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Can make 5 more MLAs quit Congress: Jarkiholi

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defections in the party earlier

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Minister for Major and Medium Irrigation Ramesh Jarkiholi, who played a key role in inducing defections in the Congress earlier to help form the BJP government, has again indicated that he is in touch with Opposition legislators by saying that he can get five senior Congress MLAs to quit within 24 hours if he makes up his mind and if the BJP leadership wants it.

"I will make sure that five Congress MLAs quit their party in 24 hours if I make up my mind about it and if the BJP leadership says yes," he said here on Sunday. "I have already spoken to top Congress leaders regarding this. They are all ready to join the BJP. If you know who they are, you will be surprised," he said while addressing a programme held to felicitate newly elected gram panchayat members backed by the BJP.

The Minister's remarks are being seen as a response to rumours that he is considering going back to the Congress. "It is true that I speak to Siddaramaiah, Congress leader and former Chief Minister, twice a day. That is because I consider him as my leader even today. I have very good personal relations with him. But that does not mean I am going to the Congress. I will bring more Congress leaders into the BJP, rather than going back," he said.

"Earlier, I led a team of 17 Congress MLAs to the BJP to make sure that the party came to power in Karnataka. I still hold that clout. I can get the top five leaders of the Congress to resign. I can also get such leaders into the BJP," he said.

He criticised Lakshmi Hebbalkar, Congress MLA, for her complaints that he was concentrating on her segment of Belagavi Rural.