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## Council elections: Why did JD(S) withdraw candidate?

Leaders have given differing versions of reason for decision

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Contradictory statements from the party president, local leaders and the candidate himself regarding the Janata Dal (S) decision to withdraw from the contest in the Legislative Council election to Karnataka West Graduates constituency and support an Independent candidate has given room for speculation on what transpired behind the scenes.

The sudden announcement, days before the polling on October 28, about the party supporting Independent candidate Basavaraj Gurikar and the different versions of the events from leaders have led to confusion and discontent among party loyalists.

In its official statement, the JD(S) on Wednesday said it was extending support to Mr. Gurikar as their official candidate Shivashankar Kallur had become "neutral" and had not been campaigning. But a different version emerged on Friday, when senior leader and former Mi-

nister Basavaraj Horatti told presspersons that because of family issues, the candidate had been "unable to campaign extensively" and reach out to the electorate, forcing the party to take such a decision. The party had announced Mr. Kallur as candidate a year ago, and interestingly, he had claimed that he had got several thousands of voters enrolled.

Mr. Kallur, who did not speak much at the press conference, apparently broke down during a party meeting held later. "Winning or losing is a different matter. But I never thought of withdrawing. I have been working for a year. However, as the party leaders have decided to support the Independent candidate, I have decided to withdraw," he said at the meeting, according to others who attended.

Mr. Kallur is from Annigeri, part of Naval Gund Assembly constituency, which was represented by JD(S) national general secretary N.H. Konaraddi in the previous Assembly. Mr. Konaraddi

told *The Hindu* that he was not part of the decision-making process and the party high command had taken the decision after consulting leaders from the constituency.

Considering the diminishing party base in the four districts, a few leaders are believed to have suggested that the JD(S) not field candidates for the Council poll. This view, however, was not considered earlier. But after checking the ground situation in the last couple of days, the leadership felt otherwise and the decision was taken to avoid "possible embarrassment" in case the candidate failed to garner a respectable number of votes, sources said.

Following the decision, several JD(S) workers were found campaigning for Mr. Gurikar on Saturday, but those disappointed stayed away. While political observers said such a decision from the JD(S) was not a new phenomenon and there are various precedents, it seems to have dented the party's image in the region.