

30 September 2011 Last updated at 04:44 GMT

Telangana: India new state protest enters 18th day



Protests have taken place in the capital, Hyderabad

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A strike in favour of a new state in the Telangana region of southern India's Andhra Pradesh state has entered its 18th day.

Some 800,000 protesting government employees have stopped work, leading to a shutdown of offices, schools and colleges.

Public transport is off the roads and widespread power outages are being reported from the region.

Andhra Pradesh saw violent protests for and against the proposal last year.

With a population of 40 million, the proposed Telangana state comprises 10 of Andhra Pradesh's 23 districts, including the state capital and India's sixth most populous city, Hyderabad.

Normal life in Hyderabad has come to a standstill on Friday after a fresh strike call by pro-Telangana activists, the BBC's Omer Farooq says.

For the last 18 days, 800,000 government employees - mostly teachers, public transport workers and coal mine workers - have been on strike, demanding a new state of Telangana.

As a result, schools, colleges and government offices in the region are shut.

A strike by the workers of Singareni Collieries Company has led to power cuts - electricity is mainly coal-fed in the region.

Last week, protesters blocked trains in the region, and a supporter of the new state threatened to commit suicide by jumping off the top of a hoarding in Hyderabad.

Telangana



- Population of 40 million
- Comprises 10 districts of Andhra Pradesh, including city of Hyderabad
- Landlocked, predominantly agricultural area
- One of the most under-developed regions in India
- 50-year campaign for separate status
- More than 400 people died in 1969 crackdown

In July, all 118 legislators representing the Telangana region resigned from the state assembly, which has 294 members.

And the party leading the demand for statehood, the Telangana Rashtra Samiti (TRS), is sticking to its position.

Opponents of the move are unhappy that Hyderabad, home to many major information technology and pharmaceutical companies, could become Telangana's new capital.

The final decision on a new state lies with the Indian parliament. But the state assembly must also pass a resolution approving its creation.

Deep divisions have emerged over the Telangana issue in the past two years.

In December 2009, India's Congress party-led government promised that the new state would be formed, but later said more talks were needed.

The announcement prompted widespread protests in the state, and a student committed suicide in support of the formation of Telangana.

DR GAUTAM PINGLE
DIRECTOR
CENTER FOR PUBLIC POLICY AND GOVERNANCE
ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF COLLEGE OF INDIA
BELLA VISTA
RAJ BHAVAN ROAD
HYDERABAD 500082
TEL:+91-40-6653 3000, 3081
+91-40-2331 0907 (D)
FAX:+91-40-66534356/ 23313882
E-MAIL: gpingle@asci.org.in
gautam.pingle@gmail.com