



DEVOLUTION OF POWERS TO STATES TO MICRO-MANAGE

Introduction

As COVID-19 lockdown is easing up, the states will now have to take care that they open up in a manner that does not aggravate the pandemic, while also addressing economic and humanitarian imperatives.

Not a time to start relaxing

The doubling rate of the coronavirus infection has improved to 13.6 per cent and mortality and recovery figures of COVID-19 patients have also shown positive trends, however, these developments should not make state health authorities lose sight of the challenges they will face in the coming weeks.

How to handle it now?

- State authorities will have to make arrangements to test and, if need be, isolate the returning migrants in a dignified manner.
- The resumption of inter-state buses could make their task of managing the pandemic tougher.
- At the same time, improvements in transport could ease the desperation of the working class.
- State governments need to be open-minded in exercising their transport-related powers during Lockdown 4.

Over to the states



- State governments had alleged that the earlier criteria of designating entire districts as infection zones circumscribed their capacity to kickstart economic activities. The new guidelines allow them to designate “appropriate administrative units” — districts, municipal corporations, sub-divisions or wards — as containment zones.
- Imperatives of combating the pandemic will require regular interactions between all levels of the government.
- Epidemiologists now say that the virus is here to stay, which means hotspots can change, the infection can recede from some areas and surge in other regions.
- The new guidelines allow the states to deal with such eventualities. Their micro-management of the battle against COVID-19 will be watched.

Background

What is devolution of power?

Devolution is the **statutory delegation of powers** from the central government of a sovereign state to govern at a subnational level, such as a regional or local level. It is a form of administrative decentralization. Devolved territories have the power to make legislation relevant to the area and thus granting them a higher level of autonomy.

Devolution **differs from federalism** in that the devolved powers of the subnational authority may be temporary and are reversible, ultimately residing with the central government. Thus, the state remains de jure unitary.

Legislation creating devolved parliaments or assemblies can be repealed or amended by central government in the same way as any statute. In federal systems, by contrast, sub-unit government is guaranteed in the constitution, so the powers of the sub-units cannot be withdrawn unilaterally by the central government (i.e. without the consent of the sub-units being granted through the process of constitutional amendment). The sub-units therefore have a lower degree of protection under devolution than under federalism.

The terms **devolution and decentralisation are often confused**. Devolution is ‘the transfer of decision-making capacity from higher levels in an organisation to lower levels, that is it is about who is best placed in an



organisation to make decisions’.

Decentralisation is ‘the redistribution of functions or tasks from central units in organisations to more widely dispersed units, that is it is about where in an organisation particular functions are best carried out.

-Source: Indian Express

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