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'Quorum not needed for routine panel meetings'

Essential only when they take decisions: RS Secretariat

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NEW DELHI

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Contradicting the Opposition's argument for virtual meetings of standing committees to ensure quorum during deliberations, officials at the Rajya Sabha Secretariat have said that quorum is essential only when the committees take decisions or adopt reports and not during routine deliberations.

Sources said this issue came up at a meeting on Wednesday chaired by Rajya Sabha Chairman M. Venkaiah Naidu. Congress leader and Chairman of the Standing Committee on Science and Technology Jairam Ramesh had written to Mr. Naidu demanding a virtual meeting citing lack of quorum. Quorum for these meetings is generally 11 out of 30 members.

The officials, sources said, told Mr. Naidu that out of 281



Venkaiah Naidu

meetings of the eight department-related Standing Committees that are headed by Rajya Sabha members, 16% were held without quorum: "The committee on Science and Technology & Environment and Forests held 32 meetings during the past three years, of which 22% were without quorum. In respect of the 38 meetings of the committee on Home Affairs, 21% were without quorum," a senior RS official said.

Mr. Ramesh has been heading the committee only since September last year.

He said that during his tenure, 11 meetings were held and quorum was complete in each one of them.

According to sources, eight of the 30 members of the standing committee on Science and Technology which is to deliberate on "Preparedness for COVID-19" have confirmed attendance. Of them, other than Mr. Ramesh himself, one member from the Samajwadi Party and one from Bahujan Samaj Party, the remaining are from the BJP. All the members who have confirmed are either from Delhi or Uttar Pradesh, their constituencies within driving distance to Parliament.

"Point isn't about quorum alone. It's about facilitating those MPs who want to attend and are unable to because of containment zones and quarantine restrictions in their home states," Mr. Ramesh said.