

Long wait for a Deputy Speaker for Lok Sabha

Delhi HC has asked Centre to explain stand; Cong. says it has been demanding election to the post

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With the Delhi High Court asking the Union government on Wednesday to explain its stand on a petition that said keeping the post of Deputy Speaker of the Lok Sabha vacant is a violation of Article 93 of the Constitution, the issue is once again in the spotlight.

Petitioner Pawan Reley pointed out that the position had been vacant for the past 830 days.

Constitutional post

The Congress's floor leader in the Lok Sabha, Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury said, "It is a Constitution-mandated position and not a ceremonial one. During each session, the Congress has demanded that the election to the post be held, but our demands have been ignored."

Senior Trinamool Congress leader Derek O'Brien



Vital post: When Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla contracted COVID-19, the absence of a Deputy Speaker was felt. ■PTI

said the longest time that this post had remained vacant was in the 12th Lok Sabha and even then on the 59th sitting of Parliament, election to the post was held.

"Modi-Shah is dismantling every institution, including Parliament. We have been screaming ourselves hoarse. Angry. Sad," Mr. O'Brien said.

Congress Chief Whip in the Lok Sabha Kodikunnil

Suresh said that by convention, this post went to the Opposition. "During the Budget Session of Parliament, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla contracted COVID-19. The panel of chairpersons are not equipped to handle the job," he noted.

As of now, there are nine members who are part of the panel from the BJP, the DMK, the YSR Congress Party, the BJP, the Trinamool Congress

and the Revolutionary Socialist Party.

A Deputy Speaker enjoys the same legislative powers as the Speaker. And in the absence of the Speaker because of death, illness or any other reason, the Deputy Speaker assumes the administrative powers.

First attempt

Soon after the 2019 Lok Sabha election, the government had made some effort to fill the position.

It approached the YSR Congress Party, which turned down the offer since it would have been difficult to carry on a protest against the government for not according special status to Andhra Pradesh while occupying the post.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi and his deputy in the Lok Sabha, Arjun Ram Meghwal, were not available for comment.

Mr. Birla had said that it was for the House to elect a Deputy Speaker and it was not the Speaker's job.

BJD MP Bhartruhari Mahatab, who is a member of the panel of chairpersons, said the Lok Sabha's functioning was not affected by the lack of a Deputy Speaker. "Currently, the Maharashtra Assembly is functioning without an elected Speaker after the resignation of Nana Patole," he said.

As the combined Opposition did not have the strength to elect a member of their choice, the choice fell on the government. The fact that there was no recognised leader of the Opposition also hampered the process, he said.

In 1984, when Rajiv Gandhi came to power with an overwhelming majority, the Deputy Speaker's position was given to the AIADMK, he noted.