

## Dispatches from Charleville

Fostering the esprit de corps, during the Service and even beyond Sanjeev Chopra  
21 July 2019 8:53 PM The Director's office is the last of the iconic buildings at LBSNAA (fondly called the Academy) by its Alumni: the wooden panels and the collection of books, souvenirs and memorabilia gifted by institutions, batches, and individuals make it one of the best-appointed office spaces. The set of rooms right below the director's office is also packed with books received by me in my capacity as the honorary curator of the Valley of Words—these range from translations from regional languages to Hindi and English, besides of course the best of recently published fiction and non-fiction. These dispatches are likely to be typed out from one of these two rooms—hence the title of the column—which over the next few weeks will capture the flavour of discussions, conversations, book reviews, cultural programs and development interventions that the Academy and its alumni are engaged with. Incidentally, the Charleville campus was purchased for the Academy in 1959 at a princely sum of Rs 4 lakhs! At present, we are running two programmes—an Induction training programme for officers promoted from the state services to IAS, and a mid-career training programme for officers with seven to ten years of service in IAS. Together, we have 170 officers, and the campus is again abuzz with activity—for the life on campus is not just about the classroom but the library, auditorium, discussions in the plaza over coffee, interactions over meals and conversations before and after the morning regimen of PT/Yoga.

The Induction programme was inaugurated by PK Basu, formerly a Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture, and later a member of CAT. The theme of his inaugural address was the management of change, and how we in IAS should be adept at it—for the only constant in life is change. Individuals, institutions, departments, organisations and nations which are willing to, and capable of change not only survive and do well, they also become more powerful and relevant in the process. Those who are reluctant to change, or are lackadaisical in their approach fall by the wayside. IAS as a service has been quick to adapt to changes—we have made a very effective transition from being a service focused primarily on law and order to one in which development administration became the predominant focus. In fact, IAS has been quick to respond to the political executive's changing priorities at all levels. We delivered employment guarantee programmes at the district and sub-district levels, formulated schemes at the level of states and directorates, and while in the government of India, took the lead in almost every sector—from disinvestment in non-core/non-strategic PSUs to restructuring of power utilities and bringing in a regulatory

regime in almost all the sectors—from telecom to real estate. Basu pointed out that when we started doing this, the onus of doing this naturally fell to the shoulders of IAS—and we acquitted ourselves well for two clear reasons: the training opportunities provided by the government to address these issues and of course the hard work and commitment of the officers entrusted with this task. The inaugural address for the Phase III officers who had completed one decade in the service was delivered by Pawan Agarwal, CEO of Food Safety and Standards Authority of India. He mentioned five clear changes in the eco-system of governance over the last few years. The first of these was the clear message that corruption is absolutely unacceptable and that the days of 'fixers and wheeler-dealers' were over. Governance systems are more robust than before. The second was the move towards cleanliness and Swachh Bharat—all government offices and facilities looked much better than before. The third was the breakdown of silos: departments and agencies were finally talking to each other—and whether it was the overarching goal of making India a five trillion-dollar economy or Financial Inclusion, there was a broad consensus that this is not the job of any single department. The fourth was related to the transfer of resources and responsibilities to state governments and the need to work on co-operative federalism in letter and spirit. Last but not least, there was the realisation that the government was not the sole repository of wisdom, and knowledge inputs could be sourced from everywhere. This meant that specialists indeed had a role but there was nothing to prevent members of the service from acquiring the specific skill sets that are required to make intelligent interventions in the required sectors. As a matter of fact, the Department of personnel and training and LBSNAA are keen that officers pick up a thematic area say agriculture, food and rural development, or infrastructure and municipal administration, or social sector—health, education, nutrition or the security sector—home, defence, national security, enforcement—and do online courses from the best universities, think tanks and academic institutions. This could be followed up by a Masters/M Phil and a serious engagement with academics and practice specialists in these sectors. Thus, officers wanting to specialise in agriculture could engage with IFPRI and CGIAR and follow this with degrees at Cornell or Sussex. Towards the end of last week, officers of the 1979 Foundation batch from all the Services came to the Academy to celebrate their fortieth anniversary. It was a pleasure and honour to meet several senior colleagues and get introduced to several officers from other services. This was coordinated by my former boss and mentor Anup Thakur, and he was so gracious in his appreciation of the efforts of the Academy. The bonhomie was just too great! While the Academy takes the direct responsibility of organising the retreat for officers in their Golden Jubilee years—batches often come together to mark their 20th, 25th and 40th anniversaries. Earlier this year, the '99 batch came together, and next month 1994 will celebrate their silver jubilee. We at the Academy feel that these 'homecomings' are the best way to foster the esprit de corps—not just for the duration of the Service, but even beyond!