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Unsavoury scenes in Rajya Sabha

Much of the responsibility for the ruckus in the Rajya Sabha on Sunday related to the passage of two farm bills, the suspension of eight members and their dharna outside the House rests with Deputy Chairman Harivansh, whose decisions were questioned by the Opposition. He also went on a fast on Tuesday in protest against the "humiliating conduct" of the members towards him. He rejected the demand for a division on the bills and declared them as having been passed after a voice vote. According to the rules, a division is required to be carried out even if there is a demand from only one member of the House. It has been claimed that the demands for division were not allowed because they were made when there was an uproar and that they were not made by members from their seats. These are untenable excuses. The government's hurry to declare the bills as passed was obvious.



Untenable excuses given for denying voting

A number of opposition parties had opposed the bills and brought in amendments. There was a demand that the bills should be referred to a select committee. There were claims on both the Opposition as well as government side that they had enough support in the House. But then, even some NDA allies, such as Akali Dal, have opposed these bills. Some of them could also have wanted them to be referred to a select committee. The opposition parties have contended that the deputy chairman was partisan and acted in a manner that ensured the quick passage of the bills. The ruckus in the House was cited as the reason for not allowing a division. But the House could very well have been adjourned for the next day. However, the acts of some Opposition members in tearing off the bills and breaking the mics cannot be supported either.

The Opposition has also charged that instances of high-handed and arrogant behaviour of the government and the ruling party in Parliament are increasing. This often evokes wrong and unparliamentary conduct from the opposition parties, too. Respect for the Opposition and building consensus is essential for the successful working of parliamentary democracy. The Rajya Sabha, which is the House of Elders and is therefore considered to be more mature, had most often displayed the spirit of consensus. Differences and confrontations have often been resolved through negotiations and deliberations there. It is therefore unfortunate that there were such disorderly scenes, suspension of members, and protests by them outside the House. The process is as important as the outcome in the functioning of Parliament. Already, the session has been deprived of Question Hour. It is wrong to deny the Opposition their legitimate rights, and to force them out when they protest.