

The New Look-II

Punjab—PEPSU Merger

Ved Prakash

THE reorganised State of Punjab has a natural unity in geographical, economic and social aspects. Formerly there were numerous patches of Punjab and PEPSU which were inextricably mixed up and had become sanctuaries for the tax dodgers, bootleggers and other anti-social elements. These have been obliterated by integration and Punjab has become a big, prosperous and well-knit unit.

To know Punjab, one has to meet its friendly, cheerful and hardworking people, see its numerous historic minis and its natural beauty, unspoilt by commercialisation. In the past, the eight States which formed PEPSU were regarded as dreamy and romantic retreats where the old Rajas ruled in their full regalia and time stood still. Yet in the few short years of independence and formation of the States Union, the people of these sheltered retreats proved themselves fully capable of tackling all the problems which face modern state.

The States of Punjab and PEPSU with their assets pooled together are in a far better position to meet any eventuality and work for the benefit of their people than before. Of the eighteen districts, spread over an area of 46,616 square miles which make up the new Punjab, thirteen (with 54 tehsils) belong to the historic Punjab, the 'Sword Arm of India' and 5 (with 19 tehsils) to PEPSU. There will be three Divisions in the reorganised State, viz Jullunder, Ambala and PEPSU, with 27 sub-divisions (21 of Punjab and 6 of PEPSU). The total population will be 1,61,00,000 of whom 1,26,00,000 are of the Punjab and 35,00,000 of PEPSU.

The new legislative Assembly will have 186 members 126 from Punjab and 60 from PEPSU, while the Legislative Council will have a total membership of 46, of which 40 are from Punjab and six from PEPSU. Members of Legislative Council from PEPSU have now been elected by the elected members of PEPSU Legislative Assembly in pursuance of the States Reorganisation (Elections to Provisional State Legislature) Rules, 1956. There was no Upper House in PEPSU and the Punjab Legislative Council had only

40 members. After the ensuing General Elections, the strength of the State Vidhan Sabha and Vidhan Parishad will be 40 and 154 respectively.

A new feature of reorganised Punjab, not provided for in the SRC Report, is the implementation of the Regional Formula. Broadly speaking, the Formula claims to maintain unity of the Punjab by integrating the present Punjab and the PEPSU territories, though the new State will be demarcated into two regions based on the language spoken in them. These two regions would have, for administrative and development purposes, Regional Committees consisting of respective members of the Assembly and would include the Ministers of the region but not the Chief Minister of the State. While the Regional Committees would be free to advise on all matters entrusted to them (specified in the Formula) and by Convention, their advice would generally be accepted, their position is not statutory, nor is their advice mandatory. The final decision in each matter would rest with the State Cabinet, which would of course include Ministers from both the regions. The Governor of the State would be given powers to take final decision in case there are differences in the views of the two Regional Committees on matters entrusted to them.

The Regional Committees will deal with the following matters:

1. Development and economic planning, within the framework of the general development plans and policies formulated by the State Legislatures.

2. Local self-government, that is to say the Constitutional powers of Municipal Corporations, Improvement Trusts, District Board and other local authorities for the purpose of self-government or village administration.

3. Public Health and sanitation, local hospitals and dispensaries.

4. Primary and Secondary education.

5. Agriculture.

6. Cottage and Small-Scale Industries.

7. Preservation, protection and

improvement of live stock and prevention of animal diseases; veterinary training and practice,

8. Prevention of cattle trespass,

9. Protection of wild animals and birds.

10. Fisheries.

11. Inns and inn keepers.

12. Markets and lairs.

13. Cooperatives.

14. Charities and charitable institutions, religious endowments and religious institutions.

The official language of each region will, at the district level and below, be the respective regional languages. The State will be bilingual, recognising both Punjabi (in Gurmukhi script) and Hindi (in Devnagari Script) as the official languages.

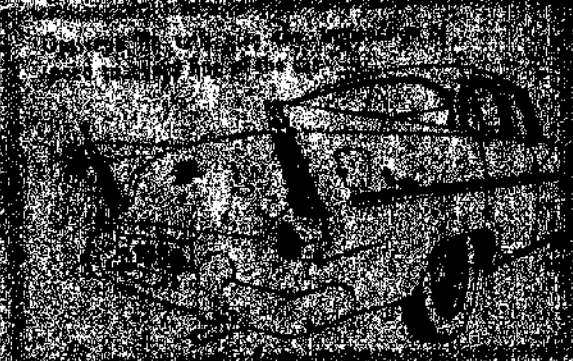
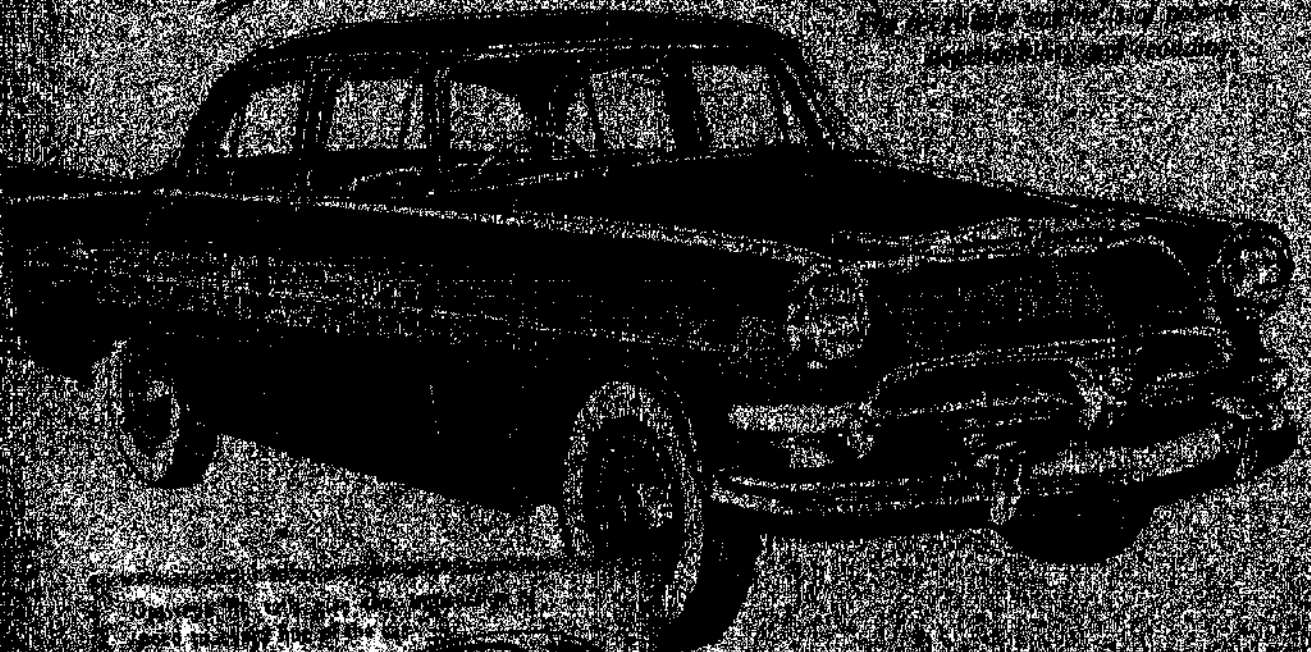
Economically, integrated Punjab will be a prosperous State and there cannot be any two opinions about it. The industrialists will have a larger market for their goods as the market was partially limited hitherto by political boundaries of the States and the different structures of taxes in vogue. There was some reduplication of undertakings by private institutions and Government which would be avoided in future and make for greater industrial efficiency. As the area of each of the States, heretofore, was too small for the establishment of any heavy industry, the Central Government did not take any interest in establishing heavy industries in Punjab. Greater Punjab can easily justify its claim for the establishment of industries like Wagon Building, Structural and Foundry Shop. Textile and Heavy Chemicals, and these claims will be greatly strengthened after the completion of the Bhakra-Nangal Project which will simultaneously augment cotton production and power supply.

The integration will be a political success, if the Regional Committees work smoothly, without communal or linguistic bias and in a statesmanlike spirit, for the lasting good of the people. The possibility has to be guarded against that the Regional Committees do not degenerate into bodies for fomenting separatism instead of fostering harmony.

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