

UNSEEMLY TURN: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON RAJ BHAVAN'S RELATIONS IN KERALA

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December 19, 2023 12:15 am | Updated 12:15 am IST

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The [conflict between the Governor and the Left Democratic Front government in Kerala](#) has turned unseemly. Raj Bhavan's relations with regimes other than those run by the Bharatiya Janata Party have been quite testy in recent years, and [the problem is quite acute in Kerala](#). The issue arises from sharp political and ideological differences, as appointees in Raj Bhavan have made it a point to use their position as chancellor of universities as well as their constitutional role in granting assent to Bills to cause annoyance to elected governments. In a sign of rising acrimony, differences over appointments to the Senate of the Kerala University have snowballed into frequent protests. While student activists accuse the Chancellor, Governor Arif Mohammed Khan, of appointing right-wing sympathisers to the Senate, he has been complaining about political interference in the universities. In the latest incident, the University of Calicut saw dramatic scenes as activists of the Students' Federation of India (SFI) put up posters against the Governor-Chancellor. The Governor has accused Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan and the State police of being behind the poster campaign against him. Some days ago, SFI activists blocked Mr. Khan's car, resulting in some arrests.

[Recent court judgments](#) have underscored that [elected regimes should not be undermined by unelected Governors](#). Such verdicts have drawn public attention to the partisan role played by Governors to stymie governance in States not run by the ruling party at the Centre. In a recent ruling, the [Supreme Court of India set aside a reappointment given to a vice-chancellor in Kannur University](#) on the ground that there was unwarranted interference by the government. Given that chancellors are expected to act independently, there is much scope for a clash with the government. However, responding to such situations through organised protests is not advisable. Chief Ministers should instruct their supporters to avoid street protests that turn belligerent. One way to resolve the issue is by legislation either removing Governors as chancellors or transferring the chancellor's powers to any other authority. However, Bills containing such changes are not likely to get the Governors' assent. This does make legal redress difficult for those aggrieved by what they deem to be arbitrary use of the chancellor's powers. It may be time to think of a long-term solution in the form of a statutory prohibition on Governors being chancellors of State universities. The M.M. Punchhi Commission on Centre-State relations had recommended ending the practice of burdening Governors with the role of university chancellor.

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