

Statement of the Chairman at the conclusion of the 219th Session

MR. CHAIRMAN: Hon'ble Members, the 219th Session of Rajya Sabha comes to a close today. It commenced on the 22nd of February, 2010 and, being the Budget Session, it was principally devoted to the financial business of the Government.

Important legislations enacted by the Council included, among others, the Constitution (108th (Amendment) Bill, 2008 (popularly known as Women's Reservation Bill); the Tamil Nadu Legislative Council Bill, 2010; the National Green Tribunal Bill, 2010 and the Payment of Gratuity (Amendment) Bill, 2010.

Apart from transacting Government business, the Session provided opportunity to the Members to discuss the working of five Ministries. In addition, Calling Attention Notices on five matters of Urgent Public Importance were admitted and discussed. These related to (1) the question of paid news (2) radiation exposure (3) HPV Vaccine programme (4) presence of arsenic in potable water and (5) irregularities in the functioning of the Medical Council of India. Two Short Duration Discussions on rise in prices of essential commodities and alleged tapping of telephone were also held.

I have directed the Secretary-General to make available Statistical Information about this Session to the Hon'ble Members.

A significant achievement of this Session was the introduction of a new Integrated Talk-Time Management and Display System, which *inter alia* provides information regarding the total time allotted to various parties, the time taken by individual Members as well as the time consumed and in balance for different parties. The system, in addition to the original Zero Hour submissions, also covers the Short Duration Discussion, Calling Attention and discussion on Private Members' Bills and Resolutions.

Notwithstanding the work done, an overview of the session cannot avoid the impression that much time was lost in disruptions and adjournments arising out of disruptions. Rules for the Conduct of Business were sought to be flouted with disturbing frequency. The Question Hour became its principal victim and could not be conducted on 13 of the 31 scheduled sittings.

Equally disturbing is the practice of the time taken by each Starred Question. We maintain the procedural fiction of admitting 20 Questions for each sitting. In actual practice, only five or six of these are taken up since far too much of the time is consumed in asking and responding to supplementary questions. Members tend to overlook the rule that the sole purpose of a supplementary is to seek elucidation on "any matter of fact regarding which an answer has been given".

The Private Members' Legislative Business suffered the most. During this long Budget Session, not even a single sitting could be devoted to private members' legislative business. Hon'ble Members also did not have adequate time to raise their Special Mentions or matters of public importance with the permission of the Chair.

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These trends in the conduct of business have invited adverse comments and lowered the image of the legislature in the eyes of the public. Correctives have thus become imperative.

21 new Members joined the House during the Session. I am sure they would make rich and valuable contributions to the House in the days to come.

I like this opportunity to thank the Leader of the House, the Leader of the Opposition, the Leaders of various parties and groups and the Hon'ble Members for the co-operation extended by them for the overall smooth functioning of the House.

I also thank the Deputy Chairman, the Members on the Panel of Vice-Chairmen, and the officers and staff of the Secretariat for their help and cooperation.