

By Sidharth Mishra



Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his team of floor managers in both the Houses must have gone for recess in the on-going Budget session of Parliament with a certain sense of satisfaction. The Parliament was adjourned on March 20, for a month, due to the stipulated mid-session recess; it will be reconvened again on April 21. Those who believe in parliamentary democracy must have noted with contentment that both the Houses; despite the Opposition's repeated attempts to create a logjam even on feeble grounds, worked to the capacity.

According to the data released by PRS, a research body working in the field of legislative activity, the current Lok Sabha session recorded a whopping productivity of

122 percent; whereas in Rajya Sabha, where the government, despite being in the minority, logged a productivity percentage of 107. The government went into the session with nine ordinances to be passed by both the houses. These included key legislation on insurance, coal, mines, textile undertakings, citizenship act, land acquisition, Andhra Pradesh reorganisation and motor vehicles acts.

Unable to manage proceedings on the floor during the winter session; the government in order to remain functional was forced to take the Ordinance route, which invited caution from President Pranab Mukherjee. During a public address, Mukherjee had said, "To meet certain exigencies and under compelling circumstances, the framers of the Constitution deemed it necessary to confer limited legislative power upon the Executive by way of promulgation of ordinances when the Legislature is not in session and circumstances justified immediate legislation. The framers also deemed it necessary to impose certain restrictions on this extraordinary legislative power by constitutionally mandating replacement of such ordinances

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within a time frame by the legislators.”

“When the Parliament fails in discharging its law making role or enacts law without discussion, it breaches the trust reposed in it by the people... Parliament must not yield its space for legislating and policy-making to mass mobilisation and street protests...” Mukherjee had further cautioned.

Taking the cue from Mukherjee’s cautionary note and show of reluctance at signing ordinances, the government took inordinate care to have better floor management this session; this was evident in the visibly greater presence of Prime Minister in the House and his reprimand to party members known to go off the tangent during their speeches, often inviting unnecessary controversies.

At the end of the first half of the Budget session the government managed to pass almost all of its ordinances with the sole exception being the controversial-’Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement (Amendment) Bill, 2015’. We would come back to the issue of the bill later but first due accolades must be given to the treasury benches for reaching out to the regional parties like the Trinamool Congress and the Biju Janata Dal and taking them on-board for the passage of the coal bill and the mines and minerals bill.

With the toughening of their respective positions on the land bill by both the sides; and the Congress president Sonia Gandhi smelling an opportunity to revive her party by opposing the bill, the government has an onerous task at hand to manage the numbers in Rajya Sabha. The chances of managing another chasm in the opposition ranks on this issue looks remote as both the Trinamool Congress and the Biju Janata Dal have “fought for the farmers” in pursuance of politics in their respective states. The Prime Minister on his part is working overtime, reaching out to various farmer organizations to create pressure on the political parties for the passage of the bill.

However, for the government to keep its promise of “acche din” (good days) for the people, it will have to work harder on the unresolved points on its reforms agenda. On the conclusion of the first half of the Budget session Finance Minister Arun Jaitley said, “Three important legislations— insurance, mining and the coal blocks allocation law — has been cleared by Parliament. Therefore we will now see a lot of investment coming into the insurance sector. There will now be a completely non-discretionary and non-discriminatory allocation of coal and mining blocks. The industry will get the minerals and coal that it needs. And the mine and coal bearing states will get the revenue that they need.”

The finance minister also asserted that the government will continue its reform impetus and take up the Constitution Amendment Bill on goods and services tax (GST) in the second half of the Budget session saying, “I hope that the Constitution Amendment Bill that was cleared by the standing committee, will be considered by Parliament in the second part of the Budget session. We may need to have another meeting for further consultations on these issues because a large number of state finance ministers are busy with their own Budget sessions.”

Well said Finance Minister Jaitley; but the effects of the reforms have to percolate down to ground zero and not just remain a part of the statistics. Despite the government figures claiming that inflation are at an all-time low, the price of vegetables and cereals are hitting an all-time high. The other day even this reporter felt the pinch when asked to pull out a 50 rupee note for a couple of brinjals. Blaming it on unseasonal rains or whatever will not do, the government has to find ways and means to overcome retail inflation. The charge of the Centre being pro-rich can only be countered if the Modi-government manages to bring some relief to the poor and the

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middle-class. It has not happened till now. The challenge is to make it happen at the earliest.

The author is Consulting Editor, [Millennium Post](#)