

REVERSE THE HOSTILITY: ON THE CONFRONTATION BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND THE OPPOSITION IN KERALA

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Adversarial relations between the ruling party and the Opposition are inevitable in a democracy and, in a way, such relations that bring strong differences of opinion and contentious views to the fore are critical. Democracy flourishes when there is reconciliation through legislative debate. Yet, [adversarial relations resulting in confrontation](#) following the lack of discourse over differences on issues of public import, speak poorly of legislative conduct. This holds true of Kerala, where legislative business has come to a standstill after a severe deterioration in relations between the ruling coalition and the Opposition. What began as an issue of the Speaker repeatedly disallowing discussion on Rule 50 notices by the Opposition United Democratic Front last week has grown into [a full-blown confrontation](#), with legal cases being filed against legislators after incidents that resulted in a ruckus in the Assembly. A case can be made that it ill behoves the Opposition to resort to parodying Assembly proceedings after the Speaker's denials or to protest in an unparliamentary way against the Chair, currently held by A.N. Shamseer. But the onus is on the Speaker and the ruling front to ensure that the Opposition's legislative privilege to have discussions on pressing issues is respected and allowed. Clearly, the repeated denial of [discussions on Rule 50 notices](#) and the filing of serious legal cases against Opposition members have only deepened the confrontation. Other grievances expressed by the Opposition that their legislators do not get sufficient play on Sabha TV, the official broadcaster, also seem to have merit.

On Monday, the Speaker struck a conciliatory note by expunging remarks made by him against a Congress legislator. He also assured the Opposition that he would uphold their rights that included the privilege to move Rule 50 notices on matters of "vital public importance" and ensure that the Assembly broadcaster was non-partisan. This should be the cue for both sides to begin a dialogue leading to the reversal of vituperative legal actions and the resumption of normal legislative discourse. Kerala is India's bellwether on socio-economic issues, but it faces unique challenges as an ecologically fragile State that has to work on a balance between development and ecological sustainability, as the Brahmapuram fire incident also exemplified. Healthy discussion and debate over ideas, even if adversarial, would go a long way in ensuring good governance by keeping the LDF government on its toes. How the ruling coalition and, by extension, the Chief Minister, responds to the Opposition's call for non-partisan conduct of legislative proceedings will determine the course of normalisation of relations between the two fronts in the State.

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