GOVT & POLITICS



DELHI CONFIDENTIAL



SUDDEN CHANGE

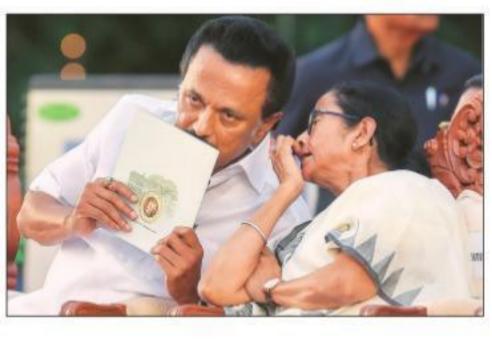
MOST PEOPLE were taken by surprise when Danish Ali, earlier with the JD(S) and chosen by its leader and former Karnataka chief minister H D Kumaraswamy to be the party's face in New Delhi, quit the regional party and contested the Lok Sabha polls on a BSP ticket from Amroha in Uttar Pradesh. There was some more surprise in store when, after the victory, BSP chief Mayawati chose Ali to be the leader of the party in Lok Sabha. But seems like the sudden rise of Ali, who spoke on some key Bills in Parliament this session, was short-lived. After Mayawati picked Girish Chandra, party MP from Nagina, to speak on the historic debate on Article 370 in Lok Sabha, the BSP chief has now appointed Jaunpur MP Shyam Singh Yadav as leader of the party in Lok Sabha.

FROM BITTER TO BANTER

THE ACRIMONY between the government and the Opposition in Parliament seems to have eased a bit when Prime Minister Narendra Modi and leaders of other parties met at Rajya Sabha Chairman M Venkaiah Naidu's chamber for customary tea after the session was adjourned sine die. Naidu was to host a lunch for Upper House MPs on Wednesday, but he told the leaders that he cancelled it following Sushma Swaraj's death. Modi then suggested that Naidu host a meal during winter so that MPs can eat more and enjoy. In a friendly banter, Congress's Anand Sharma asked Naidu whether he was trying to save on food by hosting lunch. Modi replied that Naidu would never be a miser when it comes to hosting friends and colleagues. Leader of Opposition in the Upper House, Ghulam Nabi Azad, chipped in, saying Naidu can bring prawns from Andhra Pradesh for the meal and he would arrange for good fish curry.

BIRTHDAY MESSAGE

BIRTHDAYS OF senior leaders these days see greetings from the who's who of the political class, sometimes in personal calls, and now more often on social media platforms, although such public display of greetings is rarely seen for the MPs not so well-known. However, the situation seems to have changed for the better for Lok Sabha MPs from the first session of 17th Lok Sabha. Lok Sabha TV has begun broadcasting a small profile snippet of every sitting member of the House in the day's programming on their respective birthdays. The practice started June-end, on the birthday of Union minister Pralhad Patel.



West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee with DMK president M K Stalin at an event to unveil the statue of M Karunanidhi on the leader's first death anniversary, in Chennai. PTI

Mamata expresses concern, Stalin says Centre trying to recreate dark history

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA CHENNAI, AUGUST 7

WEST BENGAL Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and DMK president M K Stalin on Wednesday accused the Centre of trying to recreate the "dark history" of the incarceration of National Conference founder Sheikh Abdullah and expressed concern over the whereabouts of mainstream political leaders from the Valley.

Banerjee unveiled a statue of former DMK supremo M Karunanidhi here on the leader's first death anniversary in the presence of Stalin on the premises of the office of DMK mouthpiece

'Murasoli'. Addressing a gathering at a public meeting held by the DMK, Banerjee said if a decision was taken in respect of any particular state, people of that state should be taken into confidence an apparent reference to

scrapping of Article 370. "What is happening," she said and expressed concern

mer CMs Mehbooba Mufti and Omar Abdullah.

Stalin said, "In the name of nationalism, the BJP government is today fomenting communalism and the DMK will oppose this duplicity with determination."

Stalin said Farooq Abdullah could not attend the event since he was under house arrest. Tracing the life and times of Sheikh Abdullah, Farooq Abdullah's father, he said the Sheikh was confined at Kodaikanal in Tamil Nadu and "they (the BJP-led Centre) are trying to recreate that dark history".

"Nowadays, why we are fighting this battle, because we have to respect Mahatma Gandhi, we cannot forget him...they were not afraid, not scared," Banerjee said, appar-

ently targeting the BIP. The battle was against "atrocities and fascism", she said, adding "we are ready to do it, we are ready to sacrifice our life, but we cannot sacrifice our motherland, we cannot sacrifice our Tamil land, we cannot sacrifice our Bengal land, we cannot sacrifice our country."

BOTH HOUSES BREAK SEVERAL RECORDS

Session ends on bright note, record sittings



Law Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad speaks in the Rajya Sabha, on Wednesday. PTI

Best in 17 years, keep up the momentum: Chairman to RS

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI, AUGUST 7

THE UPPER House set a "new normal" in its "highly productive" 249th session, which was the best in 17 years with extended sittings and record number of Bills cleared, Raiva Sabha Chairman M Venkaiah Naidu said on Wednesday.

Thirty-two Bills were cleared in 35 sittings in the first session of 17th Lok Sabha.

"I am glad that my optimism has come true during this session. With great pleasure, I have a turnaround story to report to all of you and the people of the country who have been patiently waiting for such a turnaround in the form of a functional House, breaking from the disruptive past," Naidu said.

In terms of legislative output, he said, passage of 32 Bills in these 35 sittings makes it the best session in last 17 years accounting for 52 sessions.

Bills passed during this session such as the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill, widely known as the triple talaq Bill, and Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Bill are significant in terms of their impact on the country's "social and economic landscape", Naidu said, speaking before adjourning the House sine die.

Naidu said, "The people have witnessed during this session

LAINEC RS: strength to cross-roads THE PRODUCTIVITY of Rajya Sabha during the Budget

Session seems to bear testimony of the new political balance in the country. The large transaction of government legislative business suggest that the Opposition, which used its numerical heft in the Upper House in the last five years, seems to have lost some steam after the Lok Sabha poll results. For Rajva Sabha Chairman Venkaiah Naidu, this was a rel-

Oppn story in

atively satisfying session.

what a functional Parliament means, and they are acknowledging it."

According to data available, the 131st session in 1984 was the most productive, with 37 Bills passed. Thirty-five Bills were passed in the 197th session in 2002.

"This session is the fifth best in this regard in the last 41 years," said Naidu, adding that in the last five sessions (244 to 248), only 33 Bills were passed.

While productivity of the House was at 104.92 per cent in terms of utilisation of available time, this session is the best in the last five years since 2014, and coming after 17 sessions. "During the last five sessions, productivity of the House ranged from a low of 7.44 per cent to a maximum of

65.60 per cent," he said. Naidu also appreciated the

"spirit of mutual understanding and accommodation" between the Opposition and the Treasury benches while passing Bills such as the Motor Vehicles (Amendment) and the National Medical Council, where rights of states were protected by accepting suggestions.

Naidu also appealed members to sustain the new momentum. "Having reached a new normal in this session, the task now before all of us is to sustain it without getting back to the old ways," he said.

Soon after the Rajya Sabha was adjourned sine die on Wednesday, Naidu, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and about 25 leaders from various parties discussed a range of issues. The meeting at Naidu's chamber lasted more than 30 minutes.

In a House divided, Speaker emerges with praise from both sides

LIZ MATHEW NEW DELHI, AUGUST 7

WHILE OPPOSITION members have criticised the government's purported "rush" to "push through" Bills without granting the proposed laws a chance to be scrutinised in standing or select committees, as the opening session of the 17th Lok Sabha was adjourned sine die on Tuesday, MPs from across parties also agreed that the new Speaker, Om Birla, has successfully lowered the heat in a House with a high level of acrimony and deep division by giving space to all MPs.

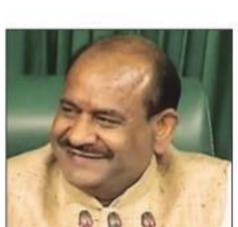
A big pat on the back for Birla came on the floor of the House when Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, leader of main opposition Congress, lauded him for "listening to the Opposition."

Chowdhury also said he wants Birla to emerge as the best among the Speaker Commonwealth countries.

RSP member N Premachandran said Birla, a second-term MP from Kota (Rajasthan), is making efforts to accommodate everyone – especially first-time MPs — "without looking at party affiliations".

Premachandran pointed out that it is not easy for new MPs to get the opportunity to participate in a discussion in the beginning of a Lok Sabha, and that some members in the past did not get a chance even after two years. "Breaking that (tradition), almost all members were given a chance to speak (in this session) — either in debates or during Zero Hour. He also gave a chance for the Opposition to speak — whether the matter is pursued by the government or not, the MPs got opportunity to place their views. That's why the House ran smoothly," the MP

from Kollam, Kerala, said. In his valedictory address on Tuesday, Birla said that the Lower House had 37 sittings over 280 hours, of which 75 hours were late sitting, and took up 1,066 issues of urgent public im-



Om Birla

portance. Birla's decision for late sittings, members pointed out, were meant primarily to give MPs a chance to raise issues they felt were important.

BJP MP Kirit Premjibhai Solanki said that despite the fact that the BJP has a majority on its own in Lok Sabha, and the NDA has 353 MPs, the House runs "very positively and the Opposition also cooperates" primarily because of the Speaker's role. "He started the practice of allowing as many MPs to speak during Zero Hour as is possibly — the House (often) got extended for that," he said.

In the end, Solanki said, MPs feel satisfied and happy, which is a good sign for a healthy democracy.

Besides efficiency, Birla is also seen as having made efforts to bring more decorum and discipline to the House. He regularly reminded that no MP can make comments or ask questions while seated, or without giving a notice. He also urged ministers not to respond to questions that come without prior notice.

He also repeatedly warned members from the Treasury benches not to make personal comments on any MP. On July 16, when BJP's S P Singh Baghel made a remark against Congress's Shashi Tharoor during Question Hour, Birla immediately intervened and expunged the comments. "No member should make any comment on other members," he said, drawing applause from the Opposition benches.

LOK SABHA

35 SITTINGS longest session since 1991, when it sat for 49

67 DAYS

days

first session of the first Lok Sabha was the longest

36 BILLS PASSED Most productive first session. 31 Bills were introduced and 24 passed during the first

session of the first Lok Sabha in 1952. No Bills were passed in the first sessions of the 11th, 14th, 15th and 16th Lok Sabha

124.28% **Productivity**

7.6 QUESTIONS answered on an average in this session, compared to 3.35 questions answered

between 1996 and

2019

5 ADDITIONAL HRS Beyond the normal working hours, with an average of 7.39 hours per day. The latest it sat for in this session was till just a minute before

RAJYA SABHA

midnight

32 BILLS PASSED 249th session was the most productive among 52 sessions over last 17 years. 35 Bills were passed during the 197th session in 2002. Only 33 Bills were passed during the last 5

sessions in 88 sittings

195 hours Total duration of 35 sittings, highest among 36 sessions in 11 years for which such data is maintained. Worked for 173 hours and 33 minutes in last 5

104.92% **PRODUCTIVITY** most productive among last 17 sessions

sessions

326 **ZERO HOUR SUBMISSIONS** best in 20 years spanning 63 sessions

50 SITTINGS best ever performance in 9th session in 1955 (All figures as of August 2)

More legislation on digital rights in LS than RS: report

KARISHMA MEHROTRA

NEW DELHI, AUGUST 7

LOK SABHA WITNESSED more legislation on digital rights than Rajya Sabha, a scrutiny of private member's legislation reveals. Parliamentary questions in Lok Sabha about data protection, Aadhaar data breaches, digital privacy, and surveillance have more than doubled between the last two sessions, according to a new

report released by international digital rights NGO Access Now.

In a review of the last five years of Parliament, Lok Sabha expressed more interest in surveillance and snooping, with 91 questions over the last 10 years against Rajya Sabha's 13.

In both Houses, focus has shifted from snooping and net and to data protection in 2018. BIP leads with the most pri-

neutrality in the 2015 budget session, to Aadhaar in 2016 and 2017,

3 MLAs write to BSY, seek withdrawal

vacy-related questions (71 MPs in the 16th Lok Sabha), followed by INC (21 MPs), AIADMK (21

MPs) and Shiv Sena (11 MPs). The Standing Committee on Information and Technology has focused mostly on call drops, network neutrality, data protection and privacy, BharatNet, and social media, in that order. The Standing Committee on Home Affairs has focused on Aadhaar and privacy, while the Standing Committee on Finance has focused on digital governance. "In addressing these important issues in the context of the

rapid growth of the internet, the Parliament will take an important role in developing rights-respecting frameworks for India's democracy in the digital age," the report said. The researchers relied on circulars, reports, and documents published by the secretariats of the Parliament available on the websites of both Houses.

Since 2014, digital topics

Sabha during the zero hours or special mentions as well as in the parliamentary debates. In Rajya Sabha, they have recently been raised increasingly in motions and resolutions as well. In the 16th Lok Sabha,

have come up most often in Lok

Congress's Muddahanumegowda asked the most privacy-related questions, while BJP's Rajeev Chandrasekhar has asked the most in Rajya Sabha over the past 10 years.

HC quashes two FIRs against Teesta Setalvad

JOHNSONTA

THREE BJP MLAs in Karnataka have written to Chief Minister and state BJP chief B S Yediyurappa, who assumed charge on July 26, seeking withdrawal of police cases lodged against "Hindu activists" in connection with three incidents of communal violence between 2013 and 2018.

BENGALURU, AUGUST 7

Thirthahalli MLA Araga Inanendra, Virajpet legislator K G Bopaiah and their Karwar counterpart Roopali Naik have written the letters.

Jnanendra has stated in his letter that over 300 "Hindu activists" were arrested in November 2014 in connection with protests seeking police action into the suspicious death of a minor girl.

"Over 300 Hindu youths who are innocent, daily wage earners, were booked in over 10 criminal cases by the police under political duress... it is requested to or-



of cases against 'Hindu activists'

Karnataka CM Yediyurappa

der withdrawal of these cases,"

the MLA has stated. The death of the girl and a police complaint by her family took a political turn after the BJP launched an agitation against the ruling Congress, accusing the police of shielding suspects because they were from a minority community. The government handed over the case to the state CID even as the BIP demanded a CBI probe.

The investigation revealed that the girl committed suicide after being upset over her grades and that the case did not involve abduction or rape as was alleged, the CID said in a statement.

"Neither was she kidnapped nor murdered," the CID said. Bopaiah, BJP MLA from

Virajpet, has sought withdrawal of cases filed against "Hindu activists" in connection with the November 2015 protests in Kodagu over Tipu Jayanti celebrations. The state-sponsored celebration of Tipu Sultan's birth an-

as several right-wing Hindutva outfits view the 18th century Mysore ruler as a tyrant. Soon after taking over as chief minister, Yeddyurappa can-

niversary had triggered clashes

celled the state-sponsored Tipu Jayanti celebrations. Karwar legislator Naik has sought withdrawal of cases filed against "Hindu activists" in the af-

termath of communal violence over the death of 18-year-old Paresh Mesta in Honnavar in 2018. Mesta was found dead in a pond in the aftermath of a clash between Hindus and Muslims over a disputed site. Propaganda

on social media claimed that the

youth was a Sangh worker who

was tortured and killed by Muslims despite forensic evidence negating this and suggesting drowning as a possible cause of death. The region remained tense for nearly six days with right-wing mobs attacking minority establishments. Several local BJP leaders were

booked and the role of local BIP MP Ananth Kumar Hegde was investigated. Over 100 persons were booked for rioting and 20 cases were filed under charges of inciting communal outrage through social media — BIP MP Shobha Karandlaje was among those booked.

The Congress government handed over the probe into Mesta's death to the CBI, which is yet to complete its investigation.

"The intention of these letters is to say BIP workers were involved in the violence and to close them. The police needs to investigate without bias... Nobody should be released under political pressure," Karnataka Congress president Dinesh Gundu Rao said.

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE AHMEDABAD, AUGUST 7

THE GUJARAT High Court on Wednesday quashed two FIRs lodged nearly five years ago against activist Teesta Setalvad after she tweeted a picture allegedly drawing parallels between a Hindu goddess and an ISIS terrorist.

Two FIRs were lodged in August 2014 against Setalvad, one at Ghatlodia police station in Ahmedabad by Vishwa Hindu Parishad activist Raju Patel, and another by one Kirit Mistry at C Division police station in Bhavnagar.

Setalvad's tweet had included a photoshopped image, allegedly drawing a visual parallel between Hindu goddess Kali and ISIS terrorists in a photograph with slain American journalist James Foley. She subsequently tweeted an apology. "The moment I realised that the illustration had created a con-

troversy and hurt many people,



Setalvad

Teesta

I deleted the tweet and tweeted an immediate apology for having inadvertently hurt their

Advocate Yogesh Ravani who represented Setalvad, said, "The court quashed the FIRs on the grounds that there was no malafide or deliberate intention and she had not intended to hurt anyone." He said it was a "balanced judgment, based on Article 19 (of the Constitution which guarantees free speech and expression) and provisions of the CrPC".

Setalvad had filed two petitions seeking the quashing of the FIRs. The Bhavnagar FIR had initially been tried at the district court but the trial was subsequently stayed and taken up by the high court.

ess.com

about the whereabouts of for-