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PAPER CLIPPINGS

ಇಲಾಖೆ / ವಿಷಯ : DEPARTMENT / SUBJECT: *Politics*

ಪತ್ರಿಕೆಯ ಹೆಸರು : NAME OF THE NEWS PAPER: *The Hindu*

ರವಿವಾರ : DATE: *10/12/19*

Lack of cohesion led to Congress' fall?

Several leaders believe that rampant groupism and divisions within cost the party dear

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The Congress has suffered a humiliating defeat in the by-polls to 15 Legislative Assembly constituencies and this resulted in resignations of Siddaramaiah to the post of Congress Legislature Party leader and Dinesh Gundu Rao to the post of KPCC president.

Citing poor performance of the party, both submitted their resignations to AICC interim president Sonia Gandhi. With the bypoll rout, the Congress made a dubious hat-trick with its third successive major defeat since 2018 – after the State Legislative Assembly and 2019 Lok Sabha elections.

Not on the same page
Several party leaders believe that rampant groupism and divisions within the party, absence of top



K.R. Ramesh Kumar, former Speaker, and Dinesh Gundu Rao, Congress leader, addressing the media at the KPCC office in Bengaluru on Monday. • SUDHAKARA JAIN

leaders from campaign, poor selection of candidates, and campaigns revolving mostly around narrative of 'anarha shasakaru' (disqualified legislators) cost the party, which ruled the State for five years by itself (2013-18) and then as part of the coalition govern-

ment (2018-19), dear. Though Congress was the first to kick-off electioneering, it ran a largely negative campaign focused on anti-Modi and anti-Yediyurappa rhetoric. Some of its leaders also issued contradictory statements on striking an alliance again with its old foe

JD(S) towards the end. Leaders claim that differences and groupism were so sharp that some top leaders such as K.H. Muniyappa, B.K. Hariprasad, M. Mallikarjun Kharge, and G. Parameshwara made only 'guest appearances' in some constituencies during the two-week-long campaign. The party's troubleshooter D.K. Shivakumar, who was trapped by the Income Tax in the alleged money-laundering case, had little time to spare.

Ahead of polls, a section of senior leaders vented their anger against Mr. Siddaramaiah's leadership for his 'unilateral' decision-making and this exposed cracks within the party. The BJP utilised this and termed Mr. Siddaramaiah a 'lonely leader' as he was troubled by internal differences within the Congress.

The campaign, largely

dominated by Mr. Siddaramaiah and his loyalists, failed to understand the electoral mood and this resulted in a clear washout of the party, particularly in north Karnataka. The dominant Lingayat community strongly backed its leader and Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa to ensure his continuance in office.

Admitting the party's dull show, Mr. Siddaramaiah in his resignation letter said: "I express my sincere regret for not being able to give satisfactory results in the byelections held to Legislative Assembly despite my sincere efforts."

Of the 15 constituencies that had gone to polls, the Congress had won 11 in 2018. In this byelections, the party lost nine constituencies and retained its seat in Shivajinagar and snatched Hunsur from the JD(S).