

An unconventional CM with focus on development, good governance

The image shows the letters 'TOI' in a large, white, serif font, centered on a solid red rectangular background.

No chief minister in Uttar Pradesh has arrived at a moment of greater urgency than Yogi Adityanath, at least in recent decades. The man who took that oath of office seemed cut from his predecessors— a math Mahant, a firebrand young man who became a politician and subsequently named as the chief minister, a prodigious orator from Gorakhpur whose unconventional persona can hardly go unnoticed, is either deeply revered or disliked.

My own first and the only encounter with him as the CM was no less unconventional and fiery. Soon after assuming the reins, he started pursuing the “skeletons” of previous regimes. Sale of sugar mills seven years back was referred to the CBI for investigation. Peeved at the politics, rather than facts, driving his decision, I protested at an audience I had sought from him. His blunt response drew equally blunt responses from me. I told him on his face that as none in the Government had checked the facts before referring it to the CBI, my team would come out spotless in the agni-pariksha.

This brush with Yogi notwithstanding, his focussed and resolute approach to root out corruption, particularly in government employment and, to check high-profile crimes and criminals has been most impressive.

Crime and Justice

At the outset of his term, Yogi Adityanath had declared his intention to make criminal justice reform a substantial part of his legacy. He reiterated his “zero tolerance” mantra towards corruption, criminals and gangsters. Crackdown on gangsters has been relentless, booking a record number of criminals under the Gangster Act and attaching record value of property. At the same time, as many as 139 hardened criminals were killed in exchange of fire with police.

Economy

Handling of the state’s economy speaks for itself. The Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) of Uttar Pradesh grew at a CAGR of around 8.43% between 2015-16 and 2020-21 to reach Rs 17.06 trillion (US\$ 234.96 billion). The Net State Domestic Product (NSDP) grew at a CAGR of around 8.42% between 2015-16 and 2020-21 to reach Rs 15.12 trillion (US\$ 208.34 billion). It is Yogi’s ambition of powering UP into a \$1 trillion economy state, behind organising one of India’s biggest ‘Investors Summit’ in 2018 which attracted 1045 intents with investments worth Rs 4.28 lakh crore.

Four and a half years after occupying office, the unemployment rate of UP reached 4.4% which was the lowest it has been in a decade. The current unemployment rate in UP stands at 7.0 %. Prior to 2017, unemployment was above 18% and with the Yogi’s resolute style of functioning, the figures have remained well below 10%.

Meanwhile, UP has emerged as the top investment destination and has received 98 investment proposals worth Rs 13,408.19 crore in the manufacturing sector during the past four years. The state, ranked number 2 in the country for ‘Ease of Doing Business’, has become the hotspot for foreign investors as well.

Women Empowerment

Women’s empowerment has been a quintessential subject in Yogi’s development agenda. Women are seen as the catalysts for development and it is for the same reason the state government launched its ‘Mission Shakti’ programme last year with the aim to create awareness about women empowerment and rights and to ensure their safety, dignity, and self-reliance.

The Yogi government started ‘Kanya Sumangala Yojana’ as part of which a sum of Rs 15,000 is deposited at the time of the birth of a girl child under this programme. The initiative has benefited over 9.91 lakh girls through direct benefit transfer (DBT).

Employment

The Yogi-led government has so far given jobs to over 4.5 lakh and by the end of the government’s present term, the number will cross five lakh. These government jobs are free from any corruption charges.

Building a world-class transportation system (expressways, metros) is part of what has made UP such a formidable force. Yogi has tasked UP Expressways Industrial Development Authority (UPEIDA) to build four expressways – 340-km Purvanchal, 296-km Bundelkhand, 91-km Gorakhpur Link and 594-km Ganga expressway. These will bring production centres within a few hours’ distance of major consumption centres or industrial hubs; paving way for cascading economic development of even remote areas.

Transparency

Transparency is central to good governance and the Yogi government has made it a cardinal rule. The state government has set a record in timely procurement of cane and payment to sugarcane farmers besides taking a big step in giving slips to the farmers from the information technology centres. This was possible because the government had decided to set up IT centres at all the 145 sugarcane cooperative societies of the state to provide sugarcane slips to sugarcane farmers in a timely and systematic manner which has given a big relief to 4.5 crore sugarcane farmers.

The state government also implemented an online single window system ‘Nivesh Mitra’ in February 2018 to facilitate digital clearances to start and operate a business in the state.

The government has performed admirably in all spheres because Yogi led from the front. He has toured the state most intensively and his visits have not been ceremonial.

(The writer is former chief secretary, UP govt. Views expressed here are his own)