

Indian government to create Telangana state in southern India

By Deepal Jayasekera and Keith Jones
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India's ruling Congress Party has decided to create a new state of Telangana through the bifurcation of the southern Indian, predominantly Telugu-speaking, state of Andhra Pradesh.

The Congress Working Committee, the party's highest body, passed a resolution calling for the creation of Telangana as India's 29th state on Tuesday evening. The Congress leadership had already secured the support of its allies in the United Progressive Alliance (UPA). India's Official Opposition, the Hindu supremacist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), has announced its support for the government plan to create Telangana—a longstanding BJP demand.

The proponents of Telangana and India's political establishment are presenting the creation of a new state as a means of overcoming socio-economic backwardness. In reality, it is a reactionary manoeuvre aimed at shoring up the fortunes of the Congress-led central government and more generally, Indian bourgeois rule, through the manipulation of regional, ethnic and caste identities.

The ten north-western districts of Andhra Pradesh, an area with a population of about 35 million, are to be included in Telangana. The state's other two regions, Rayalaseema and coastal Andhra, with populations of 15 and 35 million respectively, are to comprise a second state named Seemandhra.

The creation of the new state requires the passage of legislation by the national parliament. Home Minister Sushil Kumar Shinde said Wednesday that the government wants this done in "five to six months," but he also announced that the bill to create Telangana would not even be introduced in parliament until November.

Shinde gave no reason for the delay, which is all the more extraordinary given that the government has been actively considering the creation of Telangana since at least 2009, when it first announced its intention to bifurcate Andhra Pradesh. Faced with opposition from much of the economic and political elite in Rayalaseema and coastal Andhra, as well as concerns within the Indian ruling class that the creation of a new state could destabilize India's internal structure, the Congress backtracked and referred the issue to a government commission. Headed by a retired Supreme Court justice, the Srikrishna commission recommended against creating a separate Telangana state, saying that a "united Andhra" with special provisions to politically "empower" and develop Telangana was the best option from an economic and "national" perspective.

Four years on, none of the contentious issues, including the precedent established by the splitting of Andhra, the sharing of water and energy resources between the future states of Telangana and Seemandhra, or the fate of Hyderabad, Andhra's economic center and rapidly expanding metropolis, have been resolved.

As in 2009, the decision to create Telangana has met with widespread opposition in Rayalaseema and coastal Andhra. Due to protests called by various groups, including the "Samaikyandhra (united Andhra Pradesh) students' Joint Action Committee," many educational institutions,

and commercial establishments were closed in the two regions Wednesday, and the services of the state-run Andhra Pradesh Road Transport Corporation were disrupted.

The Congress high command's decision to split Andhra Pradesh has caused a major regional split inside the party. Seven parliamentarians and four ministers representing Congress from non-Telangana regions in Andhra Pradesh have resigned in protest, as have three ministers in Andhra's Congress state government and 26 Congress state legislators.

As expected, the decision to make Telangana a state has encouraged various regionally-based sections of the Indian elite to press forward with their own demands for the carving out of new states. Some of these demands are justified by their proponents on the basis of ethnicity, others as in the case of Telangana and the movement to make the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra a separate state, in the name of overcoming economic backwardness.

The Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJM) has renewed its demand for a Gorkhaland state based in the Darjeeling hill area of West Bengal. On July 29, on the eve of the Congress Working Committee decision, the GJM started a three-day *bandh* (total shutdown) in Darjeeling to press its demand. GJM chief Bimal Gurung told a press conference, "If the Centre announces a Telangana state then it should also declare a Gorkhaland state."

The Bodoland Peoples Front (BPF), which is a partner in the Congress Party-led government of Assam, has announced plans to intensify pressure for a separate Bodoland state. BPF parliamentarian Bwiswmuthiary has announced a mass rally in Kokrajhar on August 5 to support the statehood demand, as well as his intention to press the issue at a forthcoming meeting with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Congress Party President Sonia Gandhi, and Home Minister Shinde.

The Congress decision to press ahead with the creation of Telangana, ignoring the recommendation of its own commission

and widespread apprehension within the corporate media about its politically destabilizing ramifications, is being driven by short-term political calculations amidst a deepening economic and political crisis. India's growth rate fell to 5 percent in the 2012-13 fiscal year, its lowest in a decade, and the rupee has plummeted to record lows in recent weeks, stoking energy and food price increases. Desperate to attract foreign capital so as to revive the growth rate and forestall a potential current account crisis, the Congress-led UPA is pushing ahead with socially regressive measures further fuelling popular anger among the working class and rural toilers. Within this context, the decision to create Telangana is a high-risk attempt to boost the Congress' fortunes prior to next year's national election. The Congress calculates the decision will solidify its support in Telangana and under conditions that the BJP, as it has long-supported the Telangana demand, will be unable to exploit the opposition within the elite in Andhra's two other regions.

The dispute within Andhra Pradesh is between rival bourgeois factions. The Telangana elite calculates that statehood will give it increased access to the wealth of Hyderabad and allow them to cut better deals with the Indian central government and foreign capital. The rival "united Andhra" faction fears that the weakening of its bargaining position vis a vis both New Delhi and international big business.

The leaders of the pro-Telangana statehood movement have cynically exploited popular anger over the poverty and dilapidated public infrastructure that characterizes the region, as it does India generally. In particular they have drawn support from sections of the middle class—university students have been in the forefront of the agitation for Telangana—by claiming that statehood and the preferential-hiring practices that a Telangana state will pursue will give them better access to public sector jobs.

Various ostensibly left forces, including the Maoists, have lent support to this regionalist movement, which serves to channel social discontent behind a faction of the ruling elite and divide the working class.

In the wake of the Indian government's decision to bifurcate Telangana, K. Chandrasekhara Rao, the head of the Telangana Rashtra Samithi, the political party that has led the agitation for statehood, said that all government workers not originally from Telangana will be dismissed from their jobs. "They will have to go," declared Rao. "There is no other option."

Leaders of the All India Majlis-e-Ittehad-ul Muslimeen, a Muslim communal political party based in Hyderabad, have for their part expressed fear that the BJP will emerge as a major political force in Telangana and that the creation of the new state will otherwise adversely impact on the Muslim community.

There is a very real danger that the coming period will see ethnic and communal clashes.

Within the "united" Andhra Pradesh there have been bitter conflicts over water and energy resources, with the advocates of Telangana claiming that the coastal region has drawn undue benefit from the Godavari River. They hope to use statehood to implement their conflicting plans for exploiting the river's resources.

Most contentious of all is the fate of Hyderabad, which lies in

the Telangana region. The current capital of Andhra Pradesh, Hyderabad's population has more than doubled to over nine million since 2001 as the city was transformed into an international IT hub. Global IT corporations like Google, Amazon, Facebook, IBM, Dell and Microsoft have important operations in Hyderabad. Access to the tax revenues and other economic spin-offs they produce is a pivotal issue in the dispute between the rival factions of the Andhra elite.

The Congress government has said that Hyderabad will serve as the capital of both states for the next ten years, while a new capital is built for Seemandhra with central government funds. But New Delhi has said nothing about how the tax revenues from the city are to be divided.

The Stalinist-led Left Front is divided over the Telangana issue. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPM, the Front's largest component, opposes the creation of a separate state, although the Andhra Pradesh state secretary has defied the national party leadership in hailing the bifurcation decision.

A CPM Polit Bureau statement said that Congress decision to create Telangana "will give a fillip to demands for separate states in other places," and added that the party has "always stood for the integrity of the states based on the democratic principle of linguistic states." The CPM's opposition to Telangana has nothing to do with the struggle to unite the working class against all factions of the Indian bourgeoisie. Rather it is from the standpoint of upholding the strength of the central Indian state and the position of those sections of the bourgeoisie with which the CPM is most closely aligned. The CPM, which ruled West Bengal for 34 consecutive years until 2011, fears the creation of a separate Gorkhaland would weaken the position of the West Bengal within the Indian Union.

The other main Stalinist parliamentary party, the Communist Party of India (CPI), has lined up with the Telangana regional elite and welcomed Andhra Pradesh's bifurcation.

Whatever their tactical differences over Telangana, the Stalinists have played the principal role in enabling the bourgeoisie over the past four decades to divert mass social discontent behind myriad regionalist, casteist, ethno-separatist, and communalist movements and parties. They have systematically subordinated the working class to the parties of the Indian bourgeoisie, including propping up the current Congress Party-led government from 2004 through 2008, and they have supported the bourgeoisie in implementing its plans to transform India into a cheap labor platform, including implementing what they themselves describe as "pro-investor" policies in those states where they have held office.

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