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# Did tussle over rural road scheme lead to KSE letter?

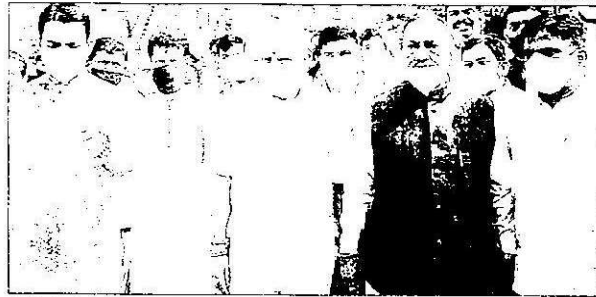
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Bengaluru: The management of a major rural infrastructure scheme, Grameena Sumarga, appears to be the trigger for the rift between BS Yediyurappa and KS Eshwarappa, who has protested the chief minister's functioning style in a letter to the governor.

The Eshwarappa camp alleges that Yediyurappa has been directly providing special grants to MLAs for road works in their constituencies instead of making these allocations under the scheme and channelling the funds through the rural

development and panchayat raj (RDPR) department. With MLAs unilaterally undertaking road works in their areas, Eshwarappa, the RDPR minister, has no say in which stretches should be developed first.

Recent speculation that Yediyurappa planned to reassign the RDPR portfolio further angered Eshwarappa, who on Wednesday decided



Pics: TOI

BS Yediyurappa's decision to give special grants to MLAs for road works reportedly angered KS Eshwarappa

to formally question Yediyurappa's alleged interference in his ministry.

The Grameena Sumarga scheme seeks to build or improve 20,000km of village roads over five years.

According to government officials, the RDPR department has been flush with funds meant for central programmes such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, Jal Jeevan Mission, Swachh Bharat Mission and Pradhan Mantri Gramin Sadak Yojana. The share of central funds in the department's Rs 17,000-crore budget is Rs 10,000 crore. The department doesn't face issues on this count. But

there have been problems in sanctioning lucrative road works, with allegations that certain local MLAs regularly issue contracts for personal gain.

According to a department official, the government sanctions Rs 1,200 crore for rural road works (Namma Grama, Namna Raste) and Rs 400 crore for road maintenance annually. "There would have been no issues if MLAs' demands for road funds fell within this allocation. They sought funds over and above this allocation and this became a source of friction (in the cabinet)," the official said.

Since 2019, the state government, first headed by

## KSE delaying works

day after RDPR minister KS Eshwarappa shot off a letter criticising BS Yediyurappa, 48 BJP MLAs have written to the chief minister, demanding immediate release of funds for rural roads. They have claimed that Eshwarappa has not cleared road works even though Yediyurappa had sanctioned Rs 1,313 crore towards road development under various heads.

Congress-JD(S) and then BJP, has approved road works of at least Rs 3,300 crore. "Everything was running smoothly earlier, with the CM allocating Rs 1,500 crore to the RDPR department during the 2019 floods. The CM and the RDPR minister developed differences after the former released Rs 775 crore and Rs 400 crore as special grants for road works to MLAs," claimed another official.

Eshwarappa, according to BJP insiders, was furious that his department had been reduced to a rubber-stamp authority while MLAs were allegedly getting direct access to funds.