

ಪತ್ರಿಕಾ ತುಣುಕುಗಳು
PAPER CLIPPINGS

ಇಲಾಖೆ / ವಿಷಯ : DEPARTMENT / SUBJECT:

Legislature session

ಪತ್ರಿಕೆಯ ಹೆಸರು : NAME OF THE NEWS PAPER:

Times of India

ದಿನಾಂಕ : DATE 20/3/21

Budget session may be cut short due to spike in Covid cases

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20.3.21
Bengaluru: The sharp surge in Covid-19 cases has cast a shadow on the ongoing budget session of the legislature. It may be curtailed if the upward trend continues next week, say authorities.

The session which began on March 4 is scheduled to go on till March 31, but a feared second wave of the pandemic is forcing the government to re-examine the schedule.

"We are closely watching the pandemic situation and the next two days are crucial. I will discuss the issue with parliamentary affairs minister Basavaraj Bommai and others on Monday. We will decide whether to cut short or continue the session," said Vishweshwar Hegde Kageri, assembly speaker.

Health minister K Sudhakar said the rapid rise in positive cases indicates beginning of the second wave, and strict measures to curb spread of the virus are imperative. "We have to accept that the second wave is here to challenge us. Although we are more experienced compared to last year when the pandemic caught us off guard, we will do well to curtail congregation of people in any manner. However, we are yet to discuss cutting short the assembly session," said Sudhakar.

The general debate on the budget initiated by leader of opposition Siddaramaiah is almost over as more than 15 members from both opposition and treasury benches spoke about it after chief minister BS Yediyurappa presented it on March 8. With no major bill lined up for approval, the speaker

SHORT TAKES

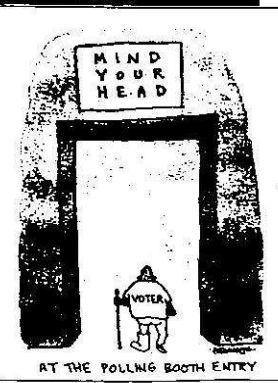
3 suspended for raising slogans against ex-CM

PCC working president Saleem Ahamed on Friday suspended three Congress workers for raising slogans against former CM Siddaramaiah – a warning to cadres that anti-party activities won't be tolerated, including showing disrespect to seniors. The three are Block Congress Committee president Adul Khader Shaheed, Mysuru City District Congress Committee vice-president Anwar Pasha and KPCC member P Raju.

Arun Singh supports mins going to court

head of the BJP core committee meeting scheduled on Saturday to decide bypoll candidates, party national general secretary and Karnataka in-charge Arun Singh defended the six ministers going to court to seek an injunction against any defamatory material being published or aired against them. "The only reason they moved the court is to prevent the conspiracy being played against us," he said.

OFFSIDE



told the House that debates on demands for grants (for departments) can be taken up on Monday and the appropriation bill can be considered for approval soon after the CM replies to the general debate.

"The government is not in the mood to curtail the session. But it's better if they do as it's the question of many lives. A detailed discussion on demands for grants can be taken up in an extended session after completing the mandatory formalities for now," said former speaker and senior Congress MLA KR Rameshkumar.

About 60% of MLAs in the 224-member assembly are aged above 60. Although they have taken the first dose of vaccination, infection can't be ruled

out before the second dose.

The ongoing campaign for assembly elections in five states and bypolls announced in Karnataka is also causing disruption to the session since many ministers, including deputy CMs Ashwath Narayan and Laxman Savadi, and forest minister Aravind Limbavali have been sent on poll assignment by the BJP leadership and other ministers are replying in the House on their behalf.

M. Mahantesh Kavatagimath, government chief whip in the council, said the mood of the upper house too is in favour of curtailing the session. "The Covid scare is to be taken seriously and I think the session may end on or before March 26," he said.