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Monsoon session could be curtailed to bare necessities

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Bengaluru: With the Covid-19 caseload on the rise in the state and several lawmakers contracting the virus, the government is contemplating curtailing the monsoon session of the legislature, which is slated to commence on Monday.

While preparations are on for the session, authorities say they will assess the situation over the first two days before taking a call on whether to terminate proceedings.

Constitutional obligations demand the gap between two sittings of the house should not be more than six months, but these are extraordinary times. With more than 70 legislators including some ministers testing positive, authorities believe exceptions can be made.

JCMadhhuswamy minister for law and order, have tabled a decision on curtailing the session in the cabinet's meeting. The cabinet also, committee (BAC), that is scheduled to meet during a break in proceedings on Monday.

"This is a sensitive issue and involves not only the health of elected representatives but also people who come in contact with them," said Madhuswamy. "During the BAC meeting, we plan to elicit the opinion of all parties and then decide for how

BIG RISK

“The real concern is that Covid-19 is on the rise with infections spreading to the districts from the worst-hit Bengaluru.

Members of the house who have recovered may still be suffering from the post-Covid symptoms and they need to be taken care of

Dr Giridhara Babu |

EPIDEMIOLOGIST AND MEMBER OF COVID-19 TECHNICAL COMMITTEE

many days the session should be held.”

The Telangana legislature session was abruptly adjourned sine die on Wednesday after an MLA and an MLC tested positive. The West Bengal government held a one-day session on September 10 just to comply with constitutional norms. Officials said Karnataka is also contemplating a similar measure.

"There should be no compromise on health," said legislative assembly speaker Jishu Shrivastava. He urged the government to take a call. "We should be prepared to make a quick decision."

Quorum challenge

While calling for a session is one thing, ensuring a quorum could be a challenge since many legislators may not turn up. About 40% of the 225 MLAs and 75 MLCs are above 60 years — a vulnerable group — and many

are planning to stay away.

What has really spooked lawmakers is the spate of infections over the past couple of days. Home minister Basavaraj Bommai and food and civil supplies minister K Gopalaih tested positive on Wednesday, while several others including chief minister BS Yediyurappa and leader of the opposition Sidaramaiah and a clutch of ministers have only recently recovered from the infection.

The assembly secretariat has organised Covid tests for everyone attending the session including personal staff of MLAs and MLCs, officers and those from the media from Friday. The tests will be held once in two days, but it remains to be seen if infections are kept in check.

"Much depends on the outcome of the first round of tests on Friday and Saturday," said legislative assembly secretary MK M. Lakshmi. "If the situation is not conducive, the session can be wound up after one or two days, but the government to take a call."

The government is under pressure to enact as many as 28 bills including 20 ordinances issued in recent months. "We want a thorough debate on bills and ordinances which are contentious," said former minister and senior Congress member RV Deshpande. "The BS Yediyurappa government should not look to push through bills in a hurry."