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Despite BJP's majority, rowdy scenes in both houses undermine Parliament's productivity

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Synopsis

There were nasty disruptions over the 2G scandal, Coalgate, Telangana etc. The Lok Sabha passed only 179 of the 328 bills on its agenda.



Chaitanya Kalbag

Our members of Parliament sowed the wind in the 15 th Lok Sabha and are reaping the whirlwind in the 16th Lok Sabha. The last Lok Sabha worked only for 61per cent of its scheduled time, the worst in the past half-century. The [Bharatiya Janata Party](#) was in very aggressive opposition to the [United Progressive Alliance](#).

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There were nasty disruptions over the 2G scandal, [Coalgate](#), [Telangana](#), and the Commonwealth Games. The Lok Sabha passed only 179 of the 328 bills on its agenda. At the end, 68 Bills lapsed; these included very important ones like the Women's Reservation Bill, the Direct Taxes Code, the Judicial Standards and Accountability Bill and the Goods and Services Tax Bill. You would have thought that the BJP with its steamroller majority would mean a more

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productive Parliament this time around. Not so, if you looked at the rowdy scenes in both houses on Wednesday when the Trinamool Congress showed its 34 MPs can be quite a handful for the BJP's 282 in the Lok Sabha.

Many states in India have "Goonda Acts" to control unruly citizens. Interestingly, Trinamool's home state came up with the first one, the Bengal Goonda Act of 1926. I couldn't spot TMC MP Tapas Paul in the melee: the former actor who got into some trouble over his rape and violence remarks has apparently been advised "complete bed rest" in a Kolkata nursing home. The Karnataka Police Manual permits the maintenance of a confidential "Register of Rowdies" and defines one of these worthies as "a hooligan, rough, vagabond or any person who is dangerous to the public peace or tranquility". We have read ad nauseum about how many criminals of major stripes are in our Parliament, but we do not see any documentation of rowdyism.

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There is a poetic justice about the BJP being at the receiving end of the TMC's bull-chested, agitational tactics, and it was amusing to see the Congress also filling its lungs in readiness for a long spell down in the galleys.

Nothing daunted, Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](#) seems determined to put some substance around his vaulting vision for the nation. If you listened to his speech in the Lok Sabha on June 11, or his speech, mostly in English, to scientists in Sriharikota on June 30, it was hard not to feel hopeful. But the practicalities of politics and the reality of systemic problems make you pause. One wonders if even a stable government with the best of intentions can crack what the Economic Survey for 2013/14 described as market failures, or "a situation in which the unrestricted actions of private persons result in a suboptimal outcome". In other words, can politics trump the unintended monopolies, market manipulation, and fast and loose plays with natural

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resources that crony capitalism has spawned since the turn of the century? Factor markets such as labour, land and capital still need to be reformed, and our institutional and regulatory frameworks have worked to thwart these reforms.

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The Economic Survey lays down a sensible road map for a second generation of reforms, for India to be able to rev up its manufacturing sector, languishing at 0.2per cent growth over the past two years. The trouble is that we are still navel-gazing about a second generation of reforms 23 years after the first wave liberalised industrial and import licensing. Ever inventive, we quickly built a regime of re-licensing, inspections, and regulatory horrors. The cost of doing business has become so prohibitive that investors, both Indian and foreign, are taking their money to other countries and jurisdictions.

Businessmen and rich people have options and can switch domiciles and investments. What about ordinary citizens? An overwhelming 80per cent of 1,442 people surveyed by CVoter on July 7 and 8 across the country said with current prices they were not saving for a secure future. A majority, 41per cent, think the Budget that Finance Minister Arun Jaitley will unveil on Thursday is going to be pro-rich; only 17per cent think that it will help the middle class.

More people (47.3 per cent) said [inflation](#) will not come down after the Budget than the 29.3 per cent who were optimistic. But hope springs eternal: 60.8per cent said they felt "acche din aane wale hain".

Although you would have to stretch your imagination to think of Modi as stout Cortez, there are sure to be many moments when his men (and women) "look'd at each other with wild surmise" when they heard of his dream projects.

Tuesday's Railway Budget did steer away from reckless populism and talked about luring private investment, both domestic and foreign, but the rather tentative plans for a bullet train bring into focus all of India's contradictions. Somewhere in there, Modi and Sadananda Gowda (who admitted he was "overwhelmed by the enormity of my responsibilities") will have to overcome ageing tracks, dirty toilets, the challenge of acquiring vast stretches of unencumbered land where no grazing buffalo will wander, and the heart-stopping risk of some of more than 11,500 unmanned level crossings to get up to speed.

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(Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this column are that of the writer. The facts and opinions expressed here do not reflect the views of www.economictimes.com.)

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