judicial verdicts.

On examination reforms, the Chairman emphasised the importance of assessing candidates for qualities such as reasoning, spontaneous thinking and judgment under ambiguity, rather than their ability to reproduce predictable or coached model answers. He also highlighted the use of digital e-admit cards and face authentication as measures to strengthen examination integrity.

The first session of the centenary deliberations was held on the theme “Role of Civil Services in Viksit Bharat” under the leadership of Smt. Suman Sharma, Member, UPSC. The session brought together Gen. N.S. Raja Subramani, Chief of Defence Staff; Shri Harsh Vardhan Shringla, Member of Parliament (Rajya Sabha) and former Foreign Secretary; and Shri Sanjay Shrinet, Chairman, Uttar Pradesh Public Service Commission.

Smt. Suman Sharma emphasised the need for outcome-driven administration and highlighted the role of civil servants as primary instruments for translating policy into ground-level outcomes. She called for a shift from procedural excuses towards proactive facilitation and for measuring administration through transformative outcomes on the ground rather than merely through financial expenditure.

Gen. N.S. Raja Subramani highlighted the need to overcome departmental silos, take intelligent risks and demonstrate decisiveness in an environment marked by rapid disruption and increasing civil-military convergence. He underlined the need for an agile and problem-solving civil service.

Shri Harsh Vardhan Shringla emphasised the importance of widening recruitment into Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities and aspirational districts, as well as bringing younger candidates into public service. He also referred to the principles of Antyodaya and Nishkama Karma, stressing the responsibility of public servants to serve the last person in the queue.

Shri Sanjay Shrinet emphasised that reforms should empower the grassroots machinery responsible for executing public programmes, noting that the overwhelming majority of the administrative machinery is below Group A level. He called for a shift from authority to accountability and highlighted the importance of administrators functioning as genuine public servants or Sevaks.

Delivering the keynote address at the panel discussion on “Public Service Commissions as a Constitutional Body,” Dr. Ashok Lahiri reflected on the UPSC’s centenary journey and its enduring role in nation-building. He traced the historical evolution of public recruitment from early patronage systems to an impartial constitutional framework rooted in merit, competitive examinations, fairness, and transparency—spanning its milestones from the Public Service Commission in 1926 to the Federal Public Service Commission in 1937, and finally its constitutional status in 1950. Dr. Lahiri underscored the Commission's vital constitutional mandate in upholding equality, justice, and public trust, while highlighting its essential responsibilities beyond recruitment to encompass promotions, service rules, and disciplinary matters.

The second session, titled “Innovations in Public Service”, was chaired by Lt Gen Raj Shukla (Retd.), Member, UPSC. Shri Shaktikanta Das, Principal Secretary-2 to the Prime Minister, delivered the keynote address.

Delivering the keynote address in the second session, Shri Shaktikanta Das, Principal Secretary-2 to the Prime Minister, commended the UPSC as the “gateway to public service,” lauding its steadfast commitment to integrity, fairness, and perseverance in the selection process. He highlighted key administrative initiatives and innovations introduced by the Government, while outlining a strategic roadmap to advance the vision of Viksit Bharat.

The discussions highlighted the potential of Artificial Intelligence, data analytics and digital architectures to reduce bureaucratic friction and optimise service delivery. The session also emphasised the need for government systems to respond in real time to a confident, aspirational and digitally literate population.

The deliberations further underscored the importance of breaking bureaucratic compartmentalisation, encouraging cross-departmental learning and building a future-ready civil service equipped to respond to emerging challenges.

The centenary discussions also reflected on the Commission's continuing adoption of technology. UPSC's technology journey has evolved over several decades, beginning with the introduction of computers in 1978, followed by successive technological interventions in its examination and recruitment processes.

More recent reforms include the introduction of the Universal Registration Number in 2025, randomised interview boards, a dedicated Candidate Helpdesk with a 30-channel IP call centre and a two-level escalation mechanism, and the expansion of examination centres.

In 2026, new examination centres were introduced at Bhubaneswar, Kanpur and Meerut for Civil Services (Preliminary) Examination and at Alwar, Hisar and Kinnaur for NDA & NA (II). The Commission also introduced measures relating to provisional answer keys and the QPRep portal.

The Commission has been strengthening its digital infrastructure and cybersecurity capabilities, while officers are also being trained in emerging technologies, including Artificial Intelligence. A High-Level Network Committee has been constituted for IT infrastructure and cybersecurity-related requirements.

A significant technological initiative has been the introduction of AI-based facial authentication. Following a pilot at select centres in Gurugram during the NDA & NA (II) and CDS (II) examinations in September 2025, the system was implemented at scale for the Civil Services (Preliminary) Examination on 24 May 2026, covering approximately 5.50 lakh candidates. The system uses invigilators' mobile phones for facial authentication, with the process taking approximately six to eight seconds per candidate.

The centenary also marks a century-long institutional journey that began on 1 October 1926, when the first Public Service Commission in India was constituted as an advisory body. Over the decades, the institution evolved into an independent constitutional body.

The constitutional framework governing Public Service Commissions is contained in Part XIV of the Constitution, under Articles 315 to 323. These provisions establish Public Service Commissions for the Union and the States and provide safeguards relating to the appointment, tenure and removal of their members.

The constitutional framework also provides for the functions of the Commission, including conducting examinations for recruitment to Union services and advising on methods of recruitment, promotions and disciplinary matters. The expenses of the Commission are charged on the Consolidated Fund, while the Commission submits an annual report to the President, including cases where its advice has not been accepted.

In carrying out its mandate, UPSC also advises the Government on Recruitment Rules, promotions through Departmental Promotion Committees, induction into the All-India Services and disciplinary cases. During 2023-24, the Commission processed records relating to 24,581 officers for promotion and 532 officers were inducted into the All-India Services.

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