

An Administrative System for Sustainable Human Development

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Ensuring sustainable human development in Karnataka would involve a multi-track strategy covering a wide range of areas and concerns, which impact on society in general and the life of citizens in particular. This paper focuses on the role of the administrative system in the State as an instrument to promote sustainable human development. The nature, goals, priorities and most importantly the efficiency of the administration is crucial to any scheme of development. The development discourse in India has consistently underscored the importance of the administration system as a critical input in any strategy for ushering in balanced and sustainable development. In recent years, with the initiation of major economic reforms geared towards ensuring greater liberalisation and the need to integrate into a competitive global environment, the role of the administration assumes even greater significance. The emphasis is clearly on redefining (not necessarily curtailing) the role of the administration, its strategies and priorities.

The 'Vision Karnataka 2025' statement unequivocally emphasises the need to ensure good governance. It as-

signs a major role to the administration in promoting socio-economic development in the state and improving the quality of life of its citizens. It is today beyond doubt that the issue of governance is critical to the assessment of the problems that confront societies. The Club of Rome in its analysis of the strategies for global survival rightly asserted that the 'deficiencies of governance are at the root of many of the strands of problematique and ... improved governance is an essential aspect of any scheme for human survival' (King and Schneider 1991: 160). In most democracies the world over, there appears to be a mismatch between what the citizens expect of the state and the apparent lack of capacity of the state, both in terms of financial and managerial resources. While on the one hand, public opinion surveys indicate general public discontent with the achievements of governments, on special services and issues the surveys reveal that the public appears reasonable satisfied with the performance of the government (Peters 1995: 8, also Yadav 1996).

Soon after being sworn in as Chief Minister of Karnataka, S.M. Krishna emphasised that he would like to tone up the administration and like to 'have a greater degree of accountability from the bureaucracy' (The Financial Express 12 October 1999). He went on to stress that it was high on his agenda to provide 'a completely corruption — free administration' (ibidem). A survey conducted in the State by the author at the time of the 1999 Assembly elections, revealed that more than 70% of the respondents were dissatisfied with the performance of the J.H. Patel government. When asked what was their main expectation from the new government, more than 85 % of the respondents wanted an improvement in the delivery system of civic agencies and a more efficient and responsive government.

To implement the promise made at the time of assuming office as Chief Minister, Krishna appointed several

task forces with specific responsibilities and an Administrative Reforms Commission to suggest ways and means to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the administration. The Chief Minister further elaborated on his agenda for reforms while presenting the first budget of his government in March 2000. The Chief Minister identified ten major areas where reforms had become imperative:

- * Eradication of poverty, empowerment of women and provision of food and nutritional security to the vulnerable sections of society;
- * Set in motion policies and programmes to realise a minimum growth rate of 7-8% per year for the next ten years
- * Strengthen the foundations of Karnataka's agriculture, horticulture, floriculture, fisheries and animal husbandry;
- * Sustaining investment in irrigation, command area development and in ensuring fuller utilisation of the irrigation potential being created.
- * Substantial expansion in infrastructure covering power, roads, water supply and sanitation through increased public and private investment;
- * Determine assault on social backwardness, particularly through increasing female literacy levels in the laggard districts and expansion of primary health care facilities specially in the poorer regions of the state;
- * Continuation of a pro-active industrial policy to accelerate growth in a wide array of employment-intensive industries;
- * Ensuring transparent, responsible and responsive administration at all levels;
- * Bringing about balanced regional development and triggering growth impulses in all regions of the state; and

* Reorienting the fiscal system of the state so that the pattern of public expenditure supports the achievement of our pressing socio-economic concerns.

The implications of the above reform agenda for the administration system were clearly evident. Earlier, the Karnataka government had outlined an agenda linked to best practices in administration and the policy initiatives the government was committed to. These included:

- * Reduction of Staff in government offices;
- * Computerisation;
- * Simplification and Modification of Acts, Rules and Procedures;
- * Redressal of Public Grievances;
- * Right to Information;
- * Citizen's Charter;
- * Delegation of Powers;
- * Citizen Grievance Machinery;
- * Meaningful Decentralisation; and
- * Single Window System

It needs to be stressed that several steps have been taken by the Karnataka government to carry forward the agenda listed above. These include, passing of the Right to Information Act, formulation of Citizen's Charter by select government agencies and putting into place a Single Window system, especially for speedy approval of new projects. The steps taken by the Karnataka government were recently lauded by the World Bank President who commended the state government's efforts towards 'accelerating the pace of reforms by bringing in transparency in administration, toning up bureaucracy to meet the challenges ahead and simplification of procedures' (Wol-

ensohn as quoted in *Deccan Herald* 14 April 2001). While reviewing the progress of the government on the promises made to the people, Chief Minister Krishna asserted that 'speed will become the essence' of his administration and a 'developmental orientation' had been given to the administration (*The Economic Times* 12 October 2000). Elaborating on this theme while presenting the budget for 2001-02, the Chief Minister outlined his strategy:

I am taking the following steps beginning June 30, 2001 to give our administration a new look. All Divisional level posts including the post of Divisional Commissioner will be abolished. Purchase of new vehicles will be deferred for one year. Rule 285 of the Karnataka Civil Service Rules will be amended to enable compulsory retirement of government employees before completing 25 years of service. In addition, the Rule will be enforced vigorously to weed out the inefficient and corrupt government officials. The Office of the Deputy Commissioner will be further empowered and all regulatory departments at the district level will be brought under his or her direct administrative control. A time limit will be fixed for files disposal at all levels. The Secretariat Manual will be amended and a single file system will be introduced between field-level officer and the Secretariat. The Tax collecting departments have not received adequate support. Greater mobility, manpower and better management of information are needed in these departments. Concern has been raised in many quarters that the present system of general transfers is not rule-based and disrupts administrative efficiency. I have decided that there will be no general transfers in 2001-02. (Karnataka Legislative Assembly, Debates, 26-3-2001)

The implications of the above reform agenda for the administration system are clearly apparent. In the context of Vision Karnataka 2025 an agenda for reform of the administrative system is outlined.

D: An Agenda for Administrative Reforms

The focus here is one a few key areas within the administrative system where reforms have become imperative in the light of the changing global reality and the goals of sustainable human development in the state.

1) Rightsizing the Administration

Over the years, several studies have pointed out to the need to reduce the number of government employees. The Fifth Pay Commission recommended a 10% cut in the number of government employees in a phased manner over a five year period. The Tenth Finance Commission too had opined that 'viable methods of reducing the strength of government employees must be explored, otherwise economic reform may lose its way in a new bureaucratic maze' (Times of India 15 November 1995). Earlier in 1991, when the government introduced major economic reforms and opened up the economy, the then Prime Minister Narasimha Rao, made a commitment to abolish 10% of positions in the government (see Shastri 1999, 2000a and 2000b). In Karnataka too, the Administrative Reforms Commission, in its interim report, has recommended the abolition of 5528 positions in the State government and the rationalisation of posts. The Commission went on to add that over 70% of the government receipts was spent on salaries and pensions. It needs to be stressed that a Cabinet Sub Committee constituted by J.H. Patel (the immediate predecessor of Chief Minister Krishna), had identified 20,000 posts which had become redundant of which 13,042 were actually scrapped. Further, the Department of Personnel and Administrative Reforms of the Government of Karnataka, with a view to rationalising positions in the government, has classified the posts into four categories : a) Doers; b) Supporters to doers; c) Supervisors; and d) Supporters to Supervisors (Kedar 1998).

The entire 'rightsizing' of government plan needs to be based on a rational assessment of the governments priorities on the one hand and a 'selective and well planned out engagement and disengagement strategy' in the light of emerging good governance challenges, economic reforms and globalisation on the other. While it is beyond the shadow of doubt that the excessive fat in the government must be shed, the reduction process should not unwittingly result in the elimination of the vitally necessary proteins.

Further, rightsizing government has two dimensions: the political and the administrative. For far too long, the serious pressure and demand for downsizing/rightsizing has focused nearly exclusively on the administrative dimension and that too the middle and lower level administrative positions. Rightsizing the political component of the administration and the higher level positions in the government has often been neglected or not taken seriously.

First, the political dimension. Much as he would have liked to have a small and compact ministry, Chief Minister Krishna was forced by political compulsions to recommend a bloated 42 member Council of Ministers. A conservative estimate pegged the expenditure on the Council of Ministers as Rs 40 crores a year (Mattoo 1999). To be fair to Chief Minister Krishna, his predecessors had much larger Ministries, with the J.H. Patel ministry having 50 ministers and the Moily ministry (in which Krishna was the second in command) having 45 ministers (for details see Patil and Shastri 1999). With the need to ensure 'political stability' and balanced 'social representation', Chief Ministers have been forced to have a larger than necessary Council of Ministers. The number of people who have to be 'accommodated' in the ministries has not only dramatically increased but it also betrays a lack of consideration for administrative competence. A series of

political and administrative convulsions have been triggered off by the formation of such 'jumbo' ministries.

A debate on the ideal size of the council of ministers was witnessed even in the Constituent Assembly at the time of the drafting of the Constitution, when members suggested that a provision be incorporated in the Constitution fixing the strength of the Council of Ministers at 15 (Constituent Assembly Debates 7:1141). However, such a provision was thought to be impractical and Ambedkar asserted that it 'is not possible at the very outset to set out a fixed number' (ibidem :1157), for the ministry and it was felt that it should better left to the Prime Minister/Chief Minister to decide how many Ministers should be included in the Ministry.

The Administrative Reforms Commission in its recommendations on the size of the council of ministers, had opined that in view of the emergence of new functions an increase in the size of the ministry was inevitable. The Commission felt that 'suitable limits' should be set for the size of the Cabinet even while permitting a larger council of ministers. It suggested that a medium sized state — like Karnataka — should have a ministry consisting of 14 to 18 members.

It has also been suggested that the size of the council of ministers should not exceed 10% of the strength of the Lok Sabha/legislative assembly or even 10% of the ruling party strength. These suggestions if accepted would imply no more 23 (10% of assembly) or 12 (10% of treasury benches) ministers in Karnataka.

Another consequence of large ministries that the disappointed lot who could not make it to the ministry have remained restive and carried on a kind of campaign to change the leadership so that their own chances of becoming ministers increased. They have in fact been in the forefront demanding the restructuring of the ministry.

Dissidence has grown and becomes a constant handicap for the state administration, politically as well as administratively.

It has also been noticed, that in order to accommodate a large number of people in the ministry, new portfolios are 'created' often without any rationale. Directorates/Departments like Backward Classes and Minorities, Small Scale Industries, Minor Irrigation and Textiles are often headed by Cabinet rank ministers. The state has had Cabinet ministers for sugar, industrial cooperatives, medical education, science and technology, small savings, ports and fisheries and many other such 'sundry' if not exotic portfolios. The budget allocation for some of these ministries/departments are so poor that the maintenance of the minister costs a disproportionate amount compared to the ministry's/department's outlay.

It is suggested that attention be focused on the need for regional balance, social groupings representation and administrative abilities whenever a ministry is composed. If in the name of political stability an ever-increasing council of ministers is allowed, not only administrative quality suffers but even the very political stability comes under attack (since there would always be some disgruntled elements). Against this background, it is desirable that a well-defined system evolve in so far as the number of ministers as well as structure of ministries are concerned. In the United States of America and in Switzerland, the Constitution or the laws lay down the number of ministries or portfolios; and in Britain these are determined by conventions. If we have got genuine regard for effective governance, these healthy practices from western democracies have to be followed. Otherwise, in the name of social accommodation and political flexibility, we would end up getting neither administrative efficiency nor political stability. A perpetual threat of dis-

sidence and incompetence would hang above the head of the chief executive.

Keeping in mind the above factors and applying a rational criteria, Karnataka could have a 31 member ministry. The Council of Ministers could consist of a Chief Minister and 15 other Cabinet Ministers and 15 Ministers of State: a total of 31 ministers. Each Cabinet Minister could be allotted one ministry. A Minister of State could be attached to each Ministry and allotted specific responsibilities. There could be 16 ministries in Karnataka of which 1 would be directly under the Chief Minister and the other 15 under Cabinet Ministers. The classification of the Ministries has been done taken into account a wide range of factors. These include, the nature of responsibilities entrusted to the State government and the need for efficiency and effectiveness in governance.

The 16 ministries could be: 1) Cabinet Affairs (under the CM) 2) Home; 3) Finance (including excise), Planning; 4) Panchayati Raj, Rural Development and Cooperation; 5) Agriculture, Horticulture, Animal Husbandry, Sericulture and Fisheries; 6) Human Resource Development: Education, Youth Services, Sports, Women's Welfare and Child Welfare and Information Technology; 7) Revenue; 8) Forests, Ecology, Energy, Environment; 9) Labour and Social Welfare; 10) Food and Civil Supplies; 11) Industries and Commerce (including Mines, Geology and Textiles); 12) Health and Family Welfare; 13) Housing and Urban Development; 14) Law, Parliamentary Affairs and Information; 15) Irrigation and Public Works; and 16) Transport and Tourism.

A similar rationalisation exercise needs to be undertaken for the high level administrative positions in the government. Tables 1 and 2 are clearly indicative of the

proliferation of positions at the highest level of administration in the state.

Table-1

Positions of Chief Secretary, Additional Chief Secretary, Commissioner and Principal Secretary and Secretary Level Positions in the State Secretariat Occupied by Officers belonging to the Indian Administrative Service.

	1959	1969	1979	1989	1999
Chief Secretary/Additional Chief Secretary	1	1	1	4	4
Commissioner & Principal Secretary	0	2	2	5	14
Secretary	9	10	12	17	24

If in 1959 there was one Post of Chief Secretary/Additional Chief Secretary in 1999 the number had risen to 4. If in 1969 there were 2 officers of the Indian Administrative Service (Karnataka cadre) occupying positions in the Secretariat of the Rank of Commissioner and Principal Secretary, in 1999 the number had risen to 14. Similarly, in 1959, if 9 officers were occupying Secretary level positions, today it has increased to 24.

Table-2

Positions of Commissioners and Directors in the State Secretariat Occupied by Officers belonging to the Indian Administrative Service.

	1959	1969	1979	1989	1999
Commissioner	8	14	13	23	32
Director	2	9	14	16	20

A similar proliferation in Commissioner and Director level positions has been witnessed. Many Directorates

which were managed by Directors till the 1970s have Commissioners today. The number of Indian Administrative Service Officers (Karnataka cadre) occupying Commissioner level posts in the Secretariat was merely 8 in 1959 and has risen to 32 in 1999. Similarly if there were 2 Director grade, Indian Administrative Service officers in 1959, there are 20 in the Secretariat today.

Similar to the rationalisation system suggested for political positions, in the case of the administrative positions too a similar principle could be followed. There could be one Chief Secretary and one Additional Chief Secretary position and 16 Commissioner and Principal Secretary positions, one for each Ministry. The number of Commissioner and Director positions could be determined on the basis of a rational analysis of the number of Commissionerates and Directorates required. Such an exercise could keep in mind the need for Directorates for agencies involved in regulatory or service delivery related functions.

A parallel exercise could be undertaken to determine the number of Additional Secretary, Joint Secretary, Deputy Secretary and Under Secretary level positions that are required in each Ministry.

2) Introducing a Tenure System in the Administration

It is heartening to note that Chief Minister Krishna has announced that there would be no general transfers in 2001-02 in view of the complaint that transfers were 'not rule-based and disrupted' 'administrative efficiency' (Karnataka Legislative Assembly, Debates, 26-3-2001). This 'moratorium on general transfer' should be utilised to draw up clear rules relating to transfer of government officials. A major factor that has impeded both efficiency and accountability in administration is the frequent transfer of government officials. It has also been argued that

the absence of a rule based transfer policy, encourages greater corruption and paves the way for the politicisation of the bureaucracy (for details see Shastri 1999, 2000a).

The problem in the Indian Administrative system (Karnataka being no exception) is that the power of transfer is an important weapon in the hands of the political leadership, frequently misused to serve patently political — even personal, ends. As a result, officers are frequently transferred as per the wishes of the political leaders under whose control their department/ directorate operates. A survey of the average tenure of Deputy Commissioners in Karnataka is clearly indicative of the havoc that the absence of a rule based transfer policy has wrought on the administrative system. Table-3 clearly shows that the average tenure of a Deputy Commissioner has come down from 23 months in 1966-70 to 11 months in 1996-2000.

Table-3
Average Tenure of Deputy Commissioners in Karnataka
(in months)

1966-70	1976-80	1986-90	1996-2000
23	18	14	11

In many other parliamentary democracies, attempts have been made to deal with the problem of unwarranted interference in the administration by the political leadership, especially in the case of transfer of government officials by adopting a two pronged strategy. In UK, the political leadership exercised little influence or direct control over the positing or promotions of officials. The senior appointments selection committee headed by the Cabinet Secretary is left to decide these questions. A former British Prime Minister, John Major is reported to have told his Cabinet Secretary and head of the civil service to decide

on questions of promotion and transfer of senior civil servants, as they knew these people and he did not (Wilson 1997: 3). In Australia, the Public Service Reform Act (1984) provides for a fixed five year tenure for senior government officers (Halligan 1997: 6). New Zealand's procedure for deciding appointments and transfer of officials is independent of 'overt ministerial discretion' and 'not matched in any other parliamentary democracy' (Roberts 1987:79). The Higher Appointments Committee oversees all issues relating to transfers and promotions. The Heads of Departments have been designated as chief executive officers with five year terms. Managerial autonomy is ensured and ministerial intervention has been made transparent. (Halligan 1997:12-13).

Karnataka could be the trend setter in the country and re-formulate its transfer policy to ensure both a tenure system and a transfer mechanism that is free of political influence and at the same time transparent. Sustained public pressure would have to be built up in this regard as ministers may not be in favour of such a move, as it would deprive them of one of their 'biggest powers' (Alexander as quoted in Prasad 1996).

3) Meaningful Decentralisation of Power

Most discussions on decentralisation of power in India, tend to exclusively focus on transfer of power to local governments. While, the discourse on decentralisation must devote the necessary space to questions related to the empowerment of local bodies, it must also cover the negotiating of power relationships within a particular level of government. Decentralisation of power is not necessarily a 'union vs state vs local' question. It also involves transfer of power from the centre to the periphery at each of the three levels: union, state and local.

A common complaint of ministers in the previous administrations in Karnataka, used to be the centralisation of power in the hands of the Chief Minister. It is interesting to note that in the present Ministry, ministers have been able to discharge their responsibilities with a reasonable degree of autonomy and the intervention of the Chief Minister had been only when it was inevitable and that too in the larger interests of the administration in particular and the state in general. The Chief Minister himself specifically stated that he had encouraged his Ministers to act independently (*The Hindu* 11 October 2000). However, it has also been observed that the Chief Ministers is himself directly in charge of several crucial departments and this has invited criticism in some quarters. As mentioned earlier in this paper, a re-organisation of the department/ministry system would result in the Chief Minister being incharge of only the Department of Cabinet Affairs with the other 15 ministries under the charge of other Cabinet Ministers. This system would introduce decentralisation in the structure of governance itself.

Decentralisation of power from the state level to the local level is yet another major area of critical concern. Karnataka had the distinction of being one of the first states to initiate major steps towards empowering local bodies and radically changing their social composition (1/3 reservation for women and reservation for backward castes besides providing for reservations for scheduled castes and tribes) through the changes introduced in 1985. Cutting across party lines, the Karnataka initiative was appreciated by all those who were interested in the straightening of local governments. The provisions of the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution draw much of their inspiration from the Karnataka experiment.

Ironically, in Karnataka itself, the provisions of the 1985 Panchayati Raj Act were diluted. The reason that

the government offered was that the changes were mandated by the 73rd and 74th amendments. Two examples could be cited in this regard. Firstly, the 1985 Act had clearly placed the bureaucracy under the control of the elected representatives. The changes made in Karnataka subsequent to the 73rd and 74th amendments, tended to strengthen the hands of the bureaucracy vis-a-vis the elected representatives. A tangential development needs to be taken into account. After the passage of the 1985 Act, the Karnataka government took a policy decision that of the two officers at the District level: a) Deputy Commissioner and b) Chief Secretary of the Zilla Parishad, the Chief Secretary would be an officer senior in rank to the Deputy Commissioner.

The message that the government wished to convey was that development functions (Zilla Parishad and Chief Secretaries responsibilities) were of greater importance when compared to regulatory functions (Deputy Commissioner's responsibilities). The second change that was brought about was the large number of ex-officio members now permitted to be present at the meetings of the local bodies (in most cases the elected representatives at the higher levels). This resulted in local initiative being crushed and prevented local leadership from asserting its position and views. This measure, ran counter to the basic philosophy of local government and prevented the process of democratic deepening.

The response of the citizens in Karnataka, to the functioning of local government is revealing. In response to a battery of questions asked during a survey conducted at the time of the 1999 Assembly elections by the author, 55% of respondents expressed satisfaction with the functioning of the local governments. Of the 45% who had reservations about the functioning of their local bodies, more than half of them felt that these bodies had not been given sufficient powers and financial autonomy.

It must be conceded that in the last few years, a few steps have been taken in Karnataka to remedy the situation and restore local governments to their '1985 glory'. However, several other concrete measures need to be taken in this regard. The two most important would be, reducing the bureaucratisation of local bodies and secondly, reducing the role of ex-officio members of local bodies. Ideally, the 73rd and 74th Amendment provision providing for ex-officio members in local bodies needs to be deleted. Further, Karnataka could benefit from the recent steps taken by the Kerala and Madhya Pradesh governments to empower local bodies and decentralize power in more meaningful ways.

4) Ensuring Greater Transparency and Accountability

The Congress Party Manifesto in the 1999 Assembly Elections promised to ensure greater transparency in the administration if voted to power. To translate this promise into a reality, two important legislations have been passed. The Karnataka Right to Information Act and the Karnataka Transparency in Tenders and Procurement Act have come into force. The Right to Information legislation has been considered an extremely progressive legislation when compared to similar legislations passed in Goa, Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh.

However, what is of greater significance, is the manner in which the two Acts are implemented. The Government has recently appointed a Committee (consisting of Secretaries to Government) to formulate the rules to govern the implementation of the Right to Information Act. Whether the Act would result in greater transparency in the administration would depend on the rules formulated and the access and opportunities actually made available to the citizen.

A linked development is the need to secure greater accountability in the administration. It has often been

opined that accountability in the Karnataka administration system is 'distant, illusory and largely non-existent' (for details see Shastri 1994). The near absence of any meaningful system of accountability has made it difficult to fix responsibility within the system. Most investigations linked to inefficiency in the administration or misuse of power, explain away the lapses as 'systems failure' with an individual within that system rarely being held specifically responsible. It may be prudent to define accountability in terms of results rather in relying merely on ensuring conformity to rules and regulations. Such an approach is referred to as a 'Hands off Eyes On' system of accountability. With the opening up of the economy and the regulatory role of the government being more in focus, such a change in approach has become urgently necessary.

5) Strengthening Citizen Grievance Mechanisms

A responsive and people friendly administration must have a strong and vibrant citizen grievance handling machinery. The Lok Ayukta, as it was originally conceived, was one such institution, to which the citizen's could take their complaints. However, over the years, the role of the Lok Ayukta has become more or more unclear and is today viewed as yet another anti-corruption authority. Chief Minister Krishna too seems to have the same view. In an interview on completing one year in office, he stated that the legislation relating to the Lok Ayukta would be amended to give the institution 'more teeth'. In the same breadth he went on to add that the 'spreading tentacles of corruption in public life and administration had to be firmly dealt with since an administration steeped in corruption would be highly inefficient' (*The Hindu*, 11 October 2000).

While the move to strengthen the Lok Ayukta institution is commendable, its role requires a more clear defini-

tion. The Lok Ayukta is essentially a citizen grievance machinery, which is much more than a mere anti-corruption authority. This fact needs to be recognised and kept in mind while amending the law to strengthen the institution. Giving the Lok Ayukta more teeth should include, providing it with an independent investigating agency and securing for it quasi-judicial powers. The Lok Ayukta reports need to be taken more seriously both by the government and by the legislature. A first step towards respecting the institution would be ensuring that all legislators, soon after their election, submit (as required) to the Lok Ayukta, a statement of their assets.

Conclusion

The above agenda if implemented, would help create an administration system in Karnataka, which would be geared to promote sustainable human development. It must be stressed that each of the components of the reforms agenda are inter-linked and no part of the reforms package can be viewed or implemented in isolation. The above administrative reforms package would help realise the goals and aspirations outlined in Vision Karnataka 2025 and help make Karnataka a model state which places its citizens first, an example for others to follow and emulate.

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