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Opposition's Speaker nominee: 'If govt gives post of Deputy Speaker or a clear assurance, a contest can be averted'

'The BJP govt has been trying to ride roughshod over the Opposition for 10 years... Had they treated the Opposition with the dignity it deserves, this situation would not have arisen,' says Congress MP K Suresh

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Congress MP Kodikunnil Suresh with Opposition MPs M K Raghavan, Anto Antony, N K Premachandran, A Raja, Deepender Singh Hooda and Manickam Tagore during filing of his nomination as the INDIA bloc candidate for the Lok Sabha Speaker post. (PTI)

With the INDIA bloc nominating the Congress's Kodikunnil Suresh, the MP from Kerala's Mavelikkara, the stage is set for a rare contest for the **Lok Sabha Speaker's post**. The ruling NDA earlier renominated BJP MP Om Birla for Speaker.

In an interview with [The Indian Express](#), Suresh speaks about the Opposition's decision to have a contest for the Speaker's post rather than choose a consensus candidate, and how the move is linked to the Opposition's play for the Deputy Speaker's post. Excerpts:

What prompted you to contest for the post of Lok Sabha Speaker?

We did not want to force a contest. **It is the government's irresponsible attitude that has created this situation. We have been saying for some days that the government should follow convention and give the post of Deputy Speaker to the Opposition. They did not give the post to the Opposition both in 2014 and 2019 on the technical**

ground that there was no Opposition party with the requisite numbers to claim the Leader of Opposition post. But the situation is different now.

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Union Defence Minister [Rajnath Singh](#) spoke to Congress president [Mallikarjun Kharge](#) seeking support for the NDA's Speaker candidate. Kharge clearly told him that the government should follow parliamentary convention and give the Deputy Speaker's post to the Opposition, which is its right. Singh told Kharge that he would get back. But there was no word from the government's side.



Congress MP Rahul Gandhi with party MP Kodikunnil Suresh, who filed nomination as INDIA bloc candidate for the Lok Sabha Speaker post on Tuesday. (PTI Photo)

Congress MP K C Venugopal and the DMK's T R Baalu then met (Rajnath) Singh and reaffirmed the position. All the senior ministers, including [Amit Shah](#) and J P Nadda, were there in that room. But Singh once again sought the support of the Opposition and said the Speaker be elected first and the issue of the Deputy Speaker could be discussed later. That response was not satisfactory for us.

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The government shied away from giving an assurance to the Opposition. In the absence of a clear assurance, we decided to contest the post of Speaker.

Was it a decision taken then and there? Had there been any discussions earlier?

Both Venugopal and Congress communications head Jairam Ramesh had been saying for some days that the government should follow parliamentary convention and give the post of Deputy Speaker to the Opposition. We had thought of contesting for the post in the event of the government not offering the post.

The government may not have given an assurance but it has also not said it will not give the Deputy Speaker post to the Opposition. Why this trust deficit?

Our experience has been like that. What happened in the case of the pro-tem Speaker? I was the senior-most MP. But they did not consider me.

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Look at the track record of this government. They kept the Deputy Speaker post vacant in the 17th Lok Sabha. In 2014, they appointed an MP from one of the friendly allies as the Deputy Speaker. The [BJP](#) government has been trying to ride roughshod over the Opposition for the last 10 years. So it is the government that has forced this contest. Had they treated the Opposition with the dignity it deserves, this situation would not have arisen.

Was the decision to contest taken after consultations with all the INDIA bloc parties? The Trinamool Congress (TMC) is yet to declare its stance.

We were expecting the government would follow parliamentary conventions and waited for a word from the government till around 11 am. The decision to contest was taken once it became clear that the government is not in a mood to give an assurance. We [contacted the TMC](#) then. Its leaders said they will have to speak to (party chief) [Mamata Banerjee](#) on such an issue and asked us to go ahead with filing of the nomination papers. The MPs of the [Samajwadi Party](#) (SP), DMK, NCP (SP) and many parties in the Opposition have signed the nomination papers.