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RS MPs want more time to speak

Members want uniform allocation for all, more representation for smaller States

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The Rajya Sabha Secretariat is pulling out the rule books and going through the precedents to tackle the demand from members that they be allocated more time in debates.

The secretariat is also looking into a demand for an increase in representation from smaller States.

On November 18, first day of its 250th session, the House hosted a debate on the "Role of Rajya Sabha in Indian polity and way forward" in which 28 members and Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke.

Equal time to speak

A fourth of the members who participated in the debate called for uniform representation for all States for reflecting true federalism since the Upper House is the Council of States. They also demanded that each member be given a minimum of



MANMOHAN SINGH
Former Prime Minister

Nominated members must be allowed more time so that the House can benefit from their special expertise

five minutes to convey views meaningfully.

Currently, members are given time according to the strength of their party in the House.

Which means that Independent or nominated mem-

bers get less time like MPs from smaller parties.

According to sources, the suggestions made by the members has been circulated to all divisions in the Rajya Sabha Secretariat by Secretary-General Desh Deepak Verma.

"Fixing a minimum time limit for each members is doable, but for equal representation for all States, legal opinion has to be taken and will be a long-drawn exercise which can be done only if there is a political will," a senior official of the secretariat said.

The inadequacy of time was raised by former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh among others. He argued that the nominated members be allowed more time so that the House can benefit from their special expertise.

Samajwadi Party leader Ramgopal Yadav demanded that even smaller States should have six members at the very least. Currently, the

northeastern States, barring Assam which has seven seats, have only one seat each. Uttar Pradesh has the highest number of members at 31.

'Wrong benchmark'

The BJD's Prasanna Acharya too argued that population should not be the basis for representation in the Upper House. Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (MDMK) leader Vaiko also supported this view.

The NCP's Praful Patel had cited the example of the U.S. Senate which has two members from each State giving equal space to every State irrespective of their size.

Bodoland People's Front leader Biswajit Daimary demanded 10 minutes each for every member. Many members argued that if a State is represented by a single member, then he/she should be allocated more time to speak.