

# New Governance for a New State

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Now that a Telangana state is formed, it remains to be seen how the state government will perform in meeting the people's expectations. There is so much that a state can do, so much that ought to have been done earlier but was not. What is required now, above all, is application of mind and a concerted effort to solve problems that are most important to the people: law and order, clean water, safe roads, good schools and hospitals. To do this across the country, states will have to be small and manageable, as C Rajagopalachari envisaged. Now we have such a small state and now is our opportunity.

Soon, we will no longer be able to blame the Seemandhra governing elite for neglecting Telangana's development. We need to be serious about making up for the lack of development in the erstwhile united state and ensuring even development of all our districts. Among our 10 districts, there are those that have poorer socioeconomic development than the others. It should be our first priority to correct this unevenness. The new Telangana leadership should not discriminate against any district, and take political and bureaucratic administration closer to the people.

If Telangana can take this path towards balanced development, then it will stand as an example for the rest of the country. If we fail in this task, then we shall have proved ourselves unworthy of the long struggle for Telangana and the great sacrifice of human lives that brought the new state into being. This is an opportunity to assist people to develop themselves and create more potential for development.

It is for us to choose how we will govern our state. Will we repeat the old model and develop only the relatively developed and politically important districts? Or shall we develop the state quickly and uniformly across all districts? That's the choice in front of us.

We must remember that allocation of funds and collection of revenue are likely to be decided by power alignments, whether it is a state with only 10 districts or 24 districts. The Hyderabadcentric approach has been widely condemned, but more than the Hyderabad-centric approach, it is the Secretariat centric approach that needs to be corrected now.

The chief minister and his/her council of ministers cannot continue to operate from the ivory tower of the Secretariat assisted by handpicked IAS officers and surrounded by MLAs begging and demanding favours. Just as it made sense for states to be smaller, the idea of smaller districts is a good idea too.

But if governance is still to be directed from the Secretariat, any number of districts will not help. It is imperative for the government to come down as close as it can to the districts. If it cannot solve every problem, at least let it be aware of them and attempt solutions. However, the cabinet model as practised so far may need rethinking. The minister is supposed to formulate policy and the bureaucrat to implement it. What happens in reality is that the bureaucrat is asked to make policy and the minister implements it in her or his own way after ensuring that the policy is favourable to the interests he represents. The tensions between the minister and bureaucrat, and between policy and implementation, make for poor and inefficient governance. The problem is apparently with the current cabinet structure. The competition by ministers and bureaucrats for 'good' posts is often only a euphemism for their intentions to derive illegal gains from administering a particular portfolio.

What does the Constitution say about the cabinet or, more formally, the Council of Ministers? Article 163 (1) says “There shall be a Council of Ministers with the Chief Minister at the head to aid and advise the Governor in the exercise of his functions, except insofar as he is by or under this Constitution required to exercise his functions or any of them in his discretion.”

No more, no less. It does not say there should be a minister of finance or revenue or tourism, etc. It, therefore, gives scope for the Council of Ministers (15 per cent of the strength of the Assembly) to be reshaped by appointing ministers for each district. In other words, there can be a minister for Warangal, one for Nizamabad and so on. At the state capital, there can be a chief minister who will have the sole responsibility for law and order and justice. He is assisted by three core ministers for finance, expenditure and administration. The rest of the portfolios can remain with the bureaucracy. The district ministers, assisted by a devolved bureaucracy, will implement the policy decided by the cabinet. They will be responsible for all the functions of government within the district, subject to the overall guidance of the chief minister.

The ministers will have an annual district budget containing revenue and expenditure estimates and targets for achievement in all fields, which then will be reallocated on the basis of the Assembly constituencies.

The district minister should be an elected representative from the same district and a small district committee consisting of all the district MLAs will assist him or her regularly.

Perhaps a wider district council, including the panchayat raj elected representatives, can meet at longer intervals. This will ensure that the elected representatives will have full responsibility for managing the development and administration of the district and their own constituencies in direct view of their constituents, who will be able to interact with them and secure the satisfaction of their needs. The ministers and MLAs will thus be more interested in staying in their constituencies rather than remaining in the state capital and paying court to the chief minister.

Similarly, most of the IAS and state bureaucracy will be transferred to the districts to carry out the business of government in their respective domains and portfolios, rather than being concentrated in the state capital, manoeuvring for better posts. Sure, they may still lobby for posts in the ‘better’ districts, but that is not something to worry about at this stage.

Cabinet meetings will be held once a month in the state capital to review progress and performance. Assembly sessions will go on as usual with the chief minister and core ministers answering all questions. The district ministers will offer inputs for specific districtlevel issues. In this schema, the Assembly session will be businesslike with nothing much to agitate about. If opposition MLAs have any matter to take up for their constituencies, they will do it more effectively in their district committee.

The Assembly will play a vital role only in making statelevel policy and shaping the overall budget. This can be systematised by a more transparent policymaking process. Thus, policy will be largely considered by a State Planning and Policy Board consisting of ministers, bureaucrats and subject specialists. Once it is drafted and discussed at public hearings, it will be redrafted, taken to the cabinet, and then to the Assembly for discussion and approval or rejection. The main problem envisaged will be finding MLAs prepared to be chief minister and core ministers, as their constituencies will feel their absence and this may reflect in an adverse vote at the next election.

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