

THE VIABILITY OF TWO PROPOSALS

Relevant for: Indian Polity | Topic: Indian Constitution - Features & Significant Provisions related to The Preamble, Union & its Territories and The Citizenship

Speaking at a roadshow in Kolkata on January 23, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee asked why India should have only one capital and suggested that there be four. She directed Sudip Bandyopadhyay, MP and leader of the Trinamool Congress in the Lok Sabha, to raise the issue in Parliament. She suggested that Parliament sessions should be held in each of the four capitals in a rotating manner. While Ms. Banerjee has the right to have her opinion on the issue, she doesn't seem to have given much thought to the feasibility of the proposal.

Four capitals would obviously mean having Parliament buildings in three other regions, too. If there are four capitals, accommodation for all the MPs and the adjunct staff will have to be constructed. While those from the northern parts of the country would prefer to be comfortably ensconced in the existing residential accommodation in New Delhi, those from other parts of the country may prefer to settle in the capital of the region to which they belong. During Parliament sessions, MPs will descend in droves to the envisaged capitals and fly out, leaving these residential accommodations vacant for months after every session. Add to this the huge expenditure involved in all the MPs and their staff having to fly to and from these capitals every now and then. Providing security to all the MPs will be a huge burden for the State Police. Even the vacant accommodations where the MPs don't reside will have to be guarded round the clock. Depending on the risk factor, enhanced security will have to be necessarily provided to a fair number of them, many of whom manage to get top security cover merely for their imprudent utterances.

Calcutta (now Kolkata) was once a capital of this country until King George V announced in December 1911 that Delhi would be the new capital. Parliament House was opened in 1927 and the magnificent Viceroy's residence (now Rashtrapati Bhavan) and the government buildings were inaugurated in 1931. One of the factors that may have weighed in favour of New Delhi could be its proximity to the summer capital, Shimla.

But today, even shifting a State capital would involve huge expenditure. In the 1980s, the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister proposed to shift the State capital to Tiruchirappalli in central Tamil Nadu. The plan was ultimately shelved when the huge burden it would impose on the State exchequer became apparent. The cost to the government exchequer to have capitals in three other States will be mind-boggling and our nation can ill-afford this.

A similar request was made in January 2021 when the Bar Councils of the five southern States called for a Supreme Court bench in south India. This has been a long-standing demand. Unlike the proposal to establish four capitals, this one merits serious consideration given the prohibitively long distance between the southern States and Delhi. Not many can afford to travel all the way to New Delhi to engage lawyers and plead their cases. The exorbitant fees of the Supreme Court lawyers in New Delhi is another deterrent.

While speaking at an online event last year, Attorney General K.K. Venugopal suggested that four benches of Court of Appeal with 15 judges each be created across the country to reduce the burden of the Supreme Court. This would enable judges to go through each case thoroughly and deliver a well-thought-out verdict. Setting up these courts would call for an amendment in the Constitution. Though the demand is to set up a bench in the south, southern Bar Councils may later take up the issue of setting up separate appellate benches in regions in the south. Such an arrangement would leave the apex court free to deal with constitutional issues. With

cases mounting in various courts, a viable solution needs to be worked out. Easy accessibility to justice for every citizen is a right that cannot be countered.

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