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## Corporation Budget passed amid uproar

### Graft in property tax collection alleged

The city Corporation's annual Budget for 2017-18 was passed by the Corporation council on Tuesday with 44 votes in favour of the Budget against 35 in opposition.

With the Budget discussion marred by allegations of corruption raised by the Opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the ruling LDF refuting the charges, the councillors of the United Democratic Front (UDF) staged a walkout, with Beemapally Rasheed saying that amidst the allegations, the UDF was being denied its chance to comment on the Budget.

A major concern expressed by the Opposition was the sum of Rs. 50 crore to be collected as arrears in property tax, with councillors alleging that many large enterprises in the city had not been making tax payments.

In response to this, Deputy Mayor Rakhi Ravikumar said the Corporation would initiate revenue recovery proceedings to collect tax arrears as part of a special drive, and the Revenue estimates would be revised by reducing the tax amount that cannot be recovered.

New proposals in the budget regarding an exhibition fee from cable TV operators and a vacant plot cess, which had faced severe opposition from the BJP and UDF, would not be implemented unless the council unanimously supported the proposal, the Deputy Mayor said.

## **Allegations**

It was brought to the notice of the council that the Tax Appeal standing committee, chaired by Simi Jyothish of the BJP, had allowed concessions in several property tax appeals without the permission of the Corporation Secretary or the council. Out of an estimate of Rs. 6.98 crore charged in taxes, only around Rs. 1.90 crore was collected by the committee.

While the BJP councillors defended the move, the LDF and

UDF councillors reproached it, citing the Kerala Municipality Act, under which such concessions can be made only by the Corporation Secretary based on the recommendations of the Tax Appeal standing committee.

Following a heated discussion on the matter, Mayor V.K. Prasanth agreed to conduct an inquiry into the matter.