
Disruption in Parliament

Introduction

- **Disruption** has been frequent in Parliament in recent times.
- Disruption is replacing discussion as the foundation of our legislative functioning.
- According to reports, 16th Lok Sabha (2014-19) lost 16 per cent of its scheduled time to disruptions.

Reasons for lack of discipline and decorum in legislatures.

- **Dissatisfaction in MPs** because of inadequate time for airing their grievances.
- Currently, government business takes priority, and private members discuss their topics post lunch on a Friday.
- Political parties not adhering to parliamentary norms and disciplining their members.
- **Absence of prompt action** against disrupting MPs under the legislature’s rules.

Earlier Rules

- The Lok Sabha has code of conduct for its MPs since 1952.
- The rules required MPs not to interrupt the speech of others, maintain silence and not obstruct proceedings by hissing or by making commentaries during debates.
- These rules were updated in 1989.

- The government decides when Parliament should meet, for how long and plays a significant role in determining what issues the House should discuss.
- Successive governments have shied away from increasing the working days of Parliament.
- When a contentious issue crops up, the government dithers on debating it, leading to Opposition MPs violating the conduct rules and disrupting the proceedings of Parliament.
Accordingly, members should not shout slogans, display placards, tear away documents in protest, play cassettes or tape recorders in the House.

It empowers the Lok Sabha Speaker to suspend MPs obstructing the Houses’ business automatically.

But these rules have not been enforced.

Role of the Government

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Recent Monsoon Session

- There were political disagreement on discussing issues such as the alleged Pegasus phone hacking and farm laws.
- Amid continuing disruptions, Lok Sabha, on an average, took less than 10 minutes to pass a law, and Rajya Sabha passed each law in less than half an hour.
- The aspect of legislative scrutiny continued to weaken in the monsoon session.
- Only 12% of the government’s legal proposals have been sent to committees for scrutiny in the current Lok Sabha.
- With Question House barely operational, ministers neither had to orally answer questions nor face pointed follow-ups on the work done by their ministries.
- While Rajya Sabha was able to deliberate on the pandemic, in the Lok Sabha, no such discussion could occur due to disruptions.
- This is the fourth consecutive session that has been cut short. The pandemic led to the curtailment of two sessions in 2020.
- The monsoon session is yet another reminder that the institution needs to rethink how it deals with disruptions.

Way Forward

- Breaking this pattern of parliamentary disruptions requires a few changes in the functioning of Parliament.
- Legislative body’s role must be strengthened and deepened so that disruption of proceedings ceases to be an option.
- Giving MPs more teeth in questioning the government and empower its committees to become critical stakeholders in the law-making process.
- This will increase the stake that MPs have in the effective functioning of the institution, and disincentivise them from disrupting it.
- A sense of accommodation by the treasury benches and a sense of responsibility by the Opposition benches is the balance essential for the smooth running of Parliament.
- This balance can only be achieved by both sides working together to uphold the dignity of Parliament.
- Enforcement of a code of conduct for MPs and MLAs.
- Increasing the sitting days of legislatures. Our legislature should meet throughout the year, like parliaments of most developed democracies.
- These increased days will not help prevent disruptions if opposition parties don’t have the opportunity to debate and highlight important issues.
- In the United Kingdom, where Parliament meets over 100 days a year, opposition parties get 20 days on which they decide the agenda for discussion in Parliament.
- Canada also has a similar concept of opposition days.
- Evolving a ‘Parliament Disruption Index’.