

Zonal Councils in the Indian Federal System

A Case Study

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The functioning of the Central Zonal Council during the seven years from its inception to 1963 refutes the many criticisms levelled against the institution of zonal councils in our federal system.

The fear that these Councils would become the proverbial fifth wheel in the administrative coach serving purpose other than impeding speed and efficiency has proved entirely unfounded. Nor have the Councils become one other tier in the power hierarchy. The States constituting a Zonal Council are not required to get the clearance of the Council before proceeding with any programme or policy.

Though the Zonal Councils are the Centre's creation and the Union Home Minister is the Chairman of all the Councils, it has not happened that in their operation the Councils have functioned as handmaids of the Centre. Use of the Councils to persuade the States to accept some policies of the Central Government is just one aspect of the role of the Councils.

If it is not trite that the Zonal Councils have been used to weaken the federal system by the Centre encroaching on the spheres of the States, the opposite is also not true. The formation of the Councils has in no way created a challenge to the authority of the Centre, nor is there any possibility of this happening in future. The Council's working is regulated by the Union Home Minister and the Joint Secretary of the Council, who is a nominee of the Government of India, is virtually the resident agent of the Central Government in the Zone, exercising administrative control over the Secretariat of the Council. The Zonal Councils have functioned as purely advisory bodies without exercising anything like coercive powers against either the Centre or the States.

ZONAL Councils, set up under the States Re-organisation Act, 1956, I have as their avowed object the development of "co-operative working" to counter "too acute a State-consciousness which has been encouraged even more by arguments about linguism and the like." They have been called upon to promote inter-State co-operation and co-ordination, this being obviously a necessary pre-requisite for the ordered progress of the individual States no less than of the nation as a whole. These Councils, thus, represent an interesting experiment in co-operative federalism, forming a part of the complex of processes for relieving, or, at any rate, reducing the strains and stresses inherent in a federal polity. In particular, they may make recommendations with regard to:

- "(a) any matter of common interest in the field of economic and social planning;
- (b) any matter concerning border disputes, linguistic minorities or inter-State transport;
- (c) any matter connected with or arising out of the re-organisation of the States under this Act."²

The present paper is restricted to the discussion of the Central Zonal Council.³ Each Council, it is true, has developed its own nuances and undertones, and, therefore, differs from its counterparts both in matters of details and positive achievements. Nevertheless the common institutional characteristics of these Councils do not, perhaps, make for any fundamental de-

viations. The over-all conclusions emerging from the present study may, therefore, generally hold good in the case of other Councils as well.

The Central Zonal Council consists of Uttar Pradesh, the largest State of the Indian Union from the point of population, and Madhya Pradesh, the largest in respect of area. It covers slightly less than one-fourth of the total area of the country, and is inhabited by one-fourth, approximately, of the country's population. This Zone is the largest in area, and in regard to population is second only to the Eastern Zone. Yet, of all the Zones, this one manifests the highest degree of linguistic homogeneity. Consequently, no psychological barriers, born of differences in the language spoken at different parts, have confronted the Central Zonal Council. Happily placed in this respect, it can usefully address itself to quite a few problems facing the participating States of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. In particular, the following problems may be solved more effectively if tackled on a zonal basis:

- (1) The problem of dacoity in the Chambal ravines and in the contiguous areas calls for inter-State administrative arrangements.
- (ii) The border between U P and M P is, in the opinion of many, not as rational as it could be; and in matters such as the construction and maintenance of roads, administration of justice, implementation of development

projects, there is constant and daily need for co-operation between the two Governments.

- (iii) Puller utilisation of Power projects near the border between the two States calls for increased co-operation and understanding between them. It is not unlikely that while demand for power exists in one State, the potential for power generation may abound in a contiguous area falling within the other State. "For the achievement of optimum benefits development schemes of different States have to be clearly co-ordinated. Water stored in the reservoirs in one State may be used with advantage for irrigation and power generation in the adjoining State. Similarly, power available in one State may be distributed in other States. In certain cases, it may be necessary to divert waters from one basin to the other for the benefit of the region as a whole. Co-operation between the States is therefore, essential for investigations, road surveys, allocation of waters and power generated and sharing of their costs."⁴

The Central Zonal Council was inaugurated on May 1, 1957, and had held five meetings until 1963:
First meeting: May 1, 1957;
Second meeting: January 4, 1958;
Third meeting: June 22, 1958;
Fourth meeting: August 28, 1960;
Fifth meeting: January 29 and 30, 1963,

It may be noted that the Council has not been meeting at regular intervals and the interval between successive meetings has been getting longer. In course of these five meetings the Council discussed 67 items including items concerning purely procedural matters. This number also includes the items that figured on the agenda on an earlier occasion as well but *on* which the discussion could not be completed, or was postponed for consideration at the subsequent meeting of the Council. Below is a list of the more important subjects discussed by the Central Zonal Council during the seven years to 1963.

- (1) Agricultural production programme for achieving the revised production targets,
- (2) Recasting of State plans in consequence of States' reorganisation.
- (3) Man-power planning.
- (4) Acquisition of land for Rihand dam.
- (5) Supply of electric energy and water for irrigation and other purposes to Madhya Pradesh from Rihand dam.
- (6) Supply of water and power to M P from Matatila dam.
- (7) Development of Chitrakut and surrounding areas.
- (8) Power development on Zonal basis in the Central Zone.
- (9) Recruitment of one-third of the number of the High Court judges from outside the State.
- (10) Inclusion in the 'core' of the Second Five Year Plan of all power development schemes under implementation in the Zone.
- (11) Inclusion of all power projects of the Zone in the Second Plan.
- (12) Formation of a Common Police Reserve Force in the Central Zone.
- (13) Development of border roads.
- (14) Joint selection of technical personnel.
- (15) Establishment of Joint Office of the Administrator-General and Official Trustee for the Central Zone.
- (16) Maintenance of inter-State liver bridges.
- (17) Co-ordination of technical educational facilities in the two States.
- (18) Conversion of certain State Highways into National Highways.
- (19) Integrated road development programme for the border areas

in the north of M P and south of UP.

- (20) Appointment of a 'study group' to examine the Motor Vehicles Rules of both the States with a view to ensuring more smooth operation of both goods and passenger road transport services on inter-State routes and connected reciprocal arrangements.
- (21) Examination of possibilities of extending irrigation from Rangan reservoir and Ken canal in M P by UP engineers.
- (22) Improvement of communications between U P and M P.
- (23) Implementation of the safeguards for linguistic minorities in U P and M P.

As mentioned earlier, the Central Zonal Council met five times since its inception to 1963, the number of participants at a meeting fluctuating between 14 and 19. This number includes the Chairman (who is the Central Home Minister), the ministers including the Chief Ministers of the participating States, their 'advisers', and some senior officials of the Central Government. In addition to the Chief Ministers of both the States, there are, as a rule, one or two other ministers from each State. Among the 'advisers' are the Chief Secretaries and Development Secretaries of both the States. The Council, thus, partakes of the features of a summit meeting of the chief executives of the member-States. A senior official of the Planning Commission has also been attending the meetings. His association with the deliberations of the Council is reflective of an urge to make the Council attend to problems of regional development and planning in a more concentrated way. Besides, there are officials of the Central Government attending the meetings. The Central Ministry of Home Affairs is invariably represented by 2/4 officials, generally of the rank of Deputy Secretary and above. The representatives of other Central Ministries which have something to do with, or say on, some items figuring on the agenda in a particular meeting, are also invited.

The nature of membership of the Council, its infrequent meetings, and short one-day sessions do not make it a suitable body for going into details of administrative policies. Inevitably, therefore, it has to depend upon committees,⁸ at one stage or the other, for most of its work. These committees, comprising officials of the two Governments, can meet more frequently and

they submit the results of their deliberations to the Council which then takes appropriate decisions. The Central Zonal Council had appointed the following committees, each entrusted with specific problems :

(1) Man power Planning Committee, consisting of Chief Secretaries, Development Commissioners, and Re-organisation (or Integration) Officers of the two States, to study the man-power problem in the Zone.

(2) Power Development (Technical) Committee for power development on Zonal basis, consisting of the following:

- (i) a representative of the Central Water and Power Commission;
- (ii) a representative of the Central Ministry of Commerce and Industry;
- (iii) Chief Engineers of the Electricity Departments, and/or Electricity Boards of the two States;
- (iv) two representatives of the Development Commissioners of each of the States;

(v) Directors of Industries of the two States;

(vi) a representative of the Federation of Electricity Undertakings of India;

(vii) a representative of the Natural Resources Division of the Planning Commission;

(viii) Joint Secretary of the Central Zonal Council.

(3) On M P's request for supply of power and water to M P from Rihand dam, the Council appointed a committee to consider this question. It consisted of the following :

(i) Secretaries of the Irrigation and Power Departments of both the States;

(ii) Chief Engineers of the department of Irrigation and Power of both the States;

(iii) representatives of the Finance Departments of both the States; and,

(vi) Joint Secretary of the Central Zonal Council.

(4) A committee consisting of the following was appointed to examine the feasibility of having a common Police Reserve Force for the Zone, and to draw up a scheme therefor:

(i) Secretary, Central Zonal Council (Chief Secretary, M P);

(ii) Home Secretaries of both the States;

(iii) Inspectors-General of Police of both the States;

(iv) Joint Secretary of the Central Zonal Council.

(5) A committee, consisting of the following, to prepare an integrated

road development programme for border areas of the two States in the South of U P and north of M P :

(i) Joint Secretary of the Central Zonal Council;

(ii) Chief Engineer, M P;

(iii) Chief Engineer, U P.

(6) A committee was appointed to make recommendations to determine the principles on which payment should be made for lands, houses, etc, for Rihand dam. It consisted of the following:

(i) Joint Secretary, Central Zonal Council;

(ii) Revenue Secretaries of both the States;

(iii) Secretary, Public Works Department, M P;

(iv) Secretary, Irrigation & Power, U P.

(7) A committee, consisting of the following, to draw up a scheme for the joint control of ferries crossing Chambal and other rivers in the border areas of Madhya Pradesh:

(i) Secretaries of the Public Works Departments of both the States;

(ii) Secretaries of the Local-Self Government Departments of both the States;

(iii) Home Secretaries of both the States;

(iv) Joint Secretary of the Central Zonal Council.

(8) A committee, consisting of the following, to prepare a progress report on the Matatila dam and to suggest ways and means for expediting its completion:

(i) a representative of the Central Ministry of Irrigation and Power;

(ii) a representative of each of the two States;

(iii) Joint Secretary of the Central Zonal Council.

(9) A committee, consisting of Chief Engineers of UP and MP, was appointed to suggest a suitable method for the sharing of income from inter-State bridges.

(10) A "study group" consisting of the following to examine the Motor Vehicles Rules of both the States with a view suggesting amendment of the Rules to ensure smoother operation of both goods and passenger road transport services on interstate routes:

(i) Road Transport Commissioners of both the States;

(ii) Joint Secretary of the Central Zonal Council.

(11) A Standing Committee of the Chief Ministers of both the States to review from time to time the progress of implementation of the various policy

decisions taken by the Chief Ministers' Conference relating to safeguards for linguistic minorities and national integration.

In the nature of things, all these committees (except Nos 2 and 11) have been of an *ad hoc* nature, ceasing to exist after completing the investigation of the problems with which they were charged. The Power Development (Technical) Committee, which was originally set up as an *ad hoc* body, was later converted into a standing one in view of the obvious importance of power planning on zonal basis.

Committees and Policy-Making

It may be-mentioned that the formation of these committees may either precede policy making or follow it. Generally the Zonal Council would wait until the problem has been thoroughly explored by a committee. It has, however, happened that a committee was set up after a policy had already secured approval, and in such a case what the committee is required to do is to prepare a detailed scheme with a view to its implementation. The committee entrusted with the drawing up of a scheme for the joint control of ferries plying between either banks of the Chambal and other rivers in the border areas of Madhya Pradesh, is in example of the latter type of committees. Most of the committees have, however, been constituted preparatory to policy-making.

The pattern of composition of these committees reveals that they are manned exclusively by officials, the joint Secretary of the Council acting as Member-Secretary of each committee. The Standing Committee of the two Chief Ministers is the only instance of a committee whose membership is of a political nature. These committees act as the arm of the Council, and certainly do not render the latter less effective, as the final decision rests, obviously, with the Zonal Council Itself. The Committee to determine the principles on which payments were to be made for lands, houses, etc, to be acquired in MP for Rihand dam made unanimous recommendations except on one point. The point in dispute related to additional compensation payable to displaced persons. While MP was insistent upon payment being made at the rate of Rs 250 per family of displaced persons, UP was inclined to pay only at the rate payable in its own State, which was Rs 125 per family. The Zonal Council accepted the recommendations of the committee on all matters relat-

ing to compensation for lands, etc, acquired in MP for Rihand dam, but as regards additional compensation to displaced persons for purposes of resettlement, it agreed that payment be made at the rate of Rs 125 instead of Rs 250 per family. Similarly, the committee to inquire into the question of supply of power and water from Rihand dam to MP could not make unanimous recommendations. The Zonal Council decided that the Chief Ministers of UP and MP should try to settle the matter between themselves.

As said earlier, the Central Minister for Home Affairs is the Chairman of the Council and the Chief Ministers of the two States hold office as vice-chairmen alternatively. The Chief Secretary of the State is the Secretary of the Council by rotation in the same order. The office of Secretary being floating in nature, the real functionary is the Joint Secretary who should be a person "not in the service of any of the States represented in the Council". A senior official of the Central Home Ministry has so far been appointed in this post. Subject to the control of the Secretary, the Joint Secretary is competent to perform all or any of the functions of the Secretary and he also acts as the member-secretary of every committee constituted by the Council. The meetings of the Council are held by rotation in UP and MP but the office of the Council is located at Allahabad (UP). The sanctioned strength of the staff of the Council Secretariat is as follows:

(i) Secretary	1
(ii) Joint Secretary	1
(iii) Section Officer	1
(iv) Upper Division Clerk-cum-Cashier	1
(v) Lower Division Clerks	2
(vi) Class IV Staff	6

The work of the Central Zonal Council may, perhaps, be better appreciated if one studies its role

(i) as an institution to help in the implementation of certain national policies and objectives:

(ii) as an institution to help promote planning on zonal instead of State basis;

(iii) as a forum for the participating States to put up a united stand on certain matters against the Centre; and

(iv) as a forum for resolving inter-State disputes.

The Central Government has in the Central Zonal Council an institution, to persuade the participating States to fall in line with centrally sponsored objectives and policies. The delicacy of this task is obvious in a federal constitu-

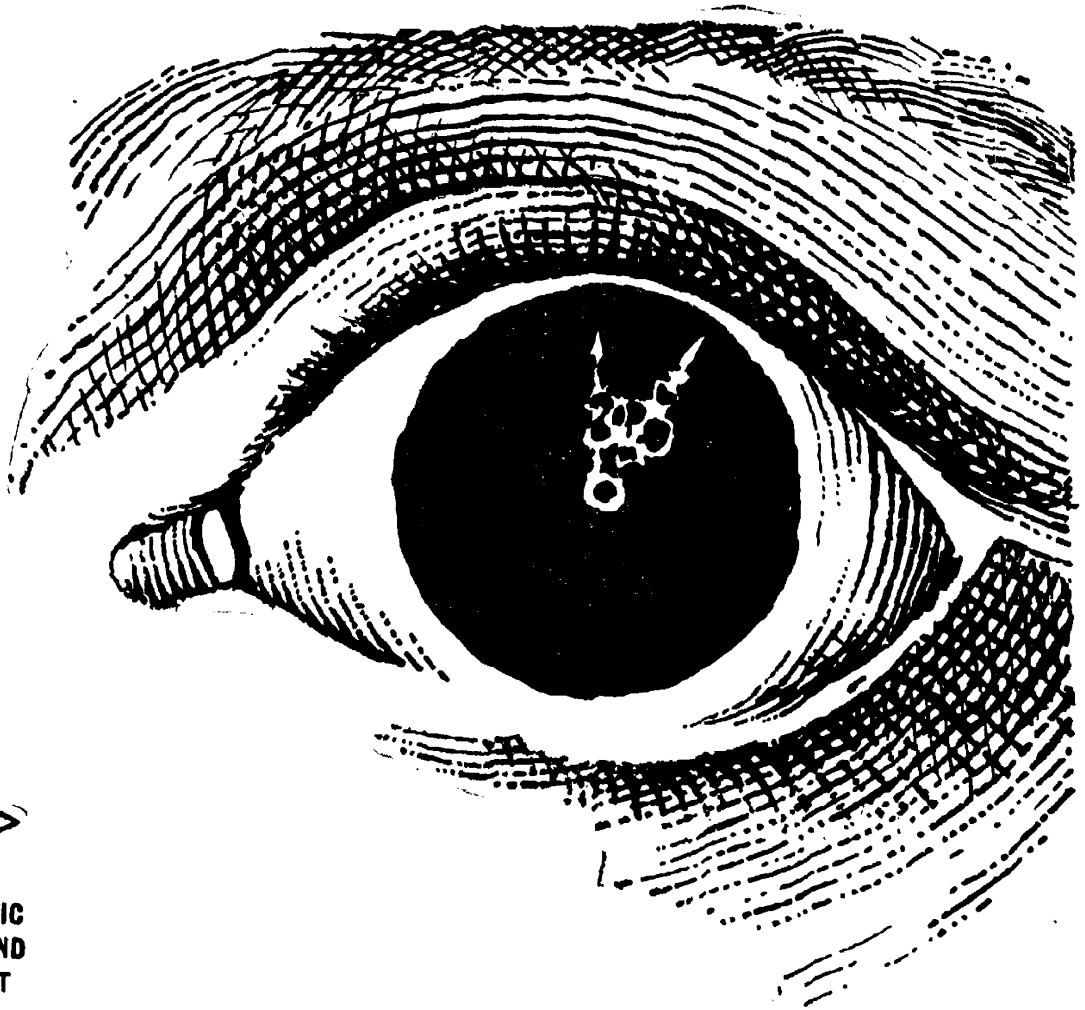
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tion which demarcates the spheres of activities of the Centre and States. The participating States in the Central Zonal Council being predominantly agricultural, the Central Government has been exhorting them to step up food production. The Chairman, for instance, observed at the second meeting of the Council: "The food situation, I am sorry to say, has deteriorated since we met last, and both the states included in this Zone are seriously affected. . . . Our planned development and stability of our economy depend vitally on our achieving self-sufficiency in food. It calls for a total effort on our part to bring additional areas under "cultivation and to increase food output per acre. I hope, each meeting of the Zonal Council will serve to focus attention to this national issue of vital importance." Again, alarmed at the upsurge of dis-integrating forces in the country, the Chairman sounded a warning at the fourth meeting of the Council held in August 1960; "Nearer home, while we are engaged in the great task of the economic reconstruction of India, we are faced with a challenge to the integrity of our country and the freedom of our people . . . In a country so large as ours, it may be difficult to cast off completely regional and other lesser affiliations but unless the supremacy of national interests, is unreservedly accepted, our liberty itself may be greatly imperilled, Our independence would be incomplete, fragmentary and even transient if we do not firmly set our face against all the narrow loyalties which stand in the way of our building an abiding sense of a harmoniously integrated nationhood."

Use for Implementing Policies

The Central Government also uses the Zonal Council to implement its policies. The Centrally sponsored safeguards for linguistic minorities have been accepted by the Central Zonal Council and are being implemented now. The Council has set up a Standing Committee comprising the two Chief Ministers to review periodically the implementation of the various policy decisions taken by the Chief Ministers' Conference relating to safeguards for linguistic minorities and national integration. It has, also, agreed to implement the centrally evolved three-language formula, and, further, to dispense with the system of compulsory tests in the regional language for purposes of recruitment. The Council is, thus, emerging as a bulwark of national integration, which is obviously an important role in the

context of the fissiparous tendencies increasingly coming to the surface in the country. Similarly, the Central Government pressed for acceptance of its proposal for recruitment of one-third of the High Court judges of a State from outside that State. This proposal was accepted "in principle" at the third meeting of the Council, held in January 1958. The central Government, moreover, has won over the participating States to its proposal for a common Police Reserve Force. Initially, this proposal encountered some opposition but was finally carried through. The Council could not for some time, take any decision on the formation of a common Police Reserve Force, as the Chief Minister of M P, supported by his U P counterpart, sought postponement in order to give further thought to the proposal and examine in greater detail the financial implications involved. Occasionally, some concession has to be made *la* the sentiments of the States to make easier the "selling" of such proposals. This may be illustrated by the Central Government's proposal regarding the appointment of one-third of the High Court judges from outside the State. This proposal has been accepted but the Centre had to make one concession, viz, that it has to secure the prior approval of the State in which the appointment is to be made.

Finally, the Central Zonal Council approved the proposal made by the Central Government, for the exchange of agenda and proceedings between the five Zonal Councils. Although a minor measure in itself, this sets the functioning of the Council in a much wider context.

The permanent association with the Zonal Council of a high-ranking official of the Planning Commission is calculated more to make the Council planning-conscious. The inclusion of a representative of the Natural Resources Division of the Planning Commission in the Power Development (Technical) Committee, set up by the Zonal Council in 1958, is a step in the same direction. The Zonal Council has been giving attention to schemes of mutual interest and concern since its inception which is well borne out by programmes like those for man-power planning in the Zone, power development on zonal basis, integrated road development for border areas of the two States, joint selection of technical personnel, etc.

Of vital importance to the successful execution of the Five Year Plans is the

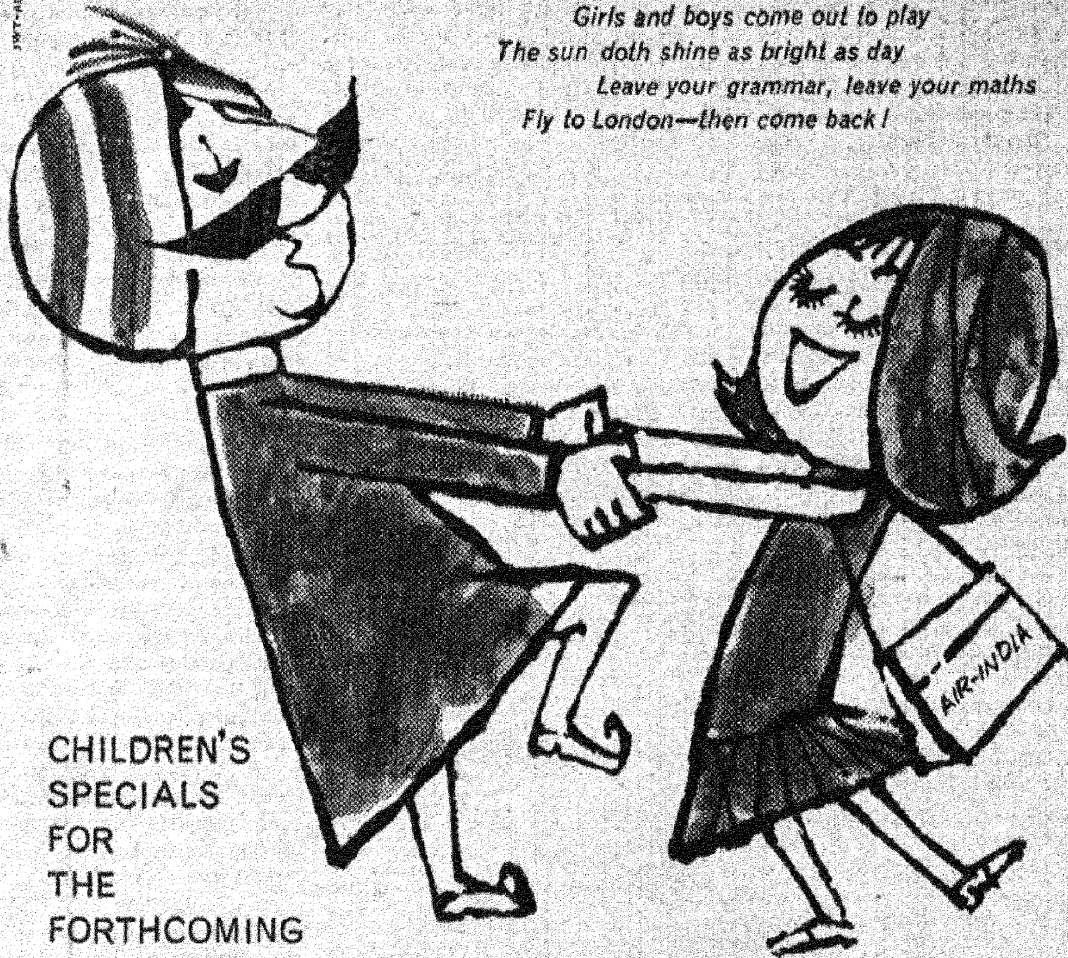
assessment of man-power requirements. The Zonal Council set up at its first meeting a Committee to study man-power problems of the entire zone. The Council has succeeded in evolving a new approach to the problem of power generation which is now being tackled keeping in view the requirements of the Zone as a whole, thereby making power available throughout the Zone. The proposal for power development on zonal basis, sponsored by the Central Ministry of Irrigation and Power, was approved at the second meeting of the Council held in 1958 and the Power Development Committee has been in existence.

Area Approach to Development

The problem of integrated road development for border areas of the two States in the South of U P and north of M P has been receiving the attention of the Council since 1938, when it constituted a committee to prepare an integrated programme of road development for border areas. As a result of the deliberations in the Council, and also of the offer of some financial assistance from the Central Government, agreement has been concluded for the construction of bridges over Chambal and Yamuna so that the Bhind-Gwalior-Etawah Road, which crosses these two rivers, can be completed. Mention may also be made here of the joint selection of technical personnel by one Public Service Commission instead of the hitherto followed practice of selection by the respective Commissions. This, to be sure, has necessitated some relaxation in rules, and requisite instructions have accordingly been issued to the respective Commissions. Finally, an illustration of planning on a Zonal level has been provided in the vicinity of Chitratkut, in the District of Banda (U P), which is important as a pilgrim centre. A joint development programme for this area was proposed in the Council in 1958. At the suggestion of the chairman, the two Governments have since agreed to allot a sum of Rs 50,000 each for development work, in the first instance. The Zonal Council has approved of the setting-up of a development authority south of the river Mandakini under the M P Government and a similar authority north of the river Mandakini under the U P Government, and, of the establishment of a Joint Advisory Committee to prepare a development plan for the entire region and to co-ordinate the working of these two bodies. This is an attempt

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Bombay/Madras/Singapore	AI-106B	Friday	...July 23, 1965
London/Bombay *	AI-112	Sunday	...July 25, 1965
Bombay/New Delhi/ Bangkok/Hong Kong	AI-112A	Monday	...July 26, 1965
Bombay/Madras/Singapore	AI-112B	Monday	...July 26, 1965

WESTBOUND:

Singapore/Madras/Bombay *	AI-107A	Wednesday	...Sept. 15, 1965
Bombay/London	AI-107	Thursday	...Sept. 16, 1965
Hong Kong/Bangkok Calcutta/Bombay *	AI-115A	Saturday	...Sept. 18, 1965
Bombay/London	AI-115	Sunday	...Sept. 19, 1965

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at evolving an area-approach to issues of public administration, and such attempts as have been made may, under wise political and administrative leadership, develop into a widespread practice in course of time.

Just as the Central Government has in the form of the Zonal Council an institution to secure the States compliance with certain matters, the participating States, too, have a parallel opportunity to urge acceptance, by the Central Government, of their proposals by putting up a united stand on certain matters against the Centre. They have been to an extent successful in such united attempts. At the very first meeting of the Council, the Chief Minister of U P referred to the need for a larger allotment of funds in the central sector of the Five Year Plan. The following issues may be cited as other illustrations of the use made of this forum by the States :

- (i) Inclusion in the 'core' of the Second Five Year Plan of all power development schemes under implementation in the zone,
- (ii) Inclusion of all power projects of the Zone in the Third Five Year Plan,
- (iii) Conversion of certain State Highways into National Highways.

The first two suggestions emerged from the Power Development (Technical) Committee, which *had* recommended that (i) all power development schemes under implementation in the zone should be included in the 'core' of the Second Five Year Plan; and (ii) all power projects of the Zone should be included in the Third Five Year Plan. These proposals were formally introduced in the Council by the two States. The chairman and the representative of the Planning Commission were not favourable to be proposed; they emphasised difficulties of getting foreign exchange. On M P's suggestion that these two resolutions being of vital importance to both the States, should be referred to the Planning Commission, the Zonal Council consented to pass these on to the Planning Commission together with copies of the discussions at the meeting. Although the material outcome of this proposal was practically nil, it is an indication of how the States have not been mere camp-followers always. Similarly, a united stand was taken on the question of conversion of certain State Highways into National Highways. The representative of the Central Ministry of Transport and Communications

indicated a "very remote" possibility of making any addition to the existing National Highway System during the Third Five Year Plan. The two States, however, insisted that the Central Government accept "in principle" the conversion of the following roads into National Highways :

- (i) Saugar - Chattarpur - Gondatulsipur-Nepal Border Road;
- (ii) Gwalior - Bhind . Pilibhit - Pithorgarh-Dharchula - Lipulekh Road;
- (iii) Jhansi - Mauranipur - Nowgong-Satna-Bela Road.

The proposal was accepted by the Zonal Council, which forwarded it to the Union Ministry of Transport and Communications for consideration.

Use for Attracting Central Aid

These demands apart, the participating States have also been utilising the Zonal Council for inducing greater financial involvement of the Central Government in certain spheres. This may be illustrated by the following examples. At the third meeting of the Council there was a proposal for construction of bridges over Chambal and Yamuna on the Gwalior-Bhind-Etawah Road. The representatives of M P remarked that out of the three bridges to be constructed, M P had already constructed the bridge on the river Kauri in their territory, and requested that the bridge over the river Yamuna should be constructed by U P, while the bridge on the river Chambal, which forms the border of the two States, should be constructed by both the States jointly. But, as all the available funds with both the States were already earmarked for the Plan, M P pressed for the Centre's financial contribution to the extent of two-thirds of the cost of both the bridges. U P, on the other hand, expressed its inability to provide funds for the construction of any of these bridges because, in the first place, these were not of great importance from its point of view, and secondly, because in its own territory there was felt a more pressing need for the construction of bridges at other places on both the Ganga and the Yamuna. It, therefore, urged that the Central Government should contribute two-thirds of the cost of construction of both the bridges while the balance could be provided by the two States. The Central Zonal Council, therefore, recommended that the Central Government should examine whether two-thirds of the cost of the two bridges

could be made available from the States' share of the Central Roads Fund. U P alone is to contribute for the bridge on Yamuna, while U P and M P are to make equal contribution for the construction of the bridge on Chambal. The Council further recommended that the Central Government should contribute the balance of one-third of the cost of the two bridges. Similarly, on another occasion, the financial commitment of the Central Government was sought to be increased in the case of another bridge, Naughat-ghat bridge. Both the States again combined on this issue, and as a result, the Zonal Council recommended that the Central Government's contribution towards the cost of Naughat-ghat bridge be enhanced to one-third of the cost, notwithstanding the original commitment limited to Rs 8 lakhs.

Fortunately, U P and M. P do not have any boundary disputes, such as have bedevilled the relations of some other States. The deliberations of the Central Zonal Council have not, therefore, been marred by injured feelings and acrimony. This, however, does not imply that complaints are never heard at the meetings of the Zonal Council. Quite a few items figuring on the agenda relate to irrigation and power problems but these, it may be added, do not appear to be the peculiar to this zone alone. Practically every river-valley project in the country has given rise to disputes among the States through which the river flows over the distribution of power and irrigation resources created. To come to this zone, M P, a comparatively backward State, has thus been insisting on an adequate supply of power and water from the Rihand and Matatila Projects, both in U P, but (he catchment areas of which lie in the north-east districts of M P. At the second meeting of the Council, M P moved for consideration the following two items :

- (i) supply of power and water for irrigation and other purposes to M P from Rihand dam;
- (ii) supply of power and water to M P from Matatila dam.

As the construction of Matatila dam had been lagging behind, the question of supply of power and water to M P was considered untimely. In fact, there has been in existence an agreement between the two Governments signed as early as 1953, and it is to be adhered to. The question of supply of power and water from the Rihand dam was, however, entrusted to a Committee consisting of the officials

of both the States. This committee succeeded in making agreed recommendations in regard to sharing of waters, compensation to be paid for lands to be acquired for the dam, and utilisation of water for irrigation by "bundling up" in the upper reaches of the Rihand dam. It, however, could not reach an agreement in regard to the question of supply of power to M P and the price to be charged. The Council thereupon asked the Chief Ministers to settle this matter between themselves. Success did not attend such informal efforts as were made by them, and this problem remained with the Council. At its meeting held in January 1963 it again figured on the agenda. In deference to the Councils desire, however, it was in formally discussed, in the first instance, between the two Chief Ministers, and to enable this get-together, the Council even adjourned its meeting, and agreed to continue deliberations the following day. Nothing concrete emerged from this informal discussion, and the Council, when it resumed its sitting the following day, was virtually faced with a deadlock. All it could do, however, was to convene a meeting of the Council the following month with the specific purpose of resolving this dispute. As a result, the Council again met in February 1963. The first day's discussion held out little hope of an agreed solution, and, in an obvious bid to keep the discussion going, the Council constituted a Committee of five officials to report "by tomorrow noon" on the question of sharing of power and water. Successive Meetings helped to narrow down the points of difference, and, ultimately, a resolution agreeable to both the States emerged many months later.

The dragging on of this dispute over a period of seven years and its eventual solution bring to the fore two points worth noting. First, the Council has no 'coercive' power to compel compliance with its decisions. What is more, it is aware of its weakness, for, despite the formal provision for voting incorporated in the statute itself, there is a marked reticence to invoke it, the intention obviously being to arrive at agreed solutions. In fact, voting has never been resorted to so far. Secondly, frequent recourse to informal channels of settlement under the aegis of the Council, yet outside its direct control, has been encouraged by the fact of the same political party being in power both at the Centre and in the States. The resultant homogeneous behavioural pattern has helped

to enhance the status and prestige of the Council by reinforcing its effectiveness.

Conclusions

The functioning of the Central Zonal Council over the seven years to 1963 serves to dispose off the various criticisms levelled against Zonal Councils. The fear that these Councils constitute the proverbial fifth wheel in the administrative coach impending speed and efficiency has proved to be entirely unfounded. An institution discussing, in the course of seven years, sixty-seven items including items of a purely routine nature as well as those which figured on the agenda more than once hardly deserves this criticism. Further, the participating States are not bound to first obtain clearance from the Council before adopting any course of action. The Council therefore, does not constitute another level in the traditional hierarchy. It is also not entirely true that the Zonal Council is the handmaid of the Centre, brought into existence to do the latter's bidding. True, the Zonal Councils are the Centre's creation, the Home Minister is the chairman of all the Councils and the expenses incurred on Council are a charge upon the Central Government. Nevertheless, acceptance of some centrally sponsored policies forms but one aspect of the performance of the Zonal Council. Nor does it emerge from the functioning of this body that the Zonal Councils may grow powerful to the extent of weakening the authority of the Centre. The Council's working is regulated by the Home Minister, and the Joint Secretary of the Council is virtually the resident-agent of the Central Government in the Zone, exercising administrative control over the secretariat of the Council. Besides, the Council has a purely advisory status which obviously inhibits the exercise of anything like dictatorial powers over either the Centre or the participating States.

In the end, a word may be said about the dispute over the supply of power and water to M P. As disputes of this nature have confronted other Zonal Councils as well, it is pertinent to ask: Should solution of problems so vital as sharing of powers and water be allowed to depend upon the moods of the States, particularly when the demand for power is everywhere much in excess of available supply? The existing arrangement stands in favour of the State in which the pro-

ject is located, and further, inevitably causes delay, which very often serves only to aggravate the existing dispute by leading to a hardening of attitudes on all sides. All this is injurious to the cause of balanced regional development, and, perhaps, calls for administrative steps to bring all projects under particular regions under some form of integrated control.

Notes

- ¹ It may be noted that the States Reorganisation Commission (1953-55) made no mention of them in its Report.
- ² Section 21(2) of the States Reorganisation Act, 1956 (henceforth referred to as the S R Act).
- ³ The S R Act has set up a Council for each of the following zones: (i) Northern zone, (ii) Southern zone, (iii) Eastern zone, (iv) Western zone, and (v) Central zone.
- ⁴ Agarwal, P P: 'A Note on the Experiences of the First Five Year Plan, in relation to Irrigation and Power Projects', in "Fourth Irrigation and Power Seminar". Central Water and Power Commission, New Delhi, 46-47.
- ⁵ This is the trend in all the Zonal Councils, The Eastern Zonal Council, thus, met once in 1957, twice in 1958, once in 1959, 1961 and 1962. It did not hold any meeting during 1960. The Southern Zonal Council, too, met twice in 1957 and 1958, and once in 1961 and 1962. Similarly, the Northern Zonal Council met twice in 1937 and 1959, and once in 1958 and 1961. It did not hold any meeting in 1960.
- ⁶ Provision has been made under Section 18 of the S R Act for the appointment of committees of the Zonal Councils for studying any particular problem or for performing such other functions as the Council may decide. The Act says: "A Zonal Council may from time to time by resolution passed at a meeting appoint Committees of its members and Advisers for performing such functions as may be specified in the resolution and may associate with any such Committee such Ministers either for the Union or for the States and such officers serving either in connection with the affairs of the Union or of the States as may be nominated in that behalf by the Council".