

# CIRCUMVENTION: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON CENTRE-STATE TIES

Relevant for: Indian Polity | Topic: Issues and Challenges Pertaining to the Federal Structure, Dispute Redressal Mechanisms, and the Centre-State Relations

Wielding power at the Centre comes with great responsibility. A major responsibility in a federal country with strong centralising features is to maintain the balance, as well as mutual respect, between political structures at the central and State levels. In particular, it is an obligation of the Centre to refrain from bypassing the elected leadership while dealing with States. Two recent developments have raised concern that the Centre wants to give instructions to officials functioning under elected State regimes. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has held two [virtual meetings with district magistrates](#) and State officials to review the COVID-19 situation. Union Education Minister [Ramesh Pokhriyal held a virtual meeting](#) to discuss the [National Education Policy](#), and related matters such as the conduct of Class XII examinations with State Secretaries in charge of education. While such meetings may help the Prime Minister or any Union Minister get some feedback from the field across India, it is quite unusual for leaders in the central political executive to bypass their counterparts in the States. The Tamil Nadu Minister for School Education, Anbil Mahesh Poyyamozhi, took the right stand by [not deputing any official to represent the State in Mr. Pokhriyal's virtual interaction](#). The idea was not to boycott the meeting, but to say the Minister ought to have been included in a discussion on the NEP.

The Prime Minister addressing district magistrates, or collectors, does have a precedent. Rajiv Gandhi addressed the heads of the district administration in Uttar Pradesh, when it was under Congress rule, on the issue of Panchayati Raj. The defence then was that such direct interactions were permissible under the Constitution, citing Articles 256 and 257. These provisions stipulate that the States are obliged to comply with laws made by Parliament and also allow some directions from the Union government. If the Prime Minister belongs to one party, and the officials addressed are from a State run by another, there is bound to be resentment that the elected representatives of the State are being bypassed. In the present case, it is true that the Centre has a major role in the pandemic response. The Disaster Management Act has been invoked to specify guidelines on lockdowns, restrictions and relaxations and to ensure smooth medical supplies. However, it would be in the larger interest of the country if events and discussions are held in such a way that the political structures at the State are not seen to be undermined. There ought to be no scope for complaints, such as the one made by West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, that [Chief Ministers felt humiliated](#) when all of them were not allowed to speak to the PM in a virtual interaction.

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From the abrogation of the special status of Jammu and Kashmir, to the landmark Ayodhya verdict, 2019 proved to be an eventful year.

**END**

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