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# 'Allow online meetings of House panels'

You can't shut a democracy due to the lockdown, says Congress leader Anand Sharma

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Resumption of domestic flights is not enough to hold meetings of the parliamentary standing committees till Parliament, as an alternative, also arranges for members to join these meetings virtually, Congress leader and Chairman of the Standing Committee on Home Affairs Anand Sharma said.

His comments came even as Parliament is preparing to resume parliamentary panel meetings, which abruptly halted during the extended COVID-19 lockdown. Two presiding officers of Parliament, Rajya Sabha Chairman M. Venkaiah Naidu and Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, met on Saturday to review

the facilities available at the Parliament House to hold meetings while adhering to strict social distancing norms. Parliamentary Affairs Minister Prahlad Joshi, too, was present. Nine rooms in the Parliament House and Annexe building have been identified for the purpose.

## Varied rules

Mr. Sharma said you can't shut the democracy because of the lockdown. "Since the flights have started, we will convene the meeting at the earliest. The point is that there is lack of clarity on the quarantine and other measures for flyers. Therefore I see no reason that we have both the provisions, that



Anand Sharma

those who are able to physically attend and those members who will be unable to travel because of restrictions should be allowed to join virtually," he told *The Hindu*.

States have announced varied quarantine and self-isolation rules for arriving pas-

sengers. Asymptomatic passengers arriving in Delhi will not require quarantine or isolation.

## 23 countries

Overall, Mr. Sharma said, there was still a lot of confusion about air travel due to which a virtual mode is essential. If Parliament of 34 nations can use the virtual method to connect, then why not the Indian Parliament, he asked.

He has, meanwhile, written a fresh letter to the Rajya Sabha Secretariat to convene the meeting of the panel on home affairs at the earliest since the Ministry of Home Affairs is at the nub of regulating the lockdown, movement of migrant workers

and other associated issues.

Chairman of the IT committee, Shashi Tharoor, who was one of the earliest to demand a virtual meeting, told *The Hindu* that he is still awaiting the Speaker's consent.

Chairman of the labour committee B. Mahtab, who has written twice to the Speaker on the issue, said he would be writing again on Tuesday seeking to convene the meeting of the panel at the earliest.

Informed sources said the effort to explore a safe medium to hold meetings virtually was being explored simultaneously. Secretary Generals of the two Houses have been directed to submit a report at the earliest.