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Sriramulu accepts his new portfolio after meeting CM

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Bengaluru: B Sriramulu, who was upset about losing the health and family welfare portfolio in a minor cabinet reshuffle, agreed to take charge of his new responsibility on Tuesday after chief minister BS Yediyurappa pacified him.

Apart from a pep talk, what worked was Yediyurappa's assurance that some of Sriramulu's demands would be considered in future decisions. Sriramulu is the new social welfare minister, while his cabinet colleague, K Sudhakar, will head both health and medical education.

Stepping out after Tuesday's meeting, which was also attended by Sudhakar, Sriramulu said he had happily accepted the new role and had no qualms. "The chief minister changed my portfolio, so that health and medical education departments can be under one minister. It had nothing to do with my performance. In fact, I asked for the social welfare portfolio last year, but he insisted that I serve as the health minister



PEACE TALKS: BS Yediyurappa met B Sriramulu & K Sudhakar at his residence on Tuesday

because my previous performance in the role, in 2008, was good," Sriramulu said.

The arrangement where he led the health department and Sudhakar medical education was severely tested as the coronavirus pandemic erupted, with complaints of contradictory public-health messages and poor coordination. At one point, Yediyurappa brought in another minister to hold Covid-19 briefings to streamline things. Finally, he decided to put Sudhakar in charge of the two related portfolios.

Sriramulu didn't take the decision well and in a possible signal to Yediyurappa, he stopped using the government-

provided vehicle on Monday. On Tuesday morning, Yediyurappa summoned Sriramulu and Sudhakar to his official residence and explained why he took the step. Sriramulu, according to BJP insiders, argued that Yediyurappa should have waited till the planned cabinet expansion. But the chief minister told him that he followed experts' advice to improve pandemic coordination. As Sudhakar is a medical doctor, it would be easier for him to handle the health portfolio, he reportedly said.

Sriramulu said the reshuffle won't be seen as his failure. "When Sudhakar took over the responsibility of Covid-19 management in Bengaluru, there were 1,000 cases. Now, there are about 5,000 every day. That doesn't mean he has failed," he said.

Sudhakar said Yediyurappa made the change after discussing the issue with him and Sriramulu. "The reason is technical, and not related to performance. Becoming the social welfare minister is a promotion for Sriramulu, and not a step down as some people are trying to portray," he said.