

CONGRESS-MUKT KARNATAKA is Yeddyurappa's priority

Former Karnataka Chief Minister BS Yeddyurappa, who took charge in April as the BJP state president, claims he will make "Congress-mukt Karnataka" a reality and bring the BJP back to power in the 2018 Assembly Elections

Shivani Venugopal

The party strongman, who is credited with winning BJP its first ever government in South India in 2008, is now vying for a second innings after he was forced to quit as the Chief Minister of the state in 2011 owing to corruption charges leveled against him in the Lokayukta report on illegal mining activities in Bellary. A lot has changed since 2011. Yeddyurappa no longer enjoys the kind of support from his party that propelled him to the CM's post back in 2008. In addition, he has more detractors in the BJP now with many of the senior leaders like KS Eshwarappa and HN Ananth Kumar openly expressing their disapproval of Yeddyurappa being at the helm of affairs once again. However, Yeddyurappa is still the BJP's best bet in the state in terms of mass appeal, and he is leaving no stone unturned to capitalize on this opportunity.

The Lingayat card

After stepping down as the Chief Minister of Karnataka, Yeddyurappa, a prominent Lingayat face, floated his own party named Karnataka Janata Paksha (KJP) in 2012. However, he subsequently merged the KJP with the BJP few months before the 2014 Lok Sabha elections. While the party had sidelined Yeddyurappa on corruption charges, he turned the situation to his advantage by addressing gatherings across the state and garnering support of the Lingayats, in a clear display of strength. Though his newly formed political outfit failed to stay afloat for long after taking off, it was enough to send a message to the national leaders of the party about the hold the former CM has over a particularly large section of people in Karnataka. He won the Lok Sabha seat from Shimoga and became the national vice-president of the BJP before being elevated as the party president of Karnataka.

Rifts within the BJP

Being at the helm as the BJP chief certainly hasn't been easy for Yeddyurappa. His style of working, termed as 'dictatorial' by his colleagues, has caused internal conflict and has been severely criticised by senior party leaders including opposition leader in the Legislative Council, KS Eshwarappa and former minister CT Ravi. BJP national president Amit Shah had to intervene to assuage the concerns of party leaders



and also imposed gag orders on senior leaders for approaching the media with their grievances. When asked about the visible revolt against him in the party, the Lok Sabha member from Shimoga eschewed answering directly and said: "This is an internal issue of the party. I would not like to comment on the internal affairs of the party in public." With regard to his style of working, he stated: "The character and structure of the party

is such that no leader can become a dictator. The organisational network and the work culture do not allow anybody to become a dictator."

The Modi-fied approach

Clad in his trademark all-white safari, the seasoned politician exhibited a rather pleasant demeanour and was unfazed by the rift in the party. To strengthen the

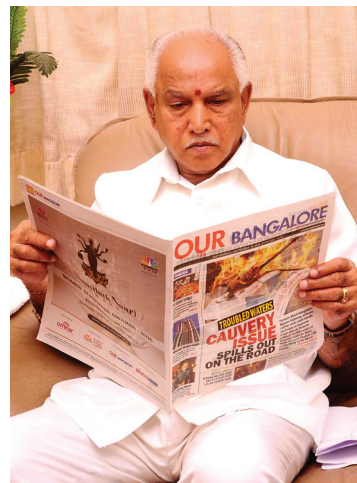
party's presence in the state, Yeddyurappa has directed his cadres to hold a series of rallies across Karnataka before September 30. According to the BJP state president, the reason behind such rallies is to maintain live contact with all sections and strata of society. When quizzed about the increase in politics of polarisation, Yeddyurappa emphasised on the fact that 2014 Lok Sabha elections was held on the development plank and attributed the party's victory to Modi. He further stated: "Even now, the prime minister speaks only about development. In fact, the BJP has drastically

sterling character."

The failure of the Congress

The image of Karnataka, especially Bangalore, has been dented in the recent incidents of violence pertaining to the Cauvery issue and the demolition of properties built on storm water drains across the city, said Yeddyurappa. He blamed the Congress government for its poor governance and for not taking preventive measures to maintain law and order in the state following the Supreme Court's verdict on the Cauvery issue.

Though the Lingayat leader said he is against encroachment of Raja Kaluve or storm water drains, he is apparently not convinced with the "unreasonable, merciless and unscientific ways of demolishing". He's questioned the BBMP officials on the sanction of illegal constructions and also their (BBMP) selective approach towards demolition. He said: "While big corporate houses are ignored, middle and lower middle class people are being thrown to footpaths. It's absolutely illogical and unscientific to depend on maps from 1904 for demolition of houses. 112-years is not a small period. The BBMP needs to think of alternatives instead of this senseless and mindless demolition."



Strong RSS grounding

Being brought up in the traditions of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Yeddyurappa has risen from the ranks. In his political tenure, the former chief minister has witnessed many sweet and sour moments and continues to base himself on the training received in RSS. Yeddyurappa concluded by saying: "I get happiness only by being amidst people—all sections and strata of society; more so the Dalits, kisans, agricultural labour, backward classes and weaker sections of society. I'm a simple man and I don't belong to the cocktail circuit of Bangalore. I'm on a constant tour of the state addressing the grievances of people and bringing it to the fore."

With just two years left for the next Assembly Elections, the BJP hasn't been able to find a replacement for Yeddyurappa, and in the current scenario he's the party's best bet in terms of the mass appeal. However, the question is whether the party chief of Karnataka can repeat the success of 2008 in 2018 as well. Though he has been acquitted of most of the corruption charges levelled against him, he is far from coming out clean, which is an unlikely possibility. After all, once tainted, forever tainted.

and qualitatively changed the discussion narrative in the country's politics. In Karnataka too, we've been talking only about development or the lack of it in our state due to the inefficient Congress government."

Dismissal of corruption charges

Yeddyurappa, who had to step down as chief minister on corruption charges, can have a sigh of relief as the High Court dismissed as many as 15 cases of corruption against him. Though, the Congress government has challenged the decision in the Supreme Court, Yeddyurappa imposes complete faith in the judiciary and is confident of getting justice. Addressing the issue of immense corruption and public's distrust of politicians, Yeddyurappa stated: "People's perception that most of the politicians are corrupt isn't wrong. However, most of the times false and baseless charges are hurled at politicians, thereby damaging their image, integrity and credibility. Nevertheless, in order to win the confidence of people, politicians must exhibit and demonstrate their