

## Andhra chief minister challenges opposition to find better state

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy Tuesday offered to hire an aircraft for leaders of the opposition parties for a nation-wide tour to prove that the state was number one in development and welfare programmes.

On the eve of completion of four years in office, the chief minister told a meet-the-press programme that he was ready to charter an aircraft for the opposition parties to undertake visits of all major states in the country.

'No other big state in the country is witnessing development and welfare on this scale,' he said and challenged the opposition parties to visit other states.

'Let us go to other state capitals and villages and spend one or two weeks studying development and welfare programmes there and compare the same with what we have achieved here in four years,' he said.

YSR, as the chief minister is popularly known, also dared the leader of opposition and Telugu Desam Party president N. Chandrababu Naidu to get a study done by any reputed agency to assess the state's development.

'I thought many a times whether Naidu has done even one good thing during his nine-year-rule (1995-2004), but I found nothing. Even in Information Technology sector which he used to talk about a lot, the state's share in total IT exports from the country was only 8.6 percent. In four years this share has gone up to 14 percent,' he said.

Listing the achievements of his government, YSR said 'credibility, compassion and courage' were the strengths of his government. 'We have high credibility because we fulfilled every single promise we made during 2004 elections. We have gone even beyond to meet the needs of people. We did not promise Rs.2 a kg rice, but we are implementing it,' he said.

Free electricity to farmers, waiver of electricity arrears of farmers, cutting down interest rate on crop loans, construction of all pending irrigation projects, pensions, loans to women self-help groups on 25 paise interest, construction of 6.5 million houses for poor and distribution of ration cards were some of the major promises made and fulfilled by the Congress government, according to the chief minister.

As the government faces by-elections in four parliament and 18 assembly constituencies May 29 and steps into the election year, Reddy was confident that people would compare the performance of his government with that headed by Naidu and repose their faith in the government.

On the TDP's allegations of corruption in irrigation projects, YSR said it failed to prove even a single allegation. 'The allegations were levelled only to prevent the government from getting the credit for all the good works being done. If we had anything to hide we would not have ordered probe by CBI (Central Bureau of Investigation) or judicial inquiries into all these allegations,' he said.

On comparing his 'padyatra' or walkathon before 2004 elections with Naidu's current yatra or state-wide tour, the chief minister said he walked to know the problems of people while Naidu was

roaming in an air-conditioned bus.

'Then government was not concerned about serious problems faced by people. Drought was prevailing then. Even God's blessings are with us because ever since we came to power the state is receiving good rains,' he said.

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