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CBI arrests ex-Minister Vinay Kulkarni

Case relates to a zilla panchayat member's murder in 2016

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
HUBBALLI

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) on Thursday arrested Congress leader and former Minister Vinay Kulkarni on charges of being involved in the murder of Dharwad Zilla Panchayat member and BJP leader Yogeeshgouda Goudar in 2016, leading to accusations of political vendetta by Congress leaders.

A daylong grilling of the former Minister, his brother Vijay Kulkarni and others, preceded the arrest. The CBI produced Mr. Vinay Kulkarni before the Second Additional District Court and



The Congress has termed the arrest as political vendetta.

sought his custody for three days. However, judge Pan-chakshari H. remanded him in judicial custody for a day.

Mr. Kulkarni was subsequently taken to Hindalga Jail in Belagavi.

The arrest evoked strong reactions from the Congress leaders, including KPCC president D.K. Shivakumar.

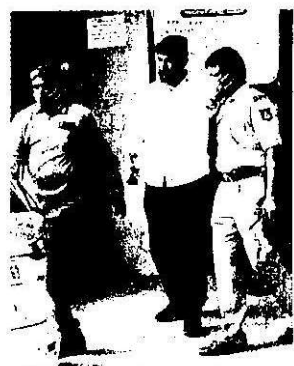
Protest staged

Hundreds of Congress supporters and followers of Mr. Vinay Kulkarni staged a protest outside the police station where he and the others were grilled for hours. They accused Union Minister Pralhad Joshi and Industries Minister Jagadish Shettar of "political conspiracy".

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CBI arrests former Minister Vinay Kulkarni in murder case



Former Minister Vinay Kulkarni being taken to district court after a health check-up at the district hospital in Dharwad.

• SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Mr. Vinay Kulkarni, speaking before the arrest, also termed the turn of events "politically motivated".

Meanwhile, Basava Jaya Mrutyunjay Swami of Lingayat Panchamasali Peetha, Kudalasangama, sought an answer from Chief Minister from B.S. Yediyurappa on why "another leader from the community was being targeted for political reasons".

Earlier in the day, CBI sleuths visited the residence of the former Minister at Shivagiri in Dharwad and asked him to appear before them for questioning at Suburban

Police Station. Another team of officials picked up Mr. Vijay Kulkarni from his Hubballi residence. Shirish Patil, a builder who is said to be a close aide of Mr. Vinay Kulkarni, and Nataraj, who took care of the dairy farm of the Minister, were also brought in for questioning. After close to three hours of grilling, both of them were let off; but the sleuths continued questioning the Kulkarni brothers. Subsequently Chandu Indi, a close relative of Mr. Kulkarni also appeared before the sleuths.

The case dates back to 2016 when Yogeeshgouda

Goudar, then zilla panchayat member from BJP, was hacked to death in his gymnasium in Dharwad on June 15. Investigating into the matter, the police had arrested six persons, including the main accused Basavaraj Mutagi. But the family members of Yogeeshgouda led by his wife Mallamma alleged a larger conspiracy behind the murder. They were backed by Mr. Joshi and Mr. Shettar who sought a CBI probe.

Ms. Mallamma, who initially was seen in BJP protests, subsequently joined Congress, reportedly with the intervention of Mr. Vinay

Kulkarni, who was then the Minister for Mines and Geology in the Congress-led government. However, Guriathagouda, elder brother of Yogeeshgouda Goudar, continued his fight seeking a CBI probe, which was rejected by the then Congress-led government. After BJP came to power, the case was handed over to the premier investigation agency in September, 2019. The CBI had arrested six persons in March this year.

'Manipulative politics'

Accusing the BJP of resorting to manipulative politics to get Mr. Vinay Kulkarni arrest-

ed by the CBI, KPCC president D.K. Shivakumar on Thursday urged the investigation agency to conduct an impartial inquiry without bowing to political pressure. "Let the CBI summon him 10 times for questioning. But it should not allow its office to be used as political weapon," Mr. Shivakumar told reporters in Bengaluru, while urging the CBI to work within the framework of law. He sought to remind the CBI and the BJP that senior Congress leader K.J. George, who too faced several inquiries, had finally been absolved of charges by the court.