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Rs 10 crore Congress war chest stolen before Maharashtra polls?

MUMBAI/DELHI: Even in a country where crimes routinely go unreported because of corruption or callousness of police or reluctance of victims, this purported one stands out both because of its enormity and the status of those who suffered.

Top Congress sources said a huge amount of cash, at least Rs 10 crore, which was part of the war chest for Maharashtra poll campaign, was stolen from a flat in Prabhadevi. The matter was brought to the notice of former chief minister Prithviraj Chavan and PCC chief Manikrao Thakre but was not reported to police.

It came to light only after a majority of party candidates, who had been assured “upppr” in the leadership, panicked when they did not get the promised funds. The party could reach funds to only 137 candidates, while the rest were left to fend for themselves.

Former chief minister Prithviraj Chavan did not respond to TOI, but state Congress president Manikrao Thakre denied that there was theft of party funds. “There is no substance in reports of theft or embezzlement of party funds,” Thakre told TOI.

However, Thakre admitted that there was acute resource crunch owing to large number of candidates. “We were to field 174 candidates, but at the last moment, it swelled to 288. Compared to our rivals, our resources were limited,” Thakre said.

A high profile former Congress minister told TOI that the funds were grossly inadequate. “Our information is that the AICC had released adequate funds, but the actual amount given to the candidates was meagre. Two of the ministers of state were given the responsibility to release the funds provided by the AICC,” he said.

When asked about the possibility of theft of funds, the former minister said he too heard that a huge amount was misplaced, but there was no confirmation. “I heard it, but I have no evidence or proof,” he said.

Sources, however, confirmed that the state unit has blamed the funds crunch, a handful which
inspired Sena and were without the support of NCP, on the 'disappearance' of crores of rupees from the flat.

According to sources, the state unit explained that the money was kept in the flat, located close to the party’s Dadar office, which was rented by it for storing propaganda material. The campaign saw it serving as the distribution centre, with candidates—the lucky ones—taking away their share of the poll coffers in their vehicles.

This has not helped mollify the aggrieved candidates, many of whom were bold to enter the fray against tough odds only because they felt that they could match the opponents at least in terms of financial resources, and are sceptical that such a large amount disappeared. They have cited the failure of the leadership to lodge an FIR to justify this disbelief. The aggrieved lot appreciates that the entire amount, as is typical in the case of campaign funds, could not have been accounted for, but feels this should not have kept the state leadership from approaching the police.

"Many people in similar situations, where the colour of money becomes a hindrance, get around the obstacle by reporting a lesser amount as having been stolen. The flat has surveillance cameras and registering an FIR would have at least helped us know the identity of the thief," a source familiar with the developments said.

Even as official spokespersons denied the alleged theft, the suspense as to why the dog did not bark on the fateful night has added to the already-long litany of grievances against the Congress persons. Sources said Chavan, who is blamed also for precipitating the collapse of ties with NCP and be exacerbating the disarray in the party by seeking to buff his image at the cost of his factional rivals, had assured the candidates that they would not be inconvenienced in terms of money.

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Reader’s opinions

Sanjeev Sharma (Nashik)
22 Followers

All those years Congress was in power in centre and in state. We all know how well they stand on the corruption issue. Now they say they did not have fund like the opposition had. What a silly joke.

Sanjeev Sharma (Nashik)
22 Followers

The complaint could not be lodged as the money was black and not declared to the EC.

Jagdish K Vasaiwala (Unknown)
148 Followers

Why not a single leader from Congress party has lodged complaint. Shri Narayan Rane has, in his press conference has said he shall inquire in to the complaint and take action as per law. Congress should also order inquiry in the matter.

Complaint is not lodged, might be because it is unaccounted money.