New Life in a Metro

A year after Telangana was born, innovation and investment are the buzzwords in the state's capital of Hyderabad

Shantanu Nandan Sharma

"Hyderabad Metro will be a game-changer for Telangana. The state's future depends on Hyderabad and the city's future largely depends on this metro rail."

NVS Reddy, managing director, Hyderabad Metro Rail

SLOGANS DURING THE TELANGANA AGITATION

- Neellu (water)
- Nidhulu (funds)
- Niyamatkalu (jobs)

ACTION ON SLOGANS (RST STATION)

- Neellu (water) - Still a problem; state government plans to restore 46,531 minor irrigation sources (Source: Finance department)
- Nidhulu (funds) - Thanks to cash-rich Hyderabad in Telangana; does not have fund crunch
- Niyamatkalu (jobs) - Unwritten rules ensure public employment is doled out only to people of Telangana

THE SLOGAN NOW

Innovate in Telangana. Invest in Telangana.
Hyderabad
Attracted Investors
not because of Chandrababu Naidu

On the day India's youngest state Telangana turned one and there were celebrations all across the city of Hyderabad, chief minister K Chandrashekar Rao claimed that Hyderabad will remain the favourite destination of investors. In an exclusive interaction with Shantanu Handan Sharma at his residence in the city, Rao said potential investors will be escorted from the airport as per a new scheme that will be launched later this month.

Edited excerpts from the interview:

How has been your transition from being an activist fighter for Telangana to ruling the state now?
Our 60-year-old struggle for Telangana was based on the slogan: Neelul (water), Nidula (funds), Nynolvulaku (jobs). We did not have any of those. That was our grouse, and we went for an agitation. Now, Telangana has been declared by the 14th Finance Commission a revenue-surplus state. Only two states in India are revenue-surplus, the other being Gujarat. Yes, there is no dearth of funds. When we took over, the main problem was power. It was a neglected sector. But with great deal of effort, we could arrange the required funds. The present production capacity is just 3,520 MW. We have made plans to produce 34,000 MW by 2018.

Let's go beyond the first year. What's the vision for the medium to long term?
Any good leader must follow both yearly and five-year plans. Yes, we have to have a vision on the state's future. We fully understand that today's world is a truly global one. And no one can stop that. Tomorrow's generation will have to be competing globally. The barriers have already been broken. So, we plan to make the young generation globally competitive.

How can you achieve that?
Let me explain. In the state of Telangana, we have a large number of hostels in our educational institutions. But having that infrastructure alone won't help. We have to change our education system altogether. Our scheme called KG to PG is aimed at that. Once this programme is implemented, it will eclipse the present system. First, we want to change the entire education system in Telangana to be residential. There will be no place for day schools. Secondly, all institutions will be of English medium, following the CBSE syllabus. Telugu will be a compulsory subject, but the medium of instruction will be English. The rich people's children go to nurseries and kindergartens before joining regular schools, but what happens to those living in rural areas? They need to be prepared before bringing them to our residential schools. Another challenge is to train our teachers; most of them can't teach in English. So we have decided, as our teachers retire, we will recruit only those who can teach in English. So, in the years to come, this new system will eclipse the existing educational system. In a span of five to seven years, I hope the whole educational system will be in English medium.

Isn't there some apprehension that Hyderabad may lose its easier sheen, and the rich and mighty may gradually move towards Andhra Pradesh?
I can challenge anyone on the fact that no city in India has the advantages as Hyderabad has. It's in the Deccan Plateau and not in a seismic zone. All top IT companies of the world have placed their back up facilities in Hyderabad. For Microsoft, Hyderabad houses the second-largest facility after the one in Silicon Valley. Recently, my son (KT Rama Rao) who is our IT minister went to the US to discuss this matter with Google. Google's presence here will be second only to that in the US.

Dispite because of law and order problems, an unforgiving climate (an unprecedented temperature of 45 degrees this summer, although it hasn't been too different in Andhra) and an uncertain labour policy of the new government, "I can challenge anyone on the fact that no city in India has the advantages as Hyderabad has. It's in the Deccan Plateau and not in a seismic zone. All top IT companies of the world have placed their back up facilities in Hyderabad. For Microsoft, Hyderabad houses the second-largest facility after the one in Silicon Valley. Recently, my son (KT Rama Rao) who is our IT minister went to the US to discuss this matter with Google. Google's presence here will be second only to that in the US."

Big Promises
KCR has been at pains to point out that the competition for investors is tough with Maharashtra and Gujarat, and his big brother Andhra Pradesh. Which is why he is promising investors all permissions for land, water, electricity at 40 in 15 days, and corruption-free procedures.

This writer was present when a group of mobile manufacturers had a one-hour-long interaction with the CM earlier this week at his residence in Begumpet. The investors wanted assurances on labour issues, pitched for tax exemptions and asked for about 500 acres to set up their manufacturing facilities. As an example of proactiveness, one of them pointed out how the Chinese authorities convened a village into today's Shenzhen, a paradise for investors.

When it was KCR's turn, he first showed the potential investors a documentary on the growth of Telangana, before asking them to come back with a concrete plan with their demands and concerns. He assured them that a mechanism with trade union leaders would be arranged in the CM's office itself and they would be able to sort out labour issues in a transparent manner. He stressed that land acquisition wouldn't be an issue, as the state has a land bank of 1.6 lakh acres.

Tongue firmly in cheek, KCR said he had no problems welcoming "naa boot" (laboratories) — in the context of Congress vice-president Rahul Gandhi’s dig at the Modi-led government's propinquity for businessmen — so long as they were willing to pay minimum wages to the workers and provide them all the basic amenities as prescribed by law.

Urdhu poet and lyricist Shadab Bedhadka, who wrote poems praising the one year of statehood, says Hyderabad will turn into a Sone ki Chidiya (a golden bird) in Telangana. "Like a Bollywood movie, we are expecting Hyderabad to be a superhit," he says.

For every Telanganaite who was part of the six-decade-long struggle for a separate state, such expectations and excitement are only natural. When the Telangana-speaking region of the erstwhile state of Hyderabard state was merged with Andhra state in 1956, there were weak protests that only escalat-

ed over the years, to finally force the UPA-II government in 2014 to concede a bifurcation of the state. People from Andhra Pradesh vehemently protested a bifurcation, and did not agree to give away the latter half of Hyderabard, which was the principal broad-based for the undivided state. But Telangana finally won the battle and Hyderabad was declared a joint capital only for 10 years, and the revenue that it earns during this period will belong to Telangana alone.

A year after the separation, the acrimony between the two sides is showing signs of receding. It is taught months to segregate the All India Services officers —IAS, IPS and Indian Forest Service. The final decision of the division of the state bureaucracy and 59 state public sector undertakings will go to the Centre.

And there are uncertainties over water-sharing of the two rivers, Krishna and Godavari.

Mud-slinging Continues
Seemdu of the Congress argues that the comparison is essentially null.

Andhra Pradesh has been on good terms with the CMs of all other states — not just with chief ministers in the Telugu-speaking states. The co-operation with Telugu states has been on good terms.

Only a week ago, a Revanth Reddy, a Telugu Desam Party (TDP) MLA, was suspended from the house in Hyderabad when he went to allegedly "buy" a nominated MLA for the upcoming MLC polls with a T50 lakh advance in cash at the direction of his "boss". The Anti Corruption Bureau (ACB) of Telangana video-graphed the entire episode and the ACB were circulated to jour-

nalists reportedly by the CM's office.

Did KCR know about the trap laid by the ACB to pin down TDP supremo Naidu? Or did he himself engineer the trap to expose his Andhra counterpart and political rival?

The answer is simple. Two years after the state were formed the year of statehood, the mod-slinging continues. The real victor, however, will be the side that gets the invest-

ments. Whether KCR can retain Hyderabad’s lustre or whether Telangana can offer investors an attractive alternative is the multi-billion-dollar question.