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13

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After NPP's return, Manipur BJP under pressure again

Regional ally, BJP
MLAs and Cong.
defectors upset

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The return of four National People's Party (NPP) MLAs to the coalition government in Manipur was expected to have settled the political crisis for the BJP.

Instead, it appears to have triggered the start of another crisis for Chief Minister Nongthombam Biren - resentment of another regional ally, the defectors from Congress and some of his own party MLAs. The Chief Minister, however, claimed on Friday that the political storm was over.

Fresh trouble for Mr. Biren began after Assam Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, also the BJP's troubleshooter in the region as convener of the North East Democratic Alliance (NEDA), promised



N. Biren

four ministerial berths to the NPP. They would not be required to take oath of office as their resignations from the Council of Ministers had not been approved.

The assurance was given after former Deputy Chief Minister Y. Joykumar and three other NPP legislators submitted a letter to Governor Najma Heptulla on June 25, expressing their renewed support to the BJP-led coalition.

The NEDA is a BJP-helmed forum of smaller parties in the Northeast that traditionally had the Congress as its

main political rival.

BJP lawmakers angry

The assurance to accommodate all the four NPP legislators as Ministers angered the BJP lawmakers who had been camping at a luxury hotel in Imphal since the political crisis began, as well as those who had defected from the Congress. These MLAs were unhappy with the "interference" of NEDA and others in Manipur politics. The Naga People's Front (NPF) too demanded one more berth and threatened to leave the alliance if ignored. In a House of 60, Manipur can have a maximum of 12 Ministers, including the Chief Minister.

"Our party MLAs, who are feeling left out, are likely to fly to Delhi and meet the central leadership..." a BJP leader said. Mr. Biren, too, said he might leave for Delhi.

I am yet to have a word from our central leadership on the allotment of portfolio.

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