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Breaking Departmentalism In Railways

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Recently, the government has approved the restructuring of the Indian Railways, including a reduction in the Board strength as well as the merger of the different cadres into a central service called the **Indian Railway Management Service (IRMS)**.

The government has taken this decision in a bid to end '**departmentalism**' in Indian Railways and ensure smooth working of the Railways.

Before Restructuring

- The Indian Railways is governed by a pool of officers, among whom engineers are recruited after the **Indian Engineering Service Examination** and civil servants through the **Civil Services Examination conducted by UPSC**.
 - The civil servants are in the **Indian Railway Traffic Service (IRTS)**, **Indian Railway Accounts Service (IRAS)** and **Indian Railway Personnel Service (IRPS)**.
 - The engineers are in five technical service cadres — **Indian Railway Service of Engineers (IRSE)**, **Indian Railway Service of Mechanical Engineers (IRSME)**, **Indian Railway Service of Electrical Engineers (IRSEE)**, **Indian Railway Service of Signal Engineers (IRSSE)** and the **Indian Railway Stores Service (IRSS)**.
- This unification of railway services has been recommended by several committees like **Prakash Tandon Committee (1994)**, **Khanna Committee (1998)**, **Rakesh Mohan Committee (2001)**, **Sam Pitroda Committee (2012)** and **Bibek Debroy committee (2015)**.

After Restructuring

- Now all the 8,400 employees at the management level will come into the **Railways through one service — the IRMS**.
- A separate exam under the Union Public Service Commission is proposed to be instituted in 2021 to induct IRMS officers.

- The Railway Board will now consist of **five members** – Chairman, who will act as a CEO, along with four members responsible for infrastructure, operations and business development, rolling stock and finance.

What was the need for restructuring?

- Railways in India carries **social obligations**, it plays the role of employer, operator, or investor.
- Further, railways are involved in **cross-subsidisation**, which means in order to keep travel prices subdued, the prices of cargo are kept at a much higher rate.
- Due to this, the **railway's operating ratio** (the ratio of operating expenses to operating revenue) has already crossed 100% in the course of the ongoing financial year.
- The **CAG pointed out** that there had been a steady decline in the revenue surplus of the Railways as well as the share of internal resources in its capital expenditure.

Impact of Restructuring

- The integration of departments will **cut the clutter in decision making** and organise the working of the Railway Board and its zones along more commercial lines.
- Increased coordination between the **maintenance and traffic staff will boost security and prevent railway accidents.**
- However, the problem is that of retrospectively integrating those 8,400 officers into the Indian Railway Management System.

Way Forward

- Allow **private entry**, including in running of private trains. The Tejas Express which is the first private passenger train, running on a pilot basis is a step in the right direction. Introduction of royal tourist trains will boost commercial avenues of railways and will play an important role in boosting India's soft power image.
- Change the composition of the Railway Board to include more specialists.
- Decentralised decision-making to zones/divisions and even further below.
- Separate the core functions of running trains from non-core functions like schools and medical services.
- A clear computation of social costs carried out throughout the Indian Railways system should be carried out, so that proper rationalisation can take place. So that a transition can be made to commercial accounting.

Conclusion

The stated aim to end departmentalism by the unification of services will expedite decision making, create a coherent vision and promote rational decision-making.

However, every large organisation is bound to have many departments. Therefore, it is the job of the government to formulate a coherent policy from the perspective of the national economy rather than as an issue pertaining to the Railways in isolation.

Drishti Mains Question

End of departmentalism in Indian railways can increase its commercial viability. Discuss.
