

Will Thoothukudi be made TN's economic capital?



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After Chennai was buffeted by floods back in 2015 and 2023, media and social media were abuzz with pleas to shift Tamil Nadu's Capital. But is it that easy to change a Capital?

Example of Telangana

Hyderabad was made the Capital of Telangana when the new state was carved out in the bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh. Andhra Pradesh was given a 10-year deadline to create its own Capital. However, it began taking care of its administration, accepting Amaravati as its Capital. The move, though, was not without its own complications.

Losing Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh lost not only its major Capital investment but also its brand value. The city that was once well known globally, attracting major corporates, has been struggling to bring in investments. Even if Andhra Pradesh had been allowed to use Hyderabad for a decade longer, it would have been futile. The

reason is that as the city is forever in possession of Telangana, all benefits accruing to the city will naturally and automatically go to the new state.

Though Amaravati has been declared as the new Capital, it is yet to fully recover from the brand value problem and has not attained stability in the global arena. Hence Amaravati has been declared as legislative Capital, Kurnool as judiciary Capital and Visakhapatnam as administrative Capital.

Maharashtra has two legislative Capitals – Mumbai and Nagpur. It is an extension of the East India Company's formation of a new province centred around Nagpur way back in 1853.

But the New Andhra's new Capitals connote the growth of modern times and will certainly be helpful to socio-economic-cultural progress. When the infrastructural growth in the new Capitals becomes self-sufficient to some extent, it will rub off on the state as a whole.

TN's need

It is futile to just toy with the idea of changing the Capital only when Tamil Nadu is confronted with natural disasters such as floods. This problem must be analyzed with a long-term vision. Taking a cue from the European and American models, Tamil Nadu's need for an economic Capital can be understood.

Several world countries have identified and promoted their economic Capitals or megacities. Examples are Frankfurt in Germany, New York in the U.S., Tokyo in Japan, London in England, Sidney in Australia and Mumbai in India, Apart from London, the other cities are not Capitals of the countries concerned, but are just de facto Capitals on account of their fabulous industrial prosperity. Shanghai is a well-planned industrial city in China, though not the Capital of the country. It is hailed as China's New York and a global alpha city.

On these lines, Chennai has naturally evolved into the Capital of Tamil Nadu, the fifth fast-growing city in India. This explains why people keep migrating to the city from various parts of the city.

That the boon of growth is turning into a worrying bane is quite amply manifest during floods. We haven't thought about having three Capitals like in Andhra Pradesh. But we can avert problems in the future and attain widespread growth if we now declare

Thoothukudi as the economic Capital of Tamil Nadu, drawing up and implementing related projects. In this respect, Thoothukudi city and district can fit the bill appropriately. How is it possible?

Favourable features of Thoothukudi

After the Madras High Court Bench was set up in Madurai, the city has almost become Tamil Nadu's judiciary Capital, reducing the number of litigants visiting Chennai. Madurai district has also grown by leaps and bounds. As for the western districts, Salem, Erode, Namakkal and Coimbatore have evolved into integrated industrial districts; so there is no need to declare any of the cities as economic Capital. As for Tiruchi, the city has no infrastructure for exports and imports and so is the case with Thanjavur and Tirunelveli. Then one may not help but ask the question: Does Thoothukudi have what it takes to be the economic Capital?

Historically Thoothukudi has been a port city that has witnessed a seamless traffic of foreigners. Once it was famous for pearl trading. The city has all it takes to be declared as the economic Capital – port, airport, railway station, road infrastructure needed for cargo transport, and so on. When it evolves into a mega city in the future, the massive lands it possesses will be very helpful for its expansion. The city has a population of 3.5 lakh, a prerequisite for a big city. It also has a sufficient number of schools and colleges. Adjoining and accessible are the cities of Tirunelveli, Madurai, and Tiruchi where students can migrate for higher education.

The move to set up an electric car manufacturing factory at the cost of Rs. 16,000 crore in the city speaks volumes about Thoothukudi's importance. The various new schemes launched by the union government in the city will incentivize its further growth. Thoothukudi has lots of massive land parcels needed for it to evolve into a semi-circular metropolitan city like Chennai. Just look at the heavy cargo traffic that the Thoothukudi port handles every day. You can understand its potential of becoming the Indian Sea's central point that links all Southeast Asian countries.

If the city is now declared as the economic Capital, its population will grow three or five times in the next decade. The city will in the long run become a great alternative to Chennai, arresting the migration of people for occupational, professional, and industrial reasons. The people will enjoy a more refined metropolitan life, witnessing a dip in casteist and regressive incidents of violence.

Well! One may tend to fear that the drinking water scarcity during summer will worsen in case of a population explosion in Thoothukudi. But here it is worthwhile to note how Dubai, though not endowed with rich water resources, manages to fulfil its drinking

water needs. The Gulf country uses reverse osmosis technology to treat and make seawater worth drinking.

Thoothukudi does not depend on the Tamirabarani alone for drinking water. Though abounding in 'seemai karuvela' trees (prosopis juliflora), the city will soon turn into a place lush and plush with greenery. When it becomes the economic Capital, international industrial corporates will make a beeline for this city, make the most of its fallow lands for their industrial enterprises, and in a cascading effect, the city will have an attractive and rich makeover. Besides, tree-growing will become a commercially roaring business in the next 10 years, proving highly beneficial to the city and district.

So it is time to wake up. To implement the Thoothukudi economic Capital project, a few deputy ministers can be appointed and a subsidiary secretariat set up. These measures will eventually trigger the economic growth of southern districts and set the state on the trajectory of economic progress and prosperity.

Translated by V. Mariappan.