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Birth Pangs of ‘Telangana State’ in India

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The creation of a new southern Indian state of Telangana, consisting of 10 districts, has at last been announced. The new state is to be carved out of the 23 districts in the present state of Andhra Pradesh. It has taken over 50 years for the Telangana demand to be conceded, perhaps the longest time taken in similar cases in post-colonial independent India. It will be the 29th state in the Indian Union.

In its long journey to statehood, Telangana’s path has been strewn with agitations marked by violence, sacrifices and setbacks. The student community in recent years played a big role in the successful outcome and have been at the forefront of the movement. One is tempted to draw a parallel with similar contemporary movements elsewhere.

The Government of India has settled one set of issues but there are many more issues awaiting resolution, covering a wide gamut of political, economic, constitutional, and administrative aspects. Before we analyse these issues, we should look at some basic facts concerning the new state, compared with the residual state of Andhra Pradesh (by this or some other name).

- ❖ While the residual Andhra Pradesh would be the 8th largest state in the country, Telangana will be the 12th largest.

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- ❖ Andhra Pradesh would spread over an area of 1.60 lakh sq.km while Telangana would have an area of 1.14 lakh sq km.
- ❖ Telangana's population would be about 3.5 crore while that of Andhra Pradesh would stand at 4.9 crore.

Source: *Deccan Chronicle* 31 July 2013.

(10 lakhs make a million, and 10 millions make a crore.)

These facts will set at rest the comment about Telangana being a small state to be treated on par with Uttarakhand, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh etc.

Constitutional and Economic Issues at Stake

The process leading to formal statehood for Telangana requires at some stage a response from the existing Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly, before a relevant resolution is tabled in the Indian Parliament. The likelihood of a positive response from the Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly is anybody's guess, given the lack of consensus within that legislative chamber. There is already an undercurrent of protest from the anti-Telangana wing of the ruling Congress party in the legislature. Whether the reference to the Andhra Pradesh Assembly will be treated as merely a consultative process, or one requiring concurrence, is a matter of popular debate. Constitutional pundits opine that this is a consultative process and it will be for the Parliament to decide on the Assembly's views.

It is somewhat ironic to reflect on a similar development in Uttar Pradesh some years ago where a resolution was passed by the Uttar Pradesh Assembly for the division of that state into four parts, a resolution that is gathering dust in the Ministry of Home Affairs of the Central Government. Another interesting constitutional question that has been raised in the case of Andhra Pradesh (but not satisfactorily answered) is: in the event of a government-introduced resolution endorsing the formation of Telangana being defeated in the Assembly, will a constitutional crisis ensue, leading among other things to President's Rule (rule by the Centre) being imposed on the existing state?

These are issues that have a bearing on the federal structure laid down in the Indian Constitution.

There are a number of economic and administrative issues, like river-water sharing, power generation and distribution, creation of separate administrative cadres and equitable allocation of financial resources which are complex in nature. These have been sorted out in the past when other states were formed and can therefore be handled comfortably. If one goes back over time and reflects on how such issues were handled following the partition of British India in 1947, one is encouraged to believe that these are localised issues which pale by comparison.

Twin Capitals

A peculiar complication has been caused by the announcement that Hyderabad would be the respective capitals of both Andhra Pradesh and Telangana for a period of 10 years. It would have been better if this temporary period had been limited to three years by which time a new capital for Andhra Pradesh could be made ready. Hyderabad should have been left with Telangana because of its geographical contiguity and positioning with the rest of Telangana. Andhra Pradesh's access to Hyderabad will now have to be through a corridor slicing through Telangana districts. This will inevitably create issues about movement of goods and people and levy of state taxes.

In looking at this decision of a shared capital city, the comparison with Chandigarh is not apt, since Chandigarh can be accessed through Punjab and Haryana without either intruding into the other's territory. A 10-year arrangement is going to be difficult to work out. I am sure the Andhra Pradesh policy makers are alive to this and will work on the new capital with expedition and vigour as this would give them a more centrally located and easier-to-operate location.

Apparently (and this is guesswork) the retention of Hyderabad as a shared capital is perhaps partly motivated by the fact that entrepreneurs from coastal Andhra (in the territory of the proposed residual state) have invested in Hyderabad in real estate development, capital, and business enterprises since the existing state was created in 1956.

This however is not a compelling argument, if you examine the case of Bombay (now Mumbai) when Maharashtra and Gujarat were formed as neighbouring states in western India. The policy makers had then set aside the special pleading that Gujarati businessmen had invested heavily and therefore had high stakes in Bombay. The geographical location of Bombay inevitably and logically placed it in Maharashtra.

Concerns over Maoism, Secularism, and National Cohesion

There are apprehensions that the advent of Telangana as a state would be accompanied by an upsurge in Naxalite (Maoist) violence, somewhat on the analogy of the central Indian state of Chhattisgarh after its creation. Added to this, are the fears of the minority Muslim community based on the possibility of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) dominating the politics of Telangana. Time alone will tell whether these fears are justified.

One thing is clear. The decision on Telangana will lead to the vigorous pursuit of similar demands simmering in other parts of the country (Gorkhaland in West Bengal, Harit Pradesh in Uttar Pradesh, Bodo Land in Assam, Vidarbha in Maharashtra etc). If Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, a leader of India's freedom struggle, had ably managed the integration of princely states with the newly independent India in the late-1940s, one cannot help reflecting on how busy Indians are in breaking his creative work into fragments now. Whether this will lead to a rapid balkanisation of the country, no one can tell as yet.

Route to the New State

What then now? The road to Telangana statehood is expected to take seven months to traverse, according to one reliable estimate. This process will involve 12 steps.

- 1) Refer the new-state proposal to the existing Andhra Pradesh state legislature.
- 2) Preparation of a Cabinet note at the Centre, based on the existing state government's proposal.
- 3) A newly constituted Group of Ministers (GOM) at the Centre to examine the economic issues arising from the move to create Telangana.
- 4) Preparation of a Cabinet note at the Centre, along with a re-organisation bill, based on advice from the GOM.
- 5) Central Cabinet's approval for Telangana state bill and recommendation to the President of India to refer the draft bill to the existing Andhra Pradesh legislature.
- 6) President's recommendation.
- 7) State Assembly and Legislative Council's consideration of the bill.
- 8) Vetting of the bill by the Ministry of Law at the Centre.
- 9) A Central Cabinet note, along with the vetted bill, to be approved by the Cabinet.
- 10) Notice for the introduction of the vetted bill to be given by the Home Ministry to the *Lok Sabha /Rajya Sabha* (the two Houses of India's Parliament).
- 11) Passing of the bill by the *Lok Sabha / Rajya Sabha* by a simple majority.
- 12) President's assent, after the bill is passed by both Houses of Parliament.

Source: *Deccan Chronicle* 31 July 2013

The long road ahead as sketched here will not be without some difficulties. Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) party, which was in the vanguard of the movement for this new state, is therefore not celebrating as yet, waiting for India's Parliament to put its stamp of approval on the bill. For the same reason, silence reigns on the expected merger of TRS and the Congress party, which is a trump card sought by the Congress to do well in the general election of 2014. Their political rivals suspect and allege that this reasoning underlies the Telangana decision itself. Political expediency rules the roost as always!

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