

Immediate Task Before Telangana Govt is to Determine Fiscal Space

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HYDERABAD:

The most important issue before the Telangana government is to determine first the fiscal space available after the state division.

The state budget will be around Rs 43,000 crore and the surplus will be less than Rs 500 crore. So there is very little space for new expenditure unless old expenditure items are cut back or new levied. These issues need to be carefully considered by experts before the electoral promises are put into practice.

Use the division of government employees to ensure efficient and productive working of the existing staff.

Telangana state will have considerable space created by the division of the state level employees on the basis of nativity, etc. This space can either be filled by judicious promotions of competent and honest officials from below or by inducting retired employees on contract for a short period till the capacity of lower officials are built up.

Down-size and abolish corporations, departments:

Many government departments and organisations may have outlived their use and are existing only to provide jobs. With the shortage of staff postdivision, these activities can be pruned or shut down and their staff used productively elsewhere. For example APIDC, LIDCAP, etc.

Given the expectations aroused for development, it is vital that planning and priorities should be set at the district- level taking into account its specific needs.

These should be holistic and comprehensive with time lines, cost estimates and targets and the state government should consider them for funding. District ministers should be put in-charge and remain in their districts with competent IAS officers posted there to carry out these tasks.

Monitor revenue, expenditure and targets closely:

All revenue and expenditure monitoring should be finely detailed, in real time to avoid unspent balances sitting in private accounts or being stashed in banks as fixed deposits. Budget releases then can be made well in time for expenditure to be carried out as per schedule. Revenue and expenditure are means - target achievement is the critical end.

Remedial education and skill development for youth:

Young unemployed people should be given rigorous training both in soft skills including English language combined with vocational training. This will make them attractive candidates for private sector employers throughout the country and abroad which is looking desperately for productive manpower.

Take up uncompleted or pending irrigation projects first.

If we are to fully utilise water allocated by Bachawat in Krishna and Godavari, Telangana should move fast on the medium and minor projects which do not come under the jurisdiction of the new Central Interstate River Boards.

The restoration of tank irrigation is a critical issue.

Nearly 10 lakh acres can be restored increasing irrigation as well as ground water recharge. A comprehensive scheme of bunds, anicuts and small tanks can reduce surface water run off (into the rivers) and minimise soil erosion. This can be tagged to the NREGA scheme which is funded by the Centre. Use of earth moving machinery will help ease and accelerate completion of the work.

An exclusive electricity grid for all Telangana villages for 24/7 power supply.

This has been done in Gujarat. We need to copy that scheme which will have significant effects both to village life in general and productive work in particular.

A fixed and predictable supply of high quality power to irrigation wells and small factories.

Telangana depends largely on well irrigation and this is powered by electric pumpsets. The dedicated grid providing quality power at predictable times will make agriculture more productive and easier to manage. The State also must provide a scheme wherein the Discoms provide solar powered pump sets at nominal cost (90% subsidy is given by Centre, carbon credits are available). This will reduce the dependence on grid power, which can now be metered and charged at cost based on the time it is used (lowest at night, highest at daytime peaks), small village and town industry will also benefit. NTPC's proposal to dedicate its 2600 MW Dabhol power plant exclusively to Telangana must be negotiated. This will help in non-monsoon supply.

Telangana has vast areas of cultivable land which has been abandoned.

This has happened overtime to lands without irrigation. No farmer wants to work hard cultivating risky unirrigated crops such as traditional varieties of maize, jowar, pulses and minor cereals. These lands should be brought into cultivation either by introducing better and more robust varieties or by planting orchards or trees which do not depend on irrigation such a mango, pomegranate, ber (even munagakaya), etc. Water conservation schemes can help retain soil moisture.

Good road connectivity:

This is a critical infrastructural need which will enable the rural population to move quickly and easily between village and town and back with their produce or for their work and study.

The above tasks need clear vison, administrative ability, honest execution and dedicated monitoring and feedback. Many more needs remain to be fulfilled. The will of the Telangana people to accelerate their own development must be met now that the statehood has been achieved. The commitments made over the long struggle must be implemented. Telangana people are now joined by the entire nation in demanding development and progress. Its first Government must not fail to meet that demand.

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