

Tourism Act encroaches upon powers of LSGs: NGO

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The NGO said the constitution of `development authorities' leads to substitution of the general planning process to favour tourism-related development process that prioritises and privileges tourism-centric developments.

The Equations' critique, released to the press on Thursday, says: "The Tourism Conservation and Preservation Committee constituted under the Kerala Tourism Act 2005 took over significant powers of the LSGIs related to regulation of tourism at the local level. The Development Authorities that have been proposed to replace the Tourism Committee in the Kerala Tourism Amendment Bill 2010 also clearly bypass the Constitutional mandate and provisions of Kerala Panchayat Raj Act of 1994."

Transferring this regulatory role to a parastatal body implies loss of the democratic exercise of powers by the LSGIs, the critique said. The critique said the trend of shifting the governance of an area from the local bodies to development authorities is on the rise.

Hampi Development Authority, Karnataka; Kevadia Development Authority, Gujarat; Chilika Development Authority, Bhubaneswar are some of the examples the critique has pointed out.

Equations feels that development authorities tend to usurp the planning process. According to the Bill, the State Tourism Development Authority will have the authority to modify the development plans of the regions that are declared as Special Tourism Zones (STZs). "We believe that tourism development should be only a subset of the general planning processes," the critique said.

It further states that the Bill builds on the negative effects of its 2005 version. "According to Section 5(2) of the Kerala Tourism Act, 2005, the local authorities shall act in accordance with the advice or direction given by the Tourism Committee in respect of any area comprised in a STZ, and shall intimate to the Committee such action as taken by it. The current Bill continues with the same model, except that it has replaced tourism committees with development authorities."

The critique adds that the Bill undermines the state's devolution credentials. "Kerala has been a state that has privileged people's participation in policy making. It has been in the forefront of devolution of power to the LSGIs, including devolving development funds to the LSGIs. The `Kerala Vision Document 2025' developed by the Kerala Tourism Department specifically acknowledges that participation of local self government and NGOs are necessary to the process of tourism development in the state. The present Bill undermines these principles of public participation in tourism development."