Involving States in Foreign Policy

What is the issue?

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- The ruler of Sharjah, a UAE city, recently made his visit to Kerala.
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- On request by the Kerala CM, he agreed to release 149 Indian prisoners from Sharjah jails.
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- This significant outcome has highlighted the need for an increased role of states in India's foreign policy.
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What is Paradiplomacy?

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- Paradiplomacy is international relations conducted by subnational on their own
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- It outlines a foreign policy role for local and regional governments within a democratic federal system.
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- Economic paradiplomacy related to trade and investment in particular has become an institutionalized practice across the world.
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- Most of these states are successful at FDI promotion.
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- In India, traditionally foreign affairs are in the exclusive domain of the Union government.
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- However, in recent times "competitive federalism" is being increasingly stressed, particularly in matters of foreign affairs.
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How have regional parties influenced foreign policy?

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In past, the larger interests of India on the global scene were sacrificed for the cause of the states concerned. e.g.

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- West Bengal CM stopped then PM Manmohan Singh from signing Teesta water sharing agreement with Bangladesh.
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- Kerala insisted on trying and punishing in India, the Italian marines who killed two fishermen, leading to a rift in India’s relations with the EU.
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- Tamil Nadu had insisted that India should support the U.S. resolution against Sri Lanka in the UNHRC.
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- Also TN, for the Tamil minority's cause, stopped the PM from attending Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Sri Lanka.
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What are the recent changes made?

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- The Ministry of External Affairs now has a new States division.
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- This keeps in touch with the states and assists them in their ties with countries in which they have a special interest.
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- The special linkage could be on account of proximity or the presence of diaspora from that state.
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- Besides, IFS officers have been asked to choose a State each to understand its special requirements and to advise them.
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- In this emerging scenario, the diplomats are expected to bring their regional expertise to take the correct decisions on neighbours.
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What lies ahead?

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- There is a need for a new structure in MEA in which the states are fully represented.
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- Also, Ministry of External Affairs should have offices in key states.
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- Think tanks should be established in states to facilitate policy options and to provide inputs to the states and the Centre.
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- States should also be encouraged to secure best deals for themselves within the overall policy of the Central government.
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Source: The Hindu

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