

Haryana Roadways Strike

Why in news?

Haryana Roadways employees are on a strike to protest the government's move to allow private buses to ply within and from the state.

What is the current situation?

- Haryana Roadways came to a grinding halt 11 days ago when more than 19,000 employees launched a massive protest against the state government
- They stopped operating the fleet of 4,048 government buses.
- Haryana Roadways is considered the best for its safest travel among public sector transport undertakings or corporations in North India.
- The Union Ministry of Transport has awarded Haryana Roadways several times for the last 10 decades.
- The same Haryana Roadways has now set a record for the biggest and longest-ever agitation launched by its employees.
- Several rounds of talks between the protesters and the government have failed and the strike continues.
- On an average, nearly 12.5 lakh passengers travel by Haryana Roadways buses daily.

What event led to this strike?

- The Haryana Cabinet has decided to hire 700 private buses to induct them in the existing fleet of Haryana Roadways.
- It is planning to pay charges to the private players per kilometer basis.
- An estimated 32 lakh people use public transport in Haryana on a daily basis.
- The government's argument is that they need more buses to provide better service to commuters.
- Since it cannot buy new buses due to financial constraints, government wants to hire buses.
- Agreements to hire 510 buses on per km basis have already been signed, while 190 were yet in process.
- Protesters, however, see it as the beginning of privatization of Haryana Roadways and are thus resisting the government move.

What is the solution offered by the protesters?

- Roadways employees want the government to buy more buses instead of hiring buses from private players.
- Employees have even offered 10 per cent of their salary to the government for the purchase.
- They add that the same amount can be reimbursed to them after they retire.

What is the government's take on privatization?

- The state government has denied protesters' allegations and claim that there is no attempt to privatize Roadways in Haryana.
- Government explains that the hired buses will also operate under Roadways' control.
- The routes and timings for the hired buses will also be controlled by Roadways.
- But, the protesters are suspicious of the hiring rates.
- They claim that the private buses are being hired at much higher rates to accommodate certain private players.

What is the financial condition of Haryana Roadways?

- On an average, the Haryana Roadways earns Rs 28 per km against the expenditure of Rs 47.
- Every year, it is suffering an annual loss of Rs 678 crore.
- Officials say the loss is primarily due to free or concessional travel allowed to 40 categories.
- Students, senior citizens, sportspersons and policemen are major categories availing concessional travel.
- The Roadways estimates concessional travel's annual cost at Rs 610 crore.
- Besides this, Rs 150-200 crore is deposited with the government as annual passenger tax.
- If the government reimburses Rs 610 crore in lieu of free or concessional travel given by Roadways and the passenger tax is added, then it becomes a profitable venture for the government.

What is the state of road transport in the neighboring northern states?

- In northern states, it's only Haryana where public transport services are looked after solely by a government department.
- In Punjab, the public transport sector is looked after by a government department as well as a corporation - PRTC.
- Further in Punjab, the share of public sector buses and private buses is in the ratio of 50:50.
- Punjab, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh have private buses on permits or

kilometre basis.

Is this a crisis situation for the government?

- It seems to be as roadways employees have extended their strike.
- Haryana's Sarvkaramchari Sangh, an umbrella body of 102 unions, and Haryana Karamchari Mahasangh, comprising 42 employees unions, have joined the agitation.
- This may likely increase the confrontation between protesters and government.
- Haryana's attempts at seeking help from neighboring states to ply more buses on the state's routes have also been thwarted.
- Punjab Roadways employees unions came out in full support of Haryana Roadways and refused to enter Haryana.
- The Haryana government on August 30 had prohibited strike by the employees of the State Transport Department or Haryana Roadways for a period of six months under the Haryana Essential Services Maintenance Act, 1974.
- However the strike is carried on and still no deal was brokered.
- The State Government needs to act fast as the transport services is the lifeline for the state's economy and people's day-to-day life.

Source: The Indian Express

