Finance Bill Passed Without Discussion

What is the issue?

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- The Guillotine provision was deployed, to pass all outstanding Demands for Grants in the Budget without "discussion".
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- This has raised questions on the roles and responsibilities of the legislature in a democracy.
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What is the Guillotine provision?

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- In legislative parlance, to “guillotine” means to put together and fast-track the passage of financial business.
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- After the Budget is presented, Parliament goes into recess for about 3 weeks.
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- During this time, the House Standing Committees examine Demands for Grants for various Ministries, and prepare reports.
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- After Parliament reassembles, the Business Advisory Committee (BAC) draws up a schedule for discussions on the Demands for Grants.
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- Given the limited time, the House cannot take up the expenditure demands of all Ministries.
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- The BAC therefore identifies some important Ministries for discussions.
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- These may include Ministries of Home, Defence, External Affairs, Agriculture, Rural Development and Human Resource Development.
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- This is when Members discuss the policies and working of Ministries.
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- Once the House is done with these debates, the Speaker applies the

"guillotine".
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- This is to put to vote at once, all the other outstanding demands for grants that have not been discussed.
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- This usually happens on the last day earmarked for the discussion on the Budget.
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- The purpose is to ensure timely passage of the Finance Bill, marking the completion of the legislative exercise with regard to the Budget.
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How were the Bills passed at present?

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- Owing to the disruption in Parliament due to various issues, all Demands for Grants were "guillotined".
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- The Finance Bill and Appropriation Bill (contained the consolidated Demands for Grants) with a spending plan of Rs 89.25 lakh crore.
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- The Appropriation Bill details plans on how government ministries and departments would spend their money this fiscal.
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- This, along with 21 amendments to the Finance Bill, which contains taxation proposals for 2018-19, was introduced.
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- These were voted on, and passed by voice vote, all within 30 minutes.
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- Procedurally, the government cannot be questioned as it is at the Speaker's discretion to deploy the Guillotine provision.
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What are the concerns?

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- It was an unusual step because there were still 3 weeks left in the Budget Session.
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- There is enough time for the Bills to have undergone "discussions" in the

House.
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- The government is technically right to fast-track legislative business but it seems to have silenced the voice of democracy and unfairly bypassed the convention.
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- The clear majority of the ruling coalition in the Lower House guaranteed that the Bills would pass, without discussion.
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- But beyond legislative majorities, democracy also functioned through debate, dissent, and accountability.
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- One of the basic checks on the power of the executive in a democracy comes from the legislature’s oversight over funds.
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- The refusal to discuss the Finance Bill is symptomatic of the steady decline in the prestige and position of Parliament.
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- It is also a stain in the ideas that the Parliament embodies.
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- Notably, this Budget Session has spent the least time “discussing” the Finance Bill since 2004.
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- The government is registering the largest year-on-year decline in time spent on the Finance Bill.
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What is the way forward?

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- The responsibility for the healthy functioning of Parliament is something that must be shared by every party.
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- The government, despite its electoral dominance and even because of it, must ensure that it encourages debate rather than circumvent it.
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Source: Indian Express

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