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## India's Telugu minority granted separate Telangana state

India's Telugu minority is to be granted its own state following widespread protests and a hunger strike by one of its most popular leaders.

By Dean Nelson in New Delhi  
Published: 5:14PM GMT 10 Dec 2009

The decision has raised fears of a further break-up of India into smaller states and a weakening of the country's national identity.

The government announced the creation of Telangana, to be carved out of the current state of Andhra Pradesh, as the health of Telugu leader, K Chandrashekar Rao, deteriorated and after several campaigners committed suicide in protests which brought the state to a halt.

The announcement was marked with wild street celebrations in the state. For supporters it is a victory they have dreamed of since shortly after Independence when the former princely state of Hyderabad was absorbed into India.

But instead of a Telugu state, half the land area was merged with the more affluent Andhra coastal zone to create Andhra Pradesh where Telugu speakers account for more than 80 per cent of its 75 million population.

Supporters now face a battle with leaders in the remaining parts of Andhra Pradesh over which of the states will have Hyderabad as its capital. The city is an IT rival to Bangalore and home to the Indian headquarters of Microsoft and Google, but industry leaders fear uncertainty could deter new investors.

The demand for a separate state was largely driven by lower caste Telugu speakers who claim government spending favours those in coastal

Andhra. Literacy among Telugu speakers is just 37 per cent, compared with 72 per cent in the state capital Hyderabad, and 70 per cent of their people are from poor tribal and low caste groups.

Supporters however believe the state's vast resources – it has huge reserves of coal, granite, iron ore – can now be fully developed and more investment will improve its poor agricultural sector. They also hope to raise the profile of its 'Tollywood' film industry which rivals Bollywood in revenues and popularity.

The announcement of a new Telangana state was enthusiastically welcomed in other parts of India where minority leaders are waging campaigns to break away from larger states. It emerged days before new talks are due to begin between New Delhi, the government of West Bengal and Gorkha leaders over their demand to break away from Calcutta to create their own Gorkhaland state.

Roshan Giri of the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha movement for a Gorkha state in the Darjeeling Hills said his group had been inspired by the Telugu campaign and would now launch a series of hunger strikes to intensify pressure on the government.

In Rajasthan, campaigners for a Maru state, said larger states had focused resources on the main towns and failed to extend economic development throughout their districts.

"In our nine districts of Rajasthan there is not a single industry which employs 200 people and no universities for our 20 million people after 60 years of Independence," said Jaibeer Godara, president of the Maru Pradesh Nirman Morcha.

"If India has to grow and prosper and emerge as a global power, we have to create small states," he added.

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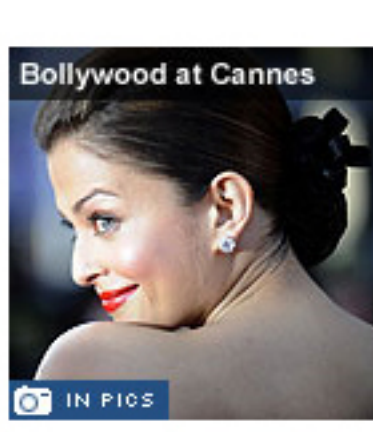
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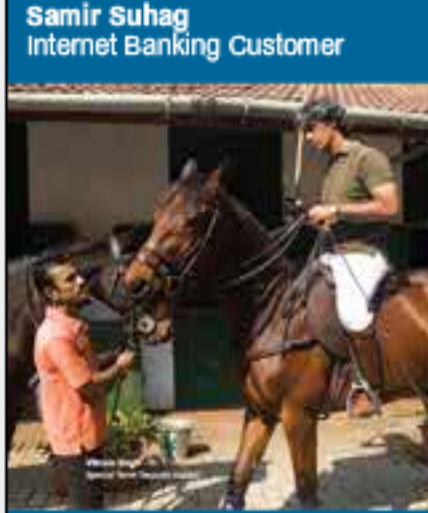
Derrick Bird is believed to have shot at passersby in 11 locations.

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