

PEGASUS SUB JUDICE, NO NEED FOR PARLIAMENT DEBATE: GOVT.

Relevant for: Indian Economy | Topic: Issues relating to Growth & Development - Public Finance, Taxation & Black Money incl. Government Budgeting

All set: President Ram Nath Kovind, Vice-President Venkaiah Naidu and Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla arriving to attend the Budget session on Monday. R.V. MOORTHY

Amid Opposition demands for a discussion on the Pegasus spyware issue, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi on Monday said the issue is *sub judice* and there need not be a separate discussion on the issue in the Budget session of Parliament.

At an all-party meeting convened virtually by the government, several Opposition leaders suggested that Prime Minister Narendra Modi should give a statement on the issue, if a full-fledged discussion is not possible. There was, however, no assurance forthcoming from Mr. Joshi or any other government representative.

Mr. Joshi, however, said that members can raise any issue while speaking on the Motion of Thanks to the President for his Address to the joint sitting of both Houses. Floor leaders of 25 parties attended the meeting in which the government was represented by Defence Minister and Deputy Leader of the Lok Sabha Rajnath Singh.

The government's stance set the stage for a confrontation between the Opposition and Treasury benches as a number of senior Opposition leaders like Congress's Rajya Sabha member K.C. Venugopal have moved a privilege motion against Information Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw for "misleading the House".

Senior Opposition members, including Congress leader in the Lok Sabha Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, Trinamool Congress leader Sudeep Bandopadhyaya, and DMK's T.R. Baalu, raised the Pegasus issue at the Business Advisory Committee (BAC) of the Lok Sabha and conveyed their intention to raise it on the floor of the House.

However, the BAC, chaired by Speaker Om Birla, allotted 12 hours to discuss the Motion of Thanks to the President and another 12 hours for the discussion on the Budget. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is expected to reply to the Motion of Thanks by next Monday (February 7).

"Leaders of all parties promised that in this important Budget Session, they will cooperate in running Parliament. I also urged them that extensive discussion can be held on President's Address and Budget. We can raise issues of the nation and discussions can be held," Mr. Birla told reporters after the BAC meeting.

Meaningful contribution

Separately, Rajya Sabha Chairman M. Venkaiah Naidu held a virtual meeting of the floor leaders to decide on the business of the House for the next 10 days.

Apart from Zero Hour, Question Hour and Private Members' Business, 23 hours will be available to have two separate discussions on the Motion of Thanks and the Union Budget. There will be no legislative business in the first part of the Budget session that ends on February 11.

Appealing to the floor leaders, Mr. Naidu said, "The Budget session provides guidance to help the national economy recover from the impact of pandemic. I earnestly appeal to all the leaders to enable a productive Budget session."

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