

Will it really work?

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Some media reports suggest that the Union government is not going to create a separate state of Telangana as announced in Parliament on December 10, 2009. What is expected instead is a Telangana Regional Board with a huge grant for the development of the region. It is also proposed to confer constitutional authority to the Board to regulate recruitment, postings and promotions of all government staff, including police and revenue officials. The Board will plan, oversee and implement development projects and other government services such as irrigation, power, roads, schools and health care.

It will also get power to administer land sales and transfers and safeguard the interest of the sons-of-the-soil. The Board's jurisdiction will naturally include Hyderabad city and the surrounding Ranga Reddy district, where there have been reports of illegal sale of government and wakf lands.

Who will administer the Board? It is likely that the Governor will chair the governing council and the council will consist of 11 other members. They will be elected directly from each of the 10 Telangana districts and one from Hyderabad city. This would be a good thing as MLAs and MPs have their own commitments to the political parties and also to the legislative organs to which they have been elected. It will also avoid ministerial interference from both Telangana and Seemaandhra Cabinet ministers.

The Board will be accountable to Parliament through the Union Ministry of Home Affairs. It will also place its annual reports and action taken reports before the Assembly for information and not for discussion as Parliament will have that sole prerogative of control over the Board. Government officials in Telangana will not be transferred to other regions and IAS, IPS and IFS officers will have to choose the Telangana sub-cadre. Annual plan and non-plan budgets will be received directly from the Union government which will approve the same, subject to Parliamentary sanction. The Board will exercise all regulatory functions and collect all taxes and carry out all expenditure in Telangana as per the budget approved by Parliament.

Vidharbha and Telangana teach us the lesson that culture, politics and development are very local, and when such alliances do not work satisfactorily for over six decades, separation is better than continued bitterness. But it is ironic that when after the States Reorganization Commission (SRC) had completed the task, some 13 new states were created in the Northeast, North and Central India. But when it comes to South India, Vidharbha, Telangana and Hyderabad-

Karnataka are fobbed off with Boards. If Boards were so effective, then why is it that these 13 new states were created instead of 13 new regional Boards?

The idea that an underdeveloped region without its own political control can progress harmoniously within a dominating political system has proven to be false earlier in Telangana and also in Vidharbha, which had a more elaborate regional policy enshrined in the Constitution as it is now proposed for Telangana. The Telangana Regional Council was a shortlived experiment, killed off deliberately as it was unacceptable to the ruling Seemaandhra political class.

To answer the inevitable question of why the Telangana Regional Council did not work and why the Vidharbh a council still does not despite the governor's key role, the Union government seems to have decided to take full responsibility for Telangana development and polity. In effect, Telangana will become a Union Territory in all but name. This will be the newest experiment of the UPA government and no one can blame them for policy paralysis. This is nothing but a weak experiment on an already devastated region which has aspirations that can not be fulfilled without full self-government within the Republic.

The main reason for this extraordinary plan seems to be that the Congress high command (or the young man commanding it) will not take the risk of offending their financial supporters from Seemandhra. They had agreed to grant Telangana only to spike YS Jagan Mohan Reddy. Now that he is safely in jail, they feel they can get a way with renegeing on their promise. "Never trust the words of princes," they said in the past; it is more true in the present.

Meanwhile, in the three years since the promise of statehood, the Telangana movement has grown beyond any expectations and is now a grassroots movement out of the control of political leaders whom the people do not wholly trust.

What's more, the scheme will not work. Three years ago there might have been some hope, 10 years ago it might have had a chance, 60 years ago it would have been a success. But the dominant regions and the majority of the political class did not let it happen. When you are a minority, there can be no hope of full justice, only toleration. The Telangana people have lost all their tolerance and want a state of their own, for better or worse.

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