



Zonal Councils

Source: PIB

Why in News?

The Union Home Minister and Minister of Cooperation chaired the **25th Central Zonal Council** meeting in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, organized by the **Inter-State Council Secretariat** in collaboration with the **Uttar Pradesh Government**.

What are Zonal Councils?

- **About:** Zonal Councils are **statutory bodies** (not constitutional) established under the **States Reorganisation Act, 1956**, as a **high-level advisory forum** to foster **cooperative working** among states and to create a **healthy inter-State and Centre-State environment**.
 - The idea of Zonal Councils was first proposed by former **Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru** in **1956** during debates on the **States Reorganisation Commission's (Fazal Ali Commission, 1953) Report**.
 - Under **Sections 15 to 22** of the **States Reorganisation Act, 1956**, five **Zonal Councils** were established.
 - The **North Eastern region** has a separate council, the **North Eastern Council**, created in **1972**, set up under the **North Eastern Council Act, 1972**.
- **Composition:**

Zonal Council	States
Northern Zonal Council	Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Punjab, Rajasthan, Delhi, Chandigarh
Central Zonal Council	Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Uttarakhand
Eastern Zonal Council	Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal, Sikkim
Western Zonal Council	Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, Dadra & Nagar Haveli, and Daman & Diu
Southern Zonal Council	Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry

- **Organizational Structure:**
 - **Chairman:** Union Home Minister (for all 5 Zonal Councils). He is also the **ex-officio Chairman** of the **North Eastern Council (NEC)**.
 - **Vice-Chairman:** Chief Minister of one of the member states (by annual rotation).
 - **Members:** The members include the **Chief Ministers**, **Lieutenant Governors**, or **Administrators** of the member States and Union Territories.
 - Additionally, from each member state, the **Governor** nominates **two ministers** as members of the Council.
 - **Advisors:** One nominee from **NITI Aayog** (earlier Planning Commission), Chief Secretaries, and Development Commissioners of the member states.
 - Each **Zonal Council** has a **Permanent Committee** comprising the **Chief Secretaries** of member states. **State-proposed issues** are first discussed by this

committee, and unresolved matters are then placed before the full **Zonal Council** for further deliberation.

- **Objectives and Functions:** Zonal Councils serve as a **structured platform** for **dialogue and coordination** on issues involving **two or more states** or the **Centre and states**, promoting **mutual understanding and cooperation**.
 - Though **advisory in nature**, they have become key instruments of **cooperative federalism**, with **61 meetings** held in the last **eleven years**.
 - **They discuss and address:**
 - Issues, like the **speedy investigation of sexual offenses** and the implementation of **Fast Track Special Courts (FTSCs)**.
 - **Financial inclusion** through **brick-and-mortar banking** in every village.
 - Implementation of the **Emergency Response Support System (ERSS-112)**.
 - Regional matters like **nutrition, education, health, electricity, urban planning**, and **cooperative sector** development.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question

Prelims:

Q. Which of the following bodies does not/do not find mention in the Constitution? (2013)

1. National Development Council
2. Planning Commission
3. Zonal Councils

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: (d)

Mains:

Q. What changes has the Union Government recently introduced in the domain of Centre-State relations? Suggest measures to be adopted to build the trust between the Centre and the States and for strengthening federalism. (2024)