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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

Double Engine Sarkar – A Threat to Constitutional Federalism?

THE HINDU

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SUBJECTS COVERED**POLITY****GS PAPERS****GS2****CURATED & WRITTEN BY****Bharat Choudhary**

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Double Engine Sarkar — A Threat to Constitutional Federalism?

The Hindu 23 March 2026

GS2

TH The Hindu

MAINS RELEVANCE: GS Paper 2



INTERVIEW ANGLE

"Does the 'double engine' model strengthen governance or undermine federalism? How would you evaluate its impact on states governed by opposition parties?"

WHY IN NEWS

The Hindu published an editorial critiquing the “double-engine sarkar” political slogan, arguing that while it promises governance efficiency through political alignment between the Centre and states, it fundamentally undermines constitutional federalism and impartial resource allocation.

The Double Engine Argument

The phrase “double-engine sarkar” has gained prominence in Indian elections, suggesting that governance is more efficient when the same political party controls both Union and State governments. Proponents argue this eliminates Centre-State friction, speeds up project approvals, and ensures seamless scheme implementation.

The Constitutional Counter-Argument

The editorial argues this framing is constitutionally problematic:

- ❶ **Public funds belong to the Republic, not a party** — Article 280 (Finance Commission) was designed specifically to prevent political bias in resource sharing. Central transfers must be based on objective criteria (population, area, fiscal discipline), not political alignment.
- ❷ **Gubernatorial overreach** — Governors appointed by the Centre have increasingly delayed assent to state legislation in opposition-ruled states. This represents institutional misuse that distorts the federal balance.
- ❸ **Delhi’s governance gridlock** — The protracted Centre-Delhi government conflict exemplifies how federal cooperation breaks down when political alignment is absent. The Supreme Court’s 2023 judgment in *Government of NCT of Delhi v. Union of India* affirmed Delhi’s legislative control over

services — yet tensions persist.

- 4 **Southern States disadvantage** — Population-based allocation formulas in upcoming Finance Commission recommendations could disadvantage southern states that have successfully controlled population growth. This becomes a “double engine” penalty for states that are both politically and demographically different.

The Cooperative Federalism Model

India’s Constitution envisions **cooperative federalism** — a model where the Centre and states collaborate as equal partners in governance:

FEATURE	COOPERATIVE FEDERALISM	“DOUBLE ENGINE” MODEL
Resource allocation	Objective criteria	Political alignment incentivised
State autonomy	Respected	Subordinated to central agenda
Governor’s role	Constitutional head	Extension of Centre’s will
Opposition states	Equal treatment	Risk of discriminatory funding
Institutional design	Federal balance	Centralisation tendency

Key Constitutional Provisions for Federalism

PROVISION	ROLE
Article 1	Union of States (not unitary)
Article 246 + Seventh Schedule	Division of powers (Union, State, Concurrent Lists)
Article 263	Inter-State Council for cooperation
Article 275	Grants-in-aid from Centre to states
Article 280	Finance Commission for tax devolution
Article 356	President’s Rule (historically misused)

The Finance Commission Dimension

The **16th Finance Commission** (chaired by Dr Arvind Panagariya) is currently deliberating the tax devolution formula for 2026-31. Key concerns:

- **Population criterion:** Using 2011 Census data could penalise southern states; using 1971 data (as done previously) is becoming increasingly outdated
- **Vertical devolution:** States demand increasing the share beyond the current 41% of divisible pool

- **Horizontal distribution:** Balancing equity (for poorer states) with efficiency (for better-performing states)

The “double engine” narrative undermines public trust in the Finance Commission’s impartiality by suggesting that political alignment delivers more resources than constitutional entitlement.

Way Forward

The editorial recommends:

- Strengthening the **Inter-State Council** (Article 263) for genuine Centre-State dialogue
- Ensuring Finance Commission recommendations are non-partisan and binding
- Reforming the **Governor’s office** to prevent its use as a political tool
- Reinforcing the **Sarkaria Commission** recommendations on Centre-State relations

UPSC RELEVANCE

Article 280, Finance Commission, Inter-State Council, Article 263, Seventh Schedule.

MAINS GS-2:

Indian federalism — constitutional vision vs political practice; Centre-State relations; role of Governors; Finance Commission and fiscal federalism.

ESSAY:

“Cooperative federalism or competitive centralism — which path for India?”

★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGEPEDIA

INDIAN FEDERALISM — KEY PROVISIONS:

Article 1: India as a “Union of States”

Article 246 + Seventh Schedule: Union List (97 items), State List (66), Concurrent List (47)

Article 263: Inter-State Council

Article 280: Finance Commission (every 5 years)

Article 356: President’s Rule

FINANCE COMMISSION:

Current: 16th FC (chaired by Dr Arvind Panagariya)

15th FC (NK Singh): recommended 41% vertical devolution

Key criteria: Population, area, income distance, forest and ecology, demographic performance

KEY JUDICIAL PRONOUNCEMENTS:

S.R. Bommai v. Union of India (1994): Limited misuse of Article 356

NCT of Delhi v. Union of India (2023): Affirmed Delhi government’s control over services

COMMISSIONS ON CENTRE-STATE RELATIONS:

Sarkaria Commission (1983): Recommended restraint in use of Article 356, Governor should be non-partisan

Punchhi Commission (2007): Recommended fixed tenure for Governors, stricter norms for President’s Rule

OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

GST Council (Article 279A): Model of cooperative federalism in indirect taxation

NITI Aayog replaced Planning Commission in 2015

73rd and 74th Amendments (1992): Third tier of federalism (Panchayats and Municipalities)

Sources: [The Hindu](#), [Vajiram & Ravi](#)

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