

## Three states by Gautam Pingle

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The winter session of the Uttar Pradesh assembly will begin on November 21, and the BSP government is likely to introduce a resolution seeking the creation of three separate states. With assembly elections now round the corner, most political parties in the fray have been reiterating their demand for an administrative split in the country's largest state. Nomenclature differs but the Congress and the BJP too have often sought a reorganisation of UP — and were Chief Minister Mayawati to pull off such a resolution, she would represent it as a sign of sincerity in setting the process rolling.

Sub-regional identifications run deep in UP, based on rich cultural, economic and historical ties. But unlike the movement for Uttarakhand (which was finally formed in 2000) and Bundelkhand, these sub-regional aspirations usually don't assert themselves as bids for completely breaking away from the mother state. Bundelkhand, with its sprawl extending into Madhya Pradesh, has long iterated a sense of separateness, but not with the stridency in other statehood movements. There is, however, a persuasive case for splitting the state into more manageable and cohesive administrative units, especially as the political economy of states becomes increasingly led by the state capital. Significantly, the fact that the political demand for smaller states comes less from the grassroots than from party leaderships makes the task both easier and more difficult in UP. There is enough space for manoeuvre for a states reorganisation commission to work out the modalities for a split on a rational basis, by privileging administrative cohesion as well as local concerns. On the other hand, political parties need to be more deliberative and deepen the demands for reorganisation with an agenda for governance and development.

The emphatic demands for reorganisation, nonetheless, hint at a key difference in the lead-up to the 2012 elections in UP. Unlike in the past, when they would see a benefit in staking out specific votebanks and leveraging their bloc of MLAs, Mayawati's 2007 victory has made them aware of the benefits of a big tent. So, sub-regional outreach could be a way of reaching out to different segments without harking too much on caste identities.

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