

The Telegraph

Nearly 43,180 posts of schoolteachers are lying vacant across the state

Bhubaneswar: A war of words has begun between the BJD and the BJP over the Odisha government's decision to hire retired teachers to meet large-scale vacancies in the state.

Union minister of state for petroleum and natural gas Dharmendra Pradhan today, for the second time, criticised the state government and asked it to "turn its attention to large-scale vacancy of teachers". Nearly 43,180 posts of schoolteachers are lying vacant across the state.

The state government shot back, saying that the teacher-on-call scheme had been introduced on the Centre's recommendation and many other states had implemented it.

Pradhan said: "The state government should come out with a statement on whether the vacancies will be filled up by certified and BEd teachers. They should tell us how many teachers have been recruited on contract basis. The Centre has not stopped the state government from filling up the vacancies."

School and mass education minister Debi Prasad Mishra said: "During a meeting in New Delhi earlier, the then Union minister of human resources development, Smriti Irani, had expressed concern over large-scale vacancies at the school level. At that meeting, it was decided to introduce the teacher-on-call scheme. Many states have introduced it."

Mishra said: "As it is not possible to immediately fill up the vacancies, we are introducing the teacher-on-call scheme, so that school studies are not hampered."

Mishra said: "Along with introducing teacher-on-call, we are going to recruit teachers in a phased manner."

Earlier, Pradhan had equated the scheme with taxis-on-call such as Ola and Uber.

BJD leaders criticised Pradhan, saying that such remarks offended the teachers' community.

BJD vice-president Damodar Rout said: "Pradhan should have decency, but people behave according to their level of education. Parents give birth to children, but it is the teachers who give education and help them rise in life. I have not learnt to criticise teachers in this kind of language."

Agriculture minister Pradeep Maharathy remarked: "Had he (Pradhan) been representing the state, he would not have made this kind of a comment. Being a minister, he should know whether such statements suit him."

The BJP state unit justified Pradhan's comments. The party's vice-president Samir Mohanty said: "The BJD is trying to divert public attention from the main issue of large-scale vacancy of teachers and indulging in political gimmicks. They are diluting the real issue. The minister (Pradhan), in fact, is concerned about the plight of teachers."