

DECISIONS IN HASTE

Relevant for: Indian Polity | Topic: Functions & Responsibilities of the States, the Governor, the Chief Minister and State COM

Health Minister Ma. Subramanian and Health Secretary J. Radhakrishnan meet Medical College deans at the Government Multi-Super Speciality Hospital, Omandurar Estate in Chennai in connection with the Charak Shapath oath issue. | Photo Credit: B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

The M.K. Stalin-led [DMK government's move into its second year](#) in Tamil Nadu this month was marked by two controversial episodes. Within days of taking the decisions [to punish the Madurai Medical College Dean](#) following a row over an oath-taking ceremony and to [ban the ancient palanquin-bearing ritual of the Dharmapuram Adheenam](#), the government had to revoke them. In hindsight, both decisions appeared to have been taken in haste; the latter case also called into question the DMK government's resolve in dealing with Hindu religious practices.

The government had removed the Dean and placed him on 'wait list' after first-year medical students were administered the Maharishi Charak Shapath instead of the conventional Hippocratic Oath during the white coat ceremony. The [Charak Shapath was recommended by the National Medical Commission](#) as early as February. While the recommendation was instantly opposed for its "regressive nature" by the Indian Medical Association and some political parties in Kerala, there were hardly any voices against it back then in Tamil Nadu. The government too did not issue any specific direction against the use of the Charak Shapath. In fact, had the State Finance Minister, a guest at the event, not flagged it, the new oath would have gone unnoticed. After the Dean was made a scapegoat, video evidence of the use of the oath, much earlier, [in other government medical colleges](#), emerged. With the AIADMK questioning the action and the medical fraternity backing the Dean, the government had no option but [to reinstate him citing his good work during the COVID-19 pandemic](#).

Editorial | [Standing on ceremony: On Charak Shapath and medical education](#)

Parallel to this, another controversy played out when [the Revenue Divisional Officer \(RDO\) of Mayiladuthurai district issued an order](#) banning the 'Pattina Pravesham', a religious ceremony during which the seer of the Dharmapuram Adheenam, a Saivite mutt, is carried by devotees on a palanquin as part of a procession. Citing Article 23 of the Constitution, the order said the event was a "violation of human rights". Besides, the RDO foresaw a potential law-and-order disturbance as the Dravidar Kazhagam, the parent outfit of the ruling DMK, and fraternal organisations had objected to the practice of human beings carrying a fellow being on their shoulders.

However, the issue snowballed when seers from the Saivite and Vaishnavite mutts raised a banner of revolt and urged the State to keep off religious practices. The Madurai Adheenam Sri Harihara Sri Gnanasambanda Desika Swamigal and the State BJP president, K. Annamalai, warned they would defy the ban and lift the palanquin on their shoulders. Except for the support of the DMK's allies, particularly the communists, the move evoked strong opposition from political parties including the AIADMK.

The government showed early signs of being on the back foot when Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Department Minister P.K. Sekar Babu said a smooth solution would be worked out. Eventually, [a group of heads of mutts met Mr. Stalin](#) and urged him to lift the ban. Within 24 hours, the Mayiladuthurai RDO [lifted the ban on the 'Pattina Pravesham'](#) citing a representation from the manager of the Adheenam. The mutt contended that the ceremony

should not be construed as “men carrying man” and that the people bearing the palanquin are devotees. Mr. Sekarbabu argued that Saivism and Tamil were inseparable, and that Mr. Stalin did not want any section to be hurt, but did not explain why the ban order was issued in the first place.

Curiously, the revocation of both decisions was attributed to the intervention of Mr. Stalin, who stayed quiet on the issues in public throughout.

sureshkumar.d@thehindu.co.in

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