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Siddaramaiah, Patil leaders of Oppn in Assembly, Council

NEW DELHI, DHNS

Former chief minister Siddaramaiah virtually gained the upper hand in the Congress state unit with the party top brass on Wednesday appointing him as leader of Opposition in the Assembly.

Congress president Sonia Gandhi also appointed ex-minister S R Patil, a loyalist of Siddaramaiah, as Opposition leader in Council.

The party did not create a separate post of the leader of the Congress Legislature Party on the Maharashtra model, a move Siddaramaiah welcomed.

However, while the party high command gave Siddaramaiah the edge in the state, it came at a cost as he had to forego his seat in the Congress Working Committee (CWC), the top decision making body of the party. "I am grateful to Hon. @INCIndia President Smt. Sonia Gandhiji for appointing me as Leader of Opposition of Karnataka Assembly & Leader of CLP. I am honoured by her faith in me," Siddaramaiah said on Twitter.

Despite lobbying by the several senior leaders for the key post, including former deputy chief minister G Parameshwara and senior minister H K Patil, the high command relied on Siddaramaiah to revive the party which suffered back-to-back losses in both Assembly and Lok Sabha polls. Sid-

daramaiah is also backed by maximum number of MLAs compared to other leaders.

"Congress president has appointed Siddaramaiah as Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Assembly and S R Patil as Leader of Opposition in the Legislative Council in Karnataka with immediate effect," a party statement issued by K C Venugopal, the AICC General Secretary said.

"The party appreciates the contribution of Shri Siddaramaiah as member of the Congress Working Committee," the party statement said.

A senior Congress leader termed Siddaramaiah's appointment as a "balancing act". A prominent role for Patil in the Legislative Council is seen as an attempt to reach out to Lingayats, a community the party had alienated ahead of the Assembly polls and also to give representation to North Karnataka.

As the party was sharply divided on the issue of the leader of the Opposition post, the Congress high command had despatched senior leader Madhusudhan Mistry to Bengaluru to ascertain the views of party legislators.

Though a section of leaders in the party blamed Siddaramaiah for the collapse of the JD(S)-Congress government and called him an outsider, the party admitted that he remained the strongest leader in the state.