

Visakhapatnam holds promise as capital of residuary state

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The division of the state is imminent with the Central Cabinet deciding to create Telangana comprising 10 districts with Hyderabad as its capital. As a result the issue of location of a capital for the residuary Andhra Pradesh is doing the rounds.

The 1953 dispute between Rayalaseema and Coastal Andhra has been revived. The Andhra State Legislature, the Secretariat and the Governor's residence were located in Kurnool and the High Court in Guntur. Now a new claimant has entered the list - Visakhapatnam.

Even in 1953 when the location of the capital of Andhra state came up, Justice Wanchoo Commission, to end the stalemate between Kurnool and Guntur/Vijayawada, recommended thus:

“That the alternative solution is to shift certain parts of the government from Madras city at once. These essential parts are the Governor, the Legislature, the ministers and the Secretariat and some other Heads of Departments like Inspector General of Police. The one place in Andhra Desa to which all these officers and offices can be shifted is Waltair-Visakhapatnam.” (p.6)

After six decades of development there are no difficulties in the choice of Visakhapatnam. It is the logical location for the capital of residuary AP now especially it is almost as big and modern as Hyderabad. And the weather is much nicer than that of Guntur or Kurnool!

It is also far removed from the narrow vested interests and politics of the Reddys of Rayalaseema and Kammas of Coastal Andhra. Though it is located far north of the residuary AP, the move should be combined by robust district -

level government which allows most decisions affecting the common people to be taken at local level. If this is done and with today's advanced communications, the location of the capital will be no hindrance to good governance.

The economic rationale of Visakhapatnam has helped it grow into a city and was strengthened by the harbour, Naval base, Hindustan Shipyard, the Caltex (now HPCL) Refinery, Coromandel Fertilisers, and the steel plant among other industrial enterprises. Vizag now has nearly 55 large and medium manufacturing units and power is supplied from NTPC's Simhadri plant.

Many international companies - especially IT companies -

prefer Visakhapatnam to any other location in residuary AP and will strengthen the case of the ITIR project now being canvassed. And unlike Hyderabad, Vizag can carry out desalination of sea water to make up any shortage in drinking water supply.

Between Hyderabad and Visakhapatnam an interesting point emerges with a comparison of the income of the two districts in which they are located. The official figures for Gross Domestic District Product (GDDP) at current prices over the years 1993-94 and 2009-10

give an unusual picture of Visakhapatnam's status compared to Hyderabad.

Annual Gross District Domestic Product (Rs Crores)		
Year	Vishakapatnam	Hyderabad
1993-94	3,287	2,998
1998-99	7,894	6,244
2004-05	18,192	15,398
2009-10	35,098	42,254

Throughout 1993- 2010

Visakhapatnam was the richest district in Andhra Pradesh and this illustrates the importance of the economic over political factors in the growth of a city. Visakhapatnam district, with more land (11,200 sq km) than Hyderabad district (217 sq km), is in a better position to plan its growth within its district borders.

Visakhapatnam, as the main port of entry for three states and its openness to foreign trade, investment and commerce, has a great future. It straddles the main communication and trade routes and railway lines along the coast and the railway line to Bailadila.

But Visakhapatnam has other problems in the making. SKC commented about Visakhapatnam real-estate operators:

“The reasons advanced by these investors for moving to Visakhapatnam are interesting. These are:

(i) Hyderabad has already too many players, whereas Visakhapatnam has few, even though it is projected as the next growth centre in Andhra Pradesh; and,

(ii) unlike their home districts, there is no competition from consolidation of capital and political power in any specific caste or community. The Kapus and Velamas, forming the majority of population, are not rich and are also deeply polarised with internal differences. This vacuum in spaces of power was conducive for the investors from Central Coastal Area to locate and exert their position in real estate development in North Coastal Area districts.” (SKC, p.333)

The fact that many of the crony capitalists and politicians have acquired large stretches of sea front brings the possibility of chosen Visakhapatnam closer. But if it avoids being ruined by real estate operators, Visakhapatnam can become the best city in India as well as capital of residuary Andhra Pradesh.

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