

NCP seeks Bill to regulate coaching classes

Alleges that deal between minister, coaching class is delaying introduction of Bill in Assembly

ALOK DESHPANDE
MUMBAI

In wake of the Surat fire tragedy, the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) on Monday accused Maharashtra Education Minister Vinod Tawde of striking a 'deal' with coaching class operators to delay the Bill seeking to regulate private coaching classes in the State.

"Maharashtra has more than one lakh coaching classes, with Mumbai alone having 30,000 to 40,000 classes. Many of these are running in small rooms, without following any safety norms. The Bill needs to be cleared at the earliest especially after the Surat tragedy," said NCP leader and former minister Anil Deshmukh.

Last week, 22 children lost their lives in a fire in Surat that engulfed a building where coaching classes were being held.

Mr. Deshmukh alleged that Mr. Tawde had struck a deal with the coaching class association to delay the Bill. The committee to formulate the Bill was constituted on



Tinder boxes: Smoke billows from the third and fourth floor of this building in Surat where coaching classes were on. At least 22 students died in the incident last week. ■ FILE PHOTO

January 4, 2017. The committee held three meetings to finalise draft of the Bill. The draft was opposed by representatives of the coaching class following which several changes are likely to be suggested.

Reacting to the allegations, Mr. Tawde said the NCP leader is using the Surat tragedy to push his politics. "The tragedy in Surat has nothing to do with Education department, it is an issue of Urban Development department. Mr. Deshmukh

was the Education minister himself. Why didn't he bring a law to regulate coaching classes in his tenure? The draft is being modified to exclude housewives who hold tuitions at home. There has been no deal with any coaching class," he said.

"The Minister had assured to bring the law based on the draft, but there has been no execution. We will be meeting Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis with a request to introduce the Bill in Assembly since the Education Minister

cannot do anything," Mr. Deshmukh said.

'Enforce safety norms'

Meanwhile, Leader of Opposition in the Gujarat Assembly Paresh Dhanani has called for strict enforcement of fire safety norms.

The Congress leader demanded that the State government conduct a thorough probe into the incident and said his party would raise the issue of fire safety during the monsoon session of the Assembly.

Hardik Patel threatens hunger strike, detained

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
SURAT

Police on Monday detained Congress leader Hardik Patel after he threatened to sit on a hunger strike if the Gujarat government failed to take action against the Mayor of Surat and fire department and municipal corporation officials within 12 hours.

Surat Police Commissioner Satish Sharma said Mr. Patel was on his way to the accident site despite the police denying him permission to hold a protest at the site of the fire.

Mr. Sharma said, "He already visited the place on Sunday and was attacked by a member of his rival group. It's a question of his protection. We cannot allow him to visit the area every day."