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Uttar Pradesh State Reorganisation Debate Revives Questions on Regionalism, Federalism and Administrative Decentralisation in India

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Recent Developments:

Uttar Pradesh Cabinet Minister and **Suheldev Bharatiya Samaj Party** chief **Om Prakash Rajbhar** has recently claimed that Uttar Pradesh could eventually be divided into **four states**, reviving the long-standing debate over the territorial reorganisation of India's most populous state. His remarks were made in September 2026 and linked the proposed reorganisation to the completion of the ongoing **caste census**.

The proposed four-region framework has been described as **Purvanchal, Madhyanchal, Bundelkhand and Harit Pradesh**. However, these remain part of the political debate and **there is no corresponding official announcement confirming a Union Government decision to divide Uttar Pradesh**.

The issue has historical precedent. In **2011**, the Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly passed a resolution proposing the division of the state into **Purvanchal, Bundelkhand, Awadh Pradesh and Paschim Pradesh** and forwarded it to the Union Government. In 2014, the Ministry of Home Affairs stated that no proposal for creating new states from Uttar Pradesh was then under consideration by the Union Government.

Regionalism in India:

Meaning and Nature:

Regionalism refers to political, cultural, economic and territorial aspirations arising from a shared regional identity based on factors such as **language, geography, history, ethnicity, economic interests and perceptions of administrative neglect**.

Regionalism can operate within the constitutional framework by seeking greater representation, development, autonomy or statehood, but it can also generate inter-regional competition when regional interests conflict with broader national objectives.

In India, regionalism is therefore not inherently anti-national; its constitutional significance depends on whether regional aspirations are accommodated through **democratic institutions, federal mechanisms and constitutional processes**.

Evolution of State Reorganisation in India:

From Colonial Boundaries to Linguistic States:

Kamaraj IAS Academy

Plot A P.127, AF block, 6 th street, 11th Main Rd, Shanthi Colony, Anna Nagar, Chennai, Tamil Nadu 600040

Phone: **044 4353 9988 / 98403 94477 / Whatsapp : 09710729833**

Colonial administrative boundaries were primarily shaped by administrative and political considerations rather than linguistic or cultural homogeneity.

After Independence, the demand for states based on linguistic identity became particularly significant, with the movement for a separate **Andhra State** gaining momentum after the death of **Potti Sreeramulu** following his prolonged fast.

The creation of Andhra State in **1953** strengthened the case for a systematic examination of state boundaries.

States Reorganisation Act, 1956:

The **States Reorganisation Commission**, chaired by **Fazl Ali**, examined linguistic, administrative, economic and national-integration considerations in determining state boundaries.

The **States Reorganisation Act, 1956** reorganised the country into **14 states and 6 Union Territories**, representing a major restructuring of India's internal territorial administration.

Subsequent reorganisations created or altered states in response to combinations of **linguistic identity, tribal aspirations, administrative considerations, economic disparities and regional movements**.

Major examples include **Maharashtra and Gujarat in 1960, several North-Eastern states in the 1960s and 1970s, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Uttarakhand in 2000, and Telangana in 2014.**

Constitutional Mechanism for State Reorganisation:

Article 3:

Article 3 empowers Parliament to form a new state by separation of territory from an existing state, unite two or more states or parts of states, increase or diminish the area of a state, alter its boundaries or change its name.

A Bill for such reorganisation can be introduced in either House of Parliament **only on the recommendation of the President**.

Where the proposal affects the area, boundaries or name of a state, the President must **refer the Bill to the concerned State Legislature for expressing its views within a specified period**.

The State Legislature's views are **consultative and not binding** on Parliament. The Supreme Court has recognised the wide constitutional power of Parliament in relation to territorial reorganisation under Article 3.

The legislation requires an **ordinary parliamentary majority**, rather than the special majority required for constitutional amendments under Article 368.

Article 4 and Federal Implications:

Article 4 permits a law made under Articles 2 and 3 to contain supplementary, incidental and consequential provisions, including adjustments relating to representation in Parliament and State Legislatures.

A law enacted under Articles 2 and 3 is **not treated as a constitutional amendment for the purposes of Article 368**, providing flexibility for internal territorial reorganisation.

The Ministry of Home Affairs handles matters concerning **formation of new states and Union Territories, interpretation of reorganisation laws, inter-state boundaries and apportionment of assets and liabilities**.

Major Drivers of Regionalism:

Uneven Regional Development:

Differences in **infrastructure, industrial investment, employment opportunities and public services** can generate demands for separate administrative units.

Regions such as **Bundelkhand and parts of Purvanchal** have historically featured in debates concerning developmental disparities within Uttar Pradesh.

Administrative Accessibility:

Large geographical areas and high population can create challenges in delivering public services, maintaining administrative responsiveness and implementing region-specific development programmes.

Advocates of smaller states generally argue that reduced administrative scale can facilitate **more focused governance and region-specific planning**, although statehood alone does not guarantee better development outcomes.

Cultural and Linguistic Identity:

Language, cultural traditions, historical experiences and regional identities can strengthen demands for political recognition.

The linguistic reorganisation of states demonstrated that regional identity could be accommodated within the constitutional framework without abandoning national political unity.

Political Mobilisation:

Regional political organisations can convert grievances relating to **representation, employment, resources, development and cultural recognition** into organised demands for greater autonomy or separate statehood.

The Telangana movement illustrates how sustained political mobilisation around regional grievances can ultimately result in the creation of a new state.

Resource and Fiscal Concerns:

Unequal access to natural resources, public expenditure, industrial investment and fiscal transfers can contribute to perceptions of regional injustice.

Resource-rich regions may simultaneously experience environmental degradation, displacement and inadequate local value addition, creating demands for greater regional control over development.

Potential Benefits of Regionalism and Smaller Administrative Units:

Accommodation of Diversity:

Constitutional recognition of regional aspirations can reduce political alienation by providing institutional channels for linguistic, cultural and territorial identities.

The **1956 reorganisation** demonstrated the role of constitutional accommodation in managing competing linguistic aspirations.

Administrative Decentralisation:

Smaller administrative units can potentially enable more geographically focused planning, closer monitoring of public services and greater responsiveness to region-specific needs.

However, administrative effectiveness also depends on **institutional capacity, fiscal resources, infrastructure and governance quality**.

Political Representation:

Regional movements can increase political representation for communities and areas that perceive themselves as under-represented in larger political units.

The creation of new states may also facilitate greater attention to region-specific development priorities.

Challenges Associated with Regionalism:

Inter-State and Intra-State Resource Disputes:

Reorganisation can create complex disputes concerning **water resources, territorial boundaries, public debt, government employees, pensions, institutions and natural resources**.

The division of an existing state therefore requires detailed arrangements for the equitable distribution of assets and liabilities.

Economic Viability:

A proposed state requires adequate **revenue capacity, administrative infrastructure, human resources and economic opportunities** to sustain public expenditure.

Smaller geographical size does not automatically translate into stronger economic performance.

Impact on Federal Coordination:

Excessive regional competition can complicate coordination over taxation, infrastructure, water, transport, internal security and resource management.

Strong institutional mechanisms are therefore necessary to prevent regional demands from becoming persistent inter-governmental conflicts.

Mobility and Local Preferences:

Regional protectionism may produce demands for preferential access to employment, education or resources for local residents.

Such measures must remain consistent with constitutional guarantees concerning **equality, freedom of movement and equality of opportunity in public employment**.

Cooperative Federal Mechanisms:

Inter-State Council:

The **Inter-State Council**, established under **Article 263** in 1990, provides a constitutional mechanism for discussing subjects involving common interests of the Union and states or among states.

Its functions include investigation and discussion of common-interest subjects and making recommendations for better **coordination of policy and action**.

Zonal Councils:

The **five Zonal Councils** were created under the States Reorganisation Act, 1956 to promote inter-state cooperation and address regional issues.

They provide platforms for discussing **border disputes, linguistic minorities, inter-state transport, economic and social planning and matters arising from state reorganisation**.

Way Forward:

Evidence-Based Reorganisation:

Demands for new states should be assessed through transparent criteria covering **administrative viability, economic capacity, geographical coherence, fiscal sustainability, infrastructure, public-service delivery and regional aspirations**.

Political demands should be distinguished from the institutional assessment required before undertaking territorial reorganisation.

Balanced Regional Development:

Greater emphasis on **district-level planning, infrastructure connectivity, fiscal equalisation and targeted investment** can address some regional disparities without necessarily requiring territorial division.

Development policy should particularly address persistent gaps in employment, health, education, irrigation and connectivity.

Strengthen Cooperative Federalism:

Regular functioning of the **Inter-State Council and Zonal Councils** can provide institutional channels for resolving regional, fiscal and territorial concerns through consultation.

The Sarkaria Commission and Punchhi Commission have both emphasised stronger mechanisms for effective **Centre–State coordination**.

Inclusive Regional Identity:

Regional identities should be accommodated while preserving **constitutional equality, national integration, freedom of movement and equal citizenship**.

The objective should be to reconcile legitimate regional aspirations with the broader requirements of India's federal structure.

Value Addition for UPSC:

GS-II: Federalism, Centre–State relations, regionalism, constitutional mechanisms, Parliament, state reorganisation and cooperative federalism.

GS-I: Post-Independence consolidation, linguistic reorganisation, regional movements and integration of diverse identities.

GS-III: Regional disparities, balanced development, fiscal capacity and infrastructure-led regional transformation.

Prelims Facts: **Article 3** deals with formation and alteration of states; the **President recommends and refers the relevant Bill to the concerned State Legislature**; the State Legislature's views are not binding; **Article 4** permits supplementary and consequential provisions; the **States Reorganisation Act, 1956** was the principal legislative instrument behind the major 1956 reorganisation.

Current Affairs Link: The 2026 Uttar Pradesh debate demonstrates how demands for statehood can emerge from the intersection of **regional identity, administrative scale, development disparities and political representation**. The reported claim regarding a four-way division remains a political assertion rather than an announced constitutional or legislative decision.