

A CAPITAL FUNCTIONING FROM DIFFERENT REGIONS

Relevant for: Indian Polity | Topic: Functions & Responsibilities of the States, the Governor, the Chief Minister and State COM

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The Andhra Pradesh Decentralisation and Inclusive Development of All Regions Repeal Bill, 2021, aiming [to repeal the earlier laws that stipulated a three-capitals plan for the State](#), was passed by the Andhra Pradesh (A.P.) Assembly on November 22, 2021. That the current government would like to introduce a comprehensive, complete, and better Bill afresh is indicative of its resolve to utilise decentralisation for an inclusive A.P.

Andhra Pradesh was bifurcated into A.P. and Telangana under the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act of 2014 with the capital, Hyderabad, going to Telangana. Soon after, the Union Ministry of Home Affairs constituted the K.C. Sivaramakrishnan Expert Committee to come up with a strategy for the new capital of A.P. After State-wide public consultations and studies, the committee recommended the trifurcation of primary capital functions. In doing so, it advocated a decentralised model of development as against the 19th century visions of concentrating wealth in select centers to create megacities like Chennai, Bengaluru and Hyderabad.

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The State has three distinct regions with uneven socio-economic development. The Rayalaseema region in the south-west, comprising the Chittoor, Kadapa, Anantapur and Kurnool districts, has dismal development indices. Similarly, the culturally rich Vizianagaram and Visakhapatnam to the north-east support vast forest tracts and tribal belts that are deprived of development. In both these areas, deficiency of basic services, inadequate social and physical infrastructure and low employment opportunities pose serious challenges. In contrast, coastal A.P., comprising nine districts, is a better developed region. The regional imbalance is further compounded by a similar spatial imbalance of urban settlements.

Locating the capital at Vijayawada would further the asymmetry as historically, such developments have inhibited the aspirations of other urban settlements. The suggested trifurcation provided an opportunity to correct the regional imbalance and redistribute wealth. However, the then A.P. government chose to ignore the recommendations of the committee and selected an area of Vijayawada, which was specifically classified as unsuitable by the committee. The unsuitability was premised on the area being a part of the floodplains of the Krishna River; supporting fertile agricultural land; and having soil that is not conducive for construction. Instead, the government chose to opt for a green field city — Amravati — as its capital, but not without losing out on the opportunity to correct spatial imbalances in regional development and settlement patterns in the State.

Decentralised development — spatial and administrative — has been advocated by many committees since the 1950s through the 1980s to be finally enacted as the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution. The distribution of the capital functions to several locations is one way of decontrolling development. It is neither a new nor a novel idea. Maharashtra, for example, performs its capital functions from Mumbai, Pune and Nagpur. In Madhya Pradesh, while the executive and legislative functions are performed from the capital at Bhopal, the High Court is located at Jabalpur with Circuit Benches at Indore and Gwalior, respectively. Jammu and Srinagar have been performing the capital functions for the State (now Union Territory) of

Jammu and Kashmir. While Uttar Pradesh functions from Prayagraj (Allahabad) and Lucknow, Uttarakhand has declared that Gairsen would be its summer capital. South Africa has three capitals: Pretoria (executive); Bloemfontein (judicial); and Cape Town (legislative). None of these functions is in Johannesburg, the largest city in the country.

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The historically perpetuated regional imbalances in A.P. as well as its elongated shape necessitate a 'multi-nodal region'. In 2019, the then government revisited the decision on Amravati. It appointed yet another committee with a mandate to suggest a "comprehensive development strategy for all-round balanced development of the state, including the Capital". The committee's views were aligned with the earlier committees' views on decentralising capital functions while also recommending a scaling down of the proposed works at Amravati.

Here we would like to draw out the subtle, yet critical, difference between decentralised capitals and decentralising capital functions. While the former assumes three capitals anchored around the functions of the executive, the legislature and the judiciary, the latter connotes one seat of capital — symbolically and physically — with the three functions being performed in different locations. Both the committees have recommended the latter. Embedded within this thinking are the objectives of creating pluralisation of services and/or conduits for services and the attendant dispersal of geographic space, one that responds to regional development needs. The second committee too premised its recommendations on the understanding that the State, while well-endowed with natural resources, showcases regional variations that need corrective measures. An emerging imperative therefore was to trigger development in the Rayalaseema districts as well as the north-eastern belt while simultaneously reducing pressure on the coast. In line with these imperatives, the second committee recommended distributed development and decentralised governance. The already functioning Grama Sachivalayams ensuring administration at the lowest level underpinned this recommendation.

Explained | [The three capitals issue of Andhra Pradesh](#)

Guiding the decentralising capital functions recommendation were two foundational principles. First, development interventions should derive from the 'genius' of the geography rather than externally imposed, contextually blind suggestions. Second, while focusing on infrastructural development, there should be 'positive constraints' in order to protect the natural resource base that must be mapped. Deriving from these guiding principles, the committee reiterated the earlier committee's recommendations of decentralising capital functions (as against three capitals). In the proposed decentralised 'capital functions' strategy, the committee recommended that the Amravati-Mangalagiri complex host the Legislative Assembly (winter), Governor's seat and the Chief Minister's camp office. The Secretariat was proposed at the Visakhapatnam Metropolitan Region (VMR), preferably away from the coast and away from Visakhapatnam city, closer to Vizianagram. The High Court was to be located at Kurnool. High Court benches were proposed in the Amravati-Mangalagiri complex and the VMR. The idea was to trigger a just model of development while taking services to people.

Also read | [Amravati a mythical capital that cannot be built: Buggana](#)

The recommendations of both the committees to distribute capital functions predates the pandemic which has exposed the massive inequalities both at the national and State levels and the fallacies of centralising growth. While the pandemic is a reminder that urbanisation must be a balanced, equitable and inclusive process, floods and droughts are a warning against urbanising the floodplains of our rivers.

K.T. Ravindran, former Chairman of the Delhi Urban Art Commission, was member of both committees, and Anjali Karol Mohan, visiting faculty, NLSIU, Bangalore, was member of the second committee. Mahavir, Professor and former Dean, SPA, New Delhi, contributed to this article. Views are personal

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