

## MAYOR-IN-COUNCIL

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Sir : - The proposed mayor-in-council Bill in Maharashtra could give wide executive powers to the mayor, who will then have a team of councilors similar to the chief minister with his team of ministers from the MLAs of his party.

Under the existing set-up, the mayor's post, specially in large cities in the state like Mumbai, Thane, Pune, etc., is more symbolic than anything else. With a short tenure of one year and without any real administrative powers, our mayors are like show pieces. Most citizens may not even remember the names of their mayors, which reflects the low esteem in which they regard these figure-head mayors. However, it may be worthwhile to replace the existing system with one which will provide for a direct election of a mayor for a fixed term of, say, four to five years, giving him the necessary executive powers and allowing him freedom to select his team from among professionals and experts. This would provide him with ample scope to prove his mettle in the discharge of his enhanced duties.

Such a system, which is adopted in many cities in the US, has worked well and has, in fact, provided a conducive environment for promoting a higher caliber of leaders at the grassroots level. And this system attracts better personalities for the executive post of a mayor. Even in a country like Germany, the mayor who is the effective head of local government is directly elected by the people, who simultaneously elect the members of a city Parliament (Municipal Corporation). For this purpose, the citizens have two votes, one for the election of the mayor and the other for the municipal councilors.

It is an admitted fact that our large metropolitan cities, consisting of educated and enlightened citizens, have failed to provide an appropriate environment to promote leadership of a higher calibre. However, as envisaged in this bill, electing a mayor from amongst the municipal councilors may mean falling into the same groove of pulls and pushes as witnessed in our state and Central legislatures. Such a mayor would be continuously walking a tightrope to please councilors to keep his position intact, thereby limiting his independence. The role of municipal councilors, besides representing their constituencies ought to involve active participation in local legislative matters and in providing necessary checks and balances vis-à-vis the actions of the mayor.