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# 8 regional parties protest over GST dues

Congress not invited as many were 'not comfortable sharing the stage' with principal Opposition party

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Eight regional parties held a joint protest at Parliament House on Thursday demanding that the Centre pay GST dues it owes to the States at the earliest. The principal Opposition party, Congress, which is ruling in four States, was not invited for the protest.

MPs from the Trinamool Congress, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS), Samajwadi Party (SP), Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) and Shiv Sena participated. The move comes ahead of a scheduled debate on the GST in the Rajya Sabha that the government had agreed upon on the insistence of the Opposition parties at an informal meeting chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Wednesday.

At a meeting of the GST Council on August 27, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had acknowledged



**Holding firm:** Members of various parties staging a protest demanding clearance of GST dues, at Parliament House in New Delhi on Thursday.

that the States were likely to face a GST revenue gap of ₹3 lakh crore this year, as the economy may contract due to COVID-19, which she termed an "Act of God". The States were asked to borrow to meet the shortfall. So far, five States have rejected the Centre's suggestion.

TRS Lok Sabha floor leader Nama Nageshwar Rao told *The Hindu* that the Centre owed ₹9,000 crore to the Te-

langana government. "States have suffered a severe financial setback because of the pandemic and at such a time, the Centre's failure to provide even the bare minimum support hurts," Mr. Rao said. He said he had asked for a debate on the issue in the Lok Sabha moving an adjournment motion.

AAP Rajya Sabha member Sanjay Singh said all those who participated in the protest

will have joint meetings in the next few days to scale it up. DMK MP Tiruchi Siva Kumar, however, is only asking for their dues "The government used COVID-19 pandemic as an excuse. Can they evict everything was fine, but why were the GST payments delayed pre-COVID also?"

RJD MP Manoj K. Jha said the government was merely using excuses. "Who are

they fooling? They have more than ₹800 crores build a new Parliament building but no money for the States. What they do realise is that if the State finances fail, then there will be grave implications and the situation could go beyond their control," he said.

## 'Not deliberate'

Asked why the Congress was not invited, sources said many political parties like the TRS and the AAP were not comfortable sharing the stage with it.

Delhi CM and AAP convener Arvind Kejriwal and Telangana CM and TRS leader Chandrashekar Rao were not invited to a Chief Minister meeting organised by Congress president Sonia Gandhi recently. "They do and follow' is no longer acceptable. It is now 'we do and you want, you may follow said Trinamool Rajya Sabha member Derek O'Brien. However, Mr. Jha said the exclusion of the Congress was not deliberate.