Government Measures to Tackle COVID-19

Why in News?

As the nation tackles the COVID-19 pandemic, the government takes some measures to save costs.

What were the measures?

- Parliament has reduced the salary and allowances of Members of Parliament (MPs) and Ministers.
- The Union Cabinet has decided to cancel the Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS) for two years.

Will there be any impact due to salary cuts?

- A 30% cut was made in Rs. 1 lakh/month salary of MPs and ministers.
- Rs. 27,000 cut was made in their office and constituency allowances.
- Both these amounts to a savings of about Rs. 5 crore/month.
- These amounts are immaterial for the Central government with an average monthly budget of Rs. 2.5-lakh crore.

- The Parliament has abdicated its constitutional role as the elected body that checks the work of government on behalf of citizens.
- Instead, it gave a symbolic gesture of reductions in pay and allowances.

What should the MPs do?

- During the crisis, MPs should be planning on the actions and policies to be taken to manage the epidemic.
- They should be working on the costs and consequences of various alternatives.
- They should be figuring out ways to have meetings of the committee and of the full House through video-conferencing.
- By doing these, the Parliament can check the work of government.

Why cancelling MPLADS is a welcome move?

- MPLADS creates several issues of accountability and jurisdiction.
- The MPLADS scheme should not be resumed after the crisis because,
    1. In financial terms, there is nearly Rs. 4,000 crore per year savings.

2. This will help MPs focus on their roles as national legislators.
- It impinges on separation of powers, both horizontally across different organs of state, and vertically across different levels of governance.

What duties of MPs does the MPLADS affect?

- Other than making laws, MPs have two key duties.
  1. They sanction the size and allocation of the government budget.
  2. They also hold the government accountable for its work, including that of spending funds appropriately.
- MPLADS brings in a conflict in both these roles.
- It asks them to identify and get specific projects executed rather than to focus on policy measures to achieve the same results.
- It distracts them from allocating and monitoring the Union Budget of Rs. 30-lakh crore to micro-managing the constituency fund of Rs. 5 crore.

What is the scope for reform that the current crisis provides?

- **Technology** - Technological reform will improve efficiency.
- Much of the daily paper work of the Parliament have been digitised.
- However, protocols and infrastructure may be needed if meetings have to be held through secure video-conferencing.
- **Pay and allowances** - The MPs should be provided with office space and research staff.
- They should be compensated in line with their duties as legislators.
- At the same time, hidden perks such as housing must be made transparent.

- **Accountability** - There is a need to hold MPs accountable for their work as national legislators.
- A representative democracy functions only as well as its legislatures do.

Source: The Hindu

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