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ಇಲಾಖೆ / ವಿಷಯ : DEPARTMENT / SUBJECT: <sup>14</sup> *Legislative Assembly Session*

ಪತ್ರಿಕೆಯ ಹೆಸರು : NAME OF THE NEWS PAPER: *Times of India* ದಿನಾಂಕ : DATE *16/3/24*

## State should cut tax to ease fuel prices: Experts, oppn

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**Bengaluru:** With the model code of conduct in place for assembly elections in five states, the Centre cannot revise the excise duty on petrol and diesel for some time. Experts and opposition parties say that instead of waiting for a policy signal from Delhi, the BS Yediyurappa government should take the initiative to check the runaway fuel prices by reducing the sales tax, a local levy.

"The state government should not wait for the Centre to make the first move. It should immediately reduce the sales tax rates on fuel to rein in the rising prices. It is an urgent need as inflation is increasing," said taxation expert BT Manohar.

Former chief minister Siddaramaiah raised the issue in the assembly on Monday as he criticised both the central and state governments for the high prices of petroleum products.

### Centre cannot lower excise duty till the code of conduct for assembly elections is in place

"The unbearable burden of taxes levied by the governments is the main reason for the exorbitant petrol and diesel prices in Karnataka. BJP is leading the governments at the Centre and in the state. The chief minister should prevail upon the Centre to reduce excise duty or he should reduce sales tax," said Siddaramaiah, who is the opposition leader in the assem-

bly. He pointed out that last year, the state government increased sales tax on petrol and diesel by 3 per cent.

The election code of conduct will remain in force till April 29. "During this period, the Centre cannot announce any policy step which can influence voters. But states like Karnataka, where bypolls are yet to be announced, can move ahead with reducing local taxes," said a poll official.

A senior official in the state finance department claimed that fuel prices were lower in Karnataka compared to other states. "The Centre has indirectly ensured that fuel prices don't go up during the elections. The prices stopped rising soon after the assembly polls were announced on February 26," the official added.