

Overall Performance of the Two Houses of Parliament

The Lok Sabha

The Budget Session of the Lok Sabha began on 25 February, 2002 and was adjourned on 22 March, till it met again for a joint sitting with the Rajya Sabha on 26 March. Thereafter, upon completion of the business at the joint Session, Lok Sabha stood adjourned once again to enable the Standing Committee to consider the Demands for Grants. It met again on 15 April and was adjourned sine-die

on 17 May. Thus, even though the total number of days of the Session was 82, the number of actual sittings was only 40 days and calculated in terms of time spent during these sittings, it was 220 hours and 54 minutes.

The performance of the house in the Budget Session is summarised in the following table:

Time Spent on Different Activities of the House (Budget Session of Lok Sabha)			
Items of discussion	Time spent on different Sessions	Percentage of total time of the House	Result of such discussions
Railway Budget	15 hours 3 minutes	6.81%	–
General Budget	22 hours 1 minute	9.97%	–
Budget in respect of a State under President's Rule	18 minutes	0.13%	–
Discussing Government Bills	61 hours 13 minutes	27.70%	House passed 38 bills and 37 bills remained pending.
Discussing Private Members' Bills	4 hours 51 minutes	2.20%	235 Bills were pending.
Question Hour	24 hours 39 minutes	11.16%	Out of 760 starred questions for oral answers, only 60 got answered. 7908 unstarred questions put down in questions list for written answers.
Short Duration Discussions Under Rule 193 on Matters of Urgent Public Importance			
Godhra Killings and Subsequent Violence	8 hours 15 minutes	3.37%	–
Prime minister's Statement on the wake of Supreme Court's Judgement on Ayodhya	4 hours 35 minutes	2.07%	–
Financial Package to Bihar	5 hours 5 minutes	2.30%	–
Terrorist Attack in Jammu	6 hours 29 minutes	2.93%	–
Zero Hour	16 hours 39 minutes	7.54%	–
Motion under Rule 191 on State failure in protecting minorities moved by Mulayam Singh	16 hours 21 minutes	7.40%	Got defeated
President's Address	12 hours 24 minutes	5.62%	–

Sources:

1. Statement showing the work transacted during the 9th Session of 13th Lok Sabha, LS Secretariat Press Release.
2. Statement showing time taken on various kinds of business transacted during the 9th Session of 13th Lok Sabha, LS Secretariat.

Short Duration discussions under Rule 193 on Matters of Urgent Public Importance also took considerable time of the House and there were enough reasons for it. Godhra killings and the subsequent violence in Gujarat took eight hours and 15 minutes of the House. The other issues discussed under Rule 193 were:

- On the statement made by the Prime Minister on the current situation in Ayodhya in the wake of the Supreme Court judgement—4 hours and 35 minutes.
- Financial package for Bihar—5 hours and 5 minutes.
- Terrorist attack on bus passengers and army camp at Kaluchak in Jammu on 15 May, 2002—six hours and 29 minutes; all adding up to 24 hours and 24 minutes or 11.05 per cent of the total time of the House.¹⁵

Zero hour too had its share—a total of 171 issues were raised and 247 members spoke, taking a total

time of 16 hours and 39 minutes during the Session (Annexure IV). Motion under Rule 191 on ‘the failure of the administration in ensuring the security of; the minority community in various parts of the country, specially in Gujarat’, moved by Mulayam Singh Yadav took 16 hours and 21 minutes of the House. Eventually, it was defeated. The President’s Address took 12 hours and 24 minutes.¹⁶

The Monsoon Session of the 13th Lok Sabha began on 18 July and was adjourned sine-die on 12 August. In fact, the Session was scheduled to conclude on 14 August, but as the House could not transact the business in an orderly manner, the Speaker adjourned the House sine-die two days in advance.

Short-duration discussion under Rule 193 on Matters of Urgent Public Importance took considerable time of the House during this Session. The four subjects discussed under Rule 193 were:

Time Spent on Different Activities of the House (Monsoon Session of Lok Sabha)

Items of discussion	Time spent on different Sessions	Percentage of total time of the House	Result of such discussions
Discussing Government Bills	12 hours 7 minutes	13.60%	12 bills could be passed, 1 withdrawn and 43 remained pending.
Discussing Private Members’ Bills	5 hours 3 minutes	5.67%	–
Question Hour	13 hours 18 minutes	14.92%	Out of 420 starred questions, only 46 were answered. 4366 unstarred questions were put down for written answers.
Short Duration Discussions Under Rule 193 on Matters of Urgent Public Importance			
Foreign investment in Print Media	16 hours 46 minutes	18.81%	Out of 1999 notices received under Rule 193, only 6 were admitted and only 4 were discussed. 1 issue was discussed partially
Relief and Rehabilitation of the Riot Victims of Gujarat			–
Disinvestment of Public Sector Undertakings			–
Flood and Drought in various parts of the country	12 hours 37 minutes	14.16%	–

15. Resume of work done by Lok Sabha (Thirteenth Lok Sabha, Tenth Session, 2002) Lok Sabha Secretariat.

16. Statement showing time taken for various kinds of business transacted during the Ninth Session of thirteenth Lok Sabha, Lok Sabha Secretariat (Annexure IV).

Contd... Time Spent on Different Activities of the House (Monsoon Session of Lok Sabha)

Items of discussion	Time spent on different Sessions	Percentage of total time of the House	Result of such discussions
Calling Attention Notices	3 hours 6 minutes	3.47%	–
Zero Hour	8 hours 25 minutes	9.44%	–
Motion under Rules 191 and 342	7 hours 18 minutes	8.19 %	408 notices received, 80 motions admitted, but no motion could be discussed because of repeated adjournments

Notes: Total number of days of the Session was 31 Number of actual sittings was 21 days Total Time period was 89 hours 7 minutes

Sources:

1. Statement showing the work transacted during the 10th Session of 13th Lok Sabha, LS Secretariat Press Release.
2. Resume of work done by Lok Sabha (13th Lok Sabha— 10th Session, 2002), Lok Sabha Secretariat.

- The situation arising out of the decision of the government to allow foreign investment in print media.
- Relief and rehabilitation of the riot victims in Gujarat.
- Disinvestment of public sector undertakings.
- Floods and drought in various parts of the country. The last issue took the longest time, the discussion spanning 12 hours and 37 minutes. All the four subjects together took 29 hours and 23 minutes, constituting 32.97 per cent of the total time. Out of 1999 notices received under Rule 193, six had been admitted, but four were discussed. One issue was partly discussed.

Calling Attention notices took 3 hours and 6 minutes and pertained to four subjects:

- Problems being faced by raw silk producers in the country.
- Problems faced by jute growers in the country and the steps taken by the government to

overcome it.

- Problems of coffee growers in Karnataka due to a sharp slump in the price of coffee in the international market.
- Recent disinvestment in IPCL, Paradeep Phosphate and Maruti Udyog and the reported proposal to disinvest BPCL, HPCL, etc.

Under Rules 191 and 342, 408 notices were received out of which 80 Motions had been admitted. However, no motion was discussed during the Session due to repeated adjournments caused by disruptions and unruly behaviour in the House. An adjournment motion on the massacre in Kasimpur, Jammu on 13 July, 2002 and the failure of the Union Government to combat cross-border terrorism was admitted, discussed and negated. The Adjournment Motion took 7 hours and 18 minutes or 8.19 per cent of the total time. Matters of Urgent Public Importance raised after the Question Hour or during the Zero Hour took 8 hours and 25 minutes or 9.44 per cent of the total time.¹⁷

Time Spent on Different Activities of the House (Winter Session of Lok Sabha)

Items of discussion	Time spent on different Sessions	Result of such discussions
General and Railway budget	4 hours 43 minutes	
Discussing Government Bills	–	17 Bills introduced and 37 got passed, 23 remained pending.
Adjournment Motions	14 hours 24 minutes	One was the drought situations, and the other was on failure of government in curbing communal elements in country.
Question Hour	–	Of 461 starred questions 76 answered orally. Out of 5089 unstarred questions.
Short Duration Discussions Under Rule 193 on Matters of Urgent Public Importance.		
Problems being faced by farmers in the country	6 hours 10 minutes	–
Internal security	4 hours 12 minutes	–
Disinvestment of Public Sector Undertakings	5 hours 7 minutes	–
Political Developments in UP	4 hours 33 minutes	–
Problems faced by sugarcane growers in the country	2 hours 3 minutes	–
Calling Attention Notices	5 hours 12 minutes	–
Zero Hour	15 hours 6 minutes	236 submissions

Notes: Number of actual sittings were for 21 days.
Total Time period 160 hours.

Sources:

1. Business Transacted during 11th Session (XIII Lok Sabha, LS Secretariat, Press Release.
2. Time spent on various kinds of business in Lok Sabha— An Analysis, LS Secretariat, June 2002.

The Rajya Sabha

The business transacted by the Rajya Sabha in 2002 is more or less similar in pattern with the Lok Sabha. The first two sessions were marked with interruptions while the winter session saw volumes of business being transacted.

The Budget Session had 38 sittings spread over 160 hours and saw the introduction of six new Bills. It was during this Session that the House unanimously moved a resolution urging the government intervene effectively in the communal violence in Gujarat

Time Spent on Different Activities of the House (Budget Session of Rajya Sabha)

Items of discussion	Time spent on different Sessions	Result of such discussions
Railway Budget General Budget	8 hours	759 starred and 5519 unstarred questions were asked. Of these 84 Starred questions were answered and 7 statements by ministries laid on the table.
Government Legislative business	46 hours	6 new Bills introduced, 3 withdrawn, 36 passed out of which, 11 were Finance Bills, 2 were Repealing Bills, 3 new Bills and 20 Amending Bills
Workings of the Ministries of Labour External Affairs and Agriculture	12 hours	–
Discussing persistent communal violence in Gujarat.	18 hours	Resolution moved unanimously urging Central Government to intervene effectively under Article 355 of the Constitution to protect the lives and properties of the citizens and also provide effective relief and rehabilitation to the victims of communal violence.
Short Duration Discussions Under Rule 193 on Matters of Urgent Public Importance		
Continuing Violence in Gujarat	15 hours	
Drinking Water crisis in the Country	–	–
Role of Governors in discharging their constitutional responsibilities in the context of UP crisis	–	–
Terrorist Attack in Jammu & Kashmir	–	–
Time lost due to interruptions	50 hours	–

Notes: 38 sittings spread over 160 hours.

Source: Valedictory Remarks, 195th Session, Rajya Sabha

There were 130 Special Mentions on Matters of Public Importance. There were Short Duration Discussions on four subjects, lasting 15 hours. They were:

- Continuing violence in Gujarat and the resultant loss of a large number of lives and property.
- Drinking water crisis in the country.
- Role of governors in discharging their constitutional responsibilities in the formation of governments in the light of events in Uttar Pradesh
- Dastardly attack by terrorists on civilians and army personnel and their family members in Jammu & Kashmir on 14 May, 2002, leading to the death of a large number of persons including women and children.

Three important matters, among them: (a) the situation in Ayodhya, (b) purchase of coffins at a higher price during the Kargil war and (c) alleged supply of election material to the finance minister in 1999 by the chairman of a company which is under CBI investigation, were raised with the permission of the chair, the discussions lasting over two hours. There was one Calling Attention on the securities scam in cooperative banks and the failure of the central government regulators.¹⁸

The Monsoon Session began on 15 July, 2002 and was scheduled to terminate on 14 August, 2002. However, due to continuous interruptions over the issue of irregularities in the allotment of petrol

18. Valedictory Remarks, 195th Session, Rajya Sabha.

pumps, the House was adjourned sine-die on 12 August. During this time, the House sat for 21 sittings spread over 80 hours (63 hours and 32 minutes excluding recess intervals). The total time lost or wasted on interruptions and disruptions was over 35 hours.

During the Session, government legislative business was transacted for over 14 hours. Five new Bills were introduced and 1 Bill was withdrawn, 12 were passed including the one on Prevention of Money Laundering Bill, 1000. Seven reports of various Parliamentary Committees were presented or laid on the Table of the House during this period.¹⁹

- Steps taken by the government to intervene in the state of Gujarat under Article 355 of the Constitution.
- Situation arising out of the deterioration in the finances of the states and unsustainable debt burden of such states, leading to severe curtailment of development activities.
- Situation in Jammu & Kashmir with special reference to the massacre in Kasim Nagar on 13 July, 2002.

There were 109 Special Mentions on Matters of Public Importance. There was one Calling Attention on the issues arising out of the decision of the VSNL

Time Spent on Different Activities of the House (Monsoon Rajya Sabha)

Items of discussion	Time spent on different Sessions	Result of such discussions
Government Legislative business	14 hours	5 new Bills introduced, 1 withdrawn, 12 passed
Question Hour	27 hours 32 minutes	420 starred questions and 2800 unstarred questions were asked and answered.
Short Duration Discussions Under Rule 193 on Matters of Urgent Public Importance.		
Drought in various parts of the country	20 hours	109 special mention of matters of public importance
Steps taken by government to intervene in Gujarat under Art. 355	–	–
Deterioration of State finances	–	–
Massacre in Karim Nagar of Jammu & Kashmir	–	–
Calling Attention	2 hours	On the decision of the VSNL Board to invest Rs 12 billion in Tata Tele Services
Time lost due to recess intervals	16 hours 28 minutes	–

Notes: 21 sittings spread over 80 hours (63 hours and 32 minutes excluding recess intervals).

Source: Valedictory Remarks, 196th Session, Rajya Sabha.

During the Session 420 Starred questions and 2800 Unstarred questions were admitted and answered. Of these 28 starred questions were orally answered and 2 statements by ministers correcting the answers to questions were made/laid.

There were Short Duration Discussions on four subjects, lasting over 20 hours. They were:

- Drought situation in many parts of the country.

Board to invest Rs 12 billion in Tata Tele Services — lasting about two hours.²⁰

The Winter Session was by far the most productive. The Session lasted 23 days, in the course of which, 35 Bills were passed, including those on electoral reforms, conservation of biodiversity, consumer welfare, development of North East, Welfare of SC and ST and financial sector reforms.

19. Valedictory Remarks, 196th Session, Rajya Sabha.

20. Ibid.

There were five Calling Attention Motions and 130 Special Mentions and Short Duration Discussions on important issues such as the drought in various parts of the country, political developments in Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh, disinvestment of PSUs, mid-year review of the economy and international development concerning West Asia.²¹

There were two important announcements in the Winter Session of Parliament: One, pertaining to the relief package announced by the Prime Minister for farmers reeling under severe drought conditions; two, the assurance given by the finance minister to pensioners, widows and senior citizens, promising a scheme that would protect their incomes from the falling interest rates.

Legislative Business

Parliament carries out its law-making duty year after year to ensure that the laws keep pace with the times. The year 2002 was no exception and a total 86 bills were passed by Parliament during the year 2002 (34 in the Budget Session, ten in the Monsoon Session and 42 in the Winter Session. (See Annexure IX for details)

In the Winter Session, like the earlier two Sessions, Parliamentarians wasted only 3 hours and 15 minutes on account of interruptions. The Session began on 18 November and adjourned sine-die on December 20. During the 23 days of sitting, lasting 160 hours, the House passed 37 government Bills and introduced 17 of them. Since 43 Bills were pending at the end of the Monsoon Session, 23 Bills must be pending by the end of the Winter Session.

Two Adjournment Motions were discussed during the Session—the longest lasting 7 hours and 53 minutes was on the unprecedented drought situation in the country and lack of comprehensive policy initiative on the part of the Union Government to combat the situation. The other Adjournment Motion was on the failure of the government to curb communal elements in the country, especially in Gujarat, from creating communal tension and disharmony among various sections of the Society (6 hours and 31 minutes).²²

The General Budget and the Railway Budget (supplementary demands for grants) together took 4

hours and 43 minutes. Parliamentarians devoted longer hours to discuss under Rule 193, the problems being faced by farmers in the country (6 hours and 10 minutes). The discussion on disinvestment of public sector undertakings took 5 hours and 7 minutes. The other issues that were discussed under Rule 193 were internal security (4 hours and 12 minutes), recent political developments in Uttar Pradesh (4 hours and 33 minutes) and problems being faced by sugarcane growers in the country (2 hours and 3 minutes).

The Zero hour, with 236 submissions took 15 hours and 6 minutes. The Question Hours during the Session saw a total number of 461 Starred questions being admitted. Those answered orally were 76. A total of 5089 Unstarred Questions were admitted during the Session. Seven issues, taking up a total time of 5 hours and 12 minutes came up for discussion under Calling Attention Motion.²³

To understand the significance of the Winter Session, one has to look at the data on the number of hours squandered by MPs in interruptions/adjournments due to disorderly behaviour during the previous years. In the Tenth Lok Sabha for example,²⁴ 279 hours and 25 minutes were thus wasted, out of a total of 2807 hours and 17 minutes of Parliament time, spanning 16 Lok Sabha Sessions, thereby taking the percentage of time wasted to 9.95 per cent. (Annexure VIII).

During the Eleventh Lok Sabha, out of 858 hours

21. Valedictory Remarks, 197th Session, Rajya Sabha.

22. Business transacted during Eleventh Session (XIII Lok Sabha), Press Release, Lok Sabha Secretariat.

23. Ibid.

24. Time spent on various kinds of business in Lok Sabha— an Analysis, Lok Sabha Secretariat, June 2002.

and 58 minutes spent during six LS Sessions, 45 hours and 20 minutes were squandered away by MPs, taking the percentage of time wasted to 5.28 per cent.²⁵ During the Twelfth Lok Sabha, 68 hours and 37 minutes or 10.66 per cent was wasted out 643 hours and 32 minutes of Parliament time last-

ing four Sessions of the 12th Lok Sabha. The percentage however doubled to 22.40 per cent during the first eight Sessions of the Thirteenth Lok Sabha, wherein, out of a total of 1287 hours and six minutes, the MPs wasted 288 hours and 40 minutes. (Annexure I)

The Lok Sabha Secretariat, in a press release said the five-week Session did not see any of the Members entering the Well of the House and neither was the House adjourned for any reason. It also claimed that in the last 30 years, no Winter Session had ever transacted the amount of business that this particular Winter Session has been able to achieve.

Working of Parliament: An Analysis

Question Hour

Questions are instruments of accountability. Questions facilitate an MP to pull up the government of the day for its failures—be it with reference to promises made or governance, or implementation of laws. The Question Hour thus gives the MP an opportunity to take an issue forward or pin down the government. However, if questions are to serve the true purpose for which they are meant, they must be specific and precise. But that requires some basic homework and unfortunately not all MPs are willing to put in that effort. Questions then become monotonous and meaningless and the answers more so. The year 2002 was no different.

Some of the negative aspects one sees during the Question Hour are:

- Repetitive questions borne out of laziness and lack of seriousness,
- asking questions merely for the sake of statistics,
- wasting Parliament time by asking for information which is already available in printed publications and
- not doing adequate homework and thereby allowing the government to get away with shoddy replies.

An MP can informally ask the government or the minister concerned for information, reports, publi-

cations, etc. and get them without much effort. Similarly, the Parliament Library at the disposal of the MP provides an excellent selection of books, periodicals and journals besides all government publications, annual reports, etc. There are helpful librarians ever willing to assist the MP in finding the required information, books and reports. Given these facilities, when an MP asks a question, it should go beyond information that is already available in reports and government publications.

But a perusal of some of the questions show how Parliament time is wasted by questions that should not have been asked at all in the first place. In the Monsoon Session, for example, there were monotonous questions on the National Health Policy, when the policy document is freely available. In almost all Sessions, there would be a few questions on Infant Mortality Rate and Maternal Healthcare—answers to these could easily be found in annual reports. The year 2002 was no exception. Many of these questions elicit lengthy answers from the government. Such questions do not serve any purpose, except of course to help the MP tell his/her constituents that he/she asked so many questions. If one were to look at the kind of meaningless questions that are asked, it seems that statistics rather than public interest has prompted them. Many MPs produce periodical report cards before their

25. Ibid.