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Reviving a far-sighted but forgotten Bill mechanism

1. What are Private Member's Bills (PMBs)?

- PMBs are legislative proposals introduced by MPs who are not Ministers.
- They allow MPs from both ruling and opposition parties to bring in their own legislative ideas.
- PMBs are introduced and discussed usually on Fridays during parliamentary sessions.
- They offer MPs freedom to express views and push issues not bound by strict party lines.

2. Deteriorating Role of PMBs in Parliament

- PMBs have increasingly become symbolic due to procedural neglect.
- Frequent disruptions, early adjournments, and prioritisation of government business have eroded the space for PMBs.
- Skipping PMBs reflects not just procedural lapses but democratic regression.

3. Statistical Trends – 17th and 18th Lok Sabha

- Since 1952, only 14 PMBs have been passed and given Presidential assent.
- No PMB has cleared both Houses since 1970.
- 17th Lok Sabha (2019–2024):
 - 729 PMBs in Lok Sabha, 705 in Rajya Sabha
 - Only 2 were discussed in Lok Sabha; 14 in Rajya Sabha
- 18th Lok Sabha (2024 onwards):
 - Only 20 MPs have introduced PMBs so far
 - 64 PMBs introduced in Budget session, none were discussed
 - Fridays allotted to PMBs were lost to disruptions or government business.

4. Significance of PMBs for Democracy



- PMBs let MPs reflect public concerns, personal views, and emerging social issues.
- They are a rare space for bipartisan contributions without party whips.
- They promote accountability, grassroots responsiveness, and policy innovation.

5. Key Examples of Notable PMBs

- **‘Right to Disconnect’ Bill (2019)** by Supriya Sule:
 - Proposed giving employees the right to disconnect after work hours
 - Sparked debate on mental health and labour rights despite no progress
- **‘Rights of Transgender Persons’ Bill (2014)** by Tiruchi Siva:
 - Passed in Rajya Sabha (first PMB in 4 decades)
 - Though it lapsed in Lok Sabha, it paved the way for the 2019 government Act
- **Gopal Chinayya Shetty’s Bill** on free healthcare for senior citizens:
 - Showed even ruling party MPs can introduce socially useful legislation
 - Based on local feedback and personal observation.

6. Constraints Due to Anti-Defection Law

- The **52nd Constitutional Amendment (1985)** introduced the Anti-Defection Law (Tenth Schedule).
- Though it ensured political stability, it also restricted MPs from acting independently of their parties.
- Treasury Bench MPs face more curbs in legislative freedom due to party discipline.
- In this restrictive environment, PMBs are among the last tools of independent initiative.

7. Voter Expectations and Individual MP Responsibility

- Voters elect MPs not just for party loyalty but for personal integrity and local work.
- MPs are expected to be voices for their constituencies, not mere party representatives.
- PMBs reflect this dual role — party allegiance and public service.

8. Urgent Need for Reforms

- **Protect Friday time slots** for PMBs through clear procedural amendments.



- Only emergency situations should be allowed to override PMB time.
- **Enforcement of discussion slots** for PMBs should be strict and consistent.

9. New Institutional Support Mechanisms

- **Proposal for a dedicated Review Committee** to screen and prioritise PMBs.
- This committee can assess Bills for quality, relevance, and constitutional validity.
- It can recommend a shortlist for debate based on public and cross-party support.

10. Time Management and Scheduling Reforms

- Instead of eating into Friday PMB slots, Parliament should **extend working hours**.
- Current working hours are 11:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.; a 1-2 hour extension can increase overall productivity.
- Delimitation and rising number of MPs make time-efficient management even more essential.

11. International Best Practice: The Ten-Minute Rule (UK)

- In the **UK Parliament**, any MP can speak for 10 minutes on their PMB.
- Another MP may oppose for 10 minutes, and the Bill is introduced without a long debate.
- India can adopt or adapt this rule to allow wider participation and idea-sharing through PMBs.

12. Institutional Acknowledgment and Vision for the Future

- **Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar** has recognised the importance of PMBs.
- He called PMBs “**far-sighted, forward-looking, and a gold mine**” for democracy.
- This highlights the need to revive and nurture PMBs as tools for democratic deepening.

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