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India's Plans For New State Cause Uproar

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NEW DELHI

India's governing Congress Party faced an angry backlash on Friday against the possibility of dividing one of the country's largest states, Andhra Pradesh, with opponents staging protests in southern India even as advocates for creating other new states began agitating elsewhere in the country.

The crisis has dominated the news in India, as Congress Party leaders in New Delhi agreed late Wednesday to start the process of creating a new state out of the Telangana region of Andhra Pradesh. National leaders made the decision in response to a 10-day "fast unto death" by an advocate for Telangana statehood that had evolved into a national drama.

But even as Telangana supporters rejoiced, opponents of the partition protested in other regions of Andhra Pradesh. Meanwhile, 130 members of the 294-member State Assembly tendered their resignations. In much of the southern and coastal regions of Andhra Pradesh, daily life came to a standstill on Friday as general strikes were called to protest dividing the state.

The situation presented the Congress Party with a predicament of its own making. The party's high command in New Delhi had made the concession to end the hunger strike by K.Chandrasekhar Rao, a regional political figure. Mr. Rao's fast had led to student protests in Hyderabad, the capital of Andhra Pradesh.

But the late-night concession in New Delhi apparently caught Congress Party lawmakers in Andhra Pradesh unawares.

Nallari Kiran Kumar Reddy, speaker of the State Assembly, confirmed that 130 members had resigned, though none of the resignations had been accepted.

In New Delhi, Congress leaders seemed to backpedal slightly. The Indian news media quoted unidentified officials as saying that a "broad consensus" would be necessary for the statehood movement to proceed.

Indian news media reported that advocates for statehood in other regions had started agitating and that some people had begun hunger strikes.

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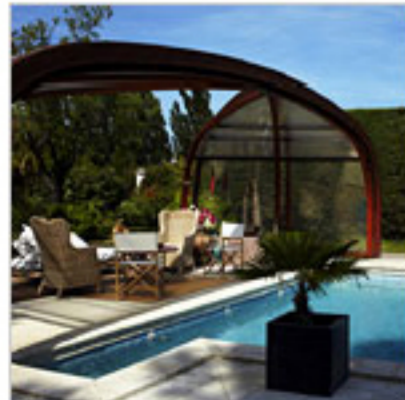
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