

‘MOST OF RS TIME SPENT ON ISSUES OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE’

Relevant for: Indian Polity | Topic: Parliament - structure, functioning, conduct of business, powers & privileges and issues arising out of these

In discussion: The Rajya Sabha during the Budget Session of Parliament in March 2020. File photo

The Upper House spends 24% of its time in deliberating and passing laws, an analysis by the Rajya Sabha Secretariat has revealed. Most of its functional time is spent on deliberating issues of public importance.

Rajya Sabha Chairman Venkaiah Naidu had directed the Secretariat to carry out this analysis to blunt the Opposition criticism that the Council of the States spends far too much time in government business (legislating) instead of debating the issues raised by them.

Data from 1978 onwards was analysed. During 1978-2018, the RS held 3,022 sittings and transacted business for 13,946 hours as against the available 18,132 hours. This comes to 76.91% productivity while 23.09% of the available time was lost due to disruptions.

The analysis revealed that 40.20% of time is spent in deliberating issues of national importance followed by 32.22% in asking questions and holding the government accountable.

Only 24.05% of its functional time is spent on making laws. And an additional 3.52% is spent on Private members Bills, which are stand alone legislation drafted by individual members. These have rarely translated into laws though.

The time spent on the Government Bills ranged from 10.87% of the time in 2015 to 40.09% in 2002. It has touched a record high of 45.90% during the historic 250th session last year. A record 15 Bills were passed with the House spending 49.08 hours of the session time of 107.05 hours.

Deliberative functions like debating electoral reforms or recent discussion on law and order in parts of Delhi take up the largest chunk of time. The oversight function — which is to hold the government accountable by way of asking questions — calling attention motions and so on takes about 32.22% of time with portion of time reserved for the daily question hour.

Another interesting outcome of the analysis is how the functioning of the Rajya Sabha has severely deteriorated post 2010. During 1978-2018, the actual functional time excluding disruptions ranged from 139 to 580 hours per year. All instances of working for above 500 hours per year were during 1978-1988 with an evident slide afterwards.

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