

'David' Kheny vs 'Goliath' Gowda



Ashok Kheny and Adi Chunchanagiri math seer Sri Balagangadharanatha Swami seen in Mandya in this file photo.

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open war

March 16: Ashok Kheny, the man who is building the Bengaluru-Mysore NICE road, has decided to contest Lok Sabha elections against former prime minister H.D. Deve Gowda, the man who has been the biggest hurdle to Kheny's expressway project. Kheny, who will contest as an independent candidate, is a virtual minnow in the political arena where Gowda is a Machiavellian mass leader.

Kheny will stalk the JD(S) supremo wherever the latter goes — if he stands for elections from Hassan, Kheny will contest in Hassan; if he contests in Mandya, which is being mentioned as a possibility, Kheny will take on him in Mandya.

Speaking to *Deccan Chronicle*, Kheny said that he felt it was time he entered politics to eliminate "bad elements" in the society. "I have been contemplating about entering politics for a long time now. I have been through several ordeals because of the dirty politics people played. I am not afraid of anyone and will contest elections against Deve Gowda from Hassan. If he contests from Mandya I will contest from there. My sister Jyothi Gurudev will contest on the BJP ticket from Hassan," Kheny said.

The NICE man is confident that he can win against Deve Gowda in the Vokkaliga belt, even saying that it would be a "cake-walk" for him.

"I will ask people what Deve Gowda has done for their children as against what he has done for his own children in the last 40 years of his political life. Gowda is what he is today because of people, and the same people will surely empower me so that I can give their children a secure future. Deve Gowda is like a bogeyman in the dark. People are just scared. Once I switch on the light, the bogeyman will disappear", he said.

"I have gained a lot of sup-

not so NICE Seven prime ministers, 5 chief ministers, 9 PWD ministers, 8 chief secretaries, 8 PWD secretaries, 6 secretaries for urban development, 10 secretaries of infrastructure, over 350 IAS officers, more than 100 cabinet meetings and nearly 10,500 signatures from government officials at various levels. Not to forget innumerable court hearings and judgments — that's the list of trials Ashok Kheny, the man in the eye of the storm for over 10 years now, has endured.

port from all quarters. Many have joined me in the fight against corrupt politicians," he added.

Though sources in political circles say that it would be a futile bid, Kheny has been making moves within the Vokkaliga community that might help him make at least a little dent into Gowda's stronghold.

"Last month, Ashok Kheny and the seer of Adi Chunchanagiri math Sri Balagangadharanatha Swami came together in Mandya and Chunchanagiri. The Vokkaliga seer didn't just stop at lauding Kheny for his fight, but also attacked Deve Gowda for his conduct. The seer commands a lot of respect in these two districts and has a big say in the community. This apart, Kheny doesn't have to depend on anyone for money power. So you never know," said a senior politician.

Asked why he was not contesting as a BJP candidate, Kheny said, "I don't want to be identified with any party. I will contest as an independent candidate so that I will not be bound by any party principles that I may not be ready to defer to." Kheny said he was waiting eagerly for Gowda to file his nomination. As soon as he does, Kheny will file his own.

humble farmer



Deve Gowda was born in 1933 in Haradanahalli village, Hassan. A Civil Engineering diploma holder, he joined Congress in 1953 and remained a member till 1962, when he contested Karnataka assembly elections as an independent candidate from Holenarasipur constituency and won. He repeated the feat for five more terms and remained an MLA till 1992. In the 1980s, he served as Minister of Public Works and Irrigation. He resigned from the Cabinet in 1987 to protest insufficient allocation of funds for irrigation. As the Janata Party broke up, he joined hands with Ramakrishna Hegde and started the Janata Dal, of which he became the state president in 1994. In December that year, he became the 14th chief minister of Karnataka. Two years later, with Janata Dal 16 MPs in the state and 43 across the country, Gowda became a consensus choice in the Third Front to become prime minister of the country.

NICE man



Born to a family of the Nizam's noblemen in 1950 in Kheny Ranjoli in Bidar. His great grandfather Murudappa Kheny is said to have been so rich that he lent money to the Nizam himself for salary payouts. The family lost a large chunk of property after the Urban Land Ceiling Act and later to Karanja Dam project. A product of St. Joseph's Boys' High School and KREC, Suratkal, Kheny did a Master's in Management Science and Engineering at Woster Polytechnic, Massachusetts. In 1979, Kheny started SAB Engineering and Constructions Inc. and Railway Systems Design Inc. In 1987, President Ronald Reagan honoured him with the 'Outstanding Businessman of the Year of a Minority Community Award'. In 1995, he came to India with William Feld, the governor of Massachusetts, and clinched the Bangalore-Mysore Infrastructure Corridor project with the H.D. Deve Gowda government.