



Transforming Cantonment Towns

For Prelims: Transforming Cantonment Towns, British-era concept of cantonment towns, Cantonments Act, 1924, Cantonments Act, 2006.

For Mains: Transforming Cantonment Towns.

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Why in News?

The Ministry of Defense has decided to **demerge civil areas from Military Stations** and integrate them with municipalities in their respective states, aiming to move away from the **British-era concept of cantonment towns**.

- The decision, which affects many cantonment towns established during the pre-independence era, is set to reshape the **administrative landscape and promote better civil-military relations**.

How are Cantonment Administrations Controlled in India?

- **About Cantonment:**
 - Comprising both military and civilian population, **cantonments are different from military stations**, which are meant purely for the training and accommodation of the armed forces.
- **Background:**
 - Cantonment towns in India have their origins in the **colonial era when the British established military stations** to maintain control and secure their territorial interests.
 - These towns were exclusively **reserved for military personnel and were governed separately** from civilian areas.
 - Over time, the demarcation between **military and civilian spheres led to distinct communities**, with limited **interaction between them**.
- **Cantonments and their structure:**
 - Cantonments are classified into four categories — **class I to class IV** — depending on the size of the area and population.
 - While a class I cantonment has eight elected civilians and eight **government/military members on the board**, a **class IV cantonment has two elected civilians** and two government/military members.
 - This board is responsible for various aspects of the cantonment's administration.
 - The station commander of the cantonment is the **ex-officio president of the board**, and an **officer of the Defence Estates Organisation** is the chief executive and the member-secretary.
 - The board has equal representation of elected and nominated/ex-officio members to balance the official representation.
- **Administrative Control:**
 - An inter-services organisation of the **Ministry of Defence** directly controls cantonment

administration.

- In terms of **Entry 3 of Union List (Schedule VII)** of the Constitution of India, **Urban Self Governance of the Cantonments** and the Housing Accommodation therein is the **subject matter of the Union of India**.
- There are more than **60 Cantonments** in the country which have been notified under the **Cantonments Act, 1924** (succeeded by the Cantonments Act, 2006).
- **Administrative structure and regulation of the Urban Governance by the Municipalities:**
 - **At the Central level:** The subject of 'urban local government' is dealt with by the following three ministries:
 - Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs.
 - Ministry of Defence in the case of cantonment boards
 - Ministry of Home Affairs in the case of Union Territories.
 - **At State Level:**
 - **Urban governance is part of the state list** under the Constitution. Thus, the administrative framework and regulation of **ULBs varies across states**.
 - The Constitution (**74th Amendment**) **Act, 1992** provided for the **establishment of Urban Local Bodies (ULBs)** (including municipal corporations) as institutions of local self-government.
 - It also empowered **state governments to devolve certain functions, authority, and power to collect revenue to these bodies, and made periodic elections for them compulsory.**
- **Issues:**
 - Civilians living in cantonment areas have long **complained of issues regarding different restrictions and** said cantonment boards have **failed to resolve them**.
 - The civilian residents complain that cantonment boards have been **unable to come up with a solution to their daily difficulties** that come with living inside cantonments — such access to home loans, free movement within the premises, for example.

What is the Significance of Demerging of Cantonment Areas?

- **Strengthening Civil-Military Relations:** The demerger of military stations and civilian areas is likely to foster better understanding and cooperation between the armed forces and the civilian population. It can also enhance mutual trust and respect, leading to smoother interactions in times of peace and crisis.
- **Local Governance and Civic Amenities:** The integration of civilian areas into municipal governance can lead to **improved civic amenities and infrastructural development**. Residents may have a more significant say in local governance matters, resulting in better urban planning and public services.
- **Historical Heritage and Urban Planning:** Many cantonment towns have a rich historical heritage dating back to the colonial era. The decision may raise questions about preserving the historical significance of these regions while **facilitating modern urban planning**.
- **Legal and Administrative Challenges:** The transition from a cantonment town to a merged municipality may bring about various legal and administrative challenges. The government will need to address these issues to ensure a smooth and efficient transition.

What are the Concerns Raised from the Demerger?

- It is felt by the experts that if cantonments are abolished, it would **adversely impact training and administration of the Army** in these areas and would also be a security hazard.

Way Forward

- The government's decision to demerge **military stations from civil areas** in cantonment towns signifies a fundamental change in administration, aiming to bridge the gap between the military and civilian communities.

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