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Hire lawyers to fight cases, panchayats told

ASHWINI M SRIPAD @Bengaluru

TO avoid contempt of court cases and embarrassment to the government, the Rural Development and Panchayat Raj department has directed panchayat development officers from gram panchayats and CEOs of zilla and taluk panchayats to appoint advocates to look into cases related to their respective jurisdictions.

Petty cases at the panchayat level pending before lower courts are moving to higher courts as they are not represented by lawyers from panchayats. At higher courts, senior State Government officials are

summoned, leaving the government embarrassed.

In a detailed circular, RDPR Principal Secretary Uma Mahadevan pointed out that under the Karnataka Gram Swaraj and Panchayat Raj Act, panchayats have a provision to hire advocates independently to fight any legal case or file writ petitions. However, transparency should be maintained while hiring advocates and they should be paid as per the guidelines issued by the Law Department. The lawyers have to be paid from panchayat funds, it stated.

Officials have to conduct workshops to sensitise officials on le-

gal cases. Panchayat development officers and CEOs have to submit replies to courts through advocates and should do so on time. "If they fail to do it on time, or because of them the government faces contempt of court cases or embarrassment, action will be taken against such officials," Uma warned.

RDPR department sources said that many cases related to their department are pending before the High Court, Karnataka Administrative Tribunal, civil and other courts. Though

panchayats have the provision to hire lawyers, may don't, resulting in cases going to higher courts, where senior State Government officials, including the principal secretary, have to appear, causing embarrassment.

"All these are small cases which can be resolved at the lower court if there is timely intervention. As there is no legal cell at RDPR, we are depending on outsourced advocates. If we don't hire them, we will be left embarrassed," sources said



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Uma Mahadevan, RDPR Principal Secretary