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BSY TAKES UP REBELS' CAUSE, RAPS HIS OWN PARTY LEADERS

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IN perhaps the first instance where he has come out strongly in support of the disqualified Congress and JDS MLAs, Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa took his party leaders to task at a recent meeting held in Hubballi to discuss preparations for the bypolls. While making his disapproval of remarks by senior BJP leaders amply clear, he asked them to understand the reality and "have a big heart", saying it was the rebels who aided the formation of his government.

A video, believed to be of his speech at the meeting, has now gone viral on social media. "I don't have any personal interest other than delivering good governance. I did not want to become CM, I was Chief Minister twice earlier," he is heard saying. BJP state president Nalin Kumar Kateel, Union Minister Pralhad Joshi, Industries Minister Jagadish Shettar, Deputy CM Govind Karjol and other senior leaders were present at the meeting.

Yediyurappa completes 100 days in office on Saturday.

According to party sources, the CM was upset after some leaders demanded that tickets be given to party loyalists and not to the disqualified MLAs. Stating that their tone does not sound like it was to save the BJP government, the CM said, "You must be knowing that the decisions regarding the 17 rebels were not taken by B S Yediyurappa or any other state leader. Our central leaders were in the know of the entire developments when the rebels were staying in Mumbai."

The rebel leaders, he said, had not visited their constituencies and families for two months and it was because of them that the BJP is in power now. "The rebels stood by their decision and even went to the Supreme Court. It's our turn to stand by them, come what may. This assurance should have come, but it did not. Many of you (seniors) made big speeches and gave suggestions. What if you were in their place? Would you be still speaking like this now?" he asked.

While requesting his party leaders to keep the discussions confidential, he even expressed doubts that someone in the meeting would have recorded his speech. "I am 100% sure it will be leaked to media," he said.

Referring to the demand by some leaders to give a ticket to Deputy CM Lakshman Savadi and Raju Kage in the bypolls, the CM pointed out that Kage lost the election from Kagwad in 2018 by over 30,000 votes and the winner (Shrimat Patil) had resigned to help the BJP form the government.

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"WAS he a fool to resign even after winning the election by such a margin? You should have said that you will convince Kage not to contest. But that did not happen," CMB S Yediyurappa told the assembled leaders. On Laxman Savadi, he said it is an exceptional case in which he cannot take any decision, but said the central leaders will take a call.

Expressing his angst, he even went on to say that he made a mistake by becoming the CM. "I won over their trust, but none of you who spoke about them could see their sacrifice. They became fools by trusting us. What was the need for them to get us sit in the treasury benches by resigning from their MLA posts? They trusted us and stayed away for two-and-half months. We did not discuss this because we were waiting for the Supreme Court decision. The judgment will be out and I am hoping that the court will allow them to contest the bypolls. If you

had said that it would be tough for our own partymen to win if they are given tickets, I would not have felt bad. But none of you, including senior leaders, spoke about this. Whom did you want to please? I was never hurt like this before," he added.

Meanwhile, in case the SC verdict is in their favour, the disqualified MLAs have decided against identifying with any party. If the SC overturns the Speaker's decision on disqualification, they are unlikely to resign as they have already been expelled from their parties.

Speaking to TNIE, one of the disqualified MLAs said there is no question of joining the party from which he had resigned and added that he will not join BJP either. "People are with me, I will remain an independent MLA," he said.

Another disqualified MLA, Munirathna, said once the judgment is out, all the 17 rebels will sit together and discuss the future course of action.