No progress yet on Manipur govt formation

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More than a week after the assembly election results in Manipur, the leadership issue still hangs in the balance even as the state BJP President on Thursday said that the name of the new Chief Minister would be finalised after Holi.

Manipur's caretaker Chief Minister N. Biren Singh and another contender for the top post Thongam Biswajit Singh along with BJP state President Adhikarimayum Sharda Devi on Tuesday rushed to Delhi to discuss the leadership issue with the central leadership of the BJP and returned to Imphal on Thursday.

Sharda Devi while talking to the media here said that after the Holi festival, the name of the BJP legislature party leader would be finalised. "In Delhi, we have discussed the outcome of the recent assembly elections with the central leaders. I have no communication about the next leader of the legislature party," she said.

Both Biren Singh and Biswajit Singh, also separately expressing their anguish over the speculative news in the various media about the new Chief Minister, said that the leadership issue was not discussed in Delhi. "Important Parliament session is going on and the people are in a Holi celebration mood. So after that the Central leaders and observers would take the decision on the leadership at an appropriate time," Biswajit Singh said.

A senior BJP leader told IANS that Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and Union Law and Justice Minister Kiren Rijiju, who were on Monday appointed as central observers, are likely to come to Imphal early next week to hold discussions with other BJP MLAs and leaders to finalise the name of the legislature party leader.

While Biren Singh, a former Congress leader, joined the BJP in October 2016, Biswajit Singh was the second-in-command in the outgoing BJP government after the Chief Minister and has been in the party for longer than Biren Singh.

Biswajit Singh was the lone BJP MLA in Manipur in 2015, two years before the saffron party wrested power in the northeastern state for the first time, defeating the Congress which had governed the state for many years including three consecutive terms (15 years) from 2002 to 2017.

In the February-March assembly elections, Biren Singh won from his traditional Heingang assembly constituency for a record 5th time while Biswajit Singh was elected to the assembly for the fourth time from Thongju seat.

The BJP has a thin majority of 32 MLAs in the 60-member Assembly. The BJP's erstwhile ally the National People's Party, secured seven seats while the Janata Dal (United) won six seats, and the Congress and the Naga People Front bagged five seats each. The Kuki People's Alliance, a newly floated tribal based party, managed two seats while three Independent candidates also got elected to the Assembly.

The NPF, the JD (U) and an Independent member have announced their support to the BJP government. Meghalaya Chief Minister and NPP supremo Conrad K. Sangma had also said that his party is ready to join the BJP-led government in Manipur if the dominant party invited them.

The NPP, the estranged ally of the BJP in Manipur, had fielded 38 candidates and fought the recent Assembly elections separately and won seven seats.

During the run up to the elections the relations between the two parties turned bitter and both accused each other over various issues. Sangma said that the NPP is a partner of the National Democratic Alliance at the Centre and supports the BJP in Arunachal Pradesh and is working together in Meghalaya. The BJP with two MLAs is the partner of the Meghalaya Democratic Alliance (MDA) government led by Sangma, who's NPP is the dominant party in the MDA.