Shortage of IAS officers at the Centre

Why in news?

The amendments proposed to Rule 6(1) of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) (Cadre) Rules of 1954 have provoked controversy.

What is the amendment about?

- The Central Government has proposed amendments to Rule 6(1) of the IAS (Cadre) Rules, 1954
- It has said that it is mandatory for the State government to provide certain fixed number of IAS officers for central deputation every year.
- It requires the State government to release such officers whose services may be sought by the Central Government in specific situations.
- In case of any disagreement, the State Government concerned shall give effect to the decision of the Central Government within a specified time.
- **Reason**- The Centre has justified them on the ground that the States are not meeting their Central Deputation Reserve (CDR) obligations because of which the Centre is suffering from an acute shortage of mid-level IAS officers.

What are the causes of shortage?

- **Reduction in the annual recruitment**- The drastic reduction in the annual recruitment of IAS officers after 1991 (from 140-160 to just 50-80) under the misguided notion that the government will have a reduced role due to economic liberalisation is the major cause.
- It took nearly 20 years for the Centre to correct this mistake and restore the annual recruitment to pre-1991 levels.
- As of January 1, 2021, the shortage of IAS officers at the all-India level was 23%.
- **Cadre review**- It is conducted jointly by the Centre and the States to designate certain strategic posts in the States as “cadre posts” and earmark them exclusively for IAS officers.
- In Tamil Nadu, it is unwarranted that posts like Commissioner of Disciplinary Proceedings, Commissioner of Archaeology, and Commissioner of Museums have been designated as cadre posts.
- A proper cadre review in all the States will release many IAS officers from non-strategic posts and reduce the shortage.
- **Recruitment process**- The discontinuance of direct recruitment of officers to the Central Secretariat Service Group B since 2000 is another reason.
- Undue delays in the regular promotions of officers from the ranks in the Central Secretariat due to protracted litigation since 2011 added to the issue.
- **Non-utilisation of services-** There is non-utilisation by the Centre of the services of officers who are appointed to the IAS by promotion or selection from the State Civil Services.
- This large pool of around 2,250 officers, usually in the age bracket of 35-55 years, who have immense field experience, remains State-bound.
- It should be made mandatory for these officers to work for at least 2 years on Central

deputation as Deputy Secretaries/Directors immediately after their appointment to the IAS and their training.

- **Administrative barriers**- Numerous administrative barriers to Central deputation imposed by the Centre itself includes
    - highly restrictive conditions
    - perverse incentives
    - annual lapsing of offer lists
    - long debarment periods
    - compulsory cooling-off periods, etc.

What solutions can help to ease the issue?

- **Mandatory central deputation**- It should be made mandatory for directly recruited IAS officers to serve at least 3 years on Central deputation between 9 and 25 years of service.
- **Transparency**- The process of empanelment of IAS officers for the posts of Joint Secretary, Additional Secretary and at the Centre is much opaque and arbitrary.
- The Centre should directly choose for those posts from among IAS officers on offer who are performing in equivalent grades in State governments through a process of selection in much the same manner as it chooses Deputy Secretaries/Directors.

What might be the implications of the proposed amendments to the IAS Cadre Rules of 1954?

- Even if the proposed amendments come into force, States can still skip Central deputations by giving adverse performance assessments or imposing false disciplinary and vigilance cases against the officers.
- The shortfall in CDR obligations can be solved by the Cabinet Secretary by having a constructive dialogue with all the Chief Secretaries or the Prime Minister by holding a meeting with all the Chief Ministers.
- The **Inter-State Council** constituted under **Article 263** of the Constitution is meant specifically for handling such Centre-State situations.
- The sanctity of the principle of cooperative federalism and the interests of national unity and administrative efficiency should be prioritised.

Reference

1. https://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-opinion/incorrect-diagnosis-wrong-remedy/article65050637.ece

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