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## NET, IAS, State-SET (KSET, WBSET, MPSET, etc.), GATE, CUET, Olympiads etc.: Zonal Councils

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- The idea of creation of Zonal Councils was mooted by the first Prime Minister of India, Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru in 1956 when during the course of debate on the report of the States Reorganization, suggested that the States proposed to be reorganized may be grouped into four or five zones having an Advisory Council to develop the habit of cooperative working among these States.
- This suggestion was made by Pandit Nehru at a time when linguistic hostilities and bitterness as a result of re-organization of the States on linguistic pattern were threatening the very fabric of our nation.
- As an antidote to this situation, it was suggested that a high level<sup>advisory</sup> forum should be set up to minimize the impact of these hostilities and to create the Center-State and Centre-State environment with a view to serving inter-State problems and fostering balanced socio economic development of the respective zones.
- In India the distribution of functions between the Union and the State enshrined in the Constitution is such that the States enjoy autonomy within the spheres allotted to them.
- However, the economic development does not respect boundaries of the States since it is the region and the nation as a whole which constitute appropriate units of development.
- A federation, despite a clear-cut division of functions between it and its units, is therefore obliged to evolve institutions to smooth over the rigidities inherent in federalism.
- Zonal Council is one such institution, which plays a very significant role in improving the Centre-States relations.
- There are five Zonal Councils which cover between them all the States and the Union Territories except Goa, Daman and Diu, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, and the Lakshdweep Islands.
- The seven North Eastern States i.e. ... Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Tripura, Mizoram, Meghalaya and Nagaland are not included in the Zonal Councils and their special problems are looked after by the North Eastern Council, set up under the North Eastern Council Act, 1972.

## Zonal Councils

They are as follows:

1. Northern Zonal Council. Includes the States of Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Rajasthan, National Capital Territory of Delhi and the UT of Chandigarh. Its headquarters is in New Delhi
2. Central Zonal Council. Includes the states of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. Its headquarters is in Allahabad.
3. Eastern Zonal Council. Includes the States of Bihar, West Bengal, Orissa and Sikkim. Its headquarters is in Kolkata.
4. Western Zonal Council. Includes the States of Maharashtra, Gujarat, Goa and the UTs of Dadar and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu. Its headquarters is in Mumbai.
5. Southern Zonal Council. Includes the States of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and the UT of Pondicherry. Its headquarters is in Chennai.

## Composition

- A Zonal Council consists of the Union Home Minister who is the Chairman of all the Councils, and the Chief Ministers of different States covered by a particular Council.
- The Chief Ministers act as the Vice-Chairman of the Council by rotation, each holding office for a period of one year at a time.
- The Councils may also associate the following as advisors ' for the the assistance in the performance of its duties: One person nominated by the Planning Commission, The Chief Secretary of each of the States in the Zone and The Development Commissioner of each of the States.

## Objectives and Functions

- The Zonal Councils have been created with the objective of the development of 'co-operate working' to counter growth of the acute State consciousness, regionalism and particularistic trends.
- The Zonal Councils act as sub-federal links between the Centre and the States.
- With the following five functions they aim at promoting inter-state co-operation and coordination in as wide a field as possible: To co-operate with each other in the success to it and speedy execution of major development projects, to enable the Centre and the States which are dealing increasingly with economic and social matters to co-operate and exchange ideas and experience in order that uniform policies for the common good of the community are evolved; to secure some kind of political equilibrium between different regions of the country; to help in arresting the growth of acute State consciousness, regionalism and particularistic trends; and to solve problems concerning the border disputes, linguistic minorities or the inter-state transport.
- Moreover, the Council has a purely advisory status and it helps in the integrated development of the country by linking regional problems with national policies and objectives

## North-Eastern Council

- Both geography and history have combined to set the North-Eastern region comprising the seven States of Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram. In 1994, Sikkim was added as the eighth member of the Council.
- Politically also, the region is characterized by the features not to be found elsewhere in the country. Except Assam, the political units in this part are very small in size. It renders them unviable in many respects and points to the need for combined action in many spheres of administrative operation.
- Further, being a latecomer in the national mainstream, it has its own legacy of emotional and psychological ambivalence in its relationship with the rest of India.
- Each community in the region is characterized by the sense of social autonomy and sovereignty.
- Except for the people in the valley, the rest of the North-Eastern region is inhabited by numerous tribes.
- Each tribe is an atomized group and is characterized by a nearly total absence of social intercourse with any other group. Therefore, the only common bond between various tribes of the region is the administrative one. Given this background, the region has largely remained underdeveloped, although it is abound with natural resources.
- From another perspective also, the region assumes significance and, therefore, attracts special attention and treatment. The region has common frontiers with as many as three foreign countries including China, with whom India's relations have not been too good. Therefore, the security of the region has rightly been a critical national problem.
- The Union Government can only ill-afford not to pay particular attention to the paramount national compulsion to keep a close watch on law and order in the region. Therefore, its interest in the area is justifiably intense and deep.
- Given this uniqueness of the region, a need was felt to bring all these separate States of the region into a kind of relationship of joint action in matters of common interest. The North-Eastern Council is an articulation of this urge towards an integrated development of the region.

## Inception

- The idea of the North-Eastern Council was first crystallized in 1968, with the Internal Affairs Committee of the Union Cabinet putting its stamp of approval in its formation.
- According to the Central Government one of the basic objectives of the formation of the body has been to provide for a unified and coordinated approach to the security and development of the region as a whole.
- However, the Government had to face stiff resistance from the political units of the region as they perceived it (the proposed Council) as a threat to their autonomy and also as an insult to their self-respect.

- They perceived it as an imposition from the Central Government, which could be used to control and supervise the assimilation process with the rest of India.
- Although the North-Eastern Council Act 1970 was passed by the Parliament, it could not be actualized in the face of stiff opposition. Consequently, a year later the Central Government enacted a new legislation, called the North-Eastern Council Act, 1971.
- In August 1972, North-Eastern Council was constituted.

## Composition

- North-Eastern Council comprises of the seven States of the region-Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram.
- The Governor of Assam is the Chairman of the Council.

## Objectives and Functions

- The Council has twin broad objectives: Ensuring integrated economic development, and Maintaining public order and security in the region.
- The two objectives are necessarily interdependent. However, an exclusive emphasis is on the later aspect because of the region's close contact with some neighboring countries, which pose threat to the rest of the country. However, without economic development security of the region cannot be ensured. The main functions of the Council are as follows:
- Work for the integrated development of the entire region. The Council may discuss any matter in which some or all of the States represented in it or the Central Government and one or more States represented in it. Have common interest. It may advise the Central Government and the Government of each State concerned as to the action to be taken on any such matter.
- It may make recommendations with regard to any matter: Of common interest in the field of economic and social planning. Concerning the inter-State transport. Relating to power or flood control projects.
- It reviews from time to time the implementation of the programs included in the regional plan and recommends measures for effecting the necessary coordination among the Governments of the States in the plan implementation. IV The Council, according to the Act, 1971, shall review from time to time the measures taken by the states represented in the Council for the maintenance of security and public order therein and recommend to the Government concerned further measures necessary in this regard. Finally, it must be remembered that the Council is an advisory body and not a supervisory one. The then PM Indira Gandhi assured that the Central Government would not use the Council to interfere in the affairs of the participating Governments.

## Working of the Council

- The Council has apparently given utmost importance to the development of communications and power in the region.

- The Council inks endeavor for the overall economic development of the region has appointed a number of expert committees like Road Committee, Electricity Committee, Terminal Power Committee, Barak River Project Committee etc.

### Rationale to Establish Separate Body

Rationale for establishing a separate body when a Zonal Council is already in operation since 1965

- This question arises naturally as many of the functions entrusted to the N-E Council are also those of the Eastern Zonal Council.
- Since the functions relating to law and order and the regional plan do not come within the purview of the Zonal Council, a separate body was required for the purpose.
- Secondly, the Eastern Zonal Council, which covers this region, has a larger membership.
- In addition to the seven States of the region, it includes West Bengal, Bihar and Orissa too.
- Moreover, the image of the Zonal Council has not been too inspiring.