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Mains Practice Questions

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Q. Parliament is a platform to deliberate, discuss and decide and not for disruptions in a democracy. Comment.

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Approach

- Illustrate the scale of disruption in parliament .
- Describe the deliberative role of Parliament and opposition in Parliamentary democracy.
- Consequences of disruptions in Parliament
- Conclusion / Way forward.

Answer

Introduction

There is a sharp rise in the time lost in disruptions and in the cost of running the Parliament. The 11th Lok Sabha lost 5 per cent of its time to disruptions. This rose to over 10 per cent in the 12th Lok Sabha and 22.40 per cent in the 13th Lok Sabha. In the 14th and 15th Lok Sabha, at least 30 per cent of the time has been lost to disruptions in session after session.

Body

In representative parliamentary democracy, parliament is at the centre of democratic processes. Parliament has critical role in governance process which becomes causality because of increasing disruptions in Parliament. Parliament in general has deliberative role, specifically it performs critical functions such as:

- **Debating Function:** The Parliament is the highest forum of debate in the country. Which makes it possible for the Parliament to analyse any or every issue that faces the nation. These discussions constitute the heart of democratic decision making.
- **Legislative Function:** The Parliament enacts legislations for the country. No law can be passed without due procedure established in Constitution where Parliament's powers have been enumerated.
- **Enforcing accountability of executive:** The most vital function of the Parliament is to ensure that the executive does not overstep its authority and remains responsible to the people who have elected them.
- **Financial Function:** The Financial powers of the Parliament, involve grant of resources to the government to implement its programmes. In democracy, legislature has financial control over the government through budgetary process. If the Government of India proposes to introduce any new tax, it has to get the approval of the Lok Sabha.

- **Representation:** Parliament represents the divergent views of members from different regional, social, economic, religious groups of different parts of the country.

Role of Opposition in a parliamentary system of government:

- Opposition has a significant role to play in form of constructive criticism of the policies of the government and to provide an alternative government. However, there are increasing instances where opposition- irrespective of party in power at centre – have used parliament as site of protest and not for debate.
- Opposition tends to disrupt parliament, whenever government did not accept opposition demand for Joint Parliamentary Committee to enquire certain alleged instances of corruption by government e.g. in 2G spectrum issue and recently Rafale deal issue saw noisy scenes because of demands of opposition .

Other reasons for disruptions:

- **Fragmented Polity:** Indian electoral system has been increasingly fragmented since 1970's with emergence of regional parties. This is also because of diversity in India. Even though it has been positive for deepening of democracy by making Indian democracy more representative, but there are certain unintended consequences of rise in regional parties. The regional issues find themselves in form of protests within the parliament leading to disruptions.
- Quality of representatives in parliament is another reason why the parliamentary conventions as developed in west are not followed in India. According to a report by the Association for Democratic Reforms and National Election Watch, at least 34 percent of Lok Sabha MPs have self-declared criminal cases against them. About 22 percent of these face serious criminal charges. Such membership is likely to have reduced commitment to democratic conventions.

Consequences of disruptions in Parliament

- **Accountability of government** is not duly enforced. The deliberative function of parliament is to receive authoritative information from government, enforcing accountability of government and ensures democratic control over executive. However, disruptions curtail scope for deliberations and discussions.
- **Discussions withheld:** Parliament represents the divergent views of members but disruptions tend to reduce these functions as there is reduced scope to raise issues of public concerns through parliamentary procedures like Questions, Motions, resolutions etc.
- **Erosion of credibility:** Disruptions also contribute to undermining the respect representatives ought to have in the eyes of the citizens. Disruptions in India are caused by the coordinated action of a party to which the disrupting members belong. This in long term is likely to erode the trust of people in democratic system.

- **Financial Loss:** With frequent disruptions Parliament the public exchequer lose crores of rupees as each hour of functioning of the House costs Rs25 lakh. There have been several estimates on the cost to the exchequer due to the disruptions. These vary from a few crore rupees to a few hundred crore rupees.
- **Resort to Ordinances:** Disruptions tends to Increase in resorting to ordinance as tool of law making using disruptions as pretext for not following due legislative procedure

Conclusion

- In any Parliamentary democracy, Parliament influences and is influenced by public opinion. It is an institution where ideas are discussed and political differences are ironed out through debate and consensus building.
- If disruptions in Parliament continue then people would slowly disengage with the institution of Parliament risking the relevance of Parliament.
- There is need to address this issue through electoral reforms to ensure better elected representatives as well as developing understanding among political parties through formal and informal channels.
- Increasing political awareness of citizenry about the role of parliament and how disruption tends to hurt public interest would help stem the frequent parliamentary disruptions.
- Parliamentary standing committees which have representations from multiple parties are effective instruments to resolve inter political party differences. Similarly, there are informal channels where party in government and opposition parties can engage to resolve issues and avoid disruptions in public interest.