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Cong claims BJP govt swindled ₹2,000 crore

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TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Bengaluru: The government on Thursday again rejected Congress' demand for a judicial investigation (JC) by a sitting judge of the high court into alleged corruption in procurement of medical equipment to tackle the Covid-19 pandemic. Congress claims the government swindled at least Rs 2,000 crore.

Hours after opposition leader Siddaramaiah and KPCC president DK Shivakumar, at a press conference, alleged seven departments had spent a total Rs 4,167 crore on equipment, ministers repeated their claim that two departments - health and medical education - had spent only Rs 321 crore.

"JC for what?" home minister Basavaraj Bommai shot back. "The allegations are entirely baseless. This is not a fit case for JC as there are no irregularities. The government has not even spent Rs 506 crore."

However, releasing some documents as evidence, Siddaramaiah and Shivakumar said the health department was given a budgetary allocation of Rs 10,032 crore, which was revised to Rs 9,689 crore. "It spent Rs 1,554 crore in April and Rs 1,768 crore in May," they said.

Besides this, they said BBMP and urban local bodies spent Rs 200 crore, while district administrations spent Rs 742 crore under the State Disaster Response Fund and labour department spent Rs 1,000 crore. They said medical education (Rs 815 crore), social welfare, food and civil supplies, education, home and woman and child welfare departments spent a total Rs 1,315 crore.

Picking out ventilators as an example, Siddaramaiah said the Centre purchased 50,000 of them through PM Cares Fund at Rs 4 lakh each



GRAFT EVIDENT? Opposition leader Siddaramaiah of Congress and KPCC president DK Shivakumar at the press conference on Thursday

COVID-19 SPEND	
Congress claim	Govt's account
Health department	
₹700cr	₹290cr
Revenue department (NDRF)	
₹742cr	₹233cr
Medical education	
₹815cr	₹33cr
Labour department	
₹1,000cr	₹892cr*
<small>(Includes ₹812 DBT for construction workers)</small>	

and the Tamil Nadu government purchased 100 transport ventilators at Rs 4.8 lakh each, but Karnataka purchased one batch on March 22 for Rs 5.6 lakh each. The second batch was purchased at a cost of Rs 12.3 lakh each the same day, and another consignment on March 24 cost Rs 18.2 lakh each. He said this data was furnished by no less than Jawaid Akhtar, additional chief secretary, health department.

He also presented a complaint filed by Dr Sarvabhousma Bagali, a former BJP MLA and medical doctor by learning, with the Lokayukta. In his complaint, Bagali says 15 ventilators supplied by a firm were useless and second hand.

Another allegation was regarding PPE kits. Siddaramaiah said the state purchased 9.6 lakh kits of which 3 lakh were purchased from a Chinese firm for Rs 2,117

"I've been observing the slanging match between Congress and BJP over corruption in managing the pandemic. The irresponsible behaviour of leaders of the two parties in times of Covid is disgusting. Both parties should stop playing politics and focus on curbing the spread of Covid-19"

HD Kumaraswamy |
FORMER CM AND JD(S) LP LEADER

each. This order was approved allegedly by the CM himself. The same kits were available in the market for Rs 330 each. Siddaramaiah said another 3.5 lakh kits were purchased from a Maharashtra-based firm for the same price, but were of such poor quality, doctors had protested, forcing the government to return 1.2 lakh kits.

"The government purchased 10,000 thermal scanners for Rs 5,945 each which were available for Rs 2,000 each even during the lockdown," Siddaramaiah said.

In a rare show of unity, five minister - Bommai, CN Ashwath Narayan, K Sudhakar, R Ashoka and Shivram Hebbar - ganged up to deny the charges. They said the not only did the government spend only Rs 324 crore, but it was forced to buy at higher prices due to poor supply.