

7. Malayalam Bhasha Bill, 2025 – Polity

Language row– Karnataka Border Area Development Authority seeks explicit exclusion of Kannada linguistic minority areas in Malayalam Bhasha bill. The Karnataka Border Area Development Authority (KBADA) has raised strong objections to the Malayalam Bhasha Bill, 2025. They have formally demanded that linguistic minority areas in Kasaragod district (Kerala) be explicitly excluded from the bill's provisions, specifically the mandate making Malayalam the compulsory first language in schools. This follows an earlier move by the Karnataka government, which urged the Kerala Governor to reject the Bill on grounds of unconstitutionality and violation of linguistic minority rights.

Key Provisions of the Malayalam Bhasha Bill, 2025

1. Official Language Status

Adoption– The Bill formally adopts Malayalam as the official language of Kerala.

Scope of Use– It mandates the use of Malayalam in government, education, judiciary, public communication, commerce, and the digital domain (subject to constitutional provisions).

Current Status– Presently, the state recognizes both English and Malayalam as official languages.

2. Education Mandate (The Core Conflict)

Compulsory First Language– Malayalam is to be the compulsory first language in all government and aided schools up to Class 10.

3. Judiciary and Legislature

Legal Proceedings– Judgments and court proceedings will be translated into Malayalam in a phased manner.

Legislative Documents– Bills and Ordinances will be introduced in Malayalam.

Translation of Acts– Important Central and State Acts, currently published in English, will be translated into Malayalam.

4. Institutional Framework & IT Integration

New Directorate– A Malayalam Language Development Directorate will be created.

Department Renaming– The *Personnel and Administrative Reforms (Official Language) Department* will be renamed as the Malayalam Language Development Department.

Digital Tools– The Information Technology Department is tasked with developing open-source software and tools to facilitate Malayalam usage in the IT sector.

Contested Provisions and Karnataka's Objections

The primary point of contention lies in **Section 2(6)** of the Bill.

Contested Provision	Karnataka's Argument / Allegation
Compulsory First Language	Mandating Malayalam as the first language violates the constitutional right of linguistic minorities (Kannadigas in Kasaragod) to be educated in their mother tongue.
Forcible Imposition	The Bill leads to coercive language learning, infringing upon constitutional protections against forced assimilation.
Impact on Students	Kannada-speaking students in Kasaragod, who currently study Kannada as their first language, would be forced to switch to Malayalam, disrupting their education.
Historical Precedent	A similar bill (Malayalam Language (Dissemination and Enrichment) Bill, 2015) passed in 2017 was previously rejected by the President, which strengthens the argument against the current Bill.

Constitutional Provisions Related to the Dispute

The conflict involves several specific articles of the Indian Constitution regarding language and minority rights.

1. State Legislature's Power

Article 345– Empowers a State legislature to adopt any one or more languages in use in the State (or Hindi) for all or any official purposes.

2. Governor's Power

Article 200– The Governor has three options when a Bill is presented

1. Give assent.
2. Withhold assent.
3. Reserve the Bill for the consideration of the President (often done if a Bill derogates from the powers of the High Court or violates the Constitution).

3. Protection of Linguistic Minorities

1. **Article 29 & 30**– Safeguard the cultural and educational rights of minorities, including the right to establish and administer educational institutions.
2. **Article 347**– Provides for the official recognition of a language spoken by a substantial section of a State's population if they desire it.
3. **Article 350A**– Mandates that every State must provide facilities for instruction in the mother tongue at the primary stage of education to children belonging to linguistic minority groups.
4. **Article 350B**– Establishes a Special Officer for Linguistic Minorities
 - a. Appointment– Appointed by the President.
 - b. Role– Investigates matters relating to safeguards provided for linguistic minorities.
 - c. Reporting– Submits reports to the President, who then places them before Parliament.

Core Demands of KBADA

Explicit Exemption – The Authority demands a clear, written exemption for Kannada-speaking linguistic minority areas in Kasaragod from the compulsory Malayalam first-language requirement.

Status Quo on Language – They insist that Kannada must remain the first language in schools located in these minority-dominated border areas, ensuring continuity for students and respect for their linguistic heritage.

Conclusion

The dispute highlights the delicate balance between a state's right to promote its official language and the constitutional safeguards ensuring that linguistic minorities are not compelled to abandon their mother tongue in education. The resolution may depend on whether the Governor reserves the Bill for the President or if the State modifies the Bill to include the requested exemptions.

Source– https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/karnataka/language-row-karnataka-border-area-development-authority-seeks-explicit-exclusion-of-kannada-linguistic-minority-areas-in-malayalam-bhasha-bill/article70498322.ece#google_vignette