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# Oppn alleges ₹145cr misuse in laptop scheme, seeks probe

## DyCM Says It Will Be Scrapped

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Bengaluru: Opposition parties on Thursday took the government to task over alleged misappropriation of Rs 145 crore in the procurement of laptops for 2019-20 as part of the Laptop Bhagya scheme, demanding an investigation into the issue. Meanwhile, the government said it will discontinue the programme from the upcoming academic year.

Opposition leader Siddaramaiah, while speaking on the budget, claimed that a Right to Information (RTI) query filed by former higher education

### POLITICS & POLICY

minister Basavaraj Rayareddi said the government has procured over 1 lakh laptops at a cost of Rs 28,320 per gadget.

"However, the same laptops were procured at a cost of Rs 14,920 per piece when my government launched the scheme. Notwithstanding inflation, no laptop can cost Rs 13,380 extra within three to four years," claimed Siddaramaiah.

While BJP legislators claimed the laptops offered were of high quality, Congress alleged there's not much difference in the configuration.

Intervening in the matter, chief minister BS Yediyurappa said the decision to procure the



Photo for representation only

**CTRL ALT DELETE:** Laptop Bhagya was launched in 2016-17 when the Siddaramaiah-led Congress government was in power

laptops at a higher price was, in fact, approved by the previous coalition government. "The decision was taken on June 14, 2019, when the coalition government was still in power," said the CM.

Former JD(S) minister Bandeppa Kashempur said the issue was deferred twice and cleared during the final cabinet meeting. "However, not all cabinet decisions have to be implemented. The BJP government could have stalled the proposal and had a relook," he said. Both JD(S) and Congress have demanded an investigation by an impartial agency, but CM Yediyurappa is yet to respond.

Meanwhile, deputy chief minister CN Aswath Narayan, who holds the higher education portfolio, said the government will not continue with the scheme from the upcoming academic year owing to financial constraints. "The government has spent Rs 311 crore on the scheme in the current fi-

nanical year and it's seen as a huge burden on the exchequer. We have decided to discontinue it. We will focus on enhancing college infrastructure and improving standards of teaching staff, so that institutions can be eligible for National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) accreditation," Narayan told the house during Question Hour.

The Siddaramaiah-led Congress government launched the scheme in 2016-17 for first-year SC and ST students in government colleges. It was extended to students from all castes whose family annual income was less than Rs 2.5 lakh. The scheme was put on hold in 2017-18 and 2018-19 and was resumed in 2018-19 during the JD(S)-Congress coalition regime.

Narayan said about one lakh students were given laptops in the current academic year and funds have not been allocated for the scheme in the budget for 2020-21.

### SHORT TAKES

#### We will get WB loans for development: BSY

Leader of opposition Siddaramaiah flayed the Yediyurappa government, claiming it is mismanaging finances and pushing the state deep into a debt trap.

Discussing the 2020-21 budgetary proposals in the assembly, Siddaramaiah said the committed expenditure has risen from 75% — when he was CM between 2013 and 2018 — to 90% in the budget presented by Yediyurappa on March 5, with an outlay of Rs 2,37,893 crore.

"With the committed expenditure, which goes to pay salaries and interest rising to 90%, you will be left with only Rs 22,000 crore. Where will the government get money from for developmental work?" he asked.

Yediyurappa intervened to say the government will borrow from World Bank for significant projects. "You need not worry about developmental work," the CM said.

#### Illegal civic amenity sites will be auctioned

Yediyurappa said the government will take steps to get back civic amenity sites that have been allotted illegally in Bengaluru. He told legislative council members 1,402 CA sites had been allotted by BDA and those illegally allotted would be taken back after probe. These sites will be auctioned and the money will be used to bridge the revenue deficit, he added.