Expressing concern over the functioning of parliamentary institutions in the country and decline of public trust in them, Vice President Venkaiah Naidu has come out with a 15-point reform charter. This is the new political normal to enable effective functioning of the Parliament and State Legislatures.

The 15-point charter:

• Political Parties has to ensure attendance of at least 50% of their legislators to all sessions.

• Review of anti-defection law.

• Review of the whip system which is restricting reasonable dissent even.

• Set up special courts for time-bound adjudication of criminal complaints against legislators.

• Pre and post legislative impact assessment.

• Address problem of rising number of legislators with criminal background.

• Governments should be responsive to opposition and opposition to be responsible and constructive while resorting to available parliamentary instruments

• Consensus on the proposal for simultaneous elections.

• Steps should be taken for the effective functioning of the Parliamentary Committees.

• The representation of women in legislatures needs to be raised.

Why is 15 point reform charter is necessary?

The present pitfalls of our parliamentary democracy are too well known to be elaborated. Briefly, these include:

Declining number of sittings of legislatures.

Persistent disruptions.

Declining quality of legislatures with criminal record.

High degree of absenteeism.

Inadequate representation of women.

Rising money and muscle power in elections.

Lack of inner democracy in functioning of the political parties.

Poor knowledge, low argumentative power of the masses, negative influences of poverty and economic disparities.

Faulty ‘First Pass the Post (FPTP)’ election system.

Society’s perpetual habit of accepting all permeable state to control public and private affairs.

Way forward:
As an institution, Parliament is central to the very idea of democracy and was assigned a pivotal role in our Constitution by the founding fathers of the republic.

Yet, so many decades later, it has neither evolved nor matured as it could, might or should have. If anything, slowly but surely, it has diminished in stature and significance.