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## Row over J&K Net ban at House panel meet

BJP MPs demand a vote on the subject

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A meeting of the Standing Committee on Information and Technology held on Wednesday turned into a battleground for the BJP and the Congress on the question of whether the committee can discuss the withdrawal of high-speed Internet in Kashmir.

Sources said BJP members Nishikant Dubey, Rajyavardhan Rathore, Sanjay Seth and others insisted that any discussion on the subject would jeopardise national security.

The meeting went on for nearly three hours, with the majority of the time devoted to the tug-of-war between the BJP and the opposition members on the subject.

A day before the meeting, Mr. Dubey tweeted, "Again @ShashiTharoor wants to discuss national security, it's alarming @ombirlakota . Loksabha rule 270 says , that Government may decline to produce a document on the ground that its disclosure would be prejudicial to the safety or interest of the State."

### Previous judgment

The BJP MPs demanded a vote on the subject. Committee chairperson and senior Congress leader Shashi Tharoor overruled them. He said the panel had previously discussed this issue and as per the rules of business, an issue that the committee

was already evaluating need not go through another round of vote.

The main question that the committee posed, as per sources, was about the status of the Internet shutdown. As per the Supreme Court judgment in the Anuradha Bhasin case, Internet services cannot be suspended indefinitely. The shutdown, the court had said, must adhere to the principles of proportionality and necessity.

Following the orders, the Central government, as per a gazette notification on 10<sup>th</sup> November, amended the Telecom Suspension Rules 2017 to insert Rule 2A, which specifies that an Internet shutdown order can remain in operation for a maximum period of 15 days. The 15-day period for Kashmir ended on Tuesday.

### No concrete reply

The committee members asked the Ministry of Home Affairs personnel who deposed on the status of the Internet shutdown whether it had been extended since the expiry of the 15-day period. The Ministry of Home Affairs, the sources said, did not provide any concrete replies.

Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla, who was to depose before the committee, had informed the Chairman and Lok Sabha Speaker about his unavailability due to important meetings.