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Centralisation of power with CM leading to governance issues

There is discontent among Ministers, MLAs who feel their voices are being ignored

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BENGALURU

The tendency towards centralisation of powers in the hands of Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa and his office seems to be leading to multiple governance issues in the State. The most recent charge by senior Minister K.S. Eshwarappa against the Chief Minister's "interference" and "authoritarianism" is only the tip of the iceberg.

There have been complaints about the absence of a "consensual approach" leading to centralisation of powers around Mr. Yediyurappa and the CMO.

This has caused discontent among a section of Ministers and legislators as their voices are being ignored in the decision-making process.

This issue came up during the recently-concluded Budget session as well. K.M. Shivalinge Gowda, JD(S) MLA, said there were strong centralising tendencies in the Budget presented by the Chief Minister for 2021-22. His criticism stemmed from the fact that the Budget did



B.S. Yediyurappa

not allocate money department wise. Instead, it allocated money under seven heads/themes, leaving discretionary powers to the Finance Department headed by Mr. Yediyurappa to allocate funds department-wise later.

Transfer of officials

Another blatant instance is seen in the transfer of officials. In last month's notification, it had been made clear that the Chief Minister's nod is mandatory to order transfer of officials in 2021. The department heads have to move files through the Chief Minister and get approval for the transfers. This reduced the power of Ministers of the

respective departments.

The Chief Minister's decision to retain Bengaluru Development portfolio has further enabled concentration of powers. Owing to this, Ministers of Bengaluru have apparently lost considerable autonomy in their functioning. This has forced some Ministers to make regular trips to the CM's official residence to get work done, it is learnt.

In fact, on several issues, the Ministers' constant refrain in recent days has been that a "final decision would be taken after consultation with the CM", be it health, conducting classes during the pandemic, or general matters relating to administration of BDA or BBMP. The CM's hands have been further strengthened by postponement of elections to the BBMP and appointment of administrator to the civic body, said sources.

Meanwhile, Leader of the Opposition Siddaramaiah has repeatedly said that B.Y. Vijayendra, son of the Chief Minister, has been acting as the "de facto CM" and accused him of interfering in

the administration.

One of the strongest critics on this front has been the ruling BJP's MLA Basavana-gouda Patil Yatnal, who has been blaming the CM and his family for alleged discrimination in allocation of funds and has predicted change of guard more than once.

While the loyalists argue that the Chief Minister has discretionary powers in the administration since he is heading the government and led the party to electoral victories, the Opposition and some within his party blame Mr. Yediyurappa and his family and absence of consultative leadership for administrative problems and several embarrassing "U-turns" in decisions.

Commenting on these developments, P.S. Jayaramu, retired professor of political science, Bangalore University, observed: "Centralisation of powers with the Chief Minister is unfortunately part of our governance tradition... But it is also a fact that both leaders from Shivamogga [Mr. Eshwarappa and Mr. Yediyurappa] have ego issues to sort out."

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