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Local body polls hang in the balance

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THIRUVANANTHAPURAM: The indecision of the government in amending the Panchayati Raj Act and the Kerala Municipality Act is likely to upset the restructuring of local self-government institutions and delimitation of wards.

These are time-consuming processes and the commission has to complete a series of procedures before January 1, 2010, well before the next elections due in September that year. The newly elected committees have to assume office in October.

Official sources told *The Hindu* here that but for deciding to go ahead with the delimitation, the government had not yet issued any guidelines to restructure the 999 grama panchayats, 152 block panchayats, 14 district panchayats, 53 municipalities and five corporations.

The Delimitation Commission had recommended in 2005 that the civic bodies need be restructured only after the next census from 2010.

After completing the census by 2012, the government could take up the reorganisation before the elections in 2015.

Proposals

Various associations and individuals have submitted proposals for bifurcating certain panchayats and upgrading some as municipalities and municipalities as corporations.

The commission can take up such proposals only on the basis of the guidelines issued by the government.

A proposal to have four standing committees in all civic bodies itself calls for a thorough reorganisation of the existing system.

The number of wards will have to increased and that will make a reorganisation imperative.

The commission will have to take up the restructuring of panchayats, municipalities and corporations simultaneously. Even if the government issues the guidelines this month, the commission will be able to start functioning full swing only by mid-September.

The LSGI secretaries in each district will have to prepare a rough sketch and forward it to a district-level officer deputed by the government for scrutiny. The officer will publish the draft proposals after the scrutiny. After eliciting public opinion, the municipal and panchayat directors will formally submit the revised proposals to the government.

The voters list prepared for the previous Lok Sabha and Assembly elections is likely to be used for the civic polls. But the State Election Commission will have to make changes on the list on the basis of the new wards, publish the draft and conduct public hearings before finalising the list.

Any delay in amending the Acts will disrupt the delimitation and election schedule, sources said.