

WHY AND HOW OF CREATING A DISTRICT

Relevant for: Indian Polity | Topic: Indian Constitution - Features & Significant Provisions related to The Preamble, Union & its Territories and The Citizenship

A file photo of a vendor selling fruits in Malerkotla.

On May 14, Punjab Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh declared Malerkotla the 23rd district of the State. This led to an angry response from Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath who took to Twitter to say that the Punjab government's decision of declaring its only Muslim-majority town a district was "a reflection of the divisive policy of the Congress".

Section 5 of the Punjab Land Revenue Act, 1887 says the "State government may, by notification, vary the limits and alter the numbers of tehsils, districts and divisions into which the State is divided".

How are new districts carved?

The power to create new districts or alter or abolish existing districts rests with the State governments. This can either be done through an executive order or by passing a law in the State Assembly.

Many States prefer the executive route by simply issuing a notification in the official gazette.

How does it help?

States argue that smaller districts lead to better administration and governance. For example, in 2016, the Assam government issued a notification to upgrade the Majuli sub-division to Majuli district for "administrative expediency".

Are there any exceptions?

The State government has been vested with unfettered powers under Section 5 of the Punjab Land Revenue Act, 1887 to create new districts, says K.B.S. Siddhu, former financial commissioner (revenue) of Punjab. "This power is generally held temporarily in abeyance only during active census operations or during the delimitation exercise of Lok Sabha/Vidhan Sabha constituencies," Mr. Sidhu says.

Does the Central government have a role to play here?

The Centre has no role to play in the alteration of districts or creation of new ones. States are free to decide. The Home Ministry comes into the picture when a State wants to change the name of a district or a railway station. The State government's request is sent to other departments and agencies such as the Ministry of Earth Sciences, Intelligence Bureau, Department of Posts, Geographical Survey of India Sciences and the Railway Ministry seeking clearance. A no-objection certificate may be issued after examining their replies.

What has been the trend?

According to the 2011 Census, there were 593 districts in the country. The Census results showed that between 2001-2011, as many as 46 districts were created by States. Though the 2021 Census is yet to happen, Know India, a website run by the Government of India, says

currently there are 718 districts in the country.

The surge in number is also due to bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh into A.P. and Telangana in 2014. Telangana at present has 33 districts and A.P. has 13 districts.

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