

# Kerala Can Lead India



**M Muneer**

Despite policy see-saw between the left and Congress governments every five years, in almost every social index, Kerala has been ahead of other Indian states. Whether it is literacy, e-literacy, healthcare, infant mortality, maternal mortality, birth rate, life expectancy or female literacy, Kerala is leading the rest of India.

Now, there is another area where Kerala will again lead India as it gets ready to become the first Indian state whose government will deliver all its poll promises using a framework that only developed nations have been using so far.

When Kerala chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan took office almost a year ago, he wanted real-time measurement and good governance to ensure the achievement of manifesto items. Within the first month itself, the CM's office worked to translate the manifesto into actionable goals, a big departure from the silo-oriented, ministry-based approach.

The Balanced Execution Agenda (BEA) framework brings in alignment and encourages inter-ministerial collaboration focused on the mission rather than individual ministry preferences. The framework provides alignment between mission, strategy, processes and individual performance, and demonstrates the value of programmes to citizens. It also develops meaningful performance metrics that will determine the success of programmes, and links mission to budget and manages resource allocation to increase inter-agency coordination to eliminate waste and duplication.

The mission of the government is building a secular, corruption-free and development-driven new Kerala. A total of 35 items were categorised in the Left

Democratic Front (LDF) manifesto into strategic objectives (that require long-term orientation) and initiatives (that are short-term and quicker).

The framework has four perspectives: fiscal discipline, citizen centricity, public system processes, and culture and capacity. Four distinct themes from 25-odd mission-critical objectives in the manifesto were identified: economic and industrial growth, infrastructure development, community welfare and sustainability.

The objectives were arranged in themes and perspectives for better monitoring and governance. Once this was done, some gaps between the mission and goals were found. For instance, there were no items in the manifesto to drive secularism and to free the state of corruption.

Ideally, the next step for the CM's office would be to facilitate a discussion of the objectives among the cabinet colleagues and close the gaps, if any. Each objective would be scrutinised for the right performance metric to know when it would be considered successful. Targets would be set at this point and each member of the cabinet, along with the concerned bureaucrat, would take ownership of one or two of the objectives and drive forward the execution in the new format.



**Do march to their drumbeat**

The cabinet would review the performance based on the metrics every month or quarter to gauge progress and take debated decisions. This would eventually overcome all coalition tensions and look at collective responsibility to deliver the promises.

Execution demands a strong leadership. Second, most elected representatives are low-risk takers and may not want to publicly commit to steep performance targets such as the one on 'creating 25 lakh jobs'. The governance and monitoring system that follows the balanced execution agenda will actually allow the ministers to take informed decisions and create alternate ways to meet such targets.

For example, to create one job in manufacturing, an estimated ₹2 crore investment is needed. Given the environmental, land-cost and other issues in Kerala, attracting an investment of ₹100 lakh crore in the next four years is nearly impossible. This means identifying new avenues for job creation such as service industries, startups and even innovation ecosystems.

The third challenge is the struggle to develop a set of performance standards that can receive support from a majority of the constituencies. To succeed, the CM must proactively set the agenda, instead of waiting for the media or opposition to take control.

The fourth challenge to execution in a scandal-driven media is that bureaucrats may be reluctant to commit to any kind of performance targets. This can be overcome with the chief minister's strong leadership skills.

The framework communicates the mission of the government to all stakeholders and invites contribution from all. In fact, with this, for example, the urban ministry will quickly align with power, water, transport and road ministries to drive Kochi as a 'smarter' city. As Kerala begins its journey, in the next four years, India will have a good example to follow and grab its rightful place at the top of the world.

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