

FOR BETTER USE: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON MPLADS FUNDS

Relevant for: Indian Polity | Topic: Parliament - structure, functioning, conduct of business, powers & privileges and issues arising out of these

The [suspension of the Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme \(MPLADS\)](#) for two years to boost the funding available for the [COVID-19](#) fight is a step in the right direction. It may appear at first blush that the decision may undermine the decentralised manner of funding local area development. However, past experience has been that some members do not utilise their full entitlement and that there is a gap between recommendation made by members and implementation by the administration under this scheme. The immediate benefit now is the freeing up of about 7,900 crore over a two-year period so that it can be spent on boosting the health infrastructure needed to combat the pandemic. This is the second announcement regarding MPLADS that the Centre has made after the disease outbreak. Last month, it allowed utilisation of MPLADS funds to the extent of at least 5lakh by each MP to purchase medical equipment for government hospitals in their constituencies. Many members made immediate use of the one-time dispensation to recommend the procurement of N95 masks, personal protective equipment, and ventilators. Now that the entire scheme has been suspended, the government should ensure that recommendations already made are acted upon immediately. While the transfer of these sums to the Consolidated Fund of India would help judicious deployment anywhere in the country, based on an assessment of the varying needs in different regions, it would redound to the government's credit if the genuine efforts made by members to help their constituents are not frustrated. It should also see to it that allocations are non-discriminatory.

[Political reactions](#) indicate that there is considerable disenchantment over the suspension — the 5-crore corpus available to each member is a source of much goodwill for elected representatives. Better performing MPs identify and fulfil local development needs with empathy and alacrity. However, there has also been persistent criticism about the scheme's very nature. A conceptual flaw pointed out by experts is that it goes against the separation of powers. It allows individual legislators to encroach on the planning and implementation duties of the administration. Jurists have pointed out that the Constitution does not confer the power to spend public money on an individual legislator. Experts have called it out for weak monitoring. The [Supreme Court, while declining to strike down the scheme](#), called for a robust accountability regime. MPLADS gives scope for MPs to utilise the funds as a source of patronage that they can dispense at will. The CAG has flagged instances of financial mismanagement and inflation of amounts spent. The Second Administrative Reforms Commission recommended its abrogation altogether, highlighting the problems of the legislator stepping into the shoes of the executive. The current suspension gives some scope for a reconsideration of the scheme in its totality.

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