

We need your support to keep journalism independent.

KNOW MORE

OPINION POLITICS

Fulminations as Fevicol: How Parliamentary Democracy Works



Jawhar Sircar

14/Aug/2024 5 min read



If the ED's depredations had effectively got the INDIA parties to unite before the elections, it were the constant fulminations in the Rajya Sabha that acted as the Fevicol in holding the opposition even closer together.



Opposition MPs stage protest outside parliament complex. Photo: X (Twitter)/@titu_dipankar

Narendra Modi has begun his third term in 2024 with the inglorious distinction of leading the “least productive parliament session” – the just-concluded monsoon-cum-budget session. Conversely, his first session after his second innings in 2019 was proudly declared by the Speaker as the “most productive” one since 1952. Along with the Rajya Sabha, it had passed a record 36 bills – demonstrating, in no uncertain terms, the cocky spirit of that phase.

The second-last session of the 17th Lok Sabha, ie, the winter one, however earned the dubious record of **suspending the largest number of MPs ever in history, 146 in all**, by exercising government’s brute majority.

Latest



EDUCATION

Financial Irregularities at...

Joydeep Sarkar 2 mins read



LABOUR

Notes from Chennai's Ma India's Informal Sector V

Vignesh Karthik K.R. and Dev



TRADE

India Cleared Investment...

The Wire Staff 1 min read



DIPLOMACY

Is Focus on Bangladesh's Hind...

Itty Abraham 5 mins read



POLITICS

Manipur Tapes: Kuki MLAs – 9...

The Wire Staff 4 mins read



SOUTH ASIA

Amid Rising Tensions, India...

The Wire Staff 5 mins read

Generations to come will refer to that bleak winter of 2023, when the three critical criminal laws bills and the Telecommunications bill – that affect one – were passed in indecent and imperious haste, even as the entire opposition had walked out in protest.

In contrast, the first full session in Narendra Modi's third term, recently over, could not pass a single piece of legislation, other than, of course, the mandatory Budget-related Finance and Appropriation Bills. The Lok Sabha did get through one bill, the new Aircrafts Act which is couched in hegemonistic Hindi and is almost unpronounceable.

But it neither came up in or got passed by the Rajya Sabha. But before the regime-enthralled section of the media starts pointing fingers at the bad boys in the opposition, we should place on record the fact that government itself did not introduce more than a couple of bills.

As soon as its **controversial Waqf bill** started triggering high levels of adrenaline and decibels in the Lok Sabha, the treasury benches decided to bring down the temperature and promptly sent it to a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) of both houses.

Sending bills to parliamentary committees for further examination was a commendable practice of the liberal UPA period, which was scorned upon by Modi's government in the past decade. This decision to send the first bill of the 17th Lok Sabha to the JPC is worthy of note. It could signify either the present NDA's decision to play safe rather than belligerent (which appears strange) or was occasioned by its two critical allies drumming sense into the Alliance – as both the states they represent have substantial numbers of minority votes.

One could hear continuous tumult in the Lok Sabha, whenever senior opposition leaders rose to make a point – though the controlled cameras did not, of course, show the treasury benches creating ruckus. The main issues that rocked both houses were the **paper leaks** and corruption in

the NET and NEET examinations; the unfortunate **deaths of UPSC aspirants in the flooded basement** of a coaching centre in Delhi; the unfair and botched-up handling of **Vinesh Phogat's attempt for gold at the Olympics** and the **devastating landslide tragedy at Wayanad**.

While the government's reaction to the 'leaked and sold' exam papers was quite bellicose, it pounced on the UPSC aspirants' deaths to haul its bête noire, the AAP-run Delhi government over coals. Members of the Rajya Sabha were taken aback when the chairman suddenly admitted a petition under rule 267 (to stop all business and discuss a burning issue) and converted it into a short-duration discussion.

Each and every one of the hundreds (maybe thousands) of petition filed by opposition MPs under rule 267 has been routinely and vigorously rejected in the last five years, but this one was placed by the government side.

Of course, one MP, originally elected by an opposition party whose loyalty appears highly suspect, joined in attacking the state government of Delhi. Incidentally, this new member gets a chance to speak almost every day in the house – records will confirm this – while other poor souls who plead with the chair to let them also intervene are ignominiously ignored. This hurts and erodes trust.

The Wayanad tragedy came up for discussion, with charges and counter-charges flying all around – which was painful, as hundreds were trapped and gasping for life. But then, better sense prevailed and the suggestions were more balanced and constructive.

The next issue, however, led to walkout by the whole opposition. Government's clumsy handling of Vinesh Phogat's case is an issue on which the entire nation is charged, especially as everyone knows the regime hates her guts.

The opposition in parliament is paid by the taxpayers to raise such issues. But any attempt to speak on it in the house was met with stern reprimands – as if some crime or undignified act was being committed. This is all on record and historians can easily surmise in the years to come who played what role. After all, propriety is no one's monopoly and we all have to earn our dignity, not just claim or thrust it.

Even so, there were meaningful debates in both houses and the opposition did not have to go to the 'well' in desperation, to agitate. As both sides were better matched in terms of numbers, it became difficult to smother dissenters who had been suspended for protesting too much, in the past.

The management of both houses appear to have conveniently forgotten Arun Jaitley's emphatic statement that disruption of parliament is a legitimate form of protest. Those in power at present had used this strategy until the UPA government fell.

This deliberate amnesia is now accompanied by severe homilies like the "shocking behaviour of the opposition", "the nation is watching" and "do not politicise issues" (what else do politicians do?). It is often deemed reprehensible to even stand up or raise slogans against a government – as many in high positions look up to it, with sheer awe.

The only departure this time was that government did not hustle through

its bills, with no debate, in an opposition-mukt house. And there were far less thunderous Nazi-type hollering “Modeeh! Modeeh!” in parliament.

Notwithstanding constant pronouncements and chiding from the chair – these were so visible on TV – it was quite clear that this government is/ was on its back-foot. The non-NDA parties were substantially numerous this time and vocal in both Houses. The Speaker had a tough time checking the new-found energies and voices of the opposition in the Lok Sabha.

The Budget debates were certainly more lively than what one has seen in the last few years, and were better covered by the regime-controlled Sansad TV as well as by the media outside. Young leaders of the opposition like Rahul Gandhi, Abhishek Bandyoadhyay and Akhilesh Yadav tore the government apart in the Lok Sabha – even as Modi and Amit Shah scowled and fumed. An essential part of the budget exercise is to examine in greater detail the programmes and demand for grants of some four different ministries in each house.

The **opposition's demand** to examine the performance of the three critical ministries, Home, Defence and External Affairs, was, however, not conceded to, by government. More vigorous arm-wrestling appears necessary on this front. Incidentally, the very day I joined in a scathing criticism on the shoddy public works of the Housing ministry and we lashed out at the poor construction of the New Parliament Building, rain water cascaded through the dome above this mediocre 1,500 crore rupee edifice!

The Rajya Sabha was deeply disappointed to see how cavalierly the scheduled debate on the ministry of Cooperation was not held – reportedly, because Amit Shah could not spare time.

The Upper House is usually less combative because of age and experience factors, but its treasury benches appeared more pugnacious. After all, their numbers have depleted with the BJD's departure and were surviving with parties that have no option but to cooperate. A constant source of disappointment and discord was because the Leader of the Opposition (LoP) was often not given the time and opportunity he deserved.

Television viewers have commented that the Rajya Sabha appeared to be more steamrolled than the other house – by constant exhortations and reprimands. But the latter irk members even more, leading to louder protests and boycotts of proceedings.

It is best not to elaborate on this further, beyond the walls of the house, but since the TV has ‘revealed’ the proceedings and these are now discussed in the public domain, we are compelled to complete the picture. We need to fill in what expunged verbatim, strictly controlled cameras and switched-off public address systems cannot convey.

On the August 9 – coincidentally the day on which Gandhiji had declared his Quit India movement (which was boycotted and opposed by the Hindu Right), the LoP was disallowed from speaking. He sought to contest the stated version of a recent reconciliatory meeting in the chairman's room – and when disallowed, many MPs rose to protest.

The chairman directed all to maintain order, which was complied with. Then, an exchange of words between MP Jaya Bachchan and the chair –

where she complained that the tenor of the chair's reproaches were hurtful – was the last straw on the camel's back.

An explosive arose – which is all on record – and so highly incensed was the opposition that it decided, quite spontaneously, to walk out of the house in protest. This reflex gesture of the INDIA parties clearly indicates that they had come closer and all were pained at such rebukes. At an improvised press briefing, the opposition spoke in one voice and Jaya Bachchan demanded an apology from the chairman.

On the television, one could witness the rantings of the treasury benches and the reiteration of the favourite theme that an 'affront' to the temporary government of the day is tantamount to undermining the great nation of ours. We are advised to do soul searching, etc, etc.

Over the last three decades, one has seen the parliamentary affairs ministers and well-accepted leaders of the ruling party (like Pranab Mukherjee, PR Das Munsri, Arun Jaitley, Sushma Swaraj) weave their way among opposition benches to reach out – for an amicable working atmosphere in the house.

Under this regime, this sort of outreach is totally missing and government leaders never miss a chance to heckle, harass and harangue. In any case, as all true opposition members boycotted the house, parliament was adjourned sine die that very evening – three days before the scheduled date.

Paradoxically, it were the sternest of castigatory rulings from the chair and the vituperative attacks of the NDA that have actually cemented stronger bonds between the Congress, the Trinamool Congress, the DMK, Aam Admi Party, the Socialists, the RJD and even the Biju Janata Dal that had finally joined the protests.

If the ED's depredations had effectively got the INDIA parties to unite before the elections, it were the constant fulminations in the Rajya Sabha that acted as the Fevicol in holding the opposition even closer together.

Jawhar Sircar is a Rajya Sabha MP of Trinamool Congress. He was earlier Secretary, Government of India, and CEO of Prasar Bharati.

Howrah: The price (& size) of these hearing aids might surprise you

Hear.com | Sponsored

He is only 2, but a blood disorder has left him unconscious.

Aryan's parents have nothing left after his transplant. Your support matters

Ketto | Sponsored

[Donate Now](#)

Say Goodbye To Mosquitoes With This Revolutionary Solution

Pest off

ProtonF | Sponsored

Belly Fat Removal Without Surgery in Howrah: The Price Might Surprise You

Unseen 2022 Unsold Car Prices in West Bengal (Limited Time)

Unsold cars | search ads | Sponsored

30 photos that really make you think

Articles Stone | Sponsored

End Season Sale: Special Discount

Shop All Type Of Premium Watches At Affordable Prices

Greatwave | Sponsored

Buy Now

The way you make your fist reveals something crucial about your personality.

Kingdom Of Men | Sponsored

Chrissy Metz Is So Skinny Now And She Looks Like A Model

Cleverst | Sponsored

Safety and Reliability

Mitsubishi Electric | Sponsored

Learn More

Suggested Reads



POLITICS

Manipur Tapes: Kuki MLAs – 9 From BJP – Ask for Speedy Probe, CM Biren to Be Debarred From Office



POLITICS

Caste Hindus Return Idol From Tamil Nadu Temple that was Damaged After Dispute With Dalits: Report



POLITICS

Taliban Bans UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Afghanistan

TOPICS

- Politics
- Economy
- World
- Security
- Law
- Science
- Society
- Culture

VOICES

- Opinion
- Editor's Pick
- Analysis

NAVIGATE

- About Us
- Support Us
- Contact Us

Readers like you make The Wire possible

Your contributions can help us provide in-depth reporting on social, political, and economic issues that affect our daily lives.

SUPPORT NOW