

# BJP MLAs corner govt in Assembly over KFD deaths

**Health minister confronted over casualties**

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**T**he ruling BJP was cornered by its own legislators in the Legislative Assembly on Monday over the Kyasanur Forest Disease (KFD), or monkey fever, that has claimed several lives till date in the Malnad region of the state.

Raising the issue during zero hour, BJP legislators Hartal Halappa and Araga Jnanendra accused the Health department of doing little to tackle the fever.

The KFD is a tick-borne viral haemorrhagic disease, which can be fatal to humans and primates. It is believed to spread through monkeys.

"What are the officials doing? What is the principal secretary doing? Is there a cure? Are there laboratories? How many people should die before the department wakes up," Halappa said, slamming his headphones on the table in anger. Halappa threatened to enter the well of the House if the government failed to act.

"The Manipal hospital, where 12-13 patients were treated last year, is sending back people because payment of Rs 8 lakh is due. How can a poor farmer pay Rs 1.4 lakh," Halappa asked. "I've met the principal secretary several times, but he just doesn't act."

"Shivamogga and North Canara (Utara Kannada) are the most affected. Poor people are dying like dogs, but officials don't care. The vaccination isn't helping. Clinical

research is what's needed," Jnanendra said.

Even Speaker Vishweshwar Hegde Kageri expressed concern over the KFD.

Jnanendra said if the Health department officials contract KFD, then they will realise the seriousness of the matter. "With such officials, even Covid-19 will not be contained."

Sriramulu said the government was aware of the KFD. "In 2019, there were 210 cases in Sagar taluk and 174 of them were reported in the Haraligode panchayat limits," the minister said. "Throughout the state, there have been 445 cases, of which there were 15 deaths."

To this, an angry Halappa rose and challenged the minister. "What are you saying? There have been 23 deaths."

Sriramulu said he will take action against officials if it was found that they provided wrong information. "I will take action against the principal secretary also if he misbehaves with MLAs," he added.

Sriramulu said a six-acre land in Sagar taluk had been identified to set up a laboratory for the KFD. Subsequently, Additional Chief Secretary (Health & Family Welfare) Jawaid Akhtar issued a note, saying that pending bills to Manipal Hospital will be cleared and more ambulances will be provided to Sagar taluk to tackle KFD.