

# Rly board rejig gets green signal

SHINE JACOB  
New Delhi, 24 December

The Union Cabinet on Tuesday gave approval to restructuring the Railway board through merger of its existing eight Group A services into central service called the Indian Railway Management Service (IRMS).

The new board will have a leaner structure on functional lines headed by the chairman and four members — covering infrastructure, operations and business development, rolling stock, and finance. In addition, the board will also include sectoral experts from industry, finance, economics, and management fields. Moving in corporate lines, the chairman will now be called as chief executive officer.

The government is seeing this as a reform, breaking a 150-year-old tradition of ‘working in silos’ that can remove departmental tussles, seen as a roadblock in fast decision making. “Unification of services will end

‘departmentalism’ and promote smooth working of Railways, expedite decision making, create a coherent vision for organisation and promote rational decision making,” Piyush Goyal, minister of railways, told the media. This is also considered as the removal of another colonial tradition, after the decision to merge the Railway Budget with the Union Budget in September 2016.

However, experts indicate that the merger of the services may not be a wise move, as compared to the Budget merger. “The concept by the government is to have one organisational goal, rather than having agendas set by departments. However, the Railways has a lot of specialised areas. For example, a mechanical or civil engineer cannot be in charge of finance department and vice versa. Hence, there may be technical difficulty for its implementation,” said VN Mathur, former member (traffic) of the Railway Board.

Based on the decision, the chairman will be the cadre controlling offi-



### ON CORPORATE TRACK

- To unify eight Group A services into Indian Railway Management Service
- Railway Board to be headed by chairman, who will be called chief executive officer

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cer responsible for human resources with assistance from a director general. In addition, the existing service of Indian Railway Medical Service will be consequently renamed as Indian Railway Health Service.

The government has lined up a massive infrastructure development

plan of ₹50 trillion to modernise the national transporter in the next 12 years — improving safety, speed, and services. This requires speedy decision making by various departments.

At present, the Railway services are organised into departments like traffic, civil, mechanical, electrical, signal and

telecom, stores, personnel, and accounts. These departments are vertically separated from top to bottom and are headed by a secretary-level officers called as members in the Railway Board. “There are pros and cons for this move, but I see more constraints for its implementation. Unless there is a regulator, a finance person getting the charge of electrical maintenance may not be a very positive sign,” said Vijay Dutt, former additional member of the Railways.

In the past 25 years, various committees headed by Prakash Tandon Committee (1994), Rakesh Mohan Committee (2001), Sam Pitroda Committee (2012), and Bibek Debroy Committee (2015) have been formed to recommend reforms.

This rejig will be a zero-cost exercise and money will be saved by surrendering posts in the board and stopping duplication of works. In addition, at the lower level, technical staff will become multitasker, that may promote skilling and improvement in services.

# India to get Chief of Defence Staff, name likely soon

AJAI SHUKLA  
New Delhi, 24 December

More than 18 years after a Group of Ministers (GoM) recommended the appointment of a tri-service commander to streamline higher management of defence, the government on Tuesday made an announcement regarding the same. “The government has approved to create the post of Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) in the rank of a four star general with salary and perquisites equivalent to a service chief.”

The government has not announced the appointment of any individual as CDS. Army chief, General Bipin Rawat, is tipped to be the first CDS, superannuates from service on December 31, having completed three years as chief of army staff (COAS).

In his Independence Day address, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had announced that “...after formation of this post (CDS), all the three forces will get effective leadership at the top.”

However, the CDS that emerges from Tuesday’s detailed press note is not in command, or even in charge, of the three services — the army, navy and air force. “The CDS will not exercise any military command, including over the three service chiefs, so as to be able to provide impartial advice to the political leadership,” says the press statement.

Nor is the CDS the “single point advisor” to the government on military matters that the GoM envisioned in 2001. “He (CDS) will act as the principal military advisor to Raksha Mantri (RM) on all tri-services matters. The three



Army Chief General Bipin Rawat tipped to be the first Chief of Defence Staff

chiefs will continue to advise RM on matters exclusively concerning their respective services.”

The announcement places the CDS in a new branch in the ministry of defence (MoD). It states he will “head the Department of Military Affairs (DMA), to be created within the MoD and function as its Secretary.”

Appointing the CDS to a “secretary” post is being seen as a creative bypass to the contentious question of the CDS’s precedence and seniority. The three service chiefs are currently senior to the defence secretary. Designating the CDS a “secretary”, on par with the defence secretary, amounts to a downgrade.

“The CDS, apart from being the head of the DMA, will also be the Permanent Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee” (PCCSC), stated the release, indicating that the government had adopted the recommendations of the Naresh Chandra Task Force that visualised the tri-service chief as only the first amongst equals, rather than being a tri-service commander.

# On track to become a more horizontal organisation

SUBHOMOY BHATTACHARJEE  
New Delhi, 24 December

Would the Railway Board want to present its new look to the world when the Railway float sails down Rajpath this Republic Day? It has issued advertisements for agencies to design those. It might have to ask those agencies to change the theme after the Cabinet on Tuesday decided to unify the existing eight Group A services of the Railways into a common officer cadre, to be called Indian Railway Management Service. The unification is one of the biggest changes to have occurred in the government structure, affecting its largest departmental undertaking.

The scale of the change is bigger than the lateral recruitment of ten joint secretary-level offi-

cers to various economic ministries that was carried out in 2018. The visible impact of that move was limited to business circles and top government officers. The merger of cadres in railways will have a far larger demonstration effect, especially in smaller towns.

There are about 1.36 million railway employees in the Centre’s civilian employee list. Every third government employee is from the railways. And across all railway colonies, it was clear who were the first among equals — enjoying a host of benefits. If it succeeds, expect similar changes in other Group A services too. The two arms of the revenue service, direct and indirect is a prime candidate, besides a host of accounts services.

The merger of cadres, while it affects only about 12,000 Group

A officers, who lead this “army”, creates a far larger noise. As Railway Minister Piyush Goyal announced, the officers’ associations had agreed to it at their “Manthan” meeting this month. They were sort of caught on the wrong foot. Days before, they had sent up a joint thank you letter to the minister for having approved their delayed promotion to the higher administrative grade, putting them on par with their colleagues in the IAS. So when the secretary of the railway board apparently asked

for the signature from the officer bearers, they had to fall in line. It is expected that the switch over will take about a year to be completed. Once it is done, the century-old rivalry between the cadres will become history. Within the Railways, the most coveted service is the Indian Railway Traffic Service, whose officers are recruited from the combined civil services examination along with their colleagues to Indian Railway Accounts Service and Indian Railway Personnel Service. The IRTS officers came from much

higher position in the merit list. Now the services will be indistinguishable. They will also be indistinguishable from the officers recruited through the parallel engineering services examinations to the engineering departments.

All of them will now be part of the same Indian Railway Management Service. Most probably the nature of the recruitment will itself change as there will be no reason to have two different examinations. There will be no accusations of one service stealing a march over the others in terms of promotion avenues.

But it could leave the millions of employees down below some what crestfallen.

For decades station master or store keepers who keep India’s largest infrastructure service

moving had fancied their chances of joining the lower grades of the IRTS officers at the end of their service career. It was like getting to be an IAS officer as a promoted officer. Those might change, since a common cadre of officers will demand more interdisciplinary skills to succeed and is likely to have less avenues for those from below.

At one stroke, a caste like hierarchy so endemic to the Railways has been abolished. As the Bibek Debroy committee had suggested: “The railways will be however free to deploy these officers in the initial stages, if necessary, in keeping with their academic/functional specialisation, even though job rotation will be the watchword”.

The Railways are on the way to become a more horizontal organisation.

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