Unification of Railway Management Services

Why in news?

The PMO wants the process of amalgamating the railway services to be completed by November 2020.

What is the story behind?

- In 2019, the Cabinet decided to integrate the Railways' eight Group 'A' services into a single Indian Railways Management Service (IRMS).
- It wanted to downsize the Railway Board, re-designating its members on functional basis instead of departments.
- The government directed the whole process of amalgamating the services to be finalised within a year by a Home Minister-led group of ministers.

Why an enduring format needs to be devised?

- A successful transition to a new integrated cadre will depend on devising an enduring format for **future recruitment**.
- A **fair readjustment** of existing 8,400 Group A officers to have their legitimate career progression should be done.
- Those existing officers who are unwilling to opt for merger with IRMS may be allowed to continue, seeking their prospects in their cadres.
- But, those who are opting for merger must be prepared for a fresh selection by the UPSC to determine inter-se seniority, done on basis of genuine suitability.
- Age and seniority based on rank in UPSC test years back alone cannot be a fair measure of suitability.

What is the anomalies with regard to the top GM posts?

- The other major concern is of increasing anomalies and distortions with regard to top general management (GM) posts.
- There is an issue that these top posts are being occupied by officers from certain departments.
- In government, career prospects mostly depend on **date of birth**, and **rank** in UPSC results.
- The administration remains purblind to disadvantage of age encountered by

officers through civil services stream, against those from the engineering services examination.
- The former generally join the service when they are 25-27 years old, while the latter join technical cadres at 21-24.
- There's a similar age anomaly in the case of Special Class Apprentices.
- This affects the morale of the staff.
- The organisation is the major loser, as it fails to optimally utilise its trained and experienced human capital.

How did the selection procedure of the top managers evolve?

- **1947** - The Railway Board had a Chief Commissioner (in 1951, re-designated as Chairman), a Financial Commissioner, and three Members (Transportation, Staff and Engineering).
- **1954** - A Member Mechanical was added.
- **1987** - A Member Electrical was added.
- Soon clamour set in for the remaining two cadres (Signalling and Stores) also to have their representation on the Board.
- **2015** - The government initiated a halfway measure to merge two verticals of Electrical and Mechanical branches on 'functional lines'.
- But, the Railway Board was expanded to make it a nine-Member body, with two new Members, one for Signalling, and one for Stores.
- Meanwhile, since 1980s, precepts for selection of GMs and Board Members for railways were altered.
- Thereby, this eroded the effectiveness of the system.
- A mechanism should have been devised first for the selection of suitable officers with requisite experience from different disciplines.

How should the Railways' top posts be manned?

- The primary task of the Railways is production and marketing transport efficiently and economically.
- So, its top management posts must be manned only by those who are appropriately trained and exposed to the market vagaries and rigours of field operations.
- Those others who provide vital support for railways' primary business would naturally be enabled to rise in their specialised domains.
- That is how the Tandon Committee (1994) advised for suitable selection of officers.

What are the other anomalies?

- Anomalies and distortions have been creeping in through subtle ploys.

- **Departmental posts** are ring-fenced.
- Some departments particularly compete to inflate the numbers to secure senior positions proportionate to the respective cadre strengths.
- Little has ever been attempted to determine cadre-wise optimal strength.
- It currently varies widely: Civil engineering commands the largest chunk, followed by Mechanical Engineering, Traffic, etc.,
- **Work charged posts** - Departments engaged in executing projects kept widening their bases through "work charged" posts.
- The Debroy Committee found that these posts were surreptitiously continued for years well after the projects were completed.

What could be done?

- There is a need to create a cohesive and integrated 'cadre' for the future.
- For this, the Railways may look for its entire Group 'A' managers to be inducted into IRMS only from amongst technical/engineering graduates.
- For future recruitments, there may thus be no major hurdle to abide by the underlying spirit of IRMS.
- Again, it is of critical importance that the Railways institutionalise the selection for the general management pool.
- A rigorous selection process together with training will help an enduring management cadre to evolve.

Source: Business Line

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