

FM finally does it for selection of Members but also needs to do admn revamp at board-level!

By TIOL News Service

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it has finally happened! The ACC is learnt to have given its nod to the MoF proposal for a minimum of one year service as a pre-condition for becoming Member to the Revenue Boards. Given that the posts of Members in CBDT and CBEC are ex-cadre by nature and they are technically filled up by selection albeit seniority is given due weightage, none from the IRS who might get adversely affected by this decision can challenge it.

True, TIOL has been consistently advocating such a selection norm so that some semblance of cotinuity could be achieved in the Revenue Boards as against the general practice of Members coming for five or six months and spending most of the time looking for a post-retirement slot. Such a culture was not only hurting the revenue interests but was also not able to give the much-needed confidence among the assesseees who used to approach them with their grievances.

Empirically speaking, even this new system of selection will have nothing to do with the merit or quality of officers who would be making it to the Boards now but the fact remains that thanks to their longer tenure they might attempt to achieve something during their tenure. Even the North Block topr brass will feel better having a continuity and stability in the Boards as even before one panel of candidates is approved by the ACC, the next panel has to be put in the queue.

But what would be pragmatic and desirable for the FM to do is to let not senior officers feel humiliated by this new culture as their juniors would be bossing over them as soon as they become Members. So, a practical way out would be to earmark slots like Settlement Commission, Advance Ruling Authority, Safema tribunal and CAT. Those who may opt to move out of the department may go to these bodies. Once it happens and all post-retirement options for the Members are closed, these out of turn promoted Members would certainly try to give their best to the revenue cause!

Though the FM has been able to accomplish this arduous task but he now needs to spare some time towards the administration in the Revenue Boards. Given that a transfer season is round the corner and a new policy is going to be in place, it is important for FM to gear up the otherwise sluggish administration which is trying to help the Revenue by not filling up the large-scale vacancies in the revenue field formations and saving a few pennies for the exchequer.

Take the case of CBEC which has many vacancies even at the Chief Commissioner-level but no proper planning for cadre management has been done. Poor homework is done before sending the file to UPSC for DPC dates and the file is simply thrown back at MoF for better work, fulfilling all the necessary conditions.

Similarly, at the Commissioner-level, if one goes by the last promotion (it took nine months for ACC approval and then final issuance of the Order), FM can jolly well guess how much time it would take this time to fill up about 40 vacancies. Let's now take a look at Addl / JC-levels.

As many as 105 posts of JC are vacant and about 265 at AC-level. 1995 Batch is due for promotion but some sort of artificial barrier is learnt to have been created by certain powerful forces in North Block. Sources confide that unless this well-connected promotee officer is promoted the IRS officers of 1995 batch have no chance! So, all efforts are on to promote this officer whose present designation itself is ad hoc. So, it has to be regularised first before he can be considered. If this is the truth then it is indeed unfortunate that so many vacancies at cutting-edge level exist but none cares for them in CBEC.

Worse, if one takes into account the consequential vacancies and promotion of Superintendent and Inspectors it would be more horrifying scenario. It is high time the FM takes personal interest and do some revamping job in both the Revenue Boards.

Tail spark:

We are told the story of a senior Chief Commissioner who planned a visit to a state outside his headquarters. Elaborate arrangements were made for the state visit of the honourable dignitary. Upon landing at the airport, to a rousing (all made up) welcome, the CC came to know that his name is not being considered for appointment as a Member of the Board as he had less than a year to go. Suddenly his mood changed and the angry CC cancelled his tour of the state and returned to the HQ. Imagine the fate of the Board if such an officer really makes it to the Board.