

AP and UP: Hand in Hand?

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The critical bit comes after the announcement of Telangana statehood by the Centre on 9th December 2009. Mayawati, on 11th December 2009, told a press conference that she congratulated the Centre on the Telangana decision and: 'I have written a letter to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh urging him to grant clearance for the creation of two more states, Bundelkhand and Harit Pradesh, out of an unmanageable Uttar Pradesh'

The long-suppressed Telangana Statehood issue was given life by the Congress Party when, in 1999 and 2000, the Congress Working Committee, presided over by Sonia Gandhi, requested in writing the NDA Government to move on this issue.

In 2003, the Congress made an electoral alliance with the Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) for the 2004 election. The two allies contested on the platform of a separate State for Telangana.

In UPA-1 government, the Telangana Statehood was part of the Common Minimum Program and mentioned in the Presidential Address. Later, the Pranab Mukherjee Committee elicited positive recommendations from all national parties. In the 2009 election, Congress again promised Statehood for Telangana, as did the main state Opposition Telugu Desam Party (TDP), now allied with the TRS.

In the late 2009, after getting positive recommendations from major political parties in the State and a unanimous resolution of the Congress Legislature Party, the Congress Core Group and the Union Cabinet decided to create the Telangana State and announced it to both Houses of Parliament.

The Congress plan sought to divide the State into three. This would split the 122 Congress MLAs who signed up for Jaganmohan Reddy as CM and also secure Telangana from the TDP. It would confine Jaganmohan Reddy to Rayalaseema, and with the Praja Rajyam Party (with merger already worked out) enable the Congress to take on the TDP in Coastal Andhra.

What went wrong with this neat scheme? The view in the State is that the TDP, realizing the Congress game plan, made a U-turn in 12 hours the day after it agreed with the decision and instructed its cadres to launch an agitation.

But the Congress would naturally disregard the TDP's interests and this is no explanation. It is also alleged that the flow of funds from real estate speculators from Coastal Andhra to influential Congress leaders in Delhi stalled the onward movement for Telangana Statehood.

This theory seems unreal – Andhra small-timers cannot counter High Command decisions. Money power, while influential in securing contracts, is not the determining factor in public

policy.

An alternate reason is suggested here. In 2007, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Mayawati had written to the Prime Minister, asking him to consider the demand of the people of Bundelkhand and of western UP for separate States. Asked if she would move a resolution in this regard in the State Assembly, Mayawati stated: "I will do so once the Centre gives its approval in principle."

This issue seems to have been started by Rahul Gandhi who had supported a Bundelkhand State (including five districts of Madhya Pradesh) and Ajit Singh of the Rashtriya Lok Dal who was campaigning for Harit Pradesh State in western UP.

Mayawati was raising the bid in this game! Mayawati again wrote to the Prime Minister in January 2008 urging division of the State. She said: "If the Centre agrees, the State Government is ready to get a resolution adopted by the State Vidhan Sabha seeking division of Uttar Pradesh into three parts - Poorvanchal, districts of western region and the Bundelkhand region".

By now she has included Eastern UP also (Poorvanchal) for separate statehood. Now the bid was raised further! The critical bit comes after the announcement of Telangana statehood by the Centre on 9th December 2009.

Mayawati, on 11th December 2009, told a press conference that she congratulated the Centre on the Telangana decision and: "I have written a letter to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh urging him to grant clearance for the creation of two more states, Bundelkhand and Harit Pradesh, out of an unmanageable Uttar Pradesh". She, or anyone else for that matter, found it difficult to administer a state with 190 million people - it would be the 6th largest country in the world, if independent.

The national political situation for the Congress has always been that unless it dominates UP polity, it cannot rule the country on its own. So its national strategy has always been dominated by UP, its Muslim and Dalit vote-banks and various short-term alliances with local UP parties.

In this context, the Bundelkhand issue was raised by Rahul Gandhi partly to destabilize Mayawati. But the shrewd politician that she is, she escalated it to greater levels, which put the Bundelkhand issue in the Congress refrigerator for a couple of years. However, the issue has not gone away.

The Congress has a way of resorting to immediate "solutions" which become long-term problems it cannot and will not solve. By 2010, the momentum for division increased with Amar Singh breaking away for the Samajwadi Party which opposed division of UP and forming a 'National Front for New Small States' and undertaking padyatras in Eastern UP.

When asked, he said: "Reasons are the same that worked for the formation of Uttarakhand and other smaller states. The per capita income is very low and people are migrating to other places to earn a living. Purvanchal generates 80 per cent of (total) power but the region lacks proper power supply.

Industries and sugar mills are closed. A separate Purvanchal state is a must for the rapid development of the region and dignified living of the people.”

By 2011, after parting with Congress, actor-turned-politician Raja Bundela decided to pursue his campaign for creation of a separate state of Bundelkhand.

His party has decided to field candidates from all 37 Assembly seats in Bundelkhand. Last week, Mayawati decided to bring a resolution in State Assembly seeking division of the state into Bundelkhand, Harit Pradesh (Western UP) and Poorvanchal Pradesh (Eastern UP). Presumably Central UP (Awadh) will be the residual UP state.

The State Cabinet has endorsed the proposal for convening the winter session of the Legislature beginning 21 November. If the Congress-led UPA government doesn't agree, she will make the new states a major electoral issue in Bundelkhand, Western UP and Eastern UP and secure support in the March 2012 election.

Further, Ajit Singh will have to break the Congress-Rashtriya Lok Dal alliance if he wants Harit Pradesh. The BJP is in favour of smaller states, so she has no problem there. This leaves her archrival Samajwadi Party - that opposes the division of UP- on the spot before an election. Every political leader in UP will want division as it opens up prospects for self-promotion within their huge state parties.

To revert to Telangana, the whole issue of statehood which was properly decided after consultations and confirmations by the political parties and the Cabinet and Parliament, seems to have put into cold storage largely due to its repercussions in UP. The idea of Gorkhaland, Seemandhra electoral prospects, money power, Hyderabad real estate, etc, were mere diversions – the real issue is the future of the Congress Party in UP and the country.

Morarji Desai once said: “A small state cannot produce great leaders”. But our young leader-in-the-making needs to win a substantial share of UP's 85 Parliamentary seats – regardless of whether UP is united or divided. With the current situation created by Mayawati, the Congress Party will have to support division of UP. If it does, Telangana will also be conceded. Speculative as this argument is, only events in UP will prove or disprove it.

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