

## Broken Houses: on the state of Parliament

With the [two Houses of Parliament](#) adjourned *sine die* on April 6, the institutional crisis afflicting the legislature has been framed by both statistics and the solutions being offered by the Treasury and Opposition benches. While each side is stacking the blame at the other's doorstep, neither will emerge unscathed; within the heavily polarised, disruption-at-any-cost strategising inside Parliament there is no sign of wiser counsel to reach across the floor and forge a *via media*. The session began on January 29, the Union Budget was presented on February 1, and the first part concluded on February 9. In the second part of the session, starting March 5, the [productivity of both Houses](#) was less than 10%. Against a long list of pending Bills, just one was passed by both Houses, the Payment of Gratuity (Amendment) Bill 2017. That was it for the Rajya Sabha. The Lok Sabha passed three other bills related to the Budget: the Finance Bill 2018 and two Appropriation Bills. These are money bills that do not need the Rajya Sabha's nod, and with the National Democratic Alliance's numbers in the Lok Sabha, their passage was never going to be in doubt. But it must be an occasion of shame that the Budget was passed in the Lower House without any debate whatsoever. Other numbers deepen the reading of the crisis: both Houses lost more than 120 hours each to disruptions; and the Rajya Sabha took up just five out of 419 listed starred questions (that is, questions that Ministers answer orally, with MPs allowed to ask supplementary questions).

However, the crisis is defined by more than numbers; it is the quality of interaction that is damaging India's democracy. The Lok Sabha Speaker, most glaringly, failed to use the powers at her command to suspend unruly MPs so that a notice for a no-confidence motion could be considered. Certainly, for all the expedient calculations that guided Opposition parties and the government at different points to have the Houses disrupted, eventually neither benefits. Both come across looking effete — the Opposition for failing to keep the government answerable (especially by failing to use Question Hour), and the government for not mustering the grace and conviction to debate a no-trust motion. Some ruling party MPs proposed that their salaries be docked, as if the crisis is nothing but budgetary. A [special session](#) before the monsoon session to finish pending business has been mooted. Although this is bound to raise the question why [Parliament was held to ransom](#) if the Opposition had indeed wanted it to function, it is an idea worth considering seriously by all parties. For one, it provides an opportunity to fix a broken parliamentary calendar and finish unfinished legislative business. For another, even the process of reaching an understanding to hold another session may help in repairing, at least to a degree, the very image of our parliamentarians — who seemed to be unabashed about creating and sustaining an institutional crisis.

Receive the best of The Hindu delivered to your inbox everyday!

Please enter a valid email address.

The revival of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, sans U.S., must buttress the free trade debate

END

Downloaded from [crackIAS.com](#)

© **Zuccess App** by [crackIAS.com](#)