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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

Putting People at the Heart of Parliament's Performance: The Case for Procedural Reform

 **HINDUSTAN TIMES**

9 August 2026 ·

POLITY**GS2**

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GS2



INTERVIEW ANGLE

"If Parliament sits for half the days it used to and the public still cannot easily track what their MP actually said or did inside the House, whose failure is that: the institution's, the media's, or the citizen's?"

 Every fact web-verified against primary sources

THE LIFT LINE

Parliament's name comes from the French for "to speak." Somewhere between 1952 and now, it started speaking for fewer days, to fewer committees, about fewer bills that anyone outside the House will ever read.

WHY THIS EDITORIAL MATTERS FOR YOUR EXAM

Most polity answers on parliamentary reform default to the seat-expansion debate tied to [delimitation](#). This editorial supplies a sharper, more testable argument: the more urgent problem is procedural decay inside the Parliament India already has, declining sitting days, a weak committee system, a functionally dead private-members channel, and thin public engagement, each of which is fixable without a constitutional amendment. A strong answer distinguishes structural reform (seats, delimitation) from procedural reform (sitting days, committees, public access), since UPSC tests both separately.

GS Paper 2: Parliament and State legislatures, structure, functioning, conduct of business, powers and privileges and issues arising out of these; Indian Constitution, comparison of the Indian constitutional scheme with that of other countries.

CONCEPT	MEANING	WHY IT IS TESTABLE
Sitting-day decline	Fall from roughly 135 days/year in the First Lok Sabha to a much lower average in the 18th Lok Sabha	Quantifiable, comparative, directly examinable trend
Opposition Hour	Reserved daily or session time where the Opposition sets the agenda, modelled on the UK (20 days/year) and Canada (22 days/year)	Comparative constitutional practice, a UPSC-favoured question type
Private members' bill	A bill introduced by a non-minister MP, distinct from a government bill	Frequently tested; near-total non-discussion rate is a key exam fact
Consultative committees	Informal committees linking MPs with ministries, mandated at least four meetings a year	Tests knowledge of committee categories beyond standing/select committees
International IDEA	Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance; India chairs it for 2026	Current-affairs institutional fact with a direct polity tie-in

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Sitting-day decline is the starting fact. The **First Lok Sabha (1952-57)** averaged roughly **135 sitting days a year**, a frequency **BR Ambedkar**, during the Constituent Assembly debates, expected future legislatures to sustain given how much deliberative work he anticipated they would need to do. The **18th Lok Sabha (June 2024 onward)** has sat far less frequently, a decline consistent with a decades-long trend documented across successive Lok Sabhas by legislative research bodies, compressing the time available for **Question Hour**, **Zero Hour** and substantive debate regardless of how many seats the House eventually holds.

This time scarcity compounds two other structural weaknesses. First, the **committee system: Consultative Committees** are required to meet at least **four times a year** but frequently do not meet even once; **Department-Related Parliamentary Standing Committees** have short tenures that disrupt continuity of scrutiny; and committees lack dedicated sectoral expert advisers beyond the staff the Parliament secretariat provides. Second, **private members' business**: only a low single-digit percentage of private member bills introduced are ever taken up for discussion, they are scheduled for **alternate Friday afternoons** when attendance is typically low, and **no private member's bill has become law since 1970**.

Against this backdrop, India assumed the **chairship of International IDEA (Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance) for 2026**, formally taking over from Switzerland at a Council of Member States meeting in Stockholm in December 2025, with Chief Election Commissioner **Gyanesh Kumar** chairing on India's behalf around the theme "Democracy for an inclusive, peaceful, resilient and sustainable world." Lok Sabha Speaker **Om Birla** has separately emphasised the importance of public participation in parliamentary democracy, even as Parliament's own website lacks a dedicated citizen engagement channel comparable to emerging state-level practices in **Kerala** and **Tamil Nadu**.

THE ANALYSIS

- 1. The seat-expansion debate is a distraction from the procedural problem.** Discussions on increasing Lok Sabha seats, prompted by delimitation concerns, implicitly assume more members will mean more effective deliberation. But if the existing members already cannot get adequate floor time, committee support or research staff, adding more members without procedural reform risks diluting per-member deliberative time further rather than improving it.
- 2. Sitting-day scarcity has a compounding effect on everything else.** Fewer sitting days mean less Question Hour and Zero Hour time, fewer opportunities for focused interventions of the kind BJP MP Tejasvi Surya and Congress MP Shashi Tharoor both flagged during an April 2026 Lok Sabha discussion on seat numbers, and greater pressure to compress legislative business, which in turn increases the temptation to pass bills with minimal scrutiny.
- 3. The committee system's weakness is a scrutiny failure, not just an attendance failure.** A Consultative Committee that never meets provides zero oversight value regardless of its formal [mandate](#). The absence of dedicated sectoral experts means even committees that do meet often lack the technical capacity to scrutinise complex legislation, a gap the UK's Select Committee system addresses through specialist advisers.
- 4. Private members' business has effectively ceased to function as a legislative channel.** A mechanism designed to let individual MPs drive policy independent of the government has become symbolic: Friday-afternoon scheduling guarantees low attendance, and the near-zero enactment rate since 1970 means MPs have little incentive to invest serious effort in bills that will almost certainly never be discussed, let alone passed.
- 5. Public engagement infrastructure lags India's own stated ambitions.** Holding the International IDEA chairship for 2026 gives India a platform-level commitment to democratic participation, yet the gap between that international role and the absence of a basic citizen engagement portal on Parliament's own website is a visible inconsistency that undercuts India's credibility on the very theme it has chosen to champion internationally.
- 6. The counter-argument is structural, not merely cynical.** Procedural reform proposals of this kind have circulated for decades without adoption, which suggests the constraint is not awareness but incentive: floor confrontation and constituency service are what get MPs re-elected, while quiet committee work and private members' bills rarely translate into visible political credit. Reform that does not change this incentive structure is unlikely to be sustained even if adopted.

DATA AND INSTITUTIONS VAULT

PRELIMS-GRADE FACTS:

First Lok Sabha (1952-57): averaged roughly 135 sitting days a year

18th Lok Sabha: constituted June 2024; sitting-day average well below the First Lok Sabha's benchmark

UK Parliament: allocates 20 Opposition Days a year

Canada's House of Commons: allocates 22 allotted (Opposition) days a year

Consultative Committees: mandated to meet at least four times a year

Private members' bills: a low single-digit percentage discussed; no bill enacted since 1970

International IDEA: India holds the 2026 chairship of the Council of Member States, taking over from Switzerland (Stockholm, December 2025), represented by CEC Gyanesh Kumar

Global Parliamentary Reports: published jointly by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and UNDP

WATCH THE TRAP: DO NOT CONFLATE THE SEAT-EXPANSION/DELIMITATION DEBATE WITH THE PROCEDURAL REFORM DEBATE THIS EDITORIAL MAKES. THEY ARE RELATED BUT ANALYTICALLY DISTINCT: ONE IS ABOUT HOW MANY MEMBERS PARLIAMENT HAS, THE OTHER IS ABOUT HOW EFFECTIVELY THE MEMBERS IT ALREADY HAS CAN DELIBERATE, SCRUTINISE AND ENGAGE CITIZENS.

THE DEBATE

Argument FOR treating procedural reform as urgent and separable from seat expansion.

Adding seats without fixing sitting-day frequency, committee functioning or private members' access risks compounding dysfunction at greater scale. Procedural reforms proposed here, a fixed sitting calendar, an Opposition Hour, mandatory committee scrutiny with sectoral experts, do not require a constitutional amendment and could be implemented through changes to Rules of Procedure and Standing Orders alone.

Argument AGAINST expecting procedural reform without incentive reform. Similar proposals, more sitting days, stronger committees, better private members' access, have been made repeatedly for decades by MPs across parties without sustained adoption. This pattern suggests the binding constraint is not a lack of good proposals but a lack of political incentive: confrontational floor behaviour and constituency-level "getting things done" are what voters reward, and quiet procedural competence is not.

Balanced verdict. Both readings can be true together: the specific reforms proposed are sound and implementable, and their durability depends on whether they are paired with changes that make procedural performance electorally visible, whether through independent MP performance tracking, media coverage of committee work, or citizen engagement tools that let voters actually see what their representatives do inside committee rooms, not just on the floor.

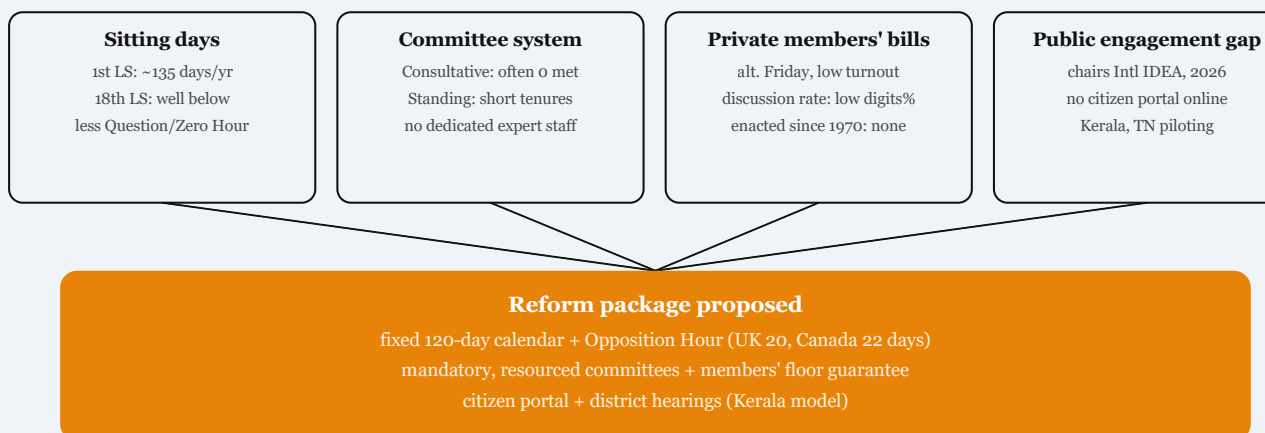
HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS

The transferable pattern: **an institution's formal powers matter less than the frequency and quality of the process through which it exercises them.** Parliament retains its full constitutional powers of legislation, oversight and representation regardless of how many days it sits or how well its committees function; what changes is how much of that power is actually exercised with deliberative rigour versus symbolically claimed and left unused.

This distinction between formal power and exercised power recurs across Indian institutions. State legislative assemblies show the same sitting-day decline pattern as Parliament. Regulatory bodies with strong **statutory** mandates can still underperform if their meeting frequency or staffing falls short of what genuine oversight requires. And citizen engagement mechanisms, whether Parliament's own website or a regulator's public consultation process, are only as valuable as their actual usability, a formally available channel that is difficult to find or use provides little real public participation. The question to ask of any institution, not just Parliament, is not "what can it do on paper" but "how often, and how well, does it actually do it."

DIAGRAM-IN-WORDS

Parliament's procedural decay, and where reform bites



Four separate symptoms, shrinking sitting days, hollowed-out committees, dormant private members' business, and no citizen-facing portal even as India chairs International IDEA, share one root cause: procedure without enforcement. The reform package treats them as one problem, not four.

TAKEAWAY BOX

A Parliament that sits less, scrutinises less and is heard from less is not weaker in law. It is weaker in practice, and practice is what citizens actually experience.

*First Lok Sabha average sitting days (~135/year); 18th Lok Sabha constituted **June 2024**; UK **20** and Canada **22** Opposition Days a year; **Consultative Committees'** mandatory **four meetings a year**; private members' bills, none enacted **since 1970**; India's **2026 International IDEA chairship** (CEC **Gyanesh Kumar**); **Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)-UNDP** Global Parliamentary Reports.*

if procedural reforms that would strengthen deliberation and public engagement carry no electoral reward for individual MPs, does the responsibility to adopt them anyway fall on party leadership, the Speaker's office, or the voting public itself?

UPSC has repeatedly tested Parliament's functioning, committee system and comparative legislative practice; this editorial updates that theme with a specific, current reform agenda tied to India's own 2026 International IDEA chairship, a strong bridge between the polity and international-institutions syllabi.

"Parliament's declining sitting days and weak committee scrutiny are a greater threat to its deliberative function than any debate over the number of its seats." Critically examine this claim with reference to India's committee system and private members' business.

Sources: *Hindustan Times, PRS Legislative Research, International IDEA, PIB*

Source: Putting People at the Heart of Parliament's Performance: The Case for Procedural Reform — Ujiyari.com |
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● KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE

Hindustan Times argues that debates over increasing the number of Lok Sabha seats miss the more consequential problem, Parliament's procedures themselves have decayed to the point that even the members it already has cannot deliberate, scrutinise or engage the public effectively, and that fixing sitting-day frequency, committee functioning and citizen access matters more than fixing arithmetic.



SUPPORTING

- Sitting days have collapsed across seven decades: the First Lok Sabha (1952-57) averaged roughly 135 sitting days a year, while the 18th Lok Sabha (June 2024 onward) has managed a markedly lower annual average, a decline that directly reduces the time available for Question Hour, Zero Hour and substantive legislative debate regardless of how many seats the House eventually has.
- The committee system, meant to function as a set of mini-parliaments doing detailed, less partisan scrutiny, is structurally weak: consultative committees frequently fail to meet even the mandatory minimum of four times a year, department-related standing committees have short tenures that disrupt continuity, and committees lack dedicated sectoral expert staff beyond what the parliament secretariat provides.
- Private members' business, the one channel through which non-minister MPs can independently drive legislative agendas, is functionally dead: only a small single-digit percentage of private member bills introduced are ever discussed, they are scheduled on low-attendance Friday afternoons, and only a handful have become law since 1952, none since 1970.
- Public engagement infrastructure lags well behind India's stated ambitions on the subject: India assumed the chairship of International IDEA for 2026, a global body dedicated to strengthening democratic participation, yet Parliament's own website has no dedicated citizen engagement channel comparable to practices already emerging in state legislatures such as Kerala and Tamil Nadu.



COUNTER

Procedural reform proposals have circulated for decades, more sitting days, an Opposition Hour, mandatory committee scrutiny, without meaningful uptake, because the incentive structure of Indian legislative politics rewards visible floor confrontation and constituency service far more than quiet committee work or private members' bills that rarely reach a vote;

reform recommendations that do not also change what gets an MP re-elected are unlikely to change legislative behaviour.

**WAY FORWARD**

Treat procedural reform as a package rather than isolated proposals: a pre-announced annual sitting calendar of at least 120 days, a guaranteed Opposition Hour modelled on the UK and Canadian precedents, mandatory referral of all bills to standing committees with adequate time and sectoral expert support, a floor for private members' business with mandatory ministerial attendance, and a citizen engagement portal that lets the public track and, where appropriate, depose before committees, following the Kerala model of district-level public hearings.


MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK
QUESTION

Parliamentary sitting days have declined sharply since the First Lok Sabha, and public engagement with legislative proceedings remains weak. Discuss the structural and procedural reforms needed to strengthen Parliament's deliberative and representative functions, with reference to committee scrutiny, private members' business and public participation. (250 words)

INTRODUCTION

Discussions on strengthening the Lok Sabha have tended to focus on delimitation and increasing the number of seats, but a more immediate problem is that Parliament's existing procedures constrain even the members it already has. Hindustan Times' editorial on August 9, 2026 argues that sitting-day frequency, committee scrutiny and public engagement, not seat numbers, are the more urgent reform priority.

BODY

The scale of the decline in parliamentary time is the clearest evidence: the First Lok Sabha (1952-57) averaged roughly 135 sitting days a year, a figure BR Ambedkar, during the Constituent Assembly debates, expected future legislatures to sustain or exceed; the 18th Lok Sabha has fallen well short of that benchmark, directly compressing the time available for Question Hour, Zero Hour and floor debate. This time scarcity is compounded by weak committee functioning: consultative committees often do not meet even the mandatory four times a year, department-related standing committees have short tenures that disrupt institutional memory, and committees lack dedicated sectoral experts beyond secretariat staff, unlike, for instance, the UK's Select Committees, which draw on specialist advisers.

Private members' business, the constitutional channel for individual MPs to legislate independently of the government, has become almost entirely symbolic: internationally comparable data shows only a low single-digit percentage of private member bills are ever discussed, they are scheduled for alternate Friday afternoons when attendance is thin, and none has been enacted since 1970. Meanwhile, India holds the 2026 chairship of International IDEA, a global body promoting democratic participation, a role that sits uneasily alongside a Parliament whose own website lacks a dedicated citizen engagement channel, even as state legislatures in Kerala and Tamil Nadu experiment with direct public hearings and citizen input mechanisms.

CONCLUSION

The reforms Hindustan Times proposes, a fixed sitting calendar, a guaranteed Opposition Hour, mandatory and better-resourced committee scrutiny, more private members' time with ministerial accountability, and a genuine citizen engagement portal, are technically straightforward and do not require a constitutional amendment. Their persistent non-implementation over decades suggests the binding constraint is political

incentive rather than institutional design, which means durable reform will require making procedural performance, not just floor visibility, something that carries an electoral cost for MPs who neglect it.

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