Enhancing Parliamentary Productivity

Source: IE

Why in News?

Recently, the former **Vice President of India** highlighted increasing **disruptions in Parliament,** emphasising the need for a transition from confrontational politics to constructive debates.

- He urged political parties to restore parliamentary decorum, foster consensus, and prioritise meaningful dialogue to strengthen democracy and rebuild public trust.

What are the Challenges to the Functioning of Parliament in India?

- **Frequent Disruptions of House:**
  - Frequent disruptions, often driven by opposition protests, waste valuable time and resources, undermining Parliament's legislative and representative functions.
    - These led to **key bills being passed without sufficient discussion,** weakening the quality of legislative debate and the effectiveness of parliamentary proceedings.
    - For instance, the **2023 Winter Session of Parliament** faced significant disruptions, including the **suspension of 141 opposition MPs** over protests related to issues such as breaches in parliamentary security.
- **Political Polarization and Adversarial Politics:**
  - **Intensified polarization** between the government and opposition has fostered adversarial politics, stalling legislative progress.
    - This divisive approach undermines consensus-building essential for effective governance.
- **Lack of Participation in Sessions:**
  - During the **17th Lok Sabha (2019–2024)**, the average attendance across sessions was 79%, but participation in debates was limited, with MPs engaging in an average of 45 debates each.
  - Certain sessions saw lower attendance, such as the Budget Session of 2021, which recorded a significant drop to 69%, primarily due to the pandemic's impact
- **Poor Quality of Legislation:**
  - Legislative quality often suffers due to insufficient debate and scrutiny, with bills sometimes passed hastily which undermines clarity and effective implementation.
    - The **Right to Information (Amendment) Bill, 2019**, faced criticism for diluting the autonomy of the Information Commission, reflecting inadequate stakeholder consultation.

- **Lack of Gender Equality:**
  - In the **18th Lok Sabha**, 74 women were elected, constituting **13.6%** of its members.
    - This marks a slight decline from the 17th Lok Sabha, where women represented **14.4%** of the members.
  - Additionally, women account for **14.05% of the Rajya Sabha.**
    - As of April 2024, women make up **26.9%** of lawmakers worldwide.

What Steps Have Been Taken to Ensure Proper Functioning of Parliament?

- **Code of Conduct:** A code of conduct has been established to guide the behavior of Members of Parliament (MPs) and to promote decorum, discourage disruptions, and encourage active participation.
- **Technology Adoption:** The Parliament has embraced technology to enhance its efficiency.
  - **Live streaming of parliamentary proceedings** in India has fostered greater **accountability and decorum** among MPs, as real-time broadcasts increase public scrutiny.
    - This has led to **more disciplined behavior,** with MPs conscious of being observed.
  - Also, online platforms and apps have been developed for **better communication among MPs.**
- **Committee System:** To improve the quality of legislative processes, Parliament utilizes a robust **committee system** to scrutinize bills, policies, and government initiatives before they reach the main House.
  - This ensures that expert opinions are integrated, improving the depth and quality of the legislative output.
- **Disciplinary Actions:**
  - Disruptive behavior by MPs is addressed through disciplinary actions. MPs who engage in unruly conduct can face suspension or expulsion from the House.
    - This measure **ensures accountability and discourages behavior that undermines** the parliamentary process.

How can the Productivity of Parliamentary Functioning in India be Enhanced?

- **Commitment to Constructive Debate**:
  - Political parties should **focus on fostering constructive dialogue** and **move away from obstructionist strategies**.
    - Promoting **consensus-building** is essential, with the government **addressing opposition concerns** and the opposition **offering feasible alternatives**.
    - This approach ensures **more productive discussions**, contributing to the overall effectiveness of parliamentary proceedings.
- **Strengthening the Role of the Presiding Officer**:
  - To improve parliamentary efficiency, the **Speaker/Chairman of the House** should be granted **enhanced powers** to swiftly address disruptions and ensure adherence to parliamentary rules.
  - This would **help maintain decorum** and allow the legislative process to proceed smoothly without unnecessary interruptions.
- **Promoting a Culture of Accountability**:
  - To promote accountability in Parliament, political parties must ensure **MPs actively engage in the legislative process** by monitoring their **attendance,** participation in debates, and **voting records.**
  - **Peer pressure, party discipline**, and **following the examples of exemplary parliamentarians** can further encourage integrity and constructive dialogue, strengthening democratic values.
  - Additionally, the **Right to Information (RTI) Act** can be leveraged to ensure **MPs' actions and records** are accessible to the public, fostering greater accountability.
- **Public Engagement and Transparency**: Increasing **public awareness** about the functioning of Parliament can build trust in the institution.
  - **Enhanced media coverage** and transparency in decision-making will ensure greater accountability.

- **Youth Engagement in Politics**: Encouraging **young leaders** to focus on values such as integrity, transparency, and accountability can bring fresh perspectives to parliamentary proceedings, **promoting ethical conduct** and effective governance.

Conclusion

The Indian Parliament faces challenges like frequent disruptions, low participation, and ineffective legislation. However, reforms such as implementing a code of conduct, leveraging technology, strengthening committee systems, and enforcing disciplinary measures are crucial to addressing these issues. To enhance its democratic function, Parliament must focus on increasing transparency, accountability, and inclusivity. This will ensure it effectively represents the people and produces impactful, meaningful legislation.

__Drishti Mains Question:__

What are the reasons behind frequent disruptions in Parliament? How can procedures be reformed to ensure uninterrupted debates?

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Prelims

Q.Which of the following is/are the exclusive power(s) of Lok Sabha? (2022)

1. To ratify the declaration of Emergency.
2. To pass a motion of no-confidence against the Council of Ministers.
3. To impeach the President of India.

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

(a) 1 and 2
(b) 2 only
(c) 1 and 3
(d) 3 only

Ans: B

Mains

Q. To what extent, in your view, the Parliament is able to ensure accountability of the executive in India? **(2021)**

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