Polity & Governance · GS - II

Indian constitution exhibits centralising tendencies to maintain unity and integrity of the nation. Elucidate in the perspective of the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897; The Disaster Management Act, 2005 and recently passed Farm Acts.

EXAM YEAR	PAPER	SUBJECT
2020	GS - II	Polity & Governance

MARKS	WORD LIMIT
15	~250 words

Answer Hint

Quasi-federal structure; Union and State powers; public health; disaster management; agricultural legislation; centralisation; cooperative federalism; judicial scrutiny; constitutional balance

Model Answer

Introduction

The Indian Constitution establishes a federal system with a relatively strong Union. Centralising tendencies aim to maintain national unity and coordinate responses to common challenges, but they may also generate tensions with state autonomy.

Centralising tendencies in the constitutional framework

- **Constitutional provisions:** The Union has significant legislative and executive powers, including residuary powers under Article 248 and the Union List. Parliament can legislate on State List subjects in specified circumstances under Articles 249, 250 and 252.
- **Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897:** The Act empowers state governments to adopt special measures to prevent the spread of dangerous epidemic diseases. During COVID-19, its operation alongside the Disaster Management Act, 2005, contributed to a nationally coordinated response, although implementation depended substantially on states.

- **Disaster Management Act, 2005:** The Act establishes national, state and district disaster-management institutions. The National Disaster Management Authority, chaired by the Prime Minister, provides central direction and coordination during major disasters.
- **Farm Acts of 2020:** The Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, the Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, and the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act generated controversy over legislative competence and state interests. The three laws were subsequently repealed in 2021.

Critical assessment

Central coordination can be valuable during pandemics and disasters, but uniform policies may overlook local conditions. Disputes over the farm laws highlighted concerns about consultation, federal balance and the distribution of legislative powers.

Way forward

Strengthen intergovernmental consultation, clarify responsibilities, respect constitutional legislative boundaries and establish transparent mechanisms for resolving Union-state disputes.

Conclusion

Centralising tendencies can protect national interests, but their legitimacy depends on constitutional authority and cooperative implementation. A balanced federation requires coordination without unnecessarily weakening state autonomy.

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