

Civil Servants as Joint Secretaries

Why in news?

A Union government circular set new conditions for empanelling civil servants for appointment as joint secretaries in central ministries.

What is the circular about?

- Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC) stipulated that the qualifying service period for empanelment of Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officers as joint secretaries at the Centre would be 16 years.
- Even earlier, an IAS officer would usually become eligible for empanelment as a joint secretary at the Centre after 16 years of service.
- However, in reality, many of them would get empanelled only after 18 years of service.
- The reiteration of empanelment as joint secretary after 16 years is, therefore, reassuring to the IAS officers.

What is the issue with the circular?

- The circular stated that not less than 2 years of experience at the deputy secretary or director level under the Central Staffing Scheme (CSS) would be mandatory for empanelment as joint secretaries at the Centre.
- This would be applicable to IAS officers from the **2007 batch** onwards.
- The circular will have significant implications for many IAS officers across the country.

What was the bold step taken by the government previously?

- In 2019, the government decided to hire private-sector professionals as joint secretaries at the Centre.
- It was a bold step to get non-IAS experts to work in the government.
- In 2019, nine private-sector professionals were hired as joint secretaries in different ministries.
- Almost a year later, another decision has been taken that would make the journey of an IAS official to the post of a joint secretary at the Centre a little

more difficult.

What does the joint secretary post mean for the IAS officers?

- For an IAS officer, the post of a joint secretary is almost like a gateway for securing a longish tenure in important positions in central ministries in New Delhi.
- A five-year stint as joint secretary is usually followed up with a promotion as additional secretary.
- After that, the officer will be promoted as either special secretary or secretary till retirement.
- Therefore, many IAS officers who joined the service after 2006 are not amused by the decision to introduce the new condition.

What do IAS officers prefer?

- Most IAS officers prefer to spend the first decade and a half of their tenure in the states.
- This is because of the relatively better designations, more power and perquisites like housing that are more generous than those they can enjoy at the Centre as a deputy secretary or even as a director.

What did the government do to make the post attractive?

- A deputy secretary at the Centre is a joint secretary in the state secretariat or a district magistrate and a director at the Centre is often a special secretary in the state secretariat.
- Even while at the Centre, a deputy secretary or a director would not be entitled to an official transport for a pick-up from residence till a few years ago.
- In 2016, these rules were modified to allow hiring of cars to pick them up from their residence.
- In February 2020, this facility was extended by another three years in a bid to make the position a bit more attractive.
- This facility was also extended to address the shortage of deputy secretaries and directors coming in from states under the CSS.

What is the monopoly?

- The IAS is only one of the 37 All India Services or Group-A Services, which take part in the CSS.
- It was created to meet the Centre's need for fresh talent at the middle or senior levels in its ministries.
- The officers would help the ministries to formulate policy and implement or

monitor various programmes with assistance from domain experts.

- The idea was to make use of officers from specialised services like the Indian Police Service, Indian Economic Service, Indian Audit and Account Service, Central Engineering Service and Indian Statistical Service.
- But in practice, it is the IAS which has virtually monopolised the process of empanelling officers as joint secretary at the Centre.

What is the conclusion?

- The 2-year minimum stint as deputy secretary or director at the Centre for all IAS officers before being empanelled as joint secretary may help the government meet its shortage of deputy secretaries and directors.
- But it is debatable if the move will help the Centre recruit more non-IAS officers as joint secretary under the CSS.

Source: Business Standard

