

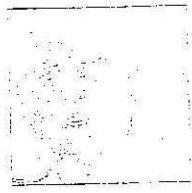


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Cabinet expansion won't help BSY

The much-delayed expansion of the Karnataka ministry has finally taken place, with Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa getting the green signal from the high command after a one-and-a-half-year wait. While the party leadership has surprised many by allowing Yediyurappa to induct most of his favourites, it has also clipped his wings and caused him acute embarrassment by refusing to let him appoint Rajarajeshwari Nagar MLA Muniranna. During the recent by-elections, Yediyurappa had made a public promise that Muniranna, who was among the 17 MLAs who quit the Congress-JD(S) combine to cross over to the BJP, would be made a minister. The chief minister was also forced to drop another defector, Excise Minister H Nagesh, much against his wishes. While humouring Yediyurappa on

the one hand, the party high command has, on the other, sent a clear signal as to who the real boss is.



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The chief minister might have hoped to breathe easy after the expansion, but that looks unlikely. He is now faced with a new set of disgruntled ministerial aspirants, especially long-standing BJP MLAs, who have launched a diatribe against him. Yediyurappa's close confidant and political adviser M P Renukacharya is in New Delhi to complain against him. Another MLA, Basanagonda Patil Yamal has alleged

that some MLAs had blackmailed Yediyurappa with a "secreter CD" to corner ministerial berths, while a few others had paid huge sums of money to be inducted. With such charges being traded by the BJP leaders themselves, and with as many as a dozen MLAs publicly criticising Yediyurappa, the cabinet expansion exercise has come under a cloud. While young leaders with potential have been ignored, the cabinet is lopsided with 40% representation to just two districts, Bengaluru and Belgaum. Political expediency has taken precedence over administrative considerations and issues of diversity and balance: Members of two dominant communities, Lingayats and Volkhaligas, have come to constitute half the ministry.

Rumours of a leadership change have been rife since several months and the cabinet expansion exercise, far from strengthening his hands, has only weakened Yediyurappa's position within the BJP. Some party insiders believe that the high command deliberately gave him a relatively free hand, having anticipated that he would thus precipitate a revolt against himself and could then be eased out without much trouble. Yediyurappa had encountered a similar situation in 2010 when as chief minister he had to face a trust vote after his own MLAs rebelled against him. This, coupled with an adverse court order, had forced him to quit office. The situation now is not much different. Yediyurappa, however, is a seasoned politician who cannot be easily written off. Only time will tell if he will sail or sink this time around.