



# DAILY EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

TOPIC

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**STRENGTHENING PARLIAMENTARY  
OVERSIGHT IN INDIA**

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## STRENGTHENING PARLIAMENTARY OVERSIGHT IN INDIA

### Context

- In India, the effectiveness of parliamentary oversight has often been questioned, while the Constitution provides a robust framework for legislative scrutiny.
  - ♦ Strengthening this mechanism is essential for transparency, accountability, and good governance.

### About the Parliamentary Oversight in India

- It is a fundamental aspect of India's democratic framework, ensuring that the **executive remains accountable to the legislature**.
- Parliament plays a crucial role in monitoring government actions, policies, and expenditures through various mechanisms such as **Question Hour, Parliamentary Committees, and Budget Scrutiny**.

### Key Mechanisms of Parliamentary Oversight

- **Parliamentary Oversight:**
  - ♦ **Article 107:** Defines the legislative process, including the introduction and passage of bills.
  - ♦ **Article 108:** Provides for joint sittings of both Houses to resolve legislative deadlocks.
  - ♦ **Article 111:** Grants the President the power to assent or return bills for reconsideration.
- **Question Hour and Zero Hour:**
  - ♦ **Question Hour** allows MPs to directly question Ministers on government policies and decisions.
  - ♦ **Zero Hour** provides an opportunity for MPs to raise urgent matters without prior notice.
- **Committee System for Legislative Review:**
  - ♦ **Standing Committees:** These analyze bills in detail before they are debated in Parliament.
  - ♦ **Public Accounts Committee (PAC):** It scrutinizes government spending and audits reports.
  - ♦ **Estimates Committee:** It examines budget allocations and efficiency of government programs.
- **Budgetary Scrutiny:**
  - ♦ **Article 112:** Mandates the presentation of the Annual Financial Statement (Union Budget).
  - ♦ **Article 113:** Requires Parliamentary approval for government expenditure.
  - ♦ **Article 117:** Ensures that Money Bills can only be introduced in the Lok Sabha with the President's recommendation.

### Challenges in Parliamentary Oversight

- **Diminishing Role of Question Hour:** Question Hour, a critical tool for government accountability, has seen frequent disruptions, reducing its effectiveness.
  - ♦ In the **17th Lok Sabha (2019-24)**, Question Hour functioned for only 60% of its scheduled time in the Lok Sabha and 52% in the Rajya Sabha.
- **Limited Influence of Parliamentary Committees: Department-related Standing Committees (DRSCs)** generate detailed reports, but their findings often do not influence legislation or executive action.
  - ♦ Committee consultations engage a small group of stakeholders, raising concerns about diversity and breadth of input.
- **Executive Dominance in Budgetary Affairs:** Union Finance Ministry crafts the Budget with minimal parliamentary involvement, reducing legislators to mere approvers rather than active participants.
  - ♦ The **Rajya Sabha has no substantive role in Budget** discussions, despite its democratic credentials.

### Success Stories in Parliamentary Oversight

- **Financial and Infrastructure Reforms:**
  - ♦ The **Standing Committee on Railways** recommended waiving dividend payments by Indian Railways in 2015 to improve its financial health, which was implemented in 2016.

- ♦ The **Committee on Public Undertakings** addressed delays in NHAI-managed highway projects, recommending that projects commence only after acquiring 80% of land and necessary clearances.
- **Policy and Legislative Amendments:**
  - ♦ The **Standing Committee on Transport** influenced amendments to the **Motor Vehicles Bill (2017)**, removing caps on third-party insurance and establishing a **National Road Safety Board**.
  - ♦ The **Estimates Committee** advised increasing domestic uranium production, reducing India's dependency on imports.
- **Accountability and Corruption Exposures:** The PAC exposed critical delays, opaque appointments, and corrupt practices during the Commonwealth Games in 2010.
  - ♦ On average, the PAC has made 180 recommendations every year in the past eight years, out of which 80% were accepted by the government.

### Recommendations for Strengthening Oversight

- **Revitalizing Question Hour:** Ensuring uninterrupted sessions and systematic scrutiny of government policies.
  - ♦ Encouraging MPs to focus on cross-ministerial issues rather than isolated queries.
- **Enhancing Committee Effectiveness:** Increasing stakeholder engagement in committee discussions.
  - ♦ Ensuring that committee recommendations are debated on the floor of Parliament.
- **Reforming Budgetary Oversight:** Establishing a **Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO)** to provide independent analysis of financial policies.
  - ♦ Allowing pre-Budget discussions to enhance legislative input.
- **Post-Legislative Scrutiny:** Laws need to be systematically reviewed after passage to assess whether they achieve their intended impact.
  - ♦ India can adopt a **model similar to the United Kingdom**, where government departments submit reviews of major laws within three to five years, examined by parliamentary committees.
- **Institutional Strengthening:** Committee reports should be made accessible through translations, visual explainers, and videos, ensuring greater public understanding.
  - ♦ Committees require dedicated research and technical support, moving beyond administrative assistance.
- **Technology-Driven Oversight:** Leveraging Artificial Intelligence and data analytics, Parliament can help members swiftly track policy trends, flag irregularities, and frame evidence-based questions.

### Conclusion

- As **former Vice-President K.R. Narayanan** noted, the purpose of legislative oversight is not to weaken the administration but to strengthen it, ensuring meaningful parliamentary support for governance.
- Strengthening oversight mechanisms means honoring the mandate given by citizens—ensuring the government remains transparent, accountable, and truly *'of the people, by the people, and for the people'*.

Source: TH

### Mains Practice Question

[Q] Discuss the significance of parliamentary oversight in India's democratic framework. What challenges hinder effective legislative scrutiny, and what reforms can be implemented to strengthen parliamentary accountability?

