

DECCAN Chronicle

Sunday, February 12, 2012

'Codify privileges of legislators'

SANDEEP SHASTRI

The 'special privileges' enjoyed by our legislators becomes a matter of animated debate each time a controversy erupts on the use and sanctity of this unique space provided to our elected representatives. It would be useful to contextualise the guarantee of these privileges to members of the legislature. The option of taking action against elected representatives for what they say or do on the floor of the House rests with the presiding officer and not with an agency outside the legislature. This provision was put in place to ensure that the elected representatives were able to articulate the grievances of the people and represent their interests without fear or favour and were in no way inhibited from fulfilling their role.



Over time, this privilege has come to be widely and liberally interpreted, often side-stepping the original intention. It is beyond doubt that elected representatives should enjoy their 'privileges' in order to be able to speak on the floor of the House without any fear of adverse action outside it. But for long now, there has been a demand to codify the privileges enjoyed by legislators.

Clear codifying will ensure that legislators are able to fulfill their roles as representatives of the people without excessive expansion of what constitutes these privileges.