

The Power of 10



by Gautam Pingle

The extension of the New Indian Express into Telangana districts with editions catering to the specific needs, concerns and affairs of the districts is welcome. Telangana is “10 districts plus Hyderabad” not “Hyderabad plus 10 districts”. While Hyderabad is the centre of much activity, it should not be the sole attention of governance or the media.

The life of Telangana is largely made of its villages, mandals and towns. Though modern services are available largely in towns and Hyderabad, decentralisation of governance and other services to the district level will improve both governance and all other services, including private services. Media attention and government efforts are the best way to enhance quality of services to the people.

The plea for District Ministers and district-level governance has been made earlier too. With the maximum number of Cabinet restricted to 22, the ten Telangana districts could each have a Minister who would be a coordinating element with the rest of his ministerial colleagues holding the usual subject portfolios. The District Minister would be the best person to canvass and monitor his district’s development needs. This would leave the other main subject Ministers to concentrate on their portfolios without having to take additional responsibility and spend their energies and time to look after their own native districts. It would also create a balancing element in the Cabinet between the two sets of Ministers. In

order to ensure hierarchy, the District Ministers could be Ministers of State and not full-time Cabinet Ministers. That is for the Chief Minister to decide.

This sort of organisation of the Cabinet must be accompanied by a breakdown of the State Budget heads into its district components. These components should be announced soon after the Budget is approved and the district should know fully what expenditure they can expect and similarly what revenue it needs to collect on various Budget heads. This will set the tasks for the district authorities presided over by the Collector and District Minister and for the people of the district. As the Chief Minister is reported as saying: “Plan for the village. Plan for the mandal. Plan for the district and then plan for the State. What all happened in the past is irrelevant for Telangana. Plan critically in the context of Telangana. It should not be a mere bureaucratic planning. Take every elected public representative right from the village level into confidence while drafting the plans.”

The main tasks are now clear: tank rehabilitation, solar pumpsets, modernisation with English medium Government schools, road connectivity to each village between mandals and towns, regular TSRTC facilities and district ambulance services for patients for villages to be taken to the nearest hospital. Completion of these basic tasks in the next five years is sufficient success for the TRS government even though the rest of what has been promised in the Budget is substantial.

The institution of Water Users Associa-

tions (WUAs) should be actively encouraged and tank rehabilitation entrusted to these bodies instead of contractors by the Irrigation Department. Electricity distribution too can be routed through distributory committees which could oversee maintenance and schedule power supply and also charge users a fee while ensuring illegal connections are removed. Similarly, school and health committees of users would ensure accountability of the service personnel.

One of the most important institutions for Telangana is Singareni Collieries Company Limited (SCCL). Its operations are spread over Khammam, Warangal, Karimnagar and Adilabad districts — where SCCL is the largest employer.

SCCL’s non-mining activities such as schools, colleges, clinics and hospitals should be spun off to a tax-exempt Singareni Foundation. The Foundation will be run by experts wholly and solely dedicated to these specific tasks who will manage them efficiently. An annual grant by SCCL will maintain existing services to SCCL workers and families. Moreover, the Foundation can generate additional resources from the State and Central governments and other sources to extend these services to the rest of the population of its four districts.

The towns of Bellampally, Kothagudem, Manuguru, Ramagundam, Mancherial and Yellandu are SCCL townships heavily dependent on expenditures of SCCL and its workers. Singareni Foundation can take responsibility for developing these towns by providing sturdy roads and efficient drains, water and sewerage supplies and power.

The question now is who will monitor this progress and report slippage or success? It has to be alert citizens who have sufficient information and necessary courage to confront the bureaucracy and elected officials at all levels when and where performance is inadequate or delayed. This needs the support of a media which is fully involved in district affairs at every level. The media is well recognised as the Fourth Estate and as a legitimate source of inquiry. The media can receive complaints of citizens, verify their truth through interviews and research and set right the matter by reporting on both the fault and its rectification. No official should be afraid of media as long as he performs and carries out his assigned work. This needs a sensitive and understanding media of high integrity and credibility — not some rumour mongering and “exposing” type which do no good to anyone except their own circulation figures.

As a result of the above, the four districts of Warangal, Karimnagar, Khammam and Adilabad would be linked together as a sub-economy and build up a strong economic, social and cultural region of Telangana. This Warangal edition of The New Indian Express can play a part in the process. It should be welcomed in the four districts.

The four districts of Warangal, Karimnagar, Khammam and Adilabad are bound together as a sub-economy to build a strong economic, social and cultural region of Telangana which should be welcomed by one and all. This Warangal edition of The New Indian Express can play a part in the process. It should be welcomed in the four districts



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