

55 percent voting in second phase in Karnataka

About 55 percent of over 11 million eligible voters exercised their franchise Friday in 66 constituencies in 10 districts of Karnataka in the second phase of elections to the 224-member state assembly.

The Congress and Bharatiya Janata Party are the main players in these districts. However, the Janata Dal-Secular, headed by former Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda, has campaigned hard to break the dominance of these two major parties in these districts.

The second phase is all-important 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, about 330 km from Bangalore.

While Yediyurappa has dominated Shikaripura's 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. It is the seventh time for Yediyurappa.

Yediyurappa has won from Shikaripura five times and lost once - in 1999.

The balloting was peaceful though in several places there were complaints of names missing from the voters list. In a few villages in Chitradurga district in central Karnataka, people stayed away in protest against improper voters-list and lack of basic facilities in the area.

Udupi and Dakshina Kannada districts on the west coast reported over 60 percent voting in spite of a call from the Maoists to boycott the elections, official sources said in Bangalore.

The voting was peaceful in volatile Bellary too. The iron-ore rich district in north Karnataka is usually hit by violence during balloting but this time it was incident-free, police and election officials said.

Voting took place in Raichur, Koppal, Uttara Kannada, Bellary, Chitradurga, Davangere, Shimoga, Udupi, Chikmagalur and Dakshina Kannada districts. There were 590 candidates - an overwhelming majority of them independents.

Udupi reported the highest turnout of around 64 percent voting and Raichur the lowest - about 47 percent.

Bellary, where two mining barons are slugging it out in the polls, recorded around 52 percent polling.

Bellary district, which had witnessed pre-poll violence, was incident free on Friday, election officials said at the state capital here.

'Polling has been peaceful at all places, including at Bellary,' a police officer said. balloting is taking place in central, coastal and parts of north Karnataka.

Police said balloting was peaceful and brisk in the districts of Udupi, Dakshina Kannada and Chikmagalur, which are under the sway of Maoists.

Two persons were killed Thursday night allegedly by Maoists in Udupi district but the incident did not affect polling as additional security has been provided in the area, police said.

There was high drama on poll eve Thursday in Bellary with a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) candidate and former minister B. Sriramulu 'absconding' after allegedly assaulting a Congress worker.

Sriramulu resurfaced Thursday night and presented himself before the Bellary police after obtaining anticipatory bail till May 19.

Bellary Superintendent of Police Amrit Pal, who questioned Sriramulu's friend and mining magnate G. Janardhana Reddy - also a BJP leader - about the alleged assault, was transferred to [Bangalore](#) Thursday night.

Police sources said the transfer was ordered to avoid possible trouble during polling Friday as BJP supporters demonstrated in Bellary Thursday protesting against the filing of cases against Sriramulu and questioning of Janardhana Reddy.

Of the 12,271 booths, 3,754 are considered 'hypersensitive' - meaning they could see violence - and 4,282 'sensitive'.

A total 56,000 security personnel were on duty. Of these, 21,000 were from the state police, 22,000 from the paramilitary forces, 10,000 were Home Guards and 3,000 from the state reserve police.

About 500 personnel were deployed in the Maoist-active districts of Udupi, Shimoga and Chikmagalur.

Security personnel in these areas had been told to shoot at sight if the Maoists tried to disrupt the polls. The leftists had distributed pamphlets in some areas calling for an election boycott.

The second phase battle was as much crucial for the Congress as was the first phase when voting took place for 89 seats in 11 districts May 10 as BJP has established a strong presence in the remaining eight districts which hold balloting for 69 seats in the third phase on May 22.

The eight districts are in north Karnataka and dominated by the political influential Lingayat community to which BJP's chief ministerial candidate Yediyurappa belongs. A sizeable section of Lingayats has drifted towards BJP on the ground that the community's interests were neglected by Congress.

While Bangarappa took on Yediyurappa in Shikaripura, in the neighbouring constituency Sorab his two sons battled it out.

The elder one, Kumar Bangarappa, is seeking re-election on the Congress ticket and the younger one, Madhu Bangarappa, is the Samajwadi Party candidate. Kumar defeated Madhu in 2004. At that time Madhu and his father were in the BJP.

In Bellary 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 fighting BJP's G. Karunakara Reddy, also a mining baron from Bellary. Reddy is now a member of the Lok Sabha.

(© IANS / India eNews)