

THE BIFURCATION BUGBEAR

Relevant for: Indian Polity | Topic: Issues and Challenges Pertaining to the Federal Structure, Dispute Redressal Mechanisms, and the Centre-State Relations

Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao and Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy in Hyderabad. | Photo Credit: Special Arrangement

The Central government indicated its intention to resolve the bilateral issues between Telangana and Andhra Pradesh by constituting a committee headed by the Joint Secretary of the Ministry of Home Affairs, Asish Kumar. The first meeting of the committee has been scheduled for February 17 through video conference.

However, the two States are not optimistic about the outcomes. Asked about the possible result of this initiative, a senior Telangana official simply said: “zero.” The pessimism is not unfounded: while the initial note issued by the Home Ministry said the issue of special category status to Andhra Pradesh was part of the agenda of the meeting, a revised note issued later had no mention of special category status.

The two States have been complaining for some time about the Central government’s inaction in exercising the powers conferred on it in the Act. Section 48 of the Act says: “In case of any dispute relating to the distribution of any goods or class of goods, the Central Government shall endeavour to settle such dispute through mutual agreement arrived between the governments of the successor States for that purpose failing which the Central Government may, on request by any of the Governments of the successor States, after consulting the Governments of the successor States, issue such direction as it may deem fit for the distribution of such goods or class of goods, as the case may be, under this sub-section”. Senior officials say one of the issues pending since the bifurcation of erstwhile united Andhra Pradesh is of Andhra Pradesh Bhavan in New Delhi. It is within the jurisdiction of the Centre to issue orders on the apportionment of Andhra Pradesh Bhavan, but the Centre has not taken any initiative so far.

Section 108(1) of the Act says: “If any difficulty arises in giving effect to the provisions of this Act, the President may, by order do anything not inconsistent with such provisions which appears to him to be necessary or expedient for the purpose of removing the difficulty: Provided that no such order shall be made after the expiry of a period of three years from the appointed day”. However, more than seven and a half years since the bifurcation of the State, the Centre had not issued any order on its behalf, say officials. The Union Home Secretaries — Rajiv Gauba in the past and Ajay Kumar Bhalla now — convened several high-level meetings, but none of them has yielded any results in resolving the issues arising out of bifurcation.

Officials say the Centre has failed to give commitments on implementing provisions in the Act. One such provision is of delimitation of the Assembly constituencies in the successor States. Section 26(1) of the Act says, “...the number of seats in the Legislative Assembly of the successor States of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana shall be increased from 175 and 119 to 225 and 153, respectively”.

Officials claim that several infrastructure projects assured to the two successor States in Schedule XIII of the Act remain on paper. Some of these include the setting up of steel factories in both the States by SAIL, a port at Dugarajapatnam in Andhra Pradesh in phases, and a rail coach factory in Telangana. The rail coach factory was dropped later on the ground that there is no demand for rail coaches at present.

It is against this context that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's statement in the Rajya Sabha on bifurcation issues resulted in protests across Telangana. Mr. Modi should present solutions to pending issues rather than criticising the Congress for all the problems. It is hoped that the Centre will take the proceedings of the preparatory meeting seriously and initiate steps to resolve the vexatious bifurcation issues instead of using this situation for scoring political points.

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