Role of Parliament in Governance

Why in news?

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The Parliament’s Winter Session has been delayed this year.

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What is the role of Parliament in a democracy?

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- The Constitution provides for the legislature to make laws, scrutinise the functioning of the executive, and hold the executive accountable for its decisions.
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- The Constitution provides for MPs to raise issues of public importance in Parliament, and examine the Government’s response to problems being faced by citizens through - \n
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1. **Debate** - which entails a reply by the concerned minister
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2. **Motion** - which entails a vote
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- Motions are made for discussing important issues such as inflation, corruption, drought, etc. or adjourning the business in the house or to express no confidence in the Government.
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- The Government is collectively responsible to Parliament for its actions.
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- The Parliament may use various methods including, debates on Bills and issues, questioning ministers during Question Hour and in parliamentary committees.
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- Question Hour is one of the forums of holding the Government accountable for its actions.
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- During this hour, MPs pose questions to the ministers regarding the implementation of laws and policies by the Government.
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Who convenes Parliament?

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- The constitution provide for the President to convene the Parliament atleast once in 6 months.
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- Since the President acts on the advice of the central government, the duration of the session is decided by the Government.
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- However, this practice of allowing the Government to convene Parliament differs from those followed in other countries.
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- In a parliamentary democracy, the executive is accountable to Parliament, so there must limited role for the Government in summoning the Legislature.
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What is the frequency?

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- Lok Sabha met for an average of 130 days in a year during the 1950s but these sittings came down to 70 days in the 2000s.
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- This decline indicates that Parliament was able to transact less business compared to previous years.
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- To address this, the National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution has recommended that Lok Sabha should have at least 120 sittings in a year, while Rajya Sabha should have 100.
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- There is a lower rate of functioning Question Hour due to the disruptions, which reduce the number of questions that may be answered orally.
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- While Parliament may sit for extra hours to transact other business, time lost during Question Hour is not made up.
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What best practices can be adopted further?

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- Given the legislature’s role in keeping the executive accountable for its actions, the Parliament should convene itself, so that it can effectively exercise its oversight functions.
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- There can be a mechanism which scrutinizes and answers the questions asked in the Question Hour with required inter-ministerial expertise and broader government policies.
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- UK has the Prime Minister’s Question Time on weekly basis to address the questions posed by MPs. Such measures can be adopted.
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Source: PRS India

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