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GOVT GETS A FIGHTING CHANCE AS SPEAKER SET TO TALK TO FIVE MLAs

Of the 13 resignations, Ramesh Kumar deemed 8 non-viable citing 'format' as reason

ANUSHA RAVI @ Bengaluru

FULLY aware that the fate of the Congress-JDS coalition lies in his hands, Speaker K R Ramesh Kumar, who returned to office on Tuesday, may have given the two parties a ray of hope in extending the life of the coalition. Stating categorically that he will go by the book, Ramesh Kumar deemed eight of the 13 resignations submitted to his office by coalition MLAs as invalid. He has given legislators two days time to seek an appointment, appear before him in person and submit their resignations in the "prescribed format" — only then would he consider.

In one smooth move, citing format, the Speaker bought some more time — both for himself and the coalition — time that is crucial for the Congress and JDS to, at least, attempt to get its house in order. The BJP though angered over "the Speaker sabotaging" their gameplan has not decided to agitate against the Speaker himself.

"Resignations of Anand Singh, Narayana Gowda, Pratap Gouda Patil, Gopalaiiah and Ramalinga Reddy are in pre-



Assembly Speaker Ramesh Kumar briefs the media on the status of the resignations of the 13 MLAs, at Vidhana Soudha on Tuesday | SHRIRAM BH

scribed format. The others aren't. They have two days to submit their resignations afresh in a proper format," Ramesh Kumar told reporters at Vidhana Soudha on Tuesday.

The coalition's fate precariously hangs on whether the Speaker will accept all resignations. If he does, the numbers will fall to 104, way less than the halfway mark of 106 in a reduced House strength of 211. On the day Karnataka assembly convenes for the monsoon ses-

sion, Ramesh Kumar has asked Anand Singh, Pratap Gouda Patil and Narayan Gowda to appear before him in person. With this decision the Speaker has compelled rebel MLAs, currently holed up in a private hotel in Maharashtra, to return to Bengaluru where the Congress may be able to dissuade them from deserting the coalition.

Senior Congress leader Ramalinga Reddy and JDS' Gopalaiiah have been summoned on July 15.

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Azad in B'luru, DKS heads to Maha to firefight

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Bengaluru

WITH Karnataka in charge K C Venugopal and State leaders unable to resolve the crisis, Congress senior leadership has deputed Ghulam Nabi Azad to bring the situation under control. Azad's visit comes at a time when Water resources minister and Congress' crisis manager D K Shivakumar is all set to visit rebel MLAs in Maharashtra on Wednesday. "They are all our friends. People who have been in politics for decades. I along with a few JDS leaders will visit them and convince them to return," Shivakumar told reporters in Bengaluru on Tuesday.

While State leaders are expected to talk to rebel legislators, Azad's single-point agenda is to hold talks with JDS supremo HD Deve Gowda and ensure smooth coordination.

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Azad holds talks with CM Kumar

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DURCES confirmed that Azad spoke to Chief Minister D Kumaraswamy and they were together trying to woo the disgruntled MLAs to return. They have also been assigned the task to ensure that there are no fresh resignations. It was after the efforts of Shivakumar and Kharge

efforts failed that a senior leader like Azad had to rush from Delhi," a highly placed source from the Congress said.

It may be noted that Azad was instrumental in forging the coalition with the JDS when the Congress failed to achieve a majority on its own in the Karnataka assembly elections 2018. The man who

was in the forefront of talks with JDS has now been deputed to work his magic for the second time around.

By deputing Azad, the Congress leadership has made it clear that it is not going to take 'Operation Kamala,' lying down and is willing to press its team of trouble-shooters to take the fight to the enemy camp.

'Resignation not genuine or voluntary'

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THE others will now have to submit their resignations in their own handwriting stating that they are resigning on their own volition and not under duress and that they are not resigning to join another party. "The Speaker will carefully scrutinise each letter. If he finds that the MLA is resigning under pressure, he may reject it," the sources said.

This clause of "voluntary resignation" is what the Congress hopes to latch on to to threaten rebel MLAs with anti-defection law. "Resigning under pressure will attract action under anti-defection law and we will petition the Speaker to disqualify these MLAs and stop them from contesting polls for the next 6 years," Congress leader Siddaramaiah told reporters while briefing about the legislature party

meeting's decision. If the Speaker, in his discretion, decides that the resignations were not voluntary, rebelling Congress MLAs face the threat of disqualification under the 10th Schedule and will not be eligible to hold any remunerative political post for duration of the period commencing from the date of disqualification till an election is held.

Tuesday's developments may have put a spanner in BJP's works. Party sources say that the leaders are upset with the Speaker's decision, but had anticipated this and are now working out new strategies to ensure the collapse of the coalition. The first of BJP's strategy will come in the form of a protest on Wednesday against the Speaker's decision while the next will come in the form of a delegation that will meet Ramesh Kumar to insist that he accept the resignations.

A Congress party source, a copy of which is available with TNM, said "it is reliably learnt that the Speaker has taken some of the members of the Congress who have resigned and they have been staying at Sofitel Hotel where security has been given. According to the note, the Speaker's power in Maharashtra only goes to stop a resignation if it is not genuine or voluntary. In an instance of the Speaker using or coercing money and power. Therefore, the Speaker is bound to enquire as to whether the resignation is not voluntary."

The rebel MLAs are latching on to the Speaker's decision while the next will come in the form of a delegation that will meet Ramesh Kumar to insist that he accept the resignations. This, Congress sources say, is a sign of hope to lure