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MPs raise concerns over exemptions in privacy Bill

'Special consideration shouldn't be given to govt. agencies'

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NEW DELHI

Ten members of the 30-member joint parliamentary committee on the Data Protection Bill, 2019, have moved amendments against the provision in the legislation giving power to the Central government to exempt any agency of the government from application of the Act. The members have said this clause makes the entire Act infructuous.

The Bill seeks to provide protection of personal data of individuals and was introduced in December last year in Lok Sabha. It was referred to the joint parliament, headed by BJP MP Mee-nakshi Lekhi, in February this year.

Congress MPs Jairam Ramesh, Manish Tewari, and Gaurav Gogoi, Trinamool

Congress MPs Derek O'Brien and Mahua Moitra, along with Biju Janta Dal MP Bharatuhari Mahtab and Amar Patnaik, BSP MP Ritesh Pandey, Shiv Sena MP Shrikant Eknath Shinde and BJP MP Rajeev Chandrashekar have moved amendments to this contentious Clause 35 of the legislation. *The Hindu* has accessed a copy of the amendments moved by the committee members.

Invoking "sovereignty and integrity of India", "public order", "friendly relations with foreign states" and "security of the state", the legislation gives powers to the Central government to suspend all or any of the provisions of this Act for government agencies.

Five of the MPs - Jairam Ramesh, Derek O'Brien, Ma-

hua Moitra, Ritesh Pandey and Amar Patnaik - want the Act to be suitably amended, vesting the power in Parliament instead of the Central government to approve any such exemption. Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi and Manish Tewari want judicial approval for it.

While moving the amendment, Mr. Ramesh argued, "The powers given to the Central government for exemptions are all-encompassing so as to make the legislation virtually infructuous."

Mr. Tewari while moving his amendment to this clause, submitted that since privacy has been held to be a fundamental right, it, therefore, is subject to the rigors of Article 21 of the Constitution of India and an exception cannot be made for the government.