

Jnana Prabodhini Competitive Examinations Centre, Pune.

**Celebrating journey of its alumnus
on account of
Tridashakpurti Varsha 2025-26
(30 years of establishment)**

Shri. Santosh Vaidya

- Presently working as Principal Secretary, Department of Finance, Government of Jammu & Kashmir
- IAS, 1998 Batch - AGMUT Cadre
- IPS, 1997 Batch
- B.Tech (Instrumentation) - IIT Kharagpur
- Masters in Economics - IGNOU
- Masters in International Public Policy - John Hopkins University, USA.



Santosh Vaidya is a career civil servant belonging to the 1998 batch of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS). He has a rich experience in public service at the state, federal, and international levels. During his undergrad studies at Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) at Kharagpur, he earned the President's Silver Medal for his academic performance. He has completed Masters programmes in Economics from IGNOU – Delhi and in International Public Policy from the Johns Hopkins University, USA.

He joined the Indian Police Service in 1997 and then transitioned to the IAS in 1998. Since then, he has served in varied assignments in Arunachal Pradesh, Goa, Delhi, Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Jammu and Kashmir. Apart from his stints in various States and UTs, he has served in the Prime Minister's Office and the World Bank at Washington DC. In his current assignment in Jammu and Kashmir, he focuses on public finance and fiscal policies for enhancing efficiency and development impact. Santosh has received the national award for his work in the disability sector and the Election Commission's certificate for his work in Delhi.

Santosh keenly follows the political economy in China and Central Asia and has written articles on the challenges in renewable energy and water management. Beyond his professional pursuits, he is passionate about jogging and trekking.

Educational and Early Career Path:

- **IIT Kharagpur and UPSC Inspiration** - Santosh graduated with a B.Tech in Instrumentation Engineering from IIT Kharagpur (1991-1995). The idea of joining civil services crystallised around the final year at IIT. During this period, he visited Vidharbha region and studied the outstanding social work of Dr Abhay and Rani Bang at Shodhgram and Dr Prakash Amte at Lok Biradari project. Santosh was also influenced by the splendid work of Dr T.N. Seshan, Kiran Bedi, and Avinash Dharmadhikari who were reforming their respective systems as "agents of change" from within the system. These exposures inspired Santosh to join the civil services instead of opting for the prevailing trend of pursuing higher studies in the US. This was a fortuitous decision as over the past twenty-seven years, the civil services afforded him an incredibly fulfilling experience in public policy and administration.
- **UPSC Attempts and Mentorship** - Santosh gave his first UPSC attempt from Kharagpur and reached the interview stage. This gave him clarity about the year-long process of UPSC examination and the level of preparations required. He also felt the need for deeper studies in his General Studies and the optional papers. As Physics and Mathematics were not the majors in his undergraduate studies, Santosh stressed on grasping these optionals when he moved to Pune after graduation. He joined Prabodhini's newly established center as one of the first students of Viku Sir at Jnana Probodhini. The facilities at the center and the group discussions helped him immensely in the General Studies and Essay papers as also in his interview preparations. He secured 78th rank in his second attempt and was selected for the IPS. Understanding gaps in one's preparation is often a challenging task as we always have our own blind spots. So he introspected with Viku Sir to identify areas which needed more focus and strategic changes for optimizing the scoring potential. Santosh joined the National Police Academy in August 1997 as the Lien option was not available in 1997. He underwent the probationary training as IPS officer while undertaking his third UPSC attempt. He secured 12th rank this time and was selected for the IAS. He joined the National Academy of Administration at Mussoorie in September 1998.



Santosh (initially selected as IPS in 1997) with other IPS batchmates during a training at National Police Academy in 1997



Santosh with other IAS Batchmates during Mid-career training at LBSNAA, Mussourie

Key Postings and Contributions:

Arunachal Pradesh (1999-2004) – A Grounding Experience:

- Santosh's first posting as an IAS officer from the AGMUT cadre was in Arunachal Pradesh in the northeastern corner of India. He began his career as Sub-District and then District Commissioner in three districts in Arunachal Pradesh. In this vast, densely forested and predominantly tribal state, he started several initiatives in the areas of land management, food supplies, relief and rehabilitation, education, health and rural development.
- Arunachal is quite challenging to administer and develop given the rugged territory, high gradient, and thick vegetation. Santosh's tenure in Arunachal included working as

a probationer in West Kameng (Bomdila), as SDM/ADC in Mechuka (near the China border), then as DC in Lower Dibang Valley (Roing) and West Siang (Along) districts. Santosh covered three distinct valleys, each with different tribes, languages, and cultures. Being a vast state with 84,000 sq km area, Arunachal Pradesh is home to 15 – 20 major tribal communities with their own distinct languages and cultural traditions. Thus based on the geographical and cultural setting of each tribal community, every district presents its own challenges. Santosh stressed on an empathetic and judicious approach while dealing with such challenges.



Santosh during ground breaking ceremony of Development Project in Arunachal Pradesh

- **Challenges and Opportunities:** Ensuring 24*7 welfare services in remote villages of such a State or constructing 4 lane highways with minimum ecological damage. Apart from its remoteness, Arunachal's development was handicapped due its weak physical and social infrastructure. Thus, his first posting place, Mechuka, had no road connectivity. On several occasions, he had to trek for six hours from the nearest trailhead. Further, though the State had huge hydropower potential, it was hardly harnessed. So Santosh keenly pursued development of roads and hydropower projects.
- **Development Focus:** Being a densely forested and predominantly tribal state, Santosh made infrastructure development and cultural preservation as key focus areas.
 - **Connectivity:** Facilitating development of roads and highways was critical as physical connectivity unlocks productivity of remote parts. Such roads and highways enable education, health and food supply to reach isolated regions and also allow their local produce to reach district / state markets. Given the natural gradient and water availability, large-scale hydro-electric projects in Arunachal

Pradesh don't cause excessive submergence and relocation of population. But both the connectivity and power projects involve land acquisition and multiple clearances. The local community needs to appreciate the benefits of such projects so that their development moves in unhindered fashion. Hence in his district postings, he pursued development of road and hydropower projects. This meant persistent work in chasing the executing agencies, getting requisite environmental clearances, and engaging the community for its support. But the effort was quite gratifying, especially so as Mechuka got all-weather road connectivity and the 1000 MW Dibang hydropower project received its federal sanction before he finished his four-year tenure in Arunachal.

- o **Cultural Preservation:** Santosh initiated a unique project in the Lower Dibang Valley district which had a large population of the Idu Mishmi tribe. But this tribe had no written script for its local language. Every language is the crucial vehicle for the culture and traditions to be passed on to the younger generations. But without any written script, the Idu Mishmi tribal language was gradually becoming extinct. Santosh and his team got the experts from Central Institute of Indian Languages, Mysore to study this challenge. With their help, they developed the script for the Idu Mishmi tribe's language. The local "Elders' Council" appreciated these efforts, leading to printing of textbooks for middle school on indigenous history and culture in this script. This initiative helped the younger generation getting formally taught in this language. It also supported the tribal community in preserving its culture and traditions.
- **Arunachal's Unique District Collector's Role:** Santosh emphasized the single-line administration model of Arunachal as the District Collector institution played a crucial role in prioritizing issues and coordinating departmental efforts. Multiplicity of authorities often nurtures conflicting decisions and confusion as no one is sure about the final course of action. Many of our projects and even cities are grappling with the coordination challenges that get created with multiple authorities and corporations. Given the paucity of resources in Arunachal Pradesh, the single-line administration was important as the District Commissioner was responsible for decision-making across sectors. It ensured prioritization and coordination at district level for optimizing developmental outcomes. The convening power and harmonization initiative of the DC institution also helped him in crisis management.

- **Judicial Exposure:** Santosh coordinated the judicial and developmental functions in his district postings in Arunachal as subordinate judiciary had not been established by the early 2000s. Thus, he also served as District and Sessions Judge during his stint in Arunachal. The judgments in serious cases (e.g., in rape or murder cases) had to be submitted to High Court for ratification. The Judicial experience was uniquely enriching as one has to examine the evidence and weigh the legal arguments in a judicious fashion. Even if there is an open and shut case involving a heinous crime, one has to remain dispassionate. Santosh dedicated Fridays to this judicial work. In each case, he endeavoured to ensure that the alleged crime and the culpability are proven beyond any doubt. It was quite gratifying when some of his judgments were later ratified by the High Court. Apart from learning about the statutes and the legal processes, this judicial exposure as a Session Judge remains a valuable learning experience for him.

Goa (2004-2007) – Urban Transformation:

- In October 2004, the Central government deputed Santosh to Goa, a state known for its tourism and industrial activity and strong infrastructure. Goa presented a stark contrast to Arunachal, being an urbanized and cosmopolitan State with abundant funding from industry, tourism, and mining. Santosh worked in the Education, Social Welfare & Public Works departments of the state government.
- **Barrier-Free India Initiative:** As Secretary for Social Welfare, Santosh noticed complete apathy towards implementation of basic facilities for the differently abled persons. The statutory mandates on the public offices and buildings under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act were ignored. He was astounded to receive a message from a delegation of persons with disabilities that it was impossible to reach his office as the state secretariat building did not provide barrier free access. He found that most of the existing Government buildings afforded no ramps, tactile tiles and mandatory elevators for smooth access for persons with disabilities. After acknowledging this widespread weakness, he got all the government buildings audited structurally for improving their access through construction of ramps and elevators, installation of auditory signals and tactile tiling work. He and his team developed technical and financial proposals based on these audit recommendations and pursued their timely execution. He also led the

initiative to amend the state's building code to enshrine barrier free access in all new buildings. He also pursued vigorously for implementing the legally mandated education and employment benefits for the disabled. Apart from the immense satisfaction, his efforts were appreciated through the National Award for this work in 2007.

- **Infrastructure Development:** While working as Secretary of the Public Works department, Santosh noticed that the regular maintenance of roads, water and sewerage works got less attention. Such upkeep work often got subordinated to the creation of new roads, water network and treatment plants. It also didn't involve ribbon-cutting opportunities which are valued politically. But such maintenance ensures long term sustenance and quality of infrastructure assets. Hence his Department initiated benchmarking of all field divisions in terms of their network length, consumer base, vehicular load, etc and created a system of performance indicators linked with incentive funds. This helped in improving accountability of officers towards such maintenance works. This initiative also increased budget efficiencies, thereby creating space for greater capital works. Despite the increased urbanization and tourist arrivals in Goa, the treatment of wastewater was a major weakness. This was leading to untreated wastewater being discharged into the open sea and pollution of the water table. So Santosh spearheaded the development of Goa's master plan for water and sewerage. This identified the priority investments in the water and sewerage sector in a scientific manner. Based on this, the Government successfully secured bilateral funding from Japan for expansion of networks and treatment plants in coastal areas.
- **Education Sector Reforms:** Though Goa had better social indicators than the national average, during his regular visits to schools, Santosh could sense the urgent need to improve quality and competitiveness of school education. Goa had lagged behind Kerala and Tamil Nadu in educational parameters despite its advantages. Santosh highlighted the poor quality of education and convinced the State leadership to tap into central funding. So he drafted the proposal for tapping federal program (Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan: SSA). This unlocked investments in construction of classrooms, engagement of teachers, and teachers' training. He also led the process for transparent selection of over 300 teachers, though he faced political backlash on this count. While his assignments were very fulfilling, they were also quite stressful as the elected representatives often had unreasonable expectations.

Delhi (2007-2013) – Urban Governance and Project Management:

- Santosh was posted to Delhi Government in October 2007, where he served in Delhi Jal Board, New Delhi Municipal Council and then Chief Minister's Office.
 - o **Delhi Jal Board** is the water and sewerage utility of Delhi and operates 26 treatment plants (11 water and 17 sewage) and about 11500 km of water network and 7800 km of sewerage network. While serving as Additional CEO of the Board during **2007-2010**, he analysed the high water losses and the consequent supply shortages and low revenue. This situation was further complicated with sub-optimal sewage interception and its treatment, leading to pollution of water bodies. The Board was suffering losses consistently, leading to under-investment in asset creation, poor quality of operations and repeated labor agitations.



Santosh Vaidya, Additional CEO, Delhi Jal Board visit to Singapore for understanding Singapore's water model

- o **Reducing Water Loss:** To check water losses, the Board focussed on reducing illegal water tapping, computerizing billing operations, and installing water meters. To gain community support, he engaged with RWAs and improved supply duration in colonies which cooperated for 100% metering. This helped in stepping up installation of quality meters and conducting water audits in all zones. The Board procured new leak detection equipment, conducted training workshops and deployed trained staff in each zone for loss reduction. By evaluating the water supply and revenue data, he led his team to identify the areas with maximum losses and developed performance-based public private partnership (PPP) projects. By analyzing the challenges in construction, metering,

and revenue collection, the Board ensured well-balanced risk allocation in its PPP projects at Vasant Vihar and Malviya Nagar. Given the apprehensions about PPPs and privatization, he simultaneously reached out to the labor unions to explain the initiatives and address their concerns. As electricity consumption and staff salary accounted for over 70% of operational expenditure, he led his team to conduct energy audits of the treatment and pumping facilities and started the process of replacing inefficient and power guzzling equipment.



Santosh along with then Hon. CM of Delhi Late Smt. Sheila Dixit & Hon. CM of Haryana Shri. Bhupindra Singh Hooda during Yamuna Water Share Negotiations

- o **Interceptor Sewer Project:** While working in DJB during 2007-10, it was apparent to Santosh that Delhi's sewerage infrastructure had lagged behind its urbanization. Wastewater from un-sewered colonies was polluting the river Yamuna and increasing its BoD level to unsafe levels. He and his team formulated the Interceptor Sewer project to trap wastewater from these colonies and ensuring its conveyance for treatment. The Board conducted investigations on over 230 drains from unsewered areas and designed a comprehensive sewerage project. Santosh pursued this project for getting technical, environmental and legal clearances from the nodal authorities and agencies. Given the mammoth size of the project, his team also secured federal financing of Rs. 1200 crore under JNNURM. With its ongoing implementation, this project is improving the water quality in Yamuna river. This experience made him realize the need of conducting frank and mature dialogue for convincing multiple stakeholders.

- o Santosh served as the **Secretary New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC)** in 2010-2012. Being the municipal body for this prestigious core area of Delhi, NDMC looks after maintenance of roads, electricity, water, health, education and sanitation in the New Delhi area that houses all major diplomatic missions and government offices and residences.
 - This assignment needed round the clock vigil from the senior officers and the commitment of over 14300 staff for impeccable maintenance of civic services. For two years, he regularly undertook early morning inspections to pep up the sanitation and horticulture workers as they went through the daily grind. As Delhi was hosting the Commonwealth Games, NDMC executed several projects for refurbishment of roads, upgrading sanitation services and sprucing up gardens. He also coordinated commissioning three multilevel parking projects. While NDMC provided the land and the rights to collect predetermined parking fees; the concessionaire had to build and operate the parking facility.
 - Santosh also fast-tracked the commissioning of Delhi's first waste-to-energy plant at Okhla. The viability gap funding to the concessionaire based on waste collected and energy generated. But such waste treatment projects often face the NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) opposition and fall prey to contractual disputes and litigation. So Santosh understood the design challenges and engaged the Okhla's local community about their concerns. Special air quality monitors were added and the plant was upgraded to alleviate such concerns.
- o In July 2012, late Smti Sheila Dikshit, the then Chief Minister picked Santosh as her **Special Secretary**. During his short stint, Santosh focused on two key initiatives; viz. Bhagidari and Annashree DBT scheme.
 - **Bhagidari:** Residents of mega-cities often feel frustrated with poor grievance-redressal. Formal governance processes, scattered public offices and the sheer speed of urban life weaken their access. The Bhagidari initiative was designed to recognize and empower the 3500 resident welfare associations (RWAs). He led his team to conduct workshops where the RWAs could discuss their grievances with government officials in informal

settings and on equal terms. This required substantial coordination with multiple Departments and follow up for ensuring that the agreed action points were operationalized in time bound fashion. These workshops facilitated communication and enhanced mutual trust between the government and citizens. This initiative made Santosh realize that more than funding, such citizen-centric governance requires an empathetic platform to discuss and appreciate diverse concerns and to find balanced solutions.



Santosh coordinating Bhagidari Campaign under guidance of CM of Delhi, Late Smt. Sheila Dixit

- **Annashree Yojana:** Santosh also worked as the Mission Director of Mission Convergence (MC) which had its outreach centers in slum areas of Delhi. As the umbrella agency for welfare programmes in slum areas, the Mission conducted several programs on financial inclusion, community health, and skill development for urban poor. Around this time, Delhi had achieved 100% Aadhar enrolment. The Chief Minister wanted to leverage this to start a Direct Benefit Transfer scheme for the urban poor. Given its outreach, the Mission was tasked with developing and rolling out the Annshree Yojana, the new scheme for direct cash transfers. Santosh studied the Bolsa Familia programme of Brazil and drafted the Annashree scheme to financially incentivize urban poor for essential measures related to immunization, education and nutrition of their children. With assistance from UNDP and UIDAI, his team conducted a citywide survey to identify the most vulnerable families and got their bank accounts linked with the

Aadhar database. The Mission developed an ICT based framework so that the eligible families could enroll easily. The coordination with the Bank and UIDAI authorities allowed the beneficiaries to open and link their banks accounts for online transfers. Within the short span of one year, he was able to scale the program from ideation to approvals to operationalization and also start monthly release of digital cash transfers to about 248,000 families.

- o Santosh also served as Additional Secretary National Capital Region (NCR), working on decongesting Delhi through satellite townships, improving connectivity (e.g., Delhi-Gurgaon, Delhi-Noida), and ensuring funding for infrastructure projects like peripheral expressways and metro extensions. Santosh had to convince the Delhi CM to fund projects that benefited beyond Delhi's immediate boundaries.

Central Government & International Role (2013-2020) – Shift to Policy Formulation:

- In his central deputation, Santosh first served as PS to Mr. Sharad Pawar (March - August 2013) and was soon selected as Director, Prime Minister's Office (PMO) in September 2013. He worked as Director PMO for about three years during the regimes of Dr. Manmohan Singh and Mr. Narendra Modi. In this stint, he worked on policy issues and the Cabinet proposals in the Energy, Environment, Road Transport, Railways and Mineral sectors. By 2012-13, these Ministries were mired in controversies relating to coal block allocations, environmental clearances, and stalled projects. His field experience proved useful as he shifted focus to formulating policies and schemes that work on ground.
 - o **Reforming Coal & Mineral Allocation:** Though the Coal sector was denationalized and opened for private investment from 1991, there were serious allegations of corruption and nepotism in allocations of coal blocks during 2007-2012. There were serious litigations about corruption in the coal allocations. Several officers, including some ex-PMO officials, were hauled up for investigation. After the Supreme Court canceled the allocations of 214 coal blocks, India stared at an energy crisis as we meet about 60% of energy needs from coal. But the PMO had already diagnosed the pitfalls in the existing 'first-come-first-serve' framework which gave undue advantage to the first-movers and deprived the government of optimal revenue-share of mineral

resources. Santosh was tasked to study global experience in mineral concession frameworks. PMO worked with the Coal Ministry to draft the Coal Mines (Special Provisions) Act. This statute ingrained competitive auctions for coal block allocations. Marathon consultations were conducted with the state/ UT governments for enlisting their support for ensuring seamless auctions and operationalization of auctioned blocks. By March 2016, auctions for 32 blocks got completed, boosting revenues of mineral-rich States like, Jharkhand, Odisha and Chattisgarh. The auctions and their operationalization also restored confidence in the coal sector. With astute lateral thinking, the PMO built on this momentum in the wider mineral sector by amending the mining sector legislation. In this amendment, PMO insisted on creating the district mineral foundation (DMF) to support livelihoods and infrastructure in the mining-affected regions. This amendment led to transparent allocations and DMF resources crossing about Rs.50,000 crore by March 2021.



Santosh & family during his stint at PMO having a candid moment with former Prime Minister Late. Dr Manmohan Singh.

- o **Reforming Clearance Systems:** The opacity, nepotism, and delays in environment, wildlife and forest clearances was an open secret. Several infrastructure projects had suffered huge time and cost overruns due to such delays. Santosh was tasked in PMO to scrutinize these clearance processes and the labyrinth of instructions. The PMO organized structured discussions of the Environment Ministry with infrastructure agencies, industry groups, and environmental organizations to develop consensus on key reforms and to develop

the required amendments. He followed up on this consensus for streamlining the clearance processes and simplifying over 62 instructions of the Ministry. Over the next two years, the Ministry – with prodding from the PMO - digitized its clearance processes, enabled digital uploading of project documents and reduced the processing time from 730 to 150 days.



Santosh Vaidya with Hon. PM Shri Narendra Modi

- o **Anchoring PRAGATI initiative:** A large number of projects had stalled by the year 2012 due to funding constraints, lack of clearances and land, etc. The Central Government created the Project Monitoring Group to resolve such constraints. But beyond these clearances, key infrastructure projects stagnated due to delays in project sanctions, lack of State-level support, logistical support and land provision. So, the PMO conceived the Pro-Active Governance and Timely Implementation (PRAGATI) platform to induce the urgency and spirit of ‘Team India’ for unshackling these projects. Santosh was tasked to anchor the PRAGATI meetings, wherein the Prime Minister would discuss the slow-moving or stranded projects and schemes with the Chief Secretaries of State / UT governments and the Secretaries of various Ministries. Santosh studied each of these projects and schemes incisively and identified their constraints of funding, connectivity, clearances, and land acquisition. He brought these projects together as the agenda for the PRAGATI meetings. Each project was mapped on GIS platform with real time photos and videos for clear understanding. When the Prime Minister reviewed these projects with the senior officials of Ministries and States, most of them showed striking results with their constraints getting resolved and clearances getting accelerated. Starting from October 2014, Santosh

facilitated the first thirteen PRAGATI meetings to rejuvenate 134 major projects. These included the Navi Mumbai airport, Coastal Highway, Trans Harbour Link road and the Mumbai Metro projects.



Santosh and other officials in a meeting with
Hon. PM Shri. Narendra Modi

- **Ministry of New and Renewable Energy:** After his stint in the PMO, Santosh was promoted as Joint Secretary and joined the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy in April 2016. He worked on coordinating large-scale solar and rooftop solar projects, establishing Green Energy Corridors for transmission, ensuring transparent auctions for solar power. While the mega Solar projects had taken off, India was still facing challenges in the rooftop solar sector with its much smaller kilowatt (KW) size projects. Power utilities had reservations about such rooftop solar plants, as they reduced their electricity sales by enabling their consumers to generate power. This sector also needed enabling policies from the states and a balanced incentive scheme from the federal government. Santosh drafted an innovative incentive scheme for Distribution companies by balancing the elements of financial prudence and competition. He simultaneously led his team to pursue twenty-eight state governments for issuing net-metering policies. His team developed a rigorous system to verify and empanel agencies for the installation of solar plants and developed a mobile app to link them with the market. To promote the solarization of all public buildings, he enlisted the support of the federal ministries. He also initiated the national awards for inducing a competitive spirit among the states and private sector players in expanding solar projects. Through these efforts, the rooftop solar tariffs soon achieved grid parity by June 2017, which further boosted this sector.



Santosh Vaidya, Joint Secretary, Minister of New & Renewable Energy with Shri. Prakash Javdekar, former Minister of Environment, Forest & Climate Change and other officials representing India at a UNFCCC CoP 20 Summit at Lima, Peru

- **World Bank, Washington DC (2017-2020):** As he completed one year in the Renewable Energy Ministry, Santosh was selected as Senior Advisor to the Executive Director (ED) in the World Bank in June 2017. The ED office represents the four nations of Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Bhutan, and India at the Board of Directors of the World Bank. The Board functions from Washington DC and works with clockwork precision with its timetable being decided months in advance.



Santosh Vaidya, ED, World Bank along with Late. Shri Arun Jeitley, former Finance Minister, Shri. Subhash Garg, former Finance Secretary and other senior officials.

- o **Multilateral Financing:** Given the large financing envelope of the World Bank, the ED office has to assess several investment proposals from several nations

simultaneously. Hence he examined the operational, and financial risks relating to the borrowing portfolio of the Bank institutions. As this examination facilitated the overall stand of the four nations at this prestigious global forum, substantial research, incisive analysis and negotiation skills were essential. As China was increasing its influence on low income countries through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), expanding the Bank's capacity and accelerating projects of developing nations were essential. Hence as the Senior Advisor, Santosh stressed on the development impact of such proposals, their financial viability and their alignment with the fiduciary policies of the Bank.



Santosh at Thomas Jefferson Memorial in USA
during his stint as Executive Director, World Bank

- o **Expanding Bank's Capacity:** The financing by Bank's institutions (IBRD and IFC) was getting constrained by the year 2017 due to the limitations of their capital. The advanced nations were not willing to provide additional shareholder capital and even to dilute their shareholding. Increasing the shareholder capital meant serious implications for both the borrowing and non-borrowing members of the Bank. Hence the Board explored various financial options of additional capital, loan pricing, administrative expenses, and transfers comprehensively. As the Board strove to balance the expectations of different shareholder Governments, this exercise required Santosh to support the ED with academic rigor and problem-solving approach. He provided critical inputs while examining possible options for loan pricing, sustainable levels of financing, graduation policy, and voting rights. As the Board endeavored to formulate the capital package for the World Bank, there were intense negotiations on possible options.

Success in such multilateral negotiations needs a strong analysis to understand the key issues and the sagacity to balance differing viewpoints. Santosh contributed substantially to these negotiations and finding the middle ground on the ticklish issues.



Santosh along with senior Indian Diplomats and Officials

- o **Reforming Vigilance System of the Bank:** Santosh also supported the Board's initiatives for reforming the Bank's policy on the Inspection Panel (IPN). The IPN is like the CVC for the Bank and its vigilance findings often lead to investigations and corrective actions by the borrowing nations. But given the disproportionate burden on the borrowing low income nations, the IPN policy framework needed amendments to improve transparency and judiciousness. This exercise again involved lengthy negotiations. As he analyzed the legal and operational implications of various measures, Santosh also explored innovative options for forging consensus. Through this approach, India and Germany developed joint papers on the reforms to IPN's framework and got approval of the Board.

Delhi (2020-2022) - COVID-19 Response:

- On returning to Delhi in August 2020, Santosh served as **Chairman of the Delhi Staff Selection Board and Secretary Health** during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic's second and third waves. Covid created an existential crisis as India needed to refurbish its health infrastructure, ensure 100% immunization and minimize adverse societal impact. Hence Delhi Government stressed on accelerated expansion of healthcare

infrastructure to augment oxygenated beds, increase medical manpower, procure ventilators, Oxygen generation plants, anti-Covid drugs and immunization, etc. As he was a novice in the healthcare sector, this required Santosh to undertake "simultaneous running and learning on the job". He worked on the expansion plan by meticulously analyzing the gaps in health infrastructure and pursuing various Hospitals and district officials to expand bed capacity for managing Covid. Santosh's ground-level work contributed positively in ensuring the availability of oxygen, expanding RT-PCR tests, and accelerating vaccination effort, and consequently limiting the severe impact of Covid waves.

- Concurrently, as **Chairman of the Delhi Staff Selection Board**, Santosh took the crucial step of restarting recruitment examinations which were stalled for several months. This stoppage meant double jeopardy for hundreds of desperate candidates as both their livelihood and health were at stake. Santosh motivated his staff to re-start the examinations and successfully convinced the Courts about the safety measures undertaken in recruitment examinations. This provided much-needed relief to candidates whose careers were on hold. He also realized that several posts had similar mandatory requirements for education and skills of candidates; but their examinations were being conducted separately. The DSSSB was already notorious for long delays in its recruitments. The system of multiple examinations created an excessive burden on candidates who were forced to re-take tests for each post. So Santosh analyzed the database of the past recruitments to explore options for improving efficiency in the conduct of examinations. On the pattern of Civil Services Examinations, he introduced the innovative system of combined examinations for posts of similar nature and mandatory requirements. This new system reduced repetitive work for the Board and also the burden of multiple examinations on the candidates.

Jammu & Kashmir (2023 – now) - Current Role:

- Santosh was deputed to Jammu and Kashmir in June 2023 where he continues to serve as the Principal Secretary of the Finance Department. J&K's fiscal situation is very challenging with a low revenue base, high committed expenditure, and high public debt. Own revenues and capital receipts cover only 35 - 40% of budgetary needs of J&K.

- Public Debt Management:** Santosh stressed on improving data transparency, strengthening debt management, phasing out high cost loans, and improving debt composition. The government transparently disclosed all the off-Budget borrowings and brought them on its Budget books in 2023-24 and 2024-25. The FRBM targets were finalized after almost 8 years and were approved by the Legislative Assembly. The Government of J&K improved the composition of its outstanding debt. To reduce the rollover risk, the Government elongated the maturity profile of its outstanding debt. As the UT's expenditure exceeds its revenue and capital receipts, the Government used to need ways and means advance (WMA) and overdraft (OD) on recurrent basis. Santosh led his team to reduce this dependency through close supervision of daily receipts and calibration of public debt issuance and the Central releases. J&K also started investing in RBI's contingency funds (CSF and GRF) after a gap of over 77 years.



Santosh Vaidya with Hon Lt. Gov of Jammu & Kashmir Shri. Manoj Sinha and other officials.

- Bridging Resource Gap:** As J&K's fiscal situation is quite fragile, Santosh studied the fiscal data of J&K over the past 10 years. He presented his analysis before the Finance Secretary and then the Hon'ble Union Finance Minister. These efforts led to the additional assistance of Rs. 5000 crore for J&K and also apportionment of public debt with Ladakh. For ensuring realistic budgeting and controlling revenue expenditure, the Budget reviews were held systematically for expanding capital investments. His team focused on measures for ensuring competitive procurement and improving expenditure efficiency in committed expenditure. J&K increased its procurement under Government e-Marketplace (GeM) to over Rs. 2100 crore by surpassing several major States. Santosh's efforts have focused on cutting high-cost debt, planning early payment of

off-budget debt, and controlling non-priority expenditure. For all welfare schemes and pensions, his team has stressed on DBT and biometric verification of beneficiaries for eliminating bogus elements. He worked on resource augmentation measures by establishing an analytics wing in GST administration and coordinating excise auctions. He convinced the political executive for calibrating taxation on fossil fuels for ensuring higher revenues. By monitoring smart metering and loss reduction initiatives in power distribution, his team reduced the under-recoveries in the power sector.

- **Reforms/ Initiatives in J&K Bank:** Santosh serves on the Boards of J&K Bank, major Universities, JV companies (CVPPL, RHPCL) and PSUs of J&K. Their Board meetings and the agenda notes required substantial work for protecting UT Government's interests and providing constructive feedback to these institutions. J&K Bank had reached its nadir in 2020-21 when its networth declined drastically and the operational losses mounted. The Government initiated a series of reforms for arms-length relationships, tracking Bank performance in scientific manner, and professionalization of the Board and management. Santosh has accelerated these reforms by coordinating meritocratic selection of new Managing Director, Chief Finance Officer and Part Time Chairperson. His team stressed on appointing qualified experts as Independent Directors of J&K Bank. These initiatives helped the Bank maintained its reform drive, reduce its NPAs and improve operational profitability to Rs. 2100 crore by March 2025.

Future Aspirations:

Santosh acknowledges the challenging security situation in his current posting but also appreciates the exposure to national security issues. Looking ahead, Santosh is keen to seek opportunities where his interests in **strategic affairs, geopolitics, and finance** can converge with work mandate.

Advice for Jnana Probodhini:

Santosh will like to see Jnana Probodhini to expand its focus beyond competitive examinations to **Public Policy**. Santosh believes India invests too little in this area, unlike other countries that have robust think tanks. Santosh suggests that Jnana Probodhini should explore creating a Public Policy center to undertake deep research on public issues and

generate innovative ideas. Such a center or advisory group can foster constructive debate and produce viable policy options that can benefit both the government and the private sector

Photo Gallery:



Santosh with family & friends at IAS Nilkanth Avhad's place (also member of JP Officers Network) at Washington DC



Santosh along with IAS Shrikar Pardeshi, Dr. Vivek Kulkarni, Dr. Savita Kulkarni and other Office bearers of Jnana Prabodhini at Jnana Prabodhini, Pune



Santosh an avid trekker and jogger enjoying Trekking in Kashmir



A photo from 2008 of Santosh with spouse Smt. Prachi Vaidya along with Dr. Vivek and Dr. Savita Kulkarni.



Santosh participating in Saptahik Upasana along with Dr. Vivek Kulkarni and all JPCEC Students at Upasna Mandir, Jnana Prabodhini, Pune



Santosh Vaidya as the Chief Guest during Felicitation Program of JPCEC's 2016 rankers.



Santosh in an interaction with Dr. Vivek Kulkarni Sir, Late. Nandedkar Sir (Sr. Faculty, JPCEC) & Late. Vivek Ponkshe Sir (Principal, Jnana Prabodhini Prashala)



Santosh interacting with JPCEC's Prerana (UPSC Interview) Batch at Maharashtra Sadan, New Delhi