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Panchamasali community flexes its muscles with massive rally

It seeks reservation under 2A category even as seer announces dharna till March 4

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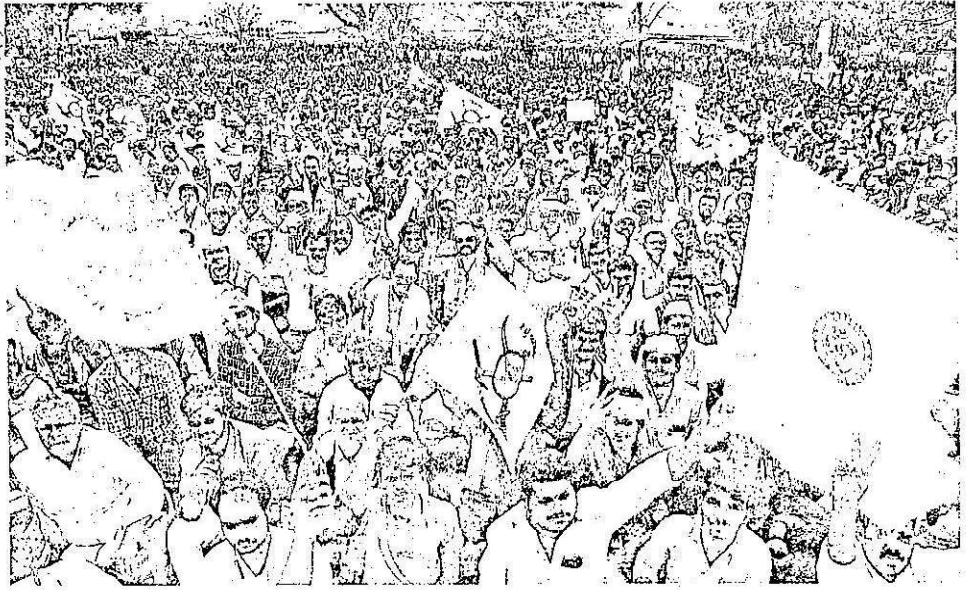
The Panchamasali community's demand for reservation under 2A category in the Other Backward Classes (OBC) list could turn into a vexing issue for Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa as their seer Basava Jayamruthyunjaya Swami on Sunday announced that he would not return to his mutt till the demand was met.

He made the announcement at a rally attended by thousands from the community, a Lingayat-Veerashaiva subsect, in Bengaluru. A march to the Vidhana Soudha, taken out after the rally, saw some tense moments but things were brought under control as the agitators were diverted to Freedom Park.

The seer insisted that the community would not settle for anything less than 2A status. "If the government does not agree to the demand, I will sit on a dharna till March 4. If the demand is not by then, I will start a hunger strike," he said, addressing a massive rally at Palace Grounds.

On Monday, Ministers Murugesu Nirani and C.C. Patil (both belonging to the community), along with other BJP legislators from the community, are scheduled to address a press conference, where the BJP's and the government's stand on the demand is expected to be spelt out.

The rally was the culmination of a padayatra by Basava Jayamruthyunjaya Swami, of Koodala Sangama Panchamasali Peetha, and Vachananda Swami, the Harihara Panchamasali Peetha seer. Speaking at the rally, the latter said that while they were confident of the Chief Minister accepting the demand, they had the "power



(Top) Panchamasali community members participating in a rally in Bengaluru on Sunday; and (above) Basava Jayamruthyunjaya Swami, Vachananda Swami, Vijayanand Kashappanavar, MLA, and Veena V. Kashappanavar at the rally. ■SUDHAKARA JAIN

Yatnal's presence

The Panchamasali rally had several legislators from the community also lending their voice to the demand. Prominent among them was Basanagouda Patil Yatnal, a constant critic of Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa and his family. He accused Mr. Yediyurappa of not showing any interest in providing the community with 2A status and also said that he was "misleading the community".

to secure it" if he did not.

At the rally, Mr. Nirani and Mr. Patil urged the community and seers to temporarily drop the demand, but this cut no ice. They tried to convince the seer to postpone the dharna, this too to no avail. Later, Mr. Nirani, in his speech, vowed to include the Panchamasali community in the 2A category. He said the demand has been there for more than

three decades and the community was socially, educationally, and economically backward.

As the procession taken out after the rally reached the Cauvery theatre junction, hundreds broke the barricade and tried to move forward. However, after the leaders were convinced, the seers agreed to shift their dharna to Freedom Park.

Earlier in the day, Home Minister Basavaraj Bommai said the reservation issue was discussed with Mr. Yediyurappa. The backward classes commission is set to hold a consultation meeting in this regard. As per the Constitution, a recommendation for change in status of reservation has to come from the commission. "We have invited the seer to a meeting," he said.