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'Question hour junked in several assemblies'

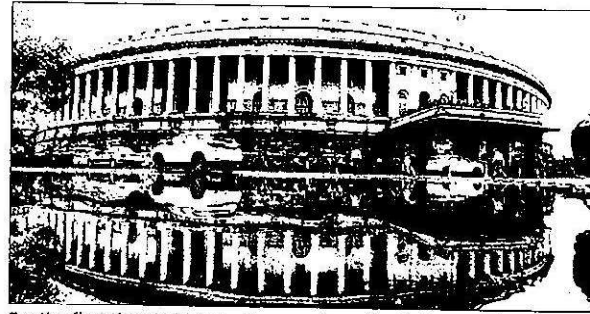
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New Delhi: Though Congress and some other opposition parties are demanding that there should be a question hour during the monsoon session of Parliament, the process has been suspended in several states where short assembly sessions took place recently due the Covid-19 situation.

Government sources said the latest state to do away with question hour was West Bengal where Trinamool Congress is in office, quite in contrast to the demand raised by its Rajya Sabha leader Derek O'Brien who called the decision to not have question hour during the upcoming Parliament session "murder of democracy".

West Bengal Speaker Biman Banerjee on Friday confirmed in Kolkata that there would be no question hour during the two-day session on September 9-10.

Since March, assembly sessions ranging from one to three days were held in Andhra Pradesh (June 16-18), Kerala (August 24), Punjab (August 28), Rajasthan (three sittings between August 14-21) and Uttar Pradesh (August 20-22). Government sources said even Maharashtra was mulling a session soon but



For the first time in history, the premises of both Houses of Parliament will be used for the running of each House

without question hour. One assembly passed more than a dozen bills in a day.

"There is a concerted effort to spread propaganda regarding question hour in the monsoon session of Parliament. Let some of the opposition leaders give answers to what assemblies have been doing," a senior government functionary said as he questioned adoption of "double standards".

He said it should also be noted that there were no special mentions and calling attention motions in most assemblies that met in the recent past. "Opposition leaders should answer why they are violent in the case of the Centre while remaining silent on states. Why are they not vocal for local assemblies to discuss question hour," a leader asked.

The government will give written replies to 160 unstarred questions in the coming session. "This effectively means the government will reply 1,120 questions every week. Besides, every day, there will be special mentions up to 10 in number, and 10 zero hour mentions will be allowed by the chair. In addition, the chair will allow short duration discussions on issues such as Covid-19, economy and other important issues," a Rajya Sabha source said.

It was pointed out that Parliament was meeting amid very trying circumstances and the presiding officers did not want to prolong the risk for all who attended. It was decided to do away with the presence of a large number of officials in the galleries of the House during question hour in view of the need for social distancing.