

Question Hour

Question Hour is the first hour of a sitting session of India's Lok Sabha devoted to questions that Members of Parliament raise about any aspect of administrative activity. The concerned Minister is obliged to answer to the Parliament, either orally or in writing, depending on the type of question raised. Questions are one of the way Parliament can hold the Executive accountable.

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Types of Question

There are two main types of question—Starred and non-starred. Starred Questions are those for which an oral answer is expected. The member is allowed to ask a supplementary question, with the permission of the Speaker, after the reply is obtained from the Minister concerned. Non-starred questions are those for which a written reply is expected. After the reply has been provided, no supplementary question can be asked. A notice period is to be given to the minister to reply to a question. However, if a Member seeks to ask a question urgently and cannot wait for the duration of the notice period, then the member can do so provided it is accepted by the Speaker. Such questions are called supplementary questions.

Recent Changes

The following procedural changes have been in force since the 5th session of the 5th Lok Sabha^[1]

- A 15-day notice period is now to be given to the minister to respond to a question in Parliament (concept of minimum and maximum notice duration has been removed). The notice duration used to be a minimum of 10 days or maximum of 21 days.
- The Speaker now has the authority to direct answers to a starred question asked by a member in case of his or her absence on the day their name was called.
- A member is now required to make a statement in the House correcting the reply given by him or her earlier irrespective of whether the reply given pertained to a starred or unstarred or a short notice question.
- The maximum questions, starred or unstarred, a member is now entitled to give is 10 per day

Question hour in other legislatures

This sort of a process where elected representatives ask questions that are replied by the Prime Minister or other government ministers is part of parliamentary tradition in many other countries. The Question Hour in the Indian Parliament is similar to the Prime Minister's Questions in the House of Commons in the United Kingdom, the First Minister's Questions in the Scottish

Parliament and National Assembly for Wales, the Question Period in the federal Parliament and provincial legislatures of Canada and the Question Time in Australia and New Zealand.

Significance

The right to ask questions was given to the legislators for the first time by the Act of 1892, and to ask supplementary questions in 1909. Any act of the Government can be made the subject of a question. Even though the question is directed to a particular minister, it is his office that is responsible for framing a response. Formally, it is the process of eliciting information from the government. However, the question hour has been used to bring out several administrative lapses.

Mundhra Scandal

India's very first major financial scam was brought to light during the 2nd Lok Sabha when Feroze Gandhi questioned the finance ministry regarding government owned Life Insurance Corporation's unauthorised investment into Haridas Mundhra's companies. It eventually resulted in the resignation of the the finance Minister T. T. Krishnamachari

Puducherry Licence Scandal^[2]

In 1974, during the 5th Lok Sabha, a licence scandal was unearthed during question hour. A memorandum allegedly signed by 21 MPs were submitted by traders of Puducherry to the Union Commerce Ministry to grant licenses for importing various items. The signatures were forged on the behest of Indira Gandhi's key aide, Lalit Narain Mishra.

See also

- Interpellation (politics)

External links

- Introduction to Question Hour in Lok Sabha

References

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This page was last edited on 17 January 2018, at 17:05.

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