

ಕರ್ನಾಟಕ ವಿಧಾನ ಸಭೆ, ಸಂಶೋಧನಾ ಹಾಗೂ ಉಲ್ಲೇಖನಾ ಶಾಖೆ
KARNATAKA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY RESEARCH AND REFERENCE BRANCH

ಪತ್ರಿಕಾ ತುಣುಕುಗಳು
PAPER CLIPPINGS

ಇಲಾಖೆ / ವಿಷಯ : DEPARTMENT / SUBJECT: Central

ಪತ್ರಿಕೆಯ ಹೆಸರು : NAME OF THE NEWS PAPER: The Hindu

ದಿನಾಂಕ : DATE 21/5/2020

Birla orders review of House panels' work

Opposition parties have been pressing for online meetings of the committees

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Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla has initiated an exercise to assess the effectiveness of the Parliamentary Standing Committees, from taking stock of the rate of attendance at their meetings to the list of recommendations that have not been accepted by the government.

This comes in the backdrop of efforts by both the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha secretariats to hold online meetings of the committees, after pressure from the Opposition parties. The Parliament session abruptly ended on March 23. None of the department-related standing committees (DRSCs) have met since then.

The Rajya Sabha secretariat had done a similar analysis. Briefing the House,



Om Birla

Chairman M. Venkaiah Naidu, on March 1, pointed out that a total of 95 MPs did not attend a single meeting of the eight DRSCs that reviewed allocations for 18 Ministries after the presentation of the 2020-21 Union Budget on February 1.

As per sources, Mr Birla had given over a dozen directives after a conclave held on May 12-14. He asked the Se-

cretariat to "follow up intensely" with the members to ensure that they attended meetings of the panels, the sources said.

The Speaker also asked all the committees to give suggestions to improve the rating/ranking of India in global indices.

Govt. orders

In similar orders in March, the government gave blanket instructions to all Ministries to improve Indian's position on various global markers, including the World Press Freedom Index.

The Lok Sabha secretariat, according to the sources, had been asked to prepare a list of cases where a committee's recommendations have not been accepted by the government or where required action is pending

for more than three months. Mr. Birla also sought a compilation of major recommendations of all the committees that have had a significant impact on common citizens.

Mr. Birla and Mr. Naidu have met twice on the issue of resuming the meetings of the committees. So far, at least three panel chairpersons - Shashi Tharoor, Anand Sharma and B. Mahab - have written to the respective presiding officers to hold meetings online. The secretariats had stalled the suggestion, claiming that the confidentiality clause will be violated if a meeting is held via videoconference. However, now both Mr. Birla and Mr. Naidu have acceded to the demand and the National Informatics Centre will provide a safe platform for holding meetings.