

Selection of Members for Revenue Boards : You show me the face, I show you the Rule!

By TIOL Edit Team

EVOLVING

a new system to improve the tax administration is really creditable for any Government of the day. But what amounts to a notable achievable with long-term intrinsic value even for the posterity is its successful implementation with minimal exceptions. But, what appears to be happening in the case of selection of Members for the Revenue Boards is that a new system has been created to generate as many exceptions as to make them nothing less than the general rule! And what should be the general rule has become a glaring exception! Though Mr K Rangabhashyam is a fine revenue officer with outstanding achievements but he was overlooked by the North Block topbrass and also the Committee of Secretaries on the sole ground that he was left with less than one-year tenure. And since it was decided at the top echelons of the Government that to make meaningful contribution to the tax system a Member must have at least one year tenure.

Now, the **very raison de'tre of this new selection criterion is awfully defeated if the MoF topbrass goes for those who have got less than one-year-tenure.** No doubt, if our bureaucracy is asked to justify such exceptions no system in the world can beat it. Like in the case of Mr Rangabhashyam, one senior officer confided that his selection has been made against the vacancy for which Mr S Talwar's name was forwarded. But since his name was not cleared due to various reasons, the eligibility of Mr Rangabhashyam was to be calculated from the date of the post falling vacant. And this way he gets one year. No doubt, there are many chinks in this argument and Mr Rangabhashyam gets selected but such a selection methodology defeats the very purpose of the new tenure system.

It would certainly have been better to stick to the earlier system if one has to work only for a few months in the Boards as it also had a few very good Chief Commissioners lined up for the Member posts but they missed the bus in terms of their age. True, the duo of Dr Manmohan Singh and Mr P Chidambaram did not wish for such a system which appears to be **advocating "you show me the face, I show you the rule"**.

Since we are here talking about the growing mess in the tax administration, the story would be incomplete if we overlook the festering mess in the CBEC. If we skip the most-disputed and complicated treatise of seniority list (a pandora's box) we cannot ignore the mess perpetrated in the recently held DPC of Chief Commissioners.

Though the DoP&T and the ACC are very clear in their directions that the DPC should not be held in a piecemeal fashion and advance planning must be done to ensure continuity in the system and also not to deny promotion in time.

But CBEC simply and perhaps gently ignored all such diktats and went on to hold DPC for only eight vacancies corresponding to March 31, 2005, deadline. Had they done proper homework they could have held the same sometime in April and May for vacancies cropping up during the entire fiscal of 2005-06. But they went ahead for reasons best known to them.

But how poor was their homework behind this DPC done in, if not unholy, then holy haste, could be gauged from the fact that the panel of **prospective Chief Commissioners also had the name of a retired official!**

And as a result, one of the officers who could have been covered was denied his promotion. Now a review DPC is expected to be held on April 1! But since it would be spilling over to the next fiscal, once again this would be violative of the DoP&T and ACC guidelines to work out the entire vacancy position for the fiscal and then go for DPC. Even UPSC will have a valid ground not to go for such piecemeal DPC.

All these episodes indeed call for better planning, transparency and non-discriminatory selection policy which should instil confidence and trust among honest and dedicated officers who never learnt the art of lobbying but could still get their dues. If our system fails to do it, a high morale coupled with integrity would certainly be a major casualty in the field formations!