

Parliamentary Session Gets Washed Out

What is the issue?

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- The Budget session of the parliament has highlighted the serious challenge that the Indian democracy is currently facing.

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- Significantly, even a “No-Confidence Motion” couldn’t be taken up.

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What were the outcomes of the Budget session?

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- Both houses of the parliament closed on April 6th, with very little business transacted in the entire session that saw vociferous protests.

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- Productivity was less than 10% of the total time, with about 120 hours being lost due to disruptions and just 5 of the 419 starred questions being taken up.

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- Among the long list of pending Bills, “Payment of Gratuity (Amendment) Bill, 2017”, was the only one passed by both houses.

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- While it was just that one bill for the Rajya Sabha, Lok Sabha passed three other budget related bills - Financial Bill 2018, and two appropriation bills.

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- These were money bills that only needed Lok Sabha approval and sailed through only because the BJP alliance has the numbers in the lower house.

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- Notably, the budget was guillotined early (citing protests), which left little scope for substantive debate (in violation of established norms).

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What are the larger implications?

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- Beyond mere numbers, the quality of interactions that took place is what has damaged India's democracy more than anything else.

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- Glaringly, the Lok Sabha Speaker failed to take up a "No-Confidence Motion" (NCM) citing protests, which is a shocking precedent like never before.

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- She could've used her powers to suspend unruly MPs (mostly AIADMK members) to ensure that the all important NCM is taken up.

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- But her intentional inaction has raised doubts on the tacit government support for the AIADMK MPs to sabotage the proceedings to suppress the NCM.

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- While Modi government's majority is not in doubt, a future government might use the same route to cling on to power, which is dangerous for the democracy.

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How does the future look?

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- Some ruling party MPs have proposed to forgo their salaries as gesture of regret for the session's washout - which is noble but misleading.

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- Notably, while the ruling coalition has conveniently blamed the opposition for the crisis, government too has played an important role in the stand-off.

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- A special session before the monsoon session to finish pending business has been mooted, but uncertainty over further sabotage remains.

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- The parliamentary system's fairness has taken a server beating and is need of a strong revival for safeguarding the vibrancy of our democracy.

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Source: The Hindu

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