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## Govt dragging feet on Cooperation Ministry discussion, says Opp

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AFTER HAVING failed to persuade the government to pick Union Home Ministry among ministries whose functioning would be discussed in Rajya Sabha, the Opposition has accused it of stalling discussion on Ministry of Cooperation, which was offered as a substitute.

Both the ministries are headed by Amit Shah. The DMK's Tiruchi N Siva, who was scheduled to initiate the debate on the Cooperation Ministry in RS, told *The Indian Express* it was the government that had offered to hold a discussion on it "as they had rejected our demand for a debate on the Ministry of Home". "The debate (on the Cooperation Ministry) was listed for Tuesday. The



Opp says govt had refused to discuss Home Ministry, headed by Amit Shah

Chairman's (Jagdeep Dhankhar's) office was also ready for the discussion. But they (the government) deliberately dragged the discussion on the New and Renewable Energy Ministry for eight hours. The House could have slotted time for it today (Wednesday), but did not."

Opposition leaders said this confirms their belief the government is trying to insulate key

ministries from gruelling debates in Parliament.

"First we wanted to discuss the ministries of Home, Defence etc., but we were given the Ministry of Cooperation... Now even the Ministry of Cooperation has been taken off. Why can't the government discuss this?" TMC MP Sagarika Ghose said.

Congress MP Shashi Tharoor said the government was equally reluctant when it came to sensitive ministries in the Lower House too. "They seem completely unwilling to discuss any issue they are uncomfortable with. There are a whole range of issues in relation to Home - J&K, the application of UAPA, functioning of Governors, misuse of investigating agencies," Tharoor said, adding that in the absence of a discussion in Parliament, there was public "venting".

Giving the example of the

Ladakh situation, he said: "We have been asking for a discussion on China border since the incident in Galwan Valley. But the government says it is sensitive."

Senior Congress MP Kodikunnil Suresh said: "In the Lok Sabha, we had demanded discussions on Home, External Affairs, Defence and Education Ministries, but they agreed only on Education."

After the Budget presentation, while the Lok Sabha discusses demands for grants for selected ministries, the Rajya Sabha holds discussion on the working of some of them.

The final word on the ministries selected for debate lies with the government. The Opposition places their demand before the Business Advisory Committee (BAC) of the House concerned, which decides the agenda then for that House, including the ministries to be discussed.

The expenditure demands of the ministries not discussed are guillotined.

Nishikant Dubey, a senior BJP leader and member of Lok Sabha BAC, refuted the Opposition's claim that they had sought a debate on Defence or Home in the Lower House. "This time they wanted to discuss Education and Railways," Dubey said.

Incidentally, the last time the Home Ministry came up for discussion on its functioning was in 2016-17 in the Lok Sabha and 2014-15 in the Rajya Sabha.

Earlier this week, almost the entire Opposition in RS, except YSRCP and BRS, demanded that the Home Ministry be included among the four ministries whose functioning was to be discussed in this Session. Besides the parties in INDIA bloc, the BJD also endorsed the demand.

With the government not

willing for it, the Opposition leaders agreed to the suggestion to discuss the Ministry of Cooperation. "As most of the Opposition parties wanted to take up issues like the misuse of Central investigative agencies and the role and actions of Governors, we gave two representations for the Home Ministry to be discussed in the House. When the government refused, the leaders agreed to have a discussion on the Ministry of Cooperation. It is a ministry held by the Home Minister as well, and he would have had to reply to the debate," said an Opposition leader.

In this session, LS has discussed demands for grants for Ministries of Education, Health and Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying. The RS has taken up debates on Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, and New and Renewable Energy Ministries.



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## Cooperatives reform through digitisation

### Cooperatives reform through digitisation

Hema Yadav

**T**he Union Budget 2024-25 as provided a significant allocation of ₹1.52 lakh crore to agriculture and allied sectors. This underscores the government's commitment to empower farmers with affordable credit, ensuring availability of seeds of high-yielding varieties, natural farming and self-sufficiency in pulses and oilseeds.

The small and marginal farmers who are members of cooperative societies, farmer producer organisations and joint liability groups are to be taken in the fold collectively to meet their need for credit, infrastructure and market.

The collectivisation of producers, resources and farm produce presents an opportunity for an integrated approach to development.

#### ACCESS TO CREDIT

Per Economic Survey 2024, the total credit disbursed to agriculture in 2024 is ₹22.84 lakh crore with ₹13.67 lakh crore allocated to crop loans and ₹9.67 lakh crore to term loans.

The District Central Cooperative Bank (DCCB) have given ₹3.36 lakh crore as loans and advances to the members of the cooperative societies. District Central Cooperative Banks (DCCB) and Primary Agriculture Credit Societies (PACS) have played a significant role in addressing the credit, input and market needs of farmers.

PACS are now set to diversify into dairy, fishery, floriculture, setting up godowns, procurement of foodgrains, fertilizers, seeds, LPG/CNG/Petrol/Diesel distributorship, common service centres, Fair Price Shops (FPS), and Business Correspondent activities.

The computerisation of 63,000 PACS will bring its operation on ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning) based common national software, linking them with NABARD through State Cooperative Banks (StCBs) and DCCBs. This will enable dispensing financial services for short, medium and long-term loans, procurement operations, PDS operations, business planning, warehousing, merchandising, borrowings, and asset management.



**FARM GROWTH.** The digital route

The Budget emphasised the importance of Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) in agriculture. The computerisation of PACS on common national software needs to have a pathway for integration with DPI for enhancing short term and long-term credit.

A unified digital ecosystem enabling digital collaboration with various other government initiatives like DPI, Agri Stack, e-Nam, e-shram portal will help in achieving the goal of digital governance.

A cooperative tech stack comprising

a platform for consolidation of data from various organisations like of credit societies, non-credit societies, cooperative banks, federations, service providers, training institutions, and regulatory bodies with the capability to have interoperability with Agri Tech Stack and others can make a difference.

Digital transformation entails the need for skilled manpower to work as data analysts, data entry operators, database managers, hardware and software maintenance, software developers, cyber security specialists, system administrators, consultants, technical consultants etc.

Skilling the youth and generating employment is one of the nine priorities of the Budget and has to be kept in mind while designing information technology projects.

Training courses, apprenticeships and internships amongst the youth are to be developed for them to take up employment in the cooperative sector.

The writer is Director, Vaikunth Mehta National Institute of Cooperative Management. Views are personal