

The Hindu 24.03.2014

Civil works may suffer as contractors threaten strike

Civil works including the re-laying of roads and reconstruction of drains in Kochi and adjoining areas may come to a standstill as contractors have threatened to boycott the works. It's the burgeoning arrears that have prompted the over 25,000-odd-contractors across the State to raise the banner of agitation. Organisations of contractors have demanded immediate steps for clearing the pending bills.

“If the governments, including the local bodies, fail to clear the bills, no new works will be taken up during the next fiscal,” said M. Mohamed, Ernakulam district secretary of the All Kerala Government Contractors' Association.

The contractors complained that the government owed them around Rs.500 crore in the district alone. “As the contractors are running short of funds, they won't be able to take up any new civil works until the pending bills are cleared,” he said.

The Kochi Corporation owed its contractors around Rs. 50

crore, the highest unpaid amount in the recent times, said M.R. Chandran Pillai, State president of the LSGD Contractors Federation.

The local body had cleared some dues recently after raising Rs.10 crore as over draft from a local bank. It has offered to clear some pending bills after the culmination of the intensive tax collection. The contractors might resort to boycott of works in the city if the local body failed to clear the pending bills within a fortnight, Mr. Chandran Pillai said.

Barring a few local bodies such as Kalamassery Municipality, the bills of completed civic works are pending in most of the local bodies in the State. "If the local bodies refuse to clear the arrears, the contractors will go in for a strike after the first week of April," said Mr. Chandran Pillai.

With the March 31 deadline fast approaching, the local bodies are on a spending spree to complete works and clear the bills of works implemented using its own funds.

Besides the work of civic bodies that have been hit due to the

paucity of funds, the scarcity of red earth has also affected the construction of houses and other buildings in the district. The district administration was not issuing permits for obtaining red earth used to fill the foundation of buildings. The government-imposed restriction had affected the commoners too, he said.

At the same time, B. Bhadra, Deputy Mayor of Kochi Corporation, said the local body had started clearing the pending bills of contractors. The process for preparing the bills for payment of money for contractors started a few days ago in the local body, she said.