

## **Centre nods for lateral entry in railway board**

NEW DELHI: In a big move to overhaul colonial-era railway bureaucracy, the Modi government has decided to allow lateral entry of external talent for one senior position in the railway board, reorganize the top decision-making body on functional lines and rework the policy of appointments of GMs and DRMs to eliminate discretion.

The Appointment Committee of Cabinet (ACC) decided to create a post of Adviser (resource mobilization & development) which will be filled through lateral entry, aiming to accelerate the modernization efforts to revamp the state-run transporter.

The ministerial panel, headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, also decided to reorganize the railway board on functional lines by creating post of member (infrastructure), member (rolling stock), member (traction).

At present, the board has members dealing with different departments such as engineering, traffic, mechanical, and staff apart from the financial commissioner.

Over the years, inter-services rivalry has often resulted in blocking of key projects, impacting the government's efforts to upgrade decaying rail infrastructure.

While reserving the post of members for different railway services, the panel also decided to create post of DGs in railway board for three services — personnel, signal and telecom and stores — which don't have representation as members.

In another move, the ACC has decided to discontinue entry of officers through the Special Class Railway Apprentice Examination (SCRA) in Indian Railway Services for mechanical engineers.

Started in 1927, the SCRA involved selection to the undergraduate programme in mechanical engineering at the Indian Railway Institute of Mechanical and Electrical Engineering (IRIMEE) at Jamalpur.

Jamalpur graduates — being the youngest to enter railway service — have usually had a disproportionately high share of senior level posts as divisional railway managers (DRMs) and general managers (GMs).

The selection process for GMs and DRMs has also being changed drastically to eliminate discretion in top level appointments which were mired in controversy during the UPA regime due to alleged corrupt practices, highlighted by the arrest of railway board member Mahesh Kumar and delay in filling large number of vacancies.

The DRM posts will be distributed as per strength of railway services and posting will be based on service-wise seniority eliminating the possibility of pick and choose.

The new policy provides for at least one post of GM for each railway service at any point of time and ensures that officers are posted as GM strictly according to their seniority vis-a-vis the date on which vacancies arise.

It also makes officers who have been empanelled for GM (open line) posts eligible for promotion as member even if they have actually not worked at the post.

As per the new system, the suitability for GM (OL) post would be determined by DPC and over-dependence on ACRs has been done away with to ensure that the officer is assessed fairly and impartially by considering his or her entire service record.

The move is significant as several attempts to revamp the railway board as recommended by many high-powered committees in the past were scuttled by the rail bureaucracy and vested interests.