



13th National Assembly of Pakistan

Budget Session Roundup

5th Session: June 02-24, 2008

The National Assembly of Pakistan

Budget Session Roundup

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Overview

The fifth session of the 13th National Assembly, the Budget Session, started on Monday June 02, 2008 and was prorogued on Tuesday June 24, 2008. Though the 5th session lasted for 23 days, the House met for 19 working days. The new government presented its first Finance Bill on June 11, 2008 which was passed on June 22, 2008.

The National Assembly met for a total of 96 Hours and 50 Minutes which means on the average a little over 5 hours per working day. This is an improvement as the average working hours in the 4th Session (previous session) of the 13th National Assembly stood at 2 hours and 45 minutes while the average working hours in the 12th National Assembly were a little over 3 hours.

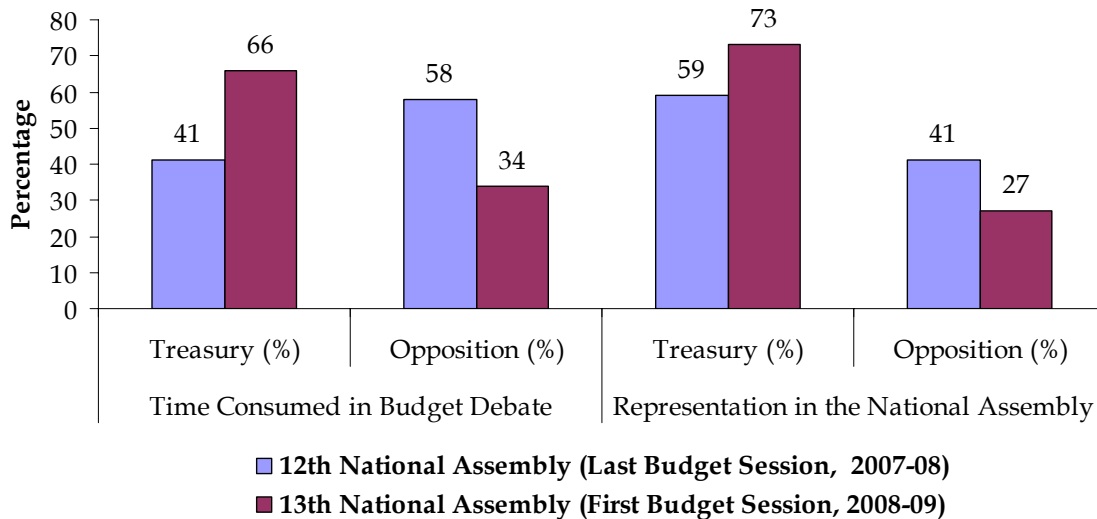
For the first time in the country's history, details of the Defence budget were placed before the Parliament. In the past only one-line Defence budget was presented and the issue was never debated in Parliament. The finance bill passed by the National Assembly also includes the controversial provision increasing the number of Supreme Court judges to 29.

The first Budget Session of the 13th National Assembly lasted for 19 working days as compared to 11 working days in 2007-08. However, the session saw no improvement in the number of days, 6 in total, in which general discussion was allowed on the budget. Despite repeated demands, this year too, no formal or informal role of the Committees was allowed for in the budget session. However 229 members, 166 (72%) from the treasury and 63 (28%) from the opposition, participated in the budget debate in the current strength of the House of 339 MNAs which translates to 68 % participation level. This is in comparison with the participation level of 55 % during the 2007-2008 budget session. This limited comparison indicates significant improvement in participation level but it should be understood that participation levels in general are higher during the initial years of an Assembly compared to the last years.

The total time allocated for budget debate was 50 hours with about 37 hours (73%) going to the treasury benches while about 13 hours (27%) were given to the opposition MNAs. This was in line with each side's representation in the National Assembly. The total time consumed in the budget debate was 41.46 hours from which 27.40 hours (66%) were consumed by the treasury benches while opposition legislators used 14.06 hours (34%) in budget debate, almost an hour more than their allocated time.

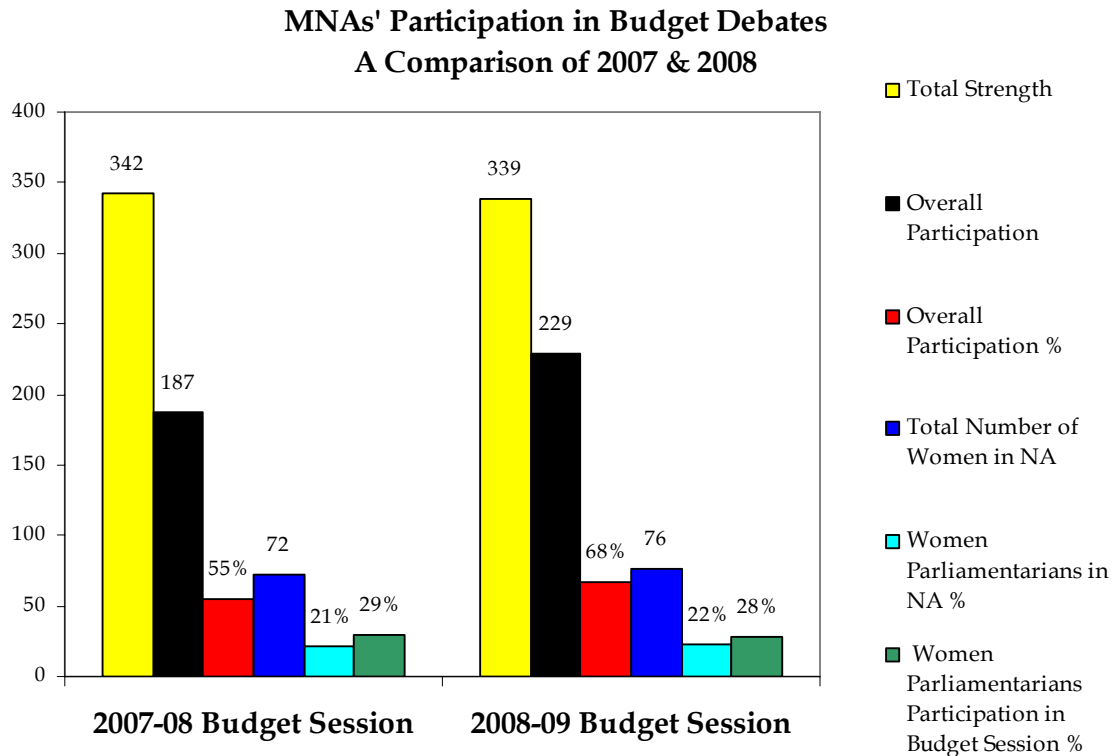
In the Budget Session 2007-08 the total time allocated was 55 hours with 32.30 hours (59%) allocated for the treasury and 22.30 hours (41%) for the opposition. The total time consumed during the budget debate of 2007-08 was 45.22 hours with 18.43 hours (41%) used by the treasury and 26.39 hours (58%) by the opposition. A total of 187 members had participated in the budget debate of 2007-08 with 77 members from the treasury and 110 members from the opposition.

	Time Consumed in Budget Debate		Representation in the National Assembly	
	Treasury (%)	Opposition (%)	Treasury (%)	Opposition (%)
12th National Assembly (Last Budget Session, 2007-08)	41 %	58 %	59%	41%
13th National Assembly (First Budget Session, 2008-09)	66%	34%	73%	27%



A total of 1148 Cut Motions were moved this year as compared to 1717 during the budget session of 2007-08. The largest number of cut motions were moved on the Ministry of Interior (205) followed by the Ministry of Health (200) and Ministry of Water and Power (181). During the budget session of 2007-08, maximum cut motions were moved on the Ministry of Water and Power (318) followed by the Ministry of Interior (316) and the Cabinet Division (301).

Out of a total of 76 Women MNAs, 64 participated in the budget debate which translates to 84 per cent participation rate, significantly higher than overall participation level of 68 %. During the 2007-08 Budget Session, women MNAs' participation rate was 76 %.



The Senate of Pakistan submitted 76 recommendations on the Finance Bill out of which 51 were adopted by the National Assembly.

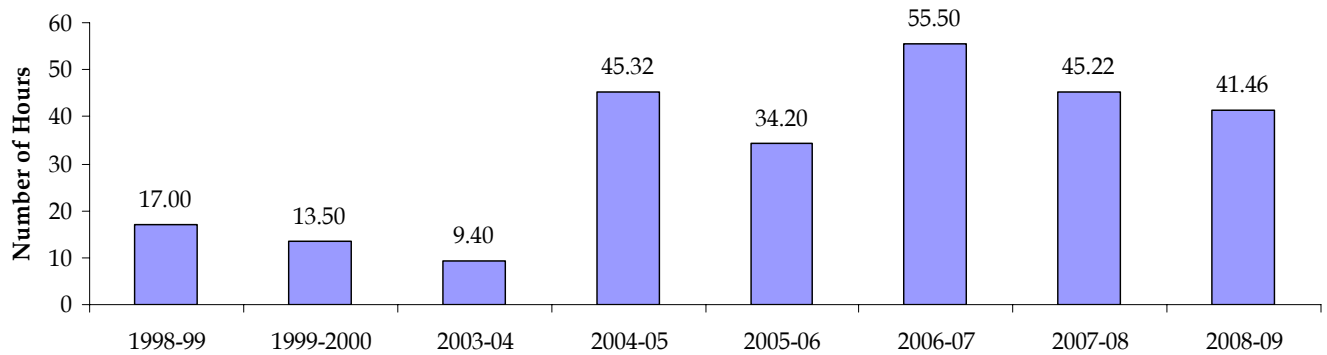
The Government introduced eight (08) bills during the session while seven (07) Private Member's Bills were also received, out of which four (04) were moved and deferred during the session.

A total of 1448 questions were received during the session out of which 18 % (254 Questions) were answered whereas 388 questions were asked during the previous session out of which 28 % (109 Questions) were answered. The average percentage of questions answered during the past 5 years of the 12th National Assembly was (21 %).

A Comparison of the Budget Sessions 1998-2008

	1998-99	1999-2000	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
Total Working Days of the Budget Session	11	13	5	9	8	13	11	19
Total Working Days of the Budget Session Consumed in General Discussion	5	6	4	6	5	7	6	6
Number of Members Participated	80	66	48	191	132	183	187	229
Time Consumed in the Budget Sessions	17.00 hours	13.50 hours	09.40 hours	45.32 hours	34.20 hours	55.50 hours	45.22 hours	41.46 hours

Time Consumed in the Budget Sessions



Key Developments

Details of the Defence Budget

The coalition Government upheld its pledge to present details of the Defence Budget in the Parliament. In the past only one-line Defence budgets have been presented and the issue never debated in the Parliament. Defence budget presented showed the service-wise break-up for 2008-09: Rs. 128.699 billion earmarked for the Army; Rs. 71.006 billion for the Air Force; Rs. 29.133 billion for the Navy; and Rs. 66.467 billion for the Defence procurement (DP) establishment and other accounts organisations. Although the level of detail was not high but the symbolic move was significant keeping in mind the short time available to the new Government before the presentation of the Budget.

National Assembly Website

The National Assembly provided on its website key information about the Assembly sittings and proceedings for the first time in the history of the country. The National Assembly website now carries the Orders of the Day (Daily Agenda of the Sittings), details of the Legislative Business and the Questions-Answers of the Question Hour. This is lauded and termed as a great step forward under the new National Assembly leadership towards a Parliament that is close to the people and its activities are transparent and open to the public. The information provided at the National Assembly website will go a long way in bringing people and the National Assembly closer and giving timely data to the media and analysts of parliamentary democracy. Full texts of the Answers provided by the Government in response to the Members' Questions contribute towards a wealth of reliable information about the Government performance and plans.

Standing Committees Remain Non-Functional

Although the leadership of the 13th National Assembly has been lauded for the timely formation of the Standing Committees during the first working session of the National Assembly, the committees remained non-functional as the chairpersons of the Committees could not be elected during the 5th Session. Standing Committees are the most important vehicles of carrying out legislative and oversight functions and the delay in making these committees functional is a cause of serious concern.

First Walkout of the PML-N

The PML-N, a key coalition partner of the PPP Government staged a walkout from the current National Assembly to protest the decision of the Lahore High Court (LHC) to disqualify Mr. Muhammad Nawaz Sharif from contesting the by-elections scheduled for June 26.

However, the walk-out was staged despite the announcement of Prime Minister Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani on the floor of the House that the government would challenge the decision in the Supreme Court with a request to postpone the by-elections in NA-123 till the final verdict on the appeal was announced.

Improvements in the Budget Process from the Next Budget

Winding up the general debate on the new government's first budget, the Minister in-charge for Finance Syed Naveed Qamar told the House that the Government planned to begin budget deliberations in the house in future as early as March rather than June. He said that beginning next year the expenditure part of the budget would be presented before the National Assembly in March for deliberations in different Standing Committees before the presentation of the final budget in June.

PILDAT welcomed the decision of the new government as PILDAT has been continuously calling upon the leadership of the National Assembly, various political parties and Parliamentarians in general for the last 5 years, to review the budget process and make it more effective. PILDAT had prepared its recommendations back in 2004 in the light of interactions with the Members of the National Assembly, civil society, general public and on the basis of its own convictions shaped by, among others, regional and international exposure.

PILDAT recommendations include that the budget process should be amended by providing an effective role to the National Assembly in the review of the budget proposals of the government and giving a significant role to the standing committees to review the demands for grants relating to their respective ministries or divisions, extending the budget session to a longer duration, i.e., up to 90 days or more, to allow a more meaningful input.

During the fourth year of the previous government, 56 MNAs from the then-ruling PML had signed a letter addressed to the PM. Late MNA, Mr. M. P. Bhandara was among the leading movers of the letter. It suggested proposals to improve the budget-making process and demanded the National Assembly be given a better role in it. Instead of being welcomed, the letter created ripples in the government ranks. Instead of being seen as meaningful suggestions for strengthening of the institution representing the public, it was dubbed as a violation of the party discipline. In the Indian Lok Sabha, the budget session begins in the 3rd week of February and go up to May. Once the Budget is presented in the Lok Sabha, there are general discussions on the provisions of the budget which last for about 4-5 days and vote on account is taken. In the interregnum, the Indian Parliament gets divided into 24 mini Parliaments or Departmentally-Related Standing Committees (DRSC) to examine demands for grants for each government department. After a thorough scrutiny, a report is

presented on each ministry. Once the budget has been scrutinized by the committees, the grants are voted on. After this stage, the appropriation bill is passed empowering the government to appropriate money out of the consolidated fund of India. After 2-3 days of discussion, the Finance Bill is passed. The entire budget process gets completed within 75 days of the presentation of the budget.

Major Issues Raised and / or Discussed

1. Improved Budget Process for the National Assembly in the Next Budget

Winding up the general debate on the new government's first budget, the Minister in-charge for Finance Syed Naveed Qamar told the House that the Government planned to begin budget deliberations in the house in future as early as March rather than June. He said that beginning next year, the expenditure part of the budget would be presented before the National Assembly in March for deliberations in different Standing Committees before the presentation of the final budget in June.

2. Prime Minister's Question Hour

On many occasions during the session Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani chose to answer questions about the Government's stance and performance although the questions were not directed at him. While answering questions the Prime Minister said that he had volunteered to reply to questions. He said that the Speaker could fix any day for Prime Minister's Question Hour in the house.

3. Restoration of the Judiciary

The demand for restoration of the pre-November 3, 2007 Judiciary in the country was time and again discussed in the House both by the PML-N legislators as well as by the opposition legislators who chided the government for not fulfilling its promise through the Muree Declaration of restoring the judges within the stipulated time.

The PML-N legislators criticized the PPPP government on many counts saying that while the PML-N wanted to keep the coalition intact, its coalition partners needed to show seriousness and sincerity in upholding their joint pledges.

PML-Q MNAs criticized the coalition government and said that these were defining moments for the country and the coalition partners had to prove that they were committed to implementing the 'Muree Declaration' and the 'Charter of Democracy.' The PPPP government needed to clarify its position on the judge's issue and criticized that differences within the coalition have hampered the solution of basic issues like poverty, supremacy of constitution, reinstatement of judges and impeachment of the President.

4. Protection of Non-Muslim Communities and Increasing funds for Non-Muslim MNAs

Prime Minister Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani announced that his government was in consultation with non-Muslim MNAs to enhance their development funds at least by one hundred per cent. The PM reiterated his Government's pledge to ensure full protection to the non-Muslim communities and increase development budget for their welfare. He said that he has directed all the concerned departments of the federal government to strictly implement the quota of non-Muslims in government jobs. Referring to the proposed constitutional package, he said the PPP has proposed representation of non-Muslims in the Senate and urged the parliamentarians to fully support this constitutional package.

5. Commuting Death Sentences to Life Imprisonment

Prime Minister Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani called for the country's thousands of death sentences to be commuted to life-term as a birthday tribute to assassinated chairperson of the Pakistan People's Party and two-time premier Benazir Bhutto. "The remission will not apply to those involved in heinous crimes," he said. Later, the cabinet approved the decision, however the Prime Minister was criticized for taking the decision as it is the President, not the Prime Minister constitutionally who has the authority to directly commute the sentences. The Prime Minister announced that the Interior Ministry had been asked to move a summary to the President to commute the sentences of those on death row to life imprisonment besides giving remission of 90 days to the prisoners.

6. Benazir Bhutto Remembered

The National Assembly Members from both sides of the aisle paid rich tributes to Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto on her 55th birthday falling on June 21. Remembered as a "symbol of the Federation and a strong Pakistan" MNAs recounted her dynamic leadership. They condemned her assassination and prayed to Allah Almighty to grant eternal peace to her soul. They also demanded an independent investigation into her assassination and bringing the culprits to justice.

The Prime Minister announced the formation of the Benazir Bhutto Trust, which would look after the children, particularly those from FATA, whose parents lost their lives in terrorist attacks or bombing; renaming the Islamabad International Airport as Benazir Bhutto Airport and renaming the Rawalpindi General Hospital, where Ms. Bhutto breathed her last, as Benazir Bhutto Hospital.

The National Assembly also observed two-minute silence to pay respect to Benazir Bhutto and to her meritorious services for the nation and the country. Dua was also offered for her departed soul in the house.

7. Opposition's Criticism of the Budget 2008-09

Following the parliamentary tradition, the general debate on the budget was opened by the Leader of the Opposition. The opposition criticised the Federal Budget 2008-09 alleging that the government, despite its claims of cutting non-development expenditure, had allocated Rs. 2 billion for purchasing helicopters under the garb of relief and it intended to purchase new cars for which it had set aside Rs. 2.69 billion. "All the PPP ministers who have been assigned more than two ministries have also taken in their control four or five luxury vehicles which are run on government fuel," opposition members claimed.

They criticised the government for doing very little for promoting agriculture. Sugar millers were not paying the cane growers fully which hampered timely sowing of the crop and lowered the production. Small farmers were also suffering at the hands of the government and getting less return for their output. The members called for increasing facilities of easy and cheaper agriculture loans, facilitating small loan defaulters, offering more subsidies on fertilisers and other inputs and streamlining irrigation in the water deficit areas of Punjab, Sindh and Balochistan. The opposition criticised an increase of Rs10 billion in CDA's budget although it had failed to properly provide the citizens sanitation, remove encroachment, manage weekly bazaars and maintain parliament lodges. They demanded that the National Accountability Bureau should be disbanded in accordance with Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani's first speech, alleging that the bureau had done no good except victimising political opponents. Prime Minister's protocol was also criticized which was termed to be the same as available to his predecessors even after his stated commitment to an austerity drive. The Government was criticized for failing to constitute the Council of Common Interests as it was pointed out that only 11 meetings of the CCI had been held over the past 36 years, which was a violation of the Constitution.

Members also criticised the Earthquake Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Authority (ERRA) for spending a huge amount on establishment expenses while doing little to mitigate the problems of the survivors of the October 2005 earthquake. The performance of the Federal Public Service Commission was also criticised. Frivolous and luxurious foreign tours by government officials, the PM, ministers and parliamentarians were also criticised and a demand was made that everyone who paid a visit abroad

should submit his/her report in the House. The Presidency and its funds also came under severe criticism from the House in which many members demanded to halve the funds of the Presidency and spend the money saved on poor.

8. Previous Government, President Pervez Musharraf Criticised

The National Assembly witnessed many fiery speeches against the person of President Pervez Musharraf and his continuation in the office during the budget speech. The long-rule of President Pervez Musharraf was criticized and many members said that as long as Gen. (Retd.) Pervez Musharraf and his legacy remained associated with the policy-making process there would be no visible change in governance.

The previous government of the PML-Q, especially the rule of former Punjab Chief Minister and current Opposition Leader in the National Assembly Chaudhry Pervaiz Ilahi was criticized. "Genocide of innocent children at Jamia Hafsa," President Musharraf's callousness in not allowing Nawaz Sharif to attend the last rites of his father, the sacking of the Chief Justice and other Judges and causing the death of a large number of people in military operations in the tribal areas and Balochistan were also criticized by members.

9. National Assembly condemned Afghan President's statement; Attack on Bajaur

The National Assembly strongly condemned Afghan President Hamid Karzai's statement of sending Afghan troops to Pakistan. The National Assembly also condemned bombardment and missile attack in Bajaur Agency through an adjournment motion. Winding up the debate, the Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi invited the opposition parties to build national consensus to tackle frequent violations on border with Afghanistan and missile attack in the Bajaur Agency and other tribal areas.

10. Kargil Debacle can be discussed in the House

Following the heated debate in the National Assembly after a point of order about the televised interview of former Corps Commander 10 Corps Lt. Gen. (Retd.) Jamshed Gulzar Kiyani, MNAs demanded a thorough probe into the debacle of Kargil and severely criticized President Musharraf's policies. The Speaker gave the ruling that Kargil and 1971 War could be discussed in the National Assembly after bringing the issues in the National Assembly Standing Committee on Defence.

Legislation

Bills Introduced

Government Bills

Eight (08) Government Members' Bills were introduced during the 5th Session while one (1) was passed:

1. The Companies (Appointment of Legal Advisers) (Amendment) Act, 2008
2. The Representation of the People (Amendment) Act, 2008
3. The Code of Criminal Procedure (Amendment) Act, 2008
4. The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2008
5. The Federal Board of Revenue (Amendment) Act, 2008
6. The Finance Bill, 2008
7. The Insurance (Amendment) Act, 2008
8. The Modaraba Companies and Modaraba (Floatation and Control) (Amendment) Act, 2008

Private Members' Bills

Seven (07) Private Members' Bills were introduced during the 5th Session. These included the following:

1. The Home Based Workers Social Protection Act, 2008: Mrs. Yasmeen Rehman and Mrs. Shakeela Khanam Rashid
2. The Pakistan Penal Code (Amendment) Act, 2008: Mrs. Kashmala Tariq
3. The Pakistan Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2008: Begum Shahnaz Sheikh and 6 others
4. The Prevention of Anti-Women Practices (Criminal Law Amendment) Act, 2008: Ch. Pervez Ellahi and 7 others
5. The Tibb-e-Unani, Ayurvedic, Homoeopathic, Herbal and other non-Allopathic Medicine Act, 2008: Dr. Attiya Inayatullah and 6 others
6. The Tibb-e-Unani, Ayurvedic, Homoeopathic, Herbal and other non-Allopathic Medicine Act, 2008: Mrs. Yasmeen Rehman
7. The Capital Development Authority (Amendment) Act, 2008: Dr. Donya Aziz and 2 others.

Resolutions

1. Resolution moved by Justice (Retd.) Fakhar-un-Nisa Khokhar, MNA to build a monument and establish a library under Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto's name, at the place of her assassination was passed by the National Assembly on June 10, 2008.
2. Resolution moved by Syed Naveed Qamar, Minister for Finance, Revenue and Statistics to establish 58 Parliamentary Friendship Groups with Parliaments of other countries and to authorise Madam Speaker to establish such groups was passed on June 24, 2008.

The Session at a Glance

Punctuality & Working Hours

Total No. of Days the Session Lasted	23
Actual No. of Days the House Met	19
Total No. of Days when the Session Started on Time	01
Total No. of Days when the Session started late by Less than 30 Minutes	08
Total No. of Days when the Session started late by More Than 30 Minutes	10
Total No. of Hours the House Met	96 hours 50 minutes
Average No. of Hours per work Day	5 hours 5 minutes

Performance during the Session

Questions

No. of Questions Received	1448
No. of Questions Admitted	928
No. of Questions Answered	254 (18%)
No. of Questions admitted but not Answered	611

Calling Attention Notices

Total Calling Attention Notices Received	176
Total brought before the House	15
Total disallowed	161

Privilege Motions

Total Privilege Motions Received	08
Brought before the House	01
Referred to the Standing Committee on Rules of Procedure	01
Motions disallowed	01

Adjournment Motions

Total Adjournment Motions Received	79
Brought before the House	06
Discussed in the House	05

Disallowed	60
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Motions under Rule 259

(Motion that Policy, Situation, Statement or any other matter be taken into consideration)

Total Motions Received under Rule 259	48
Total Motions Admitted but lapsed	31
Disallowed	12
Under Process	07

Motions under Rule 87

Total Motions Received under Rule 87	06
Total Motions Admitted	01
Discussed in the House	01

Resolutions

Total Resolutions Received	149
Total Resolutions Admitted	67
Disallowed	15
Lapsed / Under process	66
Resolutions Passed	02

Government Bills Introduced

Total Government Bills Introduced	08
Bills Passed	01 (Finance Bill 2008)
Bills Withdrawn	0
Bills Pending	15

Private Members' Bills

Private Members' Bills Received	07
Moved and deferred	04
Pending	29