

LINGAYAT RELIGION ISSUE WILL BOOMERANG ON CONG: BSY

BJP CM candidate says will expose one scam every three days to reveal Siddaramaiah's true colours, highlight Cong govt's failed promises, betrayal of dalits

PHOTOS: PUSHKAR V



INTERVIEW

KIRAN PRAKASH & HEMANTH KUMAR @ Bengaluru

POLITICAL parties in the state are already on election mode and the leaders are working overtime with their backroom boys to weave strategies to outsmart each other. While the ruling Congress is working on plans to strike at the very roots of its main rival BJP's support base with issues such as Lingayat religion and Kannada pride, State BJP president B S Yeddyurappa says he is ready with fresh ammo to end the Siddu raj. In an interaction with *TNIE*, the former Chief Minister dwelt on his strategies to derail Congress' designs and rip off Siddaramaiah's image by exposing a string of scams in the coming days. Excerpts from the conversation.

TNIE: How is your poll preparation going?

BSY: Preparations are on and will gain full vigour with the launch of 'Nava Karnataka Parivartana Yatra' on November 2. Apart from our national president Amit Shah, we are expecting Prime Minister Modi too to participate. It would be held in two parts, one will start from Bengaluru and cover the southern districts, and other from Hubballi and will touch the northern districts. The yatra would span over 75-80 days. We will cover three assembly constituencies in a day, explaining the failures of the Siddaramaiah government and highlighting the achievements of Modi government at the Centre and welfare programmes implemented by the previous BJP government in the state.

TNIE: BJP's fight against Siddaramaiah government seems to be losing steam.

BSY: Not at all. The agitations will attain their peak at the right time. You will see that soon. The Parivartana Yatra will be a game-changer as we hit the road, address rallies in every taluk and district. Our workers will fan out to every village and reach every house. We will deflate Siddaramaiah's claims on 'Anna Bhagya' as the credit should go to the Modi government, which is paying a subsidy of ₹30 per kg of rice being distributed under the scheme while state is contributing just ₹3.

TNIE: Your agitations against corruption in the Siddaramaiah government and demanding resignation of ministers D K Shivakumar and K J George fizzled out within no time, why?

BSY: This government is thick-skinned. They do not care for political agitations and people's demands. Practically speaking, they need a stronger pinch. We will do that in the days to come.

TNIE: Siddaramaiah is emerging stronger after the party's victory in the bypolls. It looks like he has stumped the BJP



Yes, I had to go to jail only because I did not get bail. But have I been convicted? No. Not even a single charge has been proved against me. Even Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi are out on bail. PWD minister H C Mahadevappa's son, who is involved in illegal sand business, is out on bail. Most of the ministers have amassed thousands of crores. It will be exposed if I-T conducts raids on their premises — B S Yeddyurappa, state BJP president

with issues like imposition of Hindi and separate Lingayat religion. How do you counter him?

BSY: This is just a feeling. But we are ready with our own strategy to expose his true colours. Our blitzkrieg to expose corruption in the Siddaramaiah government has started and it will be sustained by exposing a series of scams involving Siddaramaiah, his family members and ministerial colleagues. You will see BJP exposing a scam with necessary documents every three days. There is enough ammunition to destroy Siddaramaiah's 'Mr Clean' claims. We will also distribute handbills to every house explaining the loot by this government, their failed promises to farmers, failure to utilise central funds and betrayal of backward classes and dalits. It will become impossible for Siddaramaiah and his ministers to defend themselves or face the people.

TNIE: Congress is questioning your credibility to talk about corruption as you had to go to jail on corruption charge...

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even a single charge has been proved against me. Even Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi are out on bail. PWD minister H C Mahadevappa's son, who is involved in illegal sand business, is out on bail. Most of the ministers have amassed thousands of crores. It will be exposed if I-T conducts raids on their premises.

TNIE: Congress, by reviving the Lingayat religion issue, seems to have managed to split the community, which has been a strong support base of the BJP. You seem to be clueless to resist it.

BSY: We have decided to maintain a silence over the separate Veerashaiva-Lingayat religion issue. Siddaramaiah is fanning the issue to divert public attention to cover up his failures. The Lingayat religion issue will boomerang on him. I do not want to dwell deep, just wait and watch. As for the Karnataka flag issue that the Chief Minister has tried to misuse, there is no issue. We all have accepted the state flag which is in use for a long time. And, calling use of Hindi in a few Metro signboards as a move to forcibly impose Hindi is gross

exaggeration.

TNIE: The BJP in Karnataka is still beset with infighting and groupism even after Amit Shah's tough talking.

BSY: It is true that the party suffered due to differences between me and senior leader K S Eshwarappa. But that is a closed chapter now. As for reports about a rift between me and B L Santhosh (BJP national joint secretary - organisation), it is baseless and non-existent. Someone is spreading rumours to mislead the people. We are working together like two brothers. We are interacting with each other almost every day. All of us are together.

TNIE: BJP seems to be depending too much on Brand Modi and Amit Shah's strategies win elections in Karnataka.

BSY: Achievements of the Modi government are definitely part of our campaign. Siddaramaiah has been accusing the Modi government of discrimination in granting funds for the state. We will present the true picture. For instance, the NDA government has released ₹1,145 crore for disaster relief so far which is much

higher than the ₹6,67 crore released during the previous UPA regime. Central grants to Karnataka are set to touch ₹2.19 lakh crore in 5 years of the Modi regime, against ₹88,583 crore in the last 5 years of the UPA government.

Apart from that, we will also highlight the achievements of the previous BJP government in Karnataka. Besides, we will be holding massive rallies starting with one for Vishwakarma community. People from backward and SC/ST communities are being drawn to the party in a big way. They are all disillusioned by the Siddaramaiah government's false promises.

TNIE: Don't you think the BJP will pay a heavy price in northern Karnataka due to Modi's reluctance to intervene to resolve the Mahadayi dispute?

BSY: The previous UPA government at the Centre deliberately allowed the dispute to fester. Even now, the Congress will try to keep the dispute alive. But we are on the job to resolve it amicably through talks with

the Chief Ministers of Goa and Maharashtra. People of Karnataka can hope for a breakthrough soon. I don't want to elaborate further.

TNIE: Amit Shah wanted you to contest from northern Karnataka to shore up BJP's fortunes in the region. But, you seem to be reluctant?

BSY: People of my Shikaripura constituency are not ready to allow me to contest from elsewhere. I became an MLA and then a Chief Minister with their love and blessings. They have taken a pledge to ensure my victory without me campaigning there, so as to enable me to devote my time for campaigning elsewhere. I have a bond with Shikaripura which is difficult to break. I will discuss the issue with the national leadership and am optimistic about convincing them.



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'WE COULD HAVE DONE BETTER FOR BENGALURU. WE WILL'

TNIE: Bengaluru is crumbling, people are dying on pothole-riddled roads. Why has the principal opposition party BJP remained blind to their plight?

BSY: Congress has destroyed Bengaluru, Congress has killed Bengaluru, Congress has become a curse for Bengaluru and the Siddaramaiah government is dead for Bengaluru. What have they done for Bengaluru? Even one centimetre of rain causes flooding all over the city. The Chief Minister says they have spent Rs700Cr for improving drains. Where has the money gone? The Chief Minister claims

that he has given world class infrastructure for Bengaluru, but the city is suffering without even basic infrastructure.

TNIE: Then, why is the BJP not fighting for Bengalureans' cause?

BSY: The false claims and the loot in the name of developing Bengaluru have been exposed. The sorry state of drains and roads, and deaths of people due to potholes tell the tale of the big loot that has happened in the name of taking up infrastructure works. Yes, I accept that we as

the principal opposition party could have done better in taking up the cause of the people, raising our voice to their plight. I myself will have to take the lead. I will do that. You will see BJP leaders and workers hitting the streets of Bengaluru to fight for civic amenities, to fix the battered roads.

TNIE: What are your plans for Bengaluru if voted to power?

BSY: First, we will expose the loot perpetrated by this government in the name of

developing Bengaluru. We will come out with concrete plans for the city in consultation with senior leaders like Ananth Kumar, urban development experts and officials. Roads need to be concretised and encroachment of drains should be removed without any delay. We will do that. We will also use our influence with the Union government to bring liberal grants to improve the city's infrastructure.

