



CURRENT AFFAIRS



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INDIAN PARLIAMENT THE TEMPLE OF DEMOCRACY

WHY IN THE NEWS?

In a breakthrough to end the logjam that had paralysed the Winter Session of Parliament, the government and the Opposition reached a consensus on holding a discussion on the Constitution in both Houses.



COMPOSITION OF INDIAN PARLIAMENT:

1. Lok Sabha (House of the People)

Composition: The Lok Sabha is the lower house of Parliament. It consists of:

545 Members (Maximum, as per the Constitution):

530 Members representing States.

13 Members representing Union Territories.

2 Members from the Anglo-Indian community (though this provision has been removed by the 104th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2019).

Members are directly elected by the people through general elections using a first-past-the-post system.

Term: Lok Sabha members serve for a 5-year term, after which fresh elections are held.

Presiding Officer: The Speaker, elected from among the members.

2. Rajya Sabha (Council of States)

Composition: The Rajya Sabha is the upper house of Parliament. It consists of:

245 Members (Maximum):

233 Members elected by the elected members of the State Legislative Assemblies and by members of the Legislative Assemblies of the Union Territories, through a single transferable vote.

12 Members were nominated by the President for their contributions to the arts, literature, science, and social services.

Term: Members of the Rajya Sabha are elected for a 6-year term. One-third of its members retire every two years, ensuring continuity.

Presiding Officer: The Vice President of India is the ex-officio Chairman of the Rajya Sabha. In his absence, a Deputy Chairman is elected.

3. President of India

Role: The President is the ceremonial head of state and is also an integral part of Parliament. The President is elected indirectly by the members of the Electoral College, consisting of the elected members of both Houses of Parliament and the elected members of the Legislative Assemblies of States and Union Territories.

SESSIONS OF PARLIAMENT:

1. Budget Session

The Budget Session is the longest and most significant of the three, usually held from February to March. It begins with the President's Address and includes the presentation of the Union Budget in the Lok Sabha, followed by debates in both Houses.

Objective: The main goal is to discuss, debate, and approve the Union Budget, which outlines the government's fiscal policies and priorities for the upcoming year.

Activities: During this session, Members of Parliament (MPs) review the budgetary proposals, suggest amendments, and engage in discussions aimed at ensuring transparency and accountability in fund allocation. Other legislative work is also carried out during this time.

2. Monsoon Session

The Monsoon Session typically occurs between July and August, named after the monsoon season. This session primarily focuses on legislation, allowing MPs to introduce new bills, debate existing ones, and vote on their passage.

Objective: In addition to legislative functions, the Monsoon Session addresses various national issues, providing a platform for the government to present its views and for the opposition to raise concerns.

Activities: MPs debate and vote on proposed laws while also discussing national issues, often leading to extensive deliberations on pressing matters.

3. Winter Session

The Winter Session takes place between November and December, marking the final session of the calendar year. This session's primary focus is on reviewing and evaluating the government's policies and initiatives.

Objective: The Winter Session allows MPs to critically assess the government's performance and the effectiveness of its programs.

Activities: New bills are introduced, pending legislation is debated, and government policies are scrutinized through questions, motions, and debates.

4. Special Session

A Special Session is an exceptional event convened by the government outside the regular schedule to address urgent or significant issues. Although not specifically mentioned in the Constitution or Parliamentary rules, special sessions can be called to focus on a particular agenda or address critical national matters.

Objective: Special sessions often deal with specific events or urgent legislative needs, sometimes relating to national emergencies or important constitutional discussions.

Examples: In the past, special sessions have been convened for important events, such as the India-China war in 1962 or the India-Pakistan conflict in 1971.

IMPORTANCE OF PARLIAMENT'S SMOOTH FUNCTIONING:

- 1. Law Making:** Parliament makes laws that affect everyone. When it works smoothly, laws are passed on time to address the country's needs and problems.
- 2. Government Accountability:** Parliament holds the government accountable. MPs can ask questions, raise issues, and demand answers, ensuring the government works transparently and honestly.
- 3. Representation of People:** Parliament is where the people's concerns are voiced. MPs represent different regions, and a functioning Parliament ensures all views are heard and considered in decision-making.
- 4. Policy and Development:** Smooth functioning allows policies for national development—like education, health, and economy—to be discussed, decided, and implemented effectively.
- 5. Crisis Management:** In times of crisis (like war or natural disasters), Parliament can quickly make important decisions, ensuring the country responds well.
- 6. Checks and Balances:** Parliament ensures no branch of government becomes too powerful. It keeps the executive (government) in check, protecting democratic values.
- 7. Public Trust:** When Parliament works well, people trust the system more. This leads to better participation in the democratic process.
- 8. Economic Stability:** Parliament approves the Union Budget and economic policies. Delays can disrupt financial planning, affecting businesses and citizens.

ISSUES WITH PARLIAMENT DISRUPTIONS:

- 1. Controversial and Public Matters:** Disruptions typically occur when discussing sensitive topics like the Farm Bills, which generated intense debates and division among MPs, leading to disorder during proceedings. The contentious nature of the Bills, particularly related to agricultural reforms, sparked widespread protests and opposition, further escalating tensions in Parliament.
- 2. Avoiding Accountability:** The highest number of disruptions take place during Question Hour and Zero Hour when MPs ask questions directly to the government. While these disruptions are often blamed on the opposition, they can also be a strategy by the ruling party to avoid difficult questions or accountability.
- 3. Insufficient Time for Unlisted Issues:** Disruptions are sometimes caused by the lack of sufficient time to discuss matters not officially listed for the day's agenda. MPs may resort to raising these unlisted issues, resulting in disruptions due to the absence of formal platforms to address them.
- 4. Infrequent Use of Disciplinary Actions:** The Speaker of the Lok Sabha and the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha have the authority to maintain order, but they rarely enforce disciplinary actions. This failure to apply consequences for disruptive behaviour encourages MPs to continue such actions without fear of punishment.
- 5. Historical and Systemic Factors:** A 2001 conference in Parliament identified several long-standing factors contributing to disruptions. MPs often feel frustrated by the limited time available to voice their concerns, which leads to dissatisfaction. The government's unresponsive attitude, coupled with the confrontational approach of the ruling party, intensifies these tensions.
- 6. Party Politics:** When sensitive issues arise, the government may hesitate to debate them, prompting the opposition to disrupt parliamentary proceedings in protest. Since opposition members are usually backed by their parties in these actions, the threat of suspension or other disciplinary measures fails to deter them.

IMPACTS OF PARLIAMENT DISRUPTIONS:

- 1. Legislative Backlog:** Ongoing disruptions in Parliament have delayed the passage of critical legislation, hampering effective governance and postponing essential reforms. This impacts public welfare by preventing

the timely implementation of key policies related to health, security, and economic growth.

2. Public Perception: Continuous disruptions have eroded public trust, as citizens expect elected representatives to address national issues. The focus on protests and disorderly conduct suggests that MPs prioritize political games over meaningful legislative work, diminishing faith in Parliament's functionality.

3. Economic Consequences: Delays in vital economic legislation create uncertainty for businesses and investors. The stalling of important reforms can slow growth, hinder job creation, and negatively impact market confidence, further delaying necessary investments in infrastructure and development.

4. Weakening of Democratic Accountability: Frequent disruptions prevent crucial debates and scrutiny, undermining Parliament's role in holding the government accountable. Without these checks, transparency suffers, and the quality of governance declines, leaving citizens dissatisfied with the political process.

5. Erosion of Political Engagement: The persistent chaos in Parliament can lead to voter apathy, as citizens become disillusioned with the political process. When legislative bodies fail to function effectively, public interest in politics wanes, resulting in lower voter turnout and diminished civic engagement, ultimately threatening the health of democracy.

WAY FORWARD:

1. Promote Constructive Dialogue: Both government and opposition should engage in meaningful discussions instead of resorting to protests and disruptions. This would foster cooperation and resolve contentious issues through dialogue, ensuring smoother parliamentary proceedings.

2. Enforce Stronger Disciplinary Measures: The Speaker and Chairman should strictly enforce rules to discourage disruptive behaviour. Effective consequences for unruly conduct would deter MPs from engaging in disorderly actions, helping maintain order and discipline.

3. Allocate Time for Critical Issues: Parliament should ensure adequate time is given to discuss unlisted but significant matters. This will allow MPs to address urgent concerns without resorting to disruptions, ensuring all voices are heard.

4. Strengthen Parliamentary Accountability: Both the ruling party and opposition must be held accountable for their actions in Parliament. Transparent processes to address grievances and criticism will help rebuild trust in parliamentary procedures and enhance responsiveness.

5. Reform Parliamentary Procedures: Efficient scheduling and the use of technology can streamline legislative debates. Reforms that enable timely scrutiny of bills and reduce delays will help Parliament function more effectively.

6. Engage the Public: Rebuilding public trust requires Parliament to prioritize the needs and concerns of citizens. Transparency in decision-making, outreach initiatives, and engaging citizens in the legislative process will strengthen democracy and encourage greater political participation.

CONCLUSION

The smooth functioning of Parliament is crucial for a thriving democracy. Disruptions not only impede legislative progress but also harm the relationship between MPs and the public, undermining trust in democratic institutions. To move forward, Parliament must prioritize dialogue over conflict, enhance accountability mechanisms, and implement reforms that make the legislative process more efficient and transparent. This will enable it to fulfil its role of lawmaking, representing the people, and holding the government accountable, thereby contributing to national development and democratic stability.

PRELIMS QUESTION:

Q. With reference to the powers of the Indian Parliament, consider the following statements:

1. The Parliament of India has the power to amend the Constitution under Article 368, but only with the

approval of the President.

2. The Rajya Sabha can initiate and amend Money Bills.

3. A bill passed by both Houses of Parliament must receive the President's assent to become a law, but the President can withhold assent to any bill.

How many of the above-given statements are correct?

A. Only one

B. Only two

C. All three

D. None

Answer: A

MAINS QUESTION:

Q. Discuss the role of the Rajya Sabha in the Indian parliamentary system. How does its composition and powers differ from those of the Lok Sabha, and what impact does this have on the legislative process in India? (250 words, 15 marks)

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