

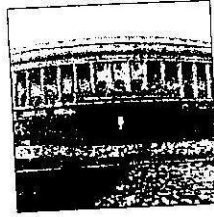


DECCAN HERALD

ESTABLISHED 1948

## Question hour: Undemocratic move

**T**he government's move to hold the monsoon session of Parliament without the question hour is wrong, and is like staging Hamlet without the Prince. The session is to start from September 14 and there will be regular and continuous sittings for two weeks. In accordance with the Covid-19 protocol, it will be held in shifts to allow distancing between MPs' seats. Timings have also been changed. This has been cited as the reason for doing away with the question hour. But a close look at the timings shows that there is no major curtailment of the hours of sitting, because the Houses will function on Saturdays and Sundays, too, and the duration of zero hour has been reduced. The government has said that officials will not be present in Parliament House to assist ministers to



**Govt is tampering with Parliament's functioning**

answer questions. That is a poor excuse, and, in any case, they should be available online and on phone.

The question hour is at the heart of Parliament's functioning because it actualises the idea of the government's accountability to the legislature and gives expression to it. The parliamentary system of government originated in that idea and it is essential for democracy. This is especially relevant in a parliament in which the ruling party has a big majority. The question hour gives the Opposition the room

and freedom to seek information from the government and to question it on various issues. At present, there are many issues of serious public interest, like the Covid-19 pandemic, the situation on the LAC and the state of the economy, on which the Opposition would want to put the government under scrutiny. The question hour provides the best opportunity for that, and it is therefore a basic democratic right of the people and the Opposition. They should not be denied it.

Parliament's function is not just to legislate and be a legal facilitator of government work. It is wrong if the government thinks that the purpose of the session is only to pass some bills. It is as much the Opposition's as the government's. The government has promised to give written answers to questions but that does not serve the purpose of a full-fledged question hour. Other parliamentary devices like short duration discussions cannot also take its place. The government has invited criticism in the past for its disregard for rights and disrespect for parliamentary and democratic institutions. The pandemic should not be used as an excuse to deny the rights of citizens, MPs and political parties. As it is, Parliament is under pressure because the government takes it for granted. Its relevance will be questioned further if its functioning is tampered with.