

Campaigning ends for first phase of Karnataka poll

Public campaigning for 89 Karnataka assembly seats going to the polls in the first phase Saturday ended Thursday evening.

The over 950 candidates, including 17 women, in the fray switched to door-to-door canvassing to woo the voters.

About 17.28 million voters, including 8.41 million women, spread across 11 districts are eligible to vote Saturday.

The Election Commission has set up 18,562 polling booths. Of this, 6,252 have been identified as 'very sensitive' and 6,353 as 'sensitive' -- official jargon to mean there may be violence in these places.

To ensure free and fair polling, the Commission is going in for micro-management for the first time by deploying observers in each polling booth. The micro-observers are drawn from public sector undertakings, banks and insurance companies.

Around 100,000 police personnel will be on duty.

The prominent candidates whose electoral fortunes will be decided Saturday are former Karnataka chief minister H.D. Kumaraswamy from Ramanagaram, his elder brother and former minister H.D. Revanna from Holenarsipur in Hassan district, former deputy chief minister Siddaramaiah from Varuna in Mysore district, Kannada film actor and union Minister of State for Information and Broadcasting M.H. Ambareesh from Srirangapatna in Mandya district and several former Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) ministers.

Both Kumaraswamy and Revanna, sons of former prime minister and Janata Dal-Secular leader H.D. Deve Gowda, are facing women candidates. Mamatha Nichani, eldest daughter of former Karnataka chief minister Ramakrishna Hegde, is taking on Kumaraswamy while S.G. Anupama, daughter-in-law of late Congress Lok Sabha member G. Puttaswamy Gowda, is fighting Revanna.

Siddaramaiah's main opponent is BJP's L. Revanasiddaiah, a retired director general of police of Karnataka.

Campaigning, which has been dull for most of the time because of stringent curbs of the Election Commission, picked up in the last three days as the Congress inducted its president Sonia Gandhi and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. The fielded L.K. Advani, Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi, party president Rajnath Singh, Sushma Swaraj, Bollywood actor Vinod Khanna and 'Saas Bahu' TV soap fame Smriti Irani.

The second phase of polling for 66 seats will take place May 16 and for the remaining 69 seats May 22. The vote count is due May 25.

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