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Govt, groups plan SC fight over BBMP

New Bill, Poll Schedule Are Conflict Points

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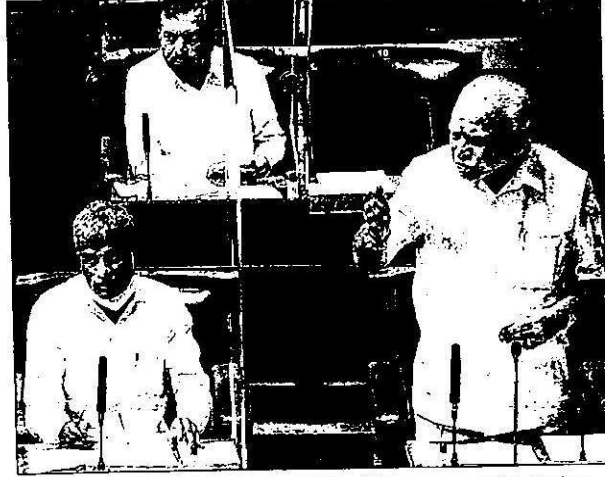
Bengaluru: The state government's decision to press ahead with plans to introduce a separate law for Bengaluru's civic administration and seek deferment of the BBMP polls has set the stage for a prolonged legal battle.

Recently, the Karnataka high court directed the State Election Commission (SEC) to hold the civic polls in February. Law and parliamentary affairs minister JC Madhuswamy said that the government would file an appeal in the court in a few days and it would ensure that the BBMP Bill was passed in the winter session of the legislature.

POLITICS & POLICY

Many civil-society organisations, including Daksh and Janagraha, have criticised the government's stand and plan to approach the apex court to halt the bill. "The draft BBMP bill was finalised without inputs from citizens. Neither the government nor the joint select house committee bothered to hold public consultations. So, we have decided to challenge this bill in the court," said Daksh co-founder Harish Narasappa.

But Madhuswamy said that public feedback was sought online and many people had sent suggestions. The bill envisages a separate law to govern Bengaluru. Apart from increasing the number of municipal wards from 198 to 243, it proposes that two mayors, instead of one,



MAKING A POINT: Chief minister BS Yediyurappa speaks during proceedings on the second day of the winter session

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should serve equal tenures and there should be 15 zonal commissioners to administer different parts of the city with limited autonomy. The zonal commissioners will report to a chief commissioner.

The joint select committee headed by BJP legislator S Raghu has scrutinised the bill is expected to submit a report to assembly speaker Vishweshwar Hegde Kageri on Wednesday, following which the government will table the bill in the house.

“We are committed to holding the BBMP polls. But it is necessary that civic wards be reorganised in accordance with the present constitution

of the city. If we conduct polls with 198 wards, then we cannot change them for the next five years. This is the best time to increase the number of wards and modify the city administration. It may take a few more months, but the implementation of the BBMP Bill will do the justice to the city. We will convince the Supreme Court on these points,” Madhuswamy said.

Ideally, the polls should have been conducted before September 10, when the BBMP council's five-year term ended. Covid-19 delayed the elections. Petitions filed in the high court said that there should not be further delay. The SEC was among the petitioners, who finally received a favourable ruling.

“There is a constitutional obligation to conduct polls for civic bodies and they cannot be postponed on any pretext. The proposed BBMP bill was drafted after the BBMP council's term ended and therefore, it cannot be used as a reason to defer the polls,” said KN Phanindra, a senior counsel who appeared for the SEC.