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Crisis-hit Congress bets big on troubleshooter Shivakumar

BANSY KALAPPA @Bengaluru

IN what seems to be a last-ditch attempt to revive its fortunes and to keep its hopes of coming back to power afloat, the Congress on Wednesday appointed DK Shivakumar as president of the Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee. Along with the Vokkaliga strongman, the party has also appointed three working presidents -- Eshwar Khandre, Satish Jarkiholi and Salim Ahmed.

The strategic move to appoint a Vokkaliga as party president is to consolidate the vote-bank of this second populous community in the state and to win back the strongholds in the Old Mysore regions from the JDS.

What set the alarm bells ringing in the Congress camp after the last assembly elections in 2018 was that despite the party registering a rise in its vote share by 1.8 per cent across the state, it saw a dangerous dip in the Vokkaliga-dominated areas.

Party strategists too are aware that till Lingayat strongman B S Yediyurappa is at the helm of affairs in the BJP, there is no hope of any party getting chunks of Lingayat votes into their kitty. The party also hopes that the combination of Sid-



Supporters hail Congress leader D K Shivakumar in front of his residence, after he was appointed as the KPCC president in Bengaluru on Wednesday | PANDARINATH B



My hearty congratulations to @DKShivakumar for being appointed as President of @INCKarnataka. I thank Smt. Sonia Gandhi for appointing the new President. I am confident that he will further strengthen the party and also the party workers will strengthen him
Siddaramalah on Twitter

daramaiah as the Congress Legislature Party leader, who is a Kuruba, and Shivakumar as party president, they could have a winning team. Shivakumar too knew the task before him when he tweeted succinct-

ly, "We will work unitedly to bring the Congress back to power in Karnataka."

As soon as he received the all-important phone call from New Delhi, while he was at Vidhana Soudha, Shivakumar immediately went over to Siddaramaiah and congratulated him on his reappointment as opposition leader. He also held a quick meeting in Siddaramaiah's chambers and held discussions with former Speaker Ramesh Kumar, newly-appointed KPCC working president Satish Jarkiholi and others, marking the start of his reign as the new KPCC president. P5,8

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Shivakumar's elevation a threat to JDS?

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SHIVAKUMAR, who turns 58 in about two months, has been through the rough and tumble of politics. He has remained a Gandhi family loyalist, despite the alleged allurements dangled by the BJP central leadership while he was being investigated by the income tax department and Enforcement Directorate. This is not Shivakumar's first stint at the helm of party affairs. He served as working president between 2008-10 when RV Deshpande was president. It was during this time that they held a padayatra to Ballari over the mining scandal and went on to win the assembly election.

JDS leader and former chief minister HD Kumaraswamy congratulated Shivakumar, but he might see the rise of another Vokkaliga power centre as a threat to his party, which depends solely on the Vokkaliga votes. For starters, Ramesh Babu, who quit the JDS as national secretary, could join the Congress.

