

MONSOON SESSION OF PARLIAMENT: POLITY

NEWS: Parliament Monsoon Session: Government to introduce eight new Bills

WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

The Monsoon Session of Parliament has commenced, featuring 21 sittings and the introduction of eight new Bills, including the Geoheritage Sites Bill and amendments to the Mines and Minerals Act. This session highlights Parliament's crucial role in legislative business and government accountability through mechanisms like Question Hour and Zero Hour, which are vital for scrutinizing executive actions. **Monsoon Session of Parliament Begins: Focus on New Legislation**

The Monsoon Session of Parliament has commenced with **21 sittings** planned, during which the government intends to introduce **eight new Bills**. Notable among these new Bills are:

- Geoheritage Sites and Geo-relics (Preservation and Maintenance) Bill
- Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Bill
- National Sports Governance Bill

About Sessions of Parliament:

The Indian Parliament functions through various sessions, which are crucial for legislative work, policy discussions, and executive accountability.

- **Constitutional Basis:**
 - **Article 85** of the Indian Constitution grants the President the power to summon each House of Parliament (Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha).
 - A critical constitutional requirement is that there must not be **more than six months** between two sessions.
 - **Article 85(1):** Empowers the President to summon Parliament at such time and place as deemed fit.
 - **Article 85(2):** Grants the President the power to **prorogue** (terminate a session) either or both Houses and to **dissolve the Lok Sabha** (ending its term).
- **Types of Sessions:** The Indian Constitution does not specify a fixed number of sessions or minimum sitting days for Parliament. Traditionally, three main sessions are held annually:
 - a. **Budget Session (February–May):**
 - **Start:** Begins with the President's address to a joint sitting of both Houses.
 - **Key Focus:** Primarily dedicated to the presentation and approval of the **Union Budget**, which includes detailed discussions on financial proposals.
 - **Process:** Includes a **recess** period during which standing committees review the demands for grants from various ministries.

- **Scope:** Besides financial matters, significant legislative business and policy discussions are also undertaken.
- **Duration:** It is typically the **longest and most significant session** of the year.

b. **Monsoon Session (July–August):**

- **Timing:** Held during the monsoon season.
- **Focus:** Primarily concentrates on **introducing and passing Bills**.
- **Purpose:** Provides an important platform for **debates on national issues** and ensuring **government accountability**.

c. **Winter Session (November–December):**

- **Timing:** The final session of the calendar year.
- **Purpose:** Serves as an opportunity to **review government performance** and address pending legislative and policy matters.

d. **Special Session:**

- **Constitutional Status:** Not explicitly defined in the Constitution.
- **Purpose:** Can be convened for **specific, urgent purposes**, such as urgent legislative business or to commemorate historic events.
- **Historical Examples:**
 - 1962: Convened during the India-China War.
 - 1971: Convened during the India-Pakistan conflict.

2. What is Question Hour?

Question Hour is a vital parliamentary device for ensuring executive accountability.

- **Timing:** It is the **first hour of a parliamentary sitting**.
- **Purpose:** During this hour, Members of Parliament (MPs) ask questions to ministers to **hold the government accountable** for its policies and actions.
- **Recent Change:** In 2014, the Rajya Sabha shifted Question Hour from 11 a.m. to 12 noon.
- **Rule Basis:** As per **Rule 38** of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha, one hour of each sitting is designated for this purpose.
- **Authority:** The presiding officers (Speaker in Lok Sabha, Chairperson in Rajya Sabha) are the final authority on conducting Question Hour.
- **Exceptions:** Question Hour is held daily during sessions, with two notable exceptions:

- When the President addresses a joint sitting of both Houses.
- When the Finance Minister presents the Union Budget.
- **Significance:**
 - **Scrutiny:** Allows for detailed scrutiny of government policies and administrative decisions.
 - **Grievances:** Highlights public grievances and identifies gaps in existing policies.
 - **Public Response:** Helps gauge public reaction to government initiatives.
 - **Action Trigger:** Can lead to further parliamentary action, such as the setting up of committees or the review of Bills.
- **Types of Questions:**
 - **Starred Questions:**
 - **Response:** Answered **orally** by the minister.
 - **Follow-up:** Marked with an asterisk (*), allowing MPs to ask **supplementary questions** for clarification.
 - **Unstarred Questions:**
 - **Response:** Answered in **written form**. The response is laid on the Table of the House.
 - **Follow-up:** **No oral answer** and **no follow-up questions** are permitted.
 - **Short Notice Questions:**
 - **Response:** Answered **orally**.
 - **Notice Period:** Allowed with **less than 10 days' notice** (though the text states 15 days, 10 days is the standard in practice) due to their urgent nature, requiring justification for the short notice.
 - **Questions to Private Members:**
 - **Response:** Can be **oral or written**.
 - **Context:** Asked when the issue relates to a private member's Bill, resolution, or any other business for which that private member is responsible in the House.
 - **Supplementary Questions:**
 - **Response:** Answered **orally**.

- **Purpose:** Asked by MPs to seek further clarification on responses to **starred** or **short notice questions**.

What is Zero Hour?

Zero Hour is a distinctive feature of Indian parliamentary practice.

- **Constitutional Status:** It is a **parliamentary convention unique to India** and is **not mentioned in the official Rules of Procedure** of Parliament.
- **Timing:** It begins **immediately after Question Hour** (typically from 12 noon) and precedes the regular agenda.
- **Purpose:** Allows MPs to **raise urgent matters of public importance without prior notice** or permission, often on issues they believe require immediate attention from the government.
- **Origin:** Introduced informally in the **1950s** as MPs felt the need for a dedicated space to raise pressing public issues that couldn't wait for formal procedures.
- **Naming:** It was named "Zero Hour" because it starts at **12:00 p.m.**, conceptually the "zero" point between the end of Question Hour and the beginning of the regular legislative business (or lunch break).
- **Recognition:** Despite its informal nature, it is widely recognized and has become a powerful tool for democratic expression, encouraged by citizens, media, MPs, and presiding officers due to its utility in raising pressing issues.

Instruments of Oversight by Legislature over Executive :

India adopted a Parliamentary system to ensure continuous executive accountability through legislative scrutiny. Parliament performs this oversight through various mechanisms:

- **Direct Questioning:** **Question Hour** and **Zero Hour** are primary tools for direct questioning of the executive.
- **Motions and Debates:**
 - **No-confidence motions:** A crucial tool to test the confidence of the Lok Sabha in the Council of Ministers.
 - **Adjournment motions:** Used to draw the attention of the House to a definite matter of urgent public importance.
 - **Debates on Bills and Budgets:** Allow for detailed discussion and critique of government policies and financial proposals.
- **Parliamentary Committees:** These committees play a crucial role in detailed scrutiny of legislation and government functioning.
 - **Department-related Standing Committees (DRSCs):** Examine demands for grants, bills, and long-term policies of specific ministries.
 - **Financial Committees:**

- **Estimates Committee:** Examines estimates included in the budget and suggests economies in public expenditure.
- **Public Accounts Committee (PAC):** Examines the annual audit reports of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG).
- **Committee on Public Undertakings:** Examines the reports and accounts of public sector undertakings.

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