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## Safety measures in Parl may impede opposition strategy to corner govt

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New Delhi: As Parliament gears up to meet in the shadow of the coronavirus pandemic, the opposition camp is worried that precautionary measures and scattered seating arrangements will seriously impede their strategy to "effectively" hold the BJP government to account. The concern is mainly about distancing. Not only will the members be seated at distance, some of the Lok Sabha MPs will also be placed in Rajya Sabha chamber from where they will connect with the Chair through a screen. "Protests or pressure tactics to force the issue appears out of question," said a member.

In normal sessions, the Opposition parties are bunched together in the two Houses and the members too sit close to each other, which in turn helps them raise

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"noisy protests" or employ "group pressure" to push their demand for discussion on an issue or to intervene in the speeches from treasury benches.

"A session being held in the shadow of an economic disaster, seriously questionable handling of the pandemic and the Chinese aggression would have put the government on the mat. It was set to be the noisiest. But the paradox is that now it may turn out to be the most placid one," a Cong-

ress member said.

Attendance is another question that the opposition is grappling with. There is a concern that some MPs, especially the elderly, may choose to skip the Parliament session out of fear of infection.

For the post-2019 opposition which is anyway very small, abstentions may further shrink their effectiveness. Congress deputy leader in LS Gaurav Gogoi said, "Any concern from the members is understandable. We are witnessing this in the standing committee meetings also." According to him, despite the handicaps, the parties are determined to make the session count.

The AICC sub-group on ordinances passed by the Modi government has submitted its report to the Congress chief and has decided to protest four of them - three on agriculture and one on REI.