

JANTA PARLIAMENT (जनता संसद)

The Budget Session of Parliament was curtailed and ended on 23rd March 2020 and since then Parliament has not been in session. The Parliamentary Committees also didn't function for more than 2 months and only in the beginning of June, some meetings could be scheduled. World over, in many countries, arrangements have been made for MPs to convene online and hold sessions as well as Committee meetings. That has not been explored in India so far, though discussions on this have been going on for some time now. The Monsoon Session of Parliament ordinarily should have started by mid-July. With Parliament not being in session, the absence of the most important platform to seek representative accountability during the Covid pandemic has created a crisis of its own.

Janta Parliament (जनता संसद) is envisioned as a simulated virtual people's Parliament session to discuss urgent Covid related policy issues.

Objectives

- To demonstrate that it would not have been difficult to convene a Parliament session, online, had the government intended to
- To set agenda for what must be discussed whenever the Parliament session is convened
- To have issue based discussions instead of political rhetoric

Janta Parliament is scheduled to be held from 16th to 21st August with two sessions each day. This is to discuss important Covid related policy issues and concerns.

Theme of the Discussion	Date	Time
Inauguration	16th August	11am - 12pm
Health	16th August	3pm – 6pm
Food Security and Nutrition	17th August	10am - 1pm
Education	17th August	3pm – 6pm
Environment	18th August	10am - 1pm
Technology and Surveillance	18th August	3pm – 6pm
Agriculture	19th August	10am - 1pm
Economy	19th August	3pm – 6pm
Impact on Vulnerable Communities Part I	20th August	10am - 1pm
Industry, Labour and Employment	20th August	3pm – 6pm
Impact on Vulnerable Communities Part II	21st August	10am - 1pm
Civil Liberties, Laws and Governance	21st August	3pm – 6pm

Participants

- Different participants will be invited for each themed discussion. Some people may participate in more than one discussion.
- There will be a minimum of 55 people (to maintain quorum) who will be visible to everyone, many of whom will also speak.
- Up to a thousand people could join online on Zoom and participate in the voting on the resolutions during the session. They will, however, not be seen and will not be able to speak.
- Everyone else will be able to view the proceeding live-streamed online.

Every effort will be made to draw participants from different parts of the country. Politicians will also be invited to participate.

Procedure

- The parliamentary tool of a Short Duration Discussion will be adopted for the discussions in the Janta Parliament
- Each discussion will last for 2.5 hours at least
- Participants will be expected to present their views on the topic, as well as table formal resolutions (optional). At the end of the discussion the resolutions will also be put to vote live
- Participants may participate as individuals or be recognized as affiliated to organizations / institutions / groups.
- A presiding officer will conduct the proceedings
- In another deviation, an external expert / panel of experts could make a short presentation to the entire House at the beginning of the discussion on the topic and present relevant data and figures.

Output

A policy proposal is also being prepared with inputs from various participating organisations. This will be submitted to Members of Parliament so that they may table the same in Parliament, refer to those in discussions during Monsoon Session, submit those as memorandum to the Government.