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Chief Minister

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Cabinet expansion: Seven in, two out?

Speculation is rife on who would be inducted and who shown the door during the reshuffle exercise

KARNATAKA BUREAU
BENGALURU/MYSURU

Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa is likely to induct seven new faces into the Cabinet while dropping two Ministers, sources close to him said. Earlier in the day, the Chief Minister said that expansion will happen either on January 13 or 14, depending on the programme of BJP national president J.P. Nadda.

While three defectors - N. Nagaraju (MTB), R. Shankar and Munirathna - are almost confirmed to join the Cabinet, the party is abuzz with speculation on the names of other party MLAs set to make the cut and the Ministers likely to be dropped.

Senior MLAs Umesh Katti and Arvind Limbavali and MLC C.P. Yogeshwar were expected to be sworn in with 10 defectors as Ministers in February 2020, but were dropped in the eleventh hour, making them leading contenders this time too. While Mr. Katti is likely to make it, Mr. Limbavali is still

Munirathna and N. Nagaraju (MTB), who crossed over to the BJP, are almost confirmed to join the Cabinet.

lobbying hard and the large number of Ministers from Bengaluru already being in the Cabinet is an impediment, sources said.

Mr. Yogeshwar has made a strong pitch arguing the party has only him to counter D.K. Shivakumar from Congress and H.D. Kumaraswamy from JD(S) in Ramanagara district and reminding the party of his role in toppling the coalition government. But there has been intense opposition to Mr. Yogeshwar who lost the Assembly polls in 2018. "Given the defectors are taking away

almost half of the ministerial berths, opportunities for party MLAs are already skewed and making MLCs Ministers is uncalled for," said a senior MLA, who is a ministerial aspirant.

The names of MLAs, including S. Angara from Dakshina Kannada, Halappa Achar from Koppal, Muruges Niranani from Bagalkot, Arvind Bellad from Dharwad, Raju Gowda from Yadgir, and K. Poornima are also doing the rounds.

Meanwhile, senior MLAs G.H. Thippareddy, S.A. Ramdas and M.P. Renukacharya

openly expressed their desire to become Ministers on Monday. MLC A.H. Vishwanath, a defector who has been disqualified from being appointed as a Minister by the Karnataka High Court, also made an indirect bid to be inducted. "Mr. Yediyurappa should not forget who were in the forefront of the efforts to help him become the Chief Minister. He should now reciprocate," he said in Mysuru.

To be dropped?

Sources close to the Chief Minister said he is likely to drop two Ministers from the Cabinet. Presently, there are seven vacancies and the party wants to keep at least two vacancies in case of a political emergency, sources said.

The names of Independent MLA and Excise Minister H. Nagesh, Women and Child Welfare Minister Shashikala Jolle, Mines and Geology Minister C.C. Patil, and Fisheries and Muzrai Minister Kota Srinivasa Poojary were doing the rounds on

this list. "The party needs a senior MLC to become the Chairman of the Council and Mr. Poojary fits the bill," a senior party leader said.

Meanwhile, Mr. Nagesh expressed confidence that the Chief Minister wouldn't drop him from the Cabinet. "I resigned as a Minister in the coalition government and supported BJP. The Chief Minister assured me that I would be a Minister for the full term," he said on Monday.

While there has been intense lobbying both to be inducted and not to be dropped, the Chief Minister is learnt to be keeping his cards close to his chest. "He has only been saying that the list will be finalised and sent by the party high command which he would abide by," a senior party MLA said.

Speaking in Mysuru, Mr. Yediyurappa said besides Mr. Nadda, BJP national general secretary in-charge of party affairs in the State Arun Singh would also be present at the swearing in.