

Campaign ends for second phase polling in Karnataka

Political parties in Karnataka Wednesday ended their campaign for the second phase of polling Friday for 66 assembly seats in 10 districts in central, coastal and northern parts of the state.

Over 11 million people are eligible to vote and decide the fate of 589 candidates, an overwhelming majority of whom are independents.

Polling will take place in over 12,000 booths in the districts of Raichur, Koppal, Uttara Kannada, Bellary, Chitradurga, Davangere, Shimoga, Udupi, Chikmagalur and Dakshina Kannada.

Around 30 percent of the 12,270 booths have been classified as hypersensitive, indicating possibility of violence during polling.

The second phase battle is mainly between the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) as the third major player in Karnataka politics, Janata Dal-Secular (JD-S) headed by former prime minister H. D. Deve Gowda does not have much support in these districts.

JD-S' main base is in the 11 districts which went to polls in the first phase May 10 to elect 89 of the 224 members of the assembly.

The third phase polling is on May 22 for 69 seats in eight districts in north Karnataka. Counting is on May 25.

The second phase is also an all-important one for BJP as its chief ministerial candidate B.S. Yediyurappa is facing a tough battle against former chief minister and state Samajwadi Party president S. Bangarappa in Shikaripura, in Shimoga district, about 330 km from Bangalore.

While Yediyurappa has dominated Shikaripura political scene for over two decades, Bangarappa has lorded over the rest of Shimoga district for over three decades. This is the first time he is contesting from Shikaripura while for Yediyurappa it is the seventh time.

Yediyurappa has won from Shikaripura five times and lost once, in the 1999 polls.

Bangarappa's home constituency is neighbouring Sorab which has now become a battleground among his two sons, the elder one is seeking re-election on Congress ticket and the younger one is fighting as Samajwadi Party candidate.

The other poll battle attracting attention is in the iron-ore rich Bellary district, where both BJP and the Congress have fielded mining magnates for the Bellary city seat.

G. Somashekara Reddy of BJP is taking on Anil Lad of the Congress in a straight fight as JD-S candidate M. Diwakar Babu retired from the contest Monday in support of Lad.

In the neighbouring Davangere district's Harapanahalli constituency, former JD-S deputy chief minister and now Congress nominee M.P. Prakash is taking on BJP's G. Karunakara Reddy, also a mining baron from Bellary. Reddy is now a member of the Lok Sabha.

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