

People pose some tough questions to disqualified MLAs contesting bypolls

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While some are about the leaders' changed loyalties, others are about flood relief work

**KARNATAKA BUREAU
BENGALURU/MANDYA/BELAGAVI**

Disqualified MLAs, now contesting from the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), have had to contend with some tough questions by voters in the course of their campaign. Instances of them being being gheraoed and questioned by voters have now come to light. While some candidates have faced questions on their defection, those contesting in north Karnataka have had a tough time facing flood victims.

Videos of at least three BJP candidates – A.H. Vishwanath in Hunsur segment, Shivaram Hebbar in Yellapur segment, and K.C. Narayana Gowda in K.R. Pete segment – being questioned on their defection have now surfaced and are being shared widely.

'Stand by your speech'

In one video, people of Ajjarani village in Yellapur segment are seen grilling Mr. Hebbar. "Do you remember what you had said about the BJP just a year ago when you were in the Congress? You should stand by your own speech," a villager is heard questioning Mr. Hebbar. As the candidate tries to pacify the villagers, his supporters are heard shouting them down, leading to chaos.



Constituents of Hunsur Assembly segment grill BJP candidate A.H. Vishwanath on various issues during his campaign. • FILE PHOTO

In a similar incident, villagers at Sharavanahalli in Hunsur segment are seen in another video surrounding Mr. Vishwanath asking him why they should vote for him again when he had not visited their village even once when they elected him from the JD(S) last year. "What has changed in a year?" a person is heard questioning. Police personnel had to intervene to bring the situation under control in the village.

Mr. Gowda, who faced the ire of JD(S) workers on the

day of filing nominations, is now campaigning with police security. Even so, there have been at least three instances of him being mobbed by people in villages. There have been instances of people mocking him for his stay in Mumbai after resignation.

The Karnataka Congress unit has tweeted these videos claiming that people of the State are rejecting those who have "sold themselves for power" and said the people could no longer be

fooled. BJP leaders, however, said these were only "stray incidents" and they were not worried.

"In most cases, it is the workers of the Congress or the JD(S) in these villages who have questioned the candidates and not common voters," claimed Ravi Kumar, BJP general secretary.

Candidates in the flood-ravaged Belagavi district are facing tough questions on relief work. Siddappa Mudakannavar, a zilla pan-chayat member from the BJP,

was locked up in a shed by angry flood victims, upset with the slow pace of relief, at Jhungarwad village near Athani on Wednesday. It was a few hours before the police rescued him.

Even Deputy Chief Minister Laxman Savadi and BJP candidate for Athani Mahesh Kumathalli faced a tough time facing flood victims at Nadi Ingalgaon village recently. Villagers rued that the survey of flood victims was faulty and despite their homes being completely damaged owing to floods, they had not got any compensation. Women from the village complained to them that since the floods in August, this was the first time any leader had come to meet them.

Congress ploy, says BJP

The ruling BJP, however, sees a Congress conspiracy in this. "The Congress has been carrying out a sustained campaign in flood-affected districts that relief work has been lax. But they have not been able to prove their charge," a senior Minister campaigning in Belagavi said.

(With inputs by K.V. Aditya Bharadwaj, Rishikesh Bahadur Desai, and M.T. Shivakumar)