

AN ALARMING FALL: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON THE STANDARD OF INDIA'S PARLIAMENTARY SESSIONS

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

The refrain that standards of parliamentary functioning have taken a beating in recent years is not without merit. In terms of the time spent on deliberating legislation, the conduct of fruitful debates both in tone and tenor, and in the quality of discussion, the reliance and participation of expert opinion through the agency of standing and parliamentary committees besides other factors, parliamentary sessions have been found to be wanting. Much of this deterioration is a consequence of representatives of political parties utilising Parliament more to showcase political spectacle than to use it as a forum for serious legislative functioning. This practice was given primacy by the Bharatiya Janata Party during the United Progressive Alliance's tenure in government, and has now been copied by the Congress and other parties, who are utilising the Houses more and more as arenas of protest. Disruption has become the norm, with the Opposition seeking to use the debates as a ploy to gain publicity — just as the BJP did earlier — but nonetheless even more damaging to legislative business, with the ruling party choosing to pass Bills without adequate discussion. Other unseemly scenes in Parliament last week — the [furore over a stray usage of a term by Congress leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury](#) (he has apologised), and then [the heckling of Congress president Sonia Gandhi](#) — have also exemplified the drastic fall in standards.

The officials in charge of maintaining decorum and order meanwhile have chosen to take punitive actions in [suspending 27 MPs](#), many for the entire monsoon session just for displaying placards, giving an impression that they would brook no protest from the Opposition, and in turn furthering its hostility towards the ruling party. This has been exacerbated by the ruling party's stance on Opposition requests for a debate on key issues such as price rise. Data from the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha secretariats showed that suspensions of MPs went up three times during the BJP's tenure in power compared to the previous eight years. Clearly, an attempt must be made by parliamentarians to tamp down on this hostility with the onus on doing so being more on the ruling party and its representatives. A revocation of the suspensions and dialogue will go a long way in mending relations. As the farmers' protests that raged on for more than a year showed, the lack of adequate parliamentary process in deliberating legislation of consequence can result in social conflict and a democratic deficit in outcomes. There are enough tools, mechanisms, structures and precedents in India's parliamentary history that can be relied upon by the current set of legislators to bring back useful deliberation. Parliamentarians must realise that the bedrock of a functioning democracy is a flourishing legislature.

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