

## Village council not to teach controversial textbook in Kerala

Giving a new dimension to the row over a class VII textbook in Kerala, an opposition controlled village panchayat (council) decided not to teach from the book in a school under its jurisdiction.

The Kalpakancheri village council in Malappuram district, about 55 km from here, passed a resolution June 30 not to teach from the textbook in the Government Upper Primary School, which functions under its control.

The council's decision if pursued by other villages, controlled by the Congress-led opposition United Democratic Front (UDF), could pose a new challenge to the state's Left Democratic Front (LDF) government.

Meanwhile, vehemently opposing the move by the Kalpakancheri panchayat, the government said the village council has no power to interfere in schools' academic matters.

'The panchayats are only entrusted with providing infrastructure for schools. Academic activities come under the purview of the education department (of the government) and not the panchayats. It is unlawful for panchayats to take a stand contrary to this,' said Local Administration Minister Paloli Muhammedkutty.

'The duty of the village council is not confined to building roads and bridges. As a democratic institution, the council is bound to protect citizens' interests,' N. Kunjappa, a member of Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) and the president of Kalpakancheri village, told IANS Friday.

'We have decided not to teach from the book as this could disturb the peace in our village. Almost all the people in the village are against the book. They were planning to hold a protest march to the school against the book,' he added.

The ombudsman for local government institutions suo moto registered a case against Kalapanakancheri village council Friday for deciding not to teach from the textbook. 'The ombudsman will look into the legality of the resolution,' an official at the office of ombudsman at Thiruvananthapuram told IANS.

The state has witnessed a wave of agitations by religious organisations and political parties against the book, introduced this year by the Communist Party of India - Marxist (CPI-M)-led government.

A chapter in the book on life without religion, particularly, has been opposed by many religious and political groups. They claim the textbook propagates atheism and the communist ideology, and demand that it be withdrawn. The state government has set up an experts committee to examine the contents of the book, but the opposition parties have rejected it as a Marxist historian, K.N.Panicker, heads the panel.

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