



EXPLAINER GOVERNANCE AND POLICY

## Crisis of pending government assurances in Parliament

CHINMAY BENDRE FEBRUARY 6, 2023

*Since government assurances are commitments of the government to elected representatives, consistent efforts are required to put them into effect. As conscientious citizens, we must not lose sight of the pending assurances, and demand an explanation from the government for its failure to combat pendency.*

**THE** Budget Session of Parliament began on January 31 and will continue till April 6. While taxation policies continue to be a top concern for the *aam aadmi* in the Union budget, this article examines the Union government's track record of upholding assurances given in the Parliament.

### What are government assurances?

Elected representatives elicit information from the government in a variety of ways. They can ask questions, take part in discussions, and deliberate in motions. The concerned minister might not have all the information that a house member has asked for. In such situations, they provide undertakings to study a matter, take action or provide information in the future. These promises are generally referred to as 'government assurances' because they are given by a minister in the house.

### Who looks after government assurances?

Before 1953, there was no institutional framework in place to follow through on government assurances, and undertakings made by ministers on the house floor. Instead, it was up to each member to keep track of these assurances. On December 1, 1953, a Committee on Government Assurances was established for the first time to guarantee the Union government's accountability to the Parliament, thereby preserving the tradition of our parliamentary democracy.

Fifteen members make up the [Lok Sabha Committee on Government Assurances](#), and ten members make up the [Rajya Sabha Committee on Government Assurances](#).

## What are the functions of the committees?

The committees carefully examine assurances and undertakings made on the house floor by ministers, and report on the progress of execution and the time it took the government to do so. The maximum period for putting assurances into action is three months from the day they were made in the house.

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The Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs keeps an [Online Assurance Monitoring System](#) to monitor the assurances.

## How many assurances are pending at the Lok Sabha?

There are no pending assurances till the 14th Lok Sabha (2004–09). After that, pendency starts to take hold. Data indicates that as of January 26, 2023, 54 assurances from the 15th Lok Sabha (2009–14) are pending and 429 assurances were dropped.

### SESSION WISE SUMMARY

AS ON : 31/01/2023 3:33 PM

LOK SABHA : 15

SESSION	FULLY IMPLEMENTED	PARTLY IMPLEMENTED	DROPPED	PENDING	TOTAL
2	42	0	13	2	57
3	33	0	8	3	44
4	67	0	7	2	76
5	66	0	14	3	83
6	488	0	33	2	523
7	368	0	10	4	382
8	801	0	85	4	890
9	539	0	39	4	582
10	810	0	60	3	873
11	482	0	31	6	519
12	438	0	24	4	466
13	550	0	44	9	603
14	264	0	22	1	287
15	386	0	39	7	432
	5334	0	429	54	5817

The data also shows that from the 16th Lok Sabha (2014–19), 168 assurances are pending and 391 assurances were dropped.

**SESSION WISE SUMMARY**

AS ON : 31/01/2023 3:33 PM

LOK SABHA : 16

SESSION	FULLY IMPLEMENTED	PARTLY IMPLEMENTED	DROPPED	PENDING	TOTAL
2	525	0	40	4	569
3	551	1	37	4	593
4	549	0	55	10	614
5	265	0	15	8	288
6	366	2	27	7	402
7	206	0	23	5	234
8	313	0	22	9	344
9	304	0	19	9	332
10	313	1	29	15	358
11	381	0	23	21	425
12	234	0	30	13	277
13	143	0	12	9	164
14	178	0	12	13	203
15	175	0	18	11	204
16	220	0	21	20	261
17	103	0	8	10	121
	4826	4	391	168	5389

Finally, the data reveals that starting with the 17th Lok Sabha in 2019, 551 assurances are pending and 122 assurances were dropped.

**SESSION WISE SUMMARY**

AS ON : 31/01/2023 3:33 PM

LOK SABHA : 17

SESSION	FULLY IMPLEMENTED	PARTLY IMPLEMENTED	DROPPED	PENDING	TOTAL
1	417	0	33	55	505
2	285	0	29	40	354
3	219	0	15	34	268
4	62	0	4	22	88
5	259	2	18	76	355
6	117	0	11	54	182
7	109	0	8	65	182
8	122	0	4	108	234
9	14	0	0	97	111
	1604	2	122	551	2279

(The above data is sourced from the [website of the Committee on Government Assurances, Lok Sabha.](#))

Also read: [The continuing decline of Parliamentary democracy in India](#)

## How many assurances are pending at the Rajya Sabha?

The record in the Rajya Sabha on pending government assurances is unsettling. The longest pending assurance can be traced back to the 198th Session of the Rajya Sabha, which was held from February to May 2003. Furthermore, 40 assurances were also dropped from this session.

Similarly, one assurance each is pending from the 204th (February to May 2005), 211th (August to September 2007), and 217th (July to August 2009) sessions of the Rajya Sabha. Additionally, 35, 10 and 54 assurances were dropped from the corresponding sessions, respectively.

From the intervening 210th (February to May 2007) session of the Rajya Sabha, two assurances are pending, in addition to 13 assurances that have been dropped. From the 219th (February to May 2010) session of the Rajya Sabha, greater pendency starts to take hold.

**“ *The absence of adequate monitoring mechanisms leads to pendency. More and more assurances are being dropped. Additionally, pendency has a multiplier effect on the ministries, leading to increased pendency over time.***

Through the 16th Lok Sabha, the Rajya Sabha held 17 sessions (232nd to 248th). Data shows that 203 assurances are pending and 140 assurances have been dropped through these sessions. Through the ongoing 17th Lok Sabha, the Rajya Sabha held ten sessions (249th to 258th). Data indicates that of the total 951 assurances made in the house, ten assurances have been dropped in addition to 451 pending assurances.

(The above data is sourced from the [website of the Committee on Government Assurances, Rajya Sabha](#).)

## **Why is the situation worrisome?**

Some of the assurances given by the ministers are long-term undertakings. They might in fact need the government's attention for longer than three months. The following three factors, however, make the situation worrisome:

Firstly, the absence of adequate monitoring mechanisms leads to pendency. For instance, the assurance provided for an Unstarred Question (USQ No. 1175) on August 8, 2011, took the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change eleven years to implement.

Lamenting the state of affairs, the Committee on Government Assurances noted in its [78th report](#) titled 'Review of pending assurances pertaining to the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change', presented to the Lok Sabha on December 22 last year, that “*inordinate delay in fulfilment of the Assurances is indicative of the*

*fact that monitoring and follow up action taken for implementation of the Assurances by the Ministry has not been adequate and needs further improvement.... However, sustained efforts need to be made by the Ministry for implementation of these Assurances as these are solemn Parliamentary obligations”.*

Secondly, more and more assurances are being dropped. For instance, the assurance to an Unstarred Question (USQ No. 3025) made by the Minister of State in the Ministry of Railways on March 16, 2016, was dropped on October 11, 2021. In this case, the Union Ministry of Law and the Union Ministry of Home Affairs were also involved in addition to some state governments on the question of amending the [Railway Protection Force Act, 1957](#) (RPF Act). The Railway Ministry stated that “*the proposal for amendment in RPF Act for empowering RPF to deal with passenger-related offences could not materialize due to the proposal not being supported by 18 States. The Ministry of Railway could, therefore, not proceed further in the instant case in view of the opposition by the States*”, as per the [76th report](#) of the Committee on Government Assurances, titled ‘Requests for Dropping of Assurances (Acceded to)’, also presented to the Lok Sabha on December 22 last year.

The record shows that through the 16th Lok Sabha, 7.25 per cent of assurances given in the Lok Sabha, and 4.76 per cent of assurances given in the Rajya Sabha were dropped. Similarly, in the ongoing Lok Sabha, 5.35 per cent of assurances given in the Lok Sabha, and 1.05 per cent of assurances given in the Rajya Sabha were dropped.

Thirdly, pendency has a multiplier effect on the ministries, leading to increased pendency over time. Let us take the Union Ministry of Law as an illustration. According to data, the ministry has six pending assurances from the 15th Lok Sabha and 20 pending assurances from the 16th Lok Sabha. In addition to this, the ministry is overwhelmed with 39 pending assurances from the 17th Lok Sabha. In the Rajya Sabha, the Ministry is responsible for 52 pending assurances. As a consequence, the Ministry accounts for 117 assurances that are now pending.

Other Union ministries like Railways (112 pending assurances), Education (88 pending assurances), Defence (74 pending assurances), and Culture (43 pending assurances) face a similar situation.

Also read: [The Decline of the Parliamentary Process in India](#)

## Closing word

It is clear that implementing some of the assurances, particularly those relating to policy considerations, contentious issues, and assurances involving other ministries, departments, agencies, and state governments may prove challenging and require

additional time. Since these assurances are commitments of the government to elected representatives, consistent efforts are required to put them into effect. As conscientious citizens, we must not lose sight of the pending assurances, and demand an explanation from the government for its failure to combat pendency.



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