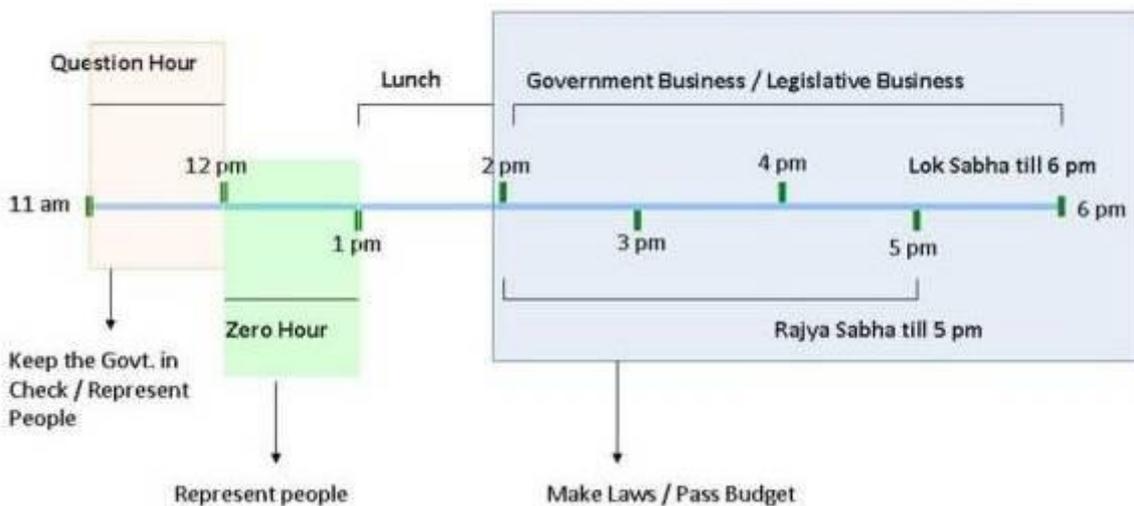




## THE QUESTION HOUR AND THE ZERO HOUR: PARLIAMENT OF INDIA

### About Parliament

## What happens in Parliament



**Question Hour:** The first hour of every sitting of Parliament is generally reserved for the asking and answering of questions.

**Zero Hour:** The time immediately following the Question Hour has come to be known as "Zero Hour". It starts at around 12 noon (hence the name) and members can, with prior notice to the Speaker, raise issues of importance during this time.

Typically, discussions on important Bills, the Budget, and other issues of national importance take place from 2pm onwards.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <http://lamp.prsindia.org/what-happens-in-parliament>



## THE QUESTION HOUR (LOK SABHA)<sup>2</sup>

### INTRODUCTION:

Generally, the **first hour of a sitting of Lok Sabha** is devoted to Questions and that hour is called the Question Hour. It has a special significance in the proceedings of Parliament.

Asking of questions is an **inherent and unfettered parliamentary right of members**. It is during the Question Hour that the **members can ask questions on every aspect of administration and Governmental activity**. Government policies in national as well as international spheres come into sharp focus as the members try to elicit pertinent information during the Question Hour.

The **Government is, as it were, put on its trial during the Question Hour and every Minister whose turn it is to answer questions has to stand up and answer for his or his administration's acts of omission and commission**. Through the Question Hour the Government is able to quickly feel the pulse of the nation and adapt its policies and actions accordingly. It is through questions in Parliament that the Government remains in touch with the people in as much as members are enabled thereby to ventilate the grievances of the public in matters concerning the administration. Questions enable Ministries to gauge the popular reaction to their policy and administration. Questions bring to the notice of the Ministers many an abuse which otherwise would have gone unnoticed. Sometimes questions may lead to the appointment of a commission, a court of enquiry or even legislation when matters raised are grave enough to agitate the public mind and are of wide public importance.

The Question Hour is an interesting part of the Parliamentary proceedings. Although a question mainly seeks information and tries to elicit facts on a particular subject, there are many a time lively and quicksilver repartees between the Members asking the questions and the Ministers answering them. These repartees are sometimes coupled with flashes of wit and humour. That is why the public galleries and the press galleries are packed to capacity during the Question Hour.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.parliamentofindia.nic.in/ls/intro/p6.htm>



## Types of Questions

Questions are of four types:-

**Starred, Un-starred, Short Notice Questions and Questions addressed to private Members:**

1. A **Starred Question** is one to which a member desires **an oral answer in the House and which is distinguished by an asterisk mark**. When a question is answered orally, supplementary questions can be asked thereon. **Only 20 questions** can be listed for oral answer on a day.
2. An **Un-starred Question** is one which is **not called for oral answer in the House and on which no supplementary questions can consequently be asked**. To such a question, a **written answer** is deemed to have been laid on the Table after the Question Hour by the Minister to whom it is addressed. It is **printed in the official report of the sitting of the House** for which it is put down. **Only 230 questions** can be listed for written answer on a day. In addition to this, 25 more questions can also be included in the Un-starred List relating to the States under Presidential Rule and the total number of questions in the list of Un-starred Questions for a day may not exceed 255 in relaxation of normal limit of 230 questions.
3. A **Short Notice Question** is one which relates to a **matter of urgent public importance** and can be asked with shorter notice than the period of notice prescribed for an ordinary question. Like a starred question, it is **answered orally followed by supplementary questions**.
4. The **Question to a Private Member** is **addressed to the Member himself/herself** and it is asked **when the subject matter of it pertains to any Bill, Resolution or any matter relating to the Business of the House for which that Member is responsible**. For such Questions, the same procedure is followed as in the case of Questions addressed to a Minister with such variations as the Speaker may consider necessary or convenient.

## Notices of Questions

A member gives notice in writing addressed to the Secretary-General, Lok Sabha, intimating his intention to ask a question. Besides the text of the question, the notice states clearly

- the **official designation of the Minister** to whom the question is addressed



- as also the **date on which the question is desired to be placed** on the list of questions for answer
- as also the **order of preference**, if any, for its being placed on the list of questions when a member tables more than one notice of questions for the same day.

The **normal period of notice of a question is not more than twenty-one and not less than ten clear days**. A short notice question can be asked with a notice **shorter than ten days**, but the member has to state briefly the **reasons for asking the question at short notice**.

**(Procedure in Lok Sabha Secretariat:** For extensive reading follow:  
<http://www.parliamentofindia.nic.in/ls/intro/p6.htm> )

**(Allotment of Days for Questions:** For extensive reading follow:  
<http://www.parliamentofindia.nic.in/ls/intro/p6.htm> )

### **Mode of Asking Questions**

The member whose question has been admitted and which is included in the list of **questions for oral answers** for a particular day, **rises in his/her seat** when the turn of his/her question comes and **asks his/her question by reading out its number on the list of questions**. The **Minister concerned answers the question**. Thereafter the member who had asked the question **can ask only two supplementary questions**. (After him/her the **second member whose name is clubbed on the question** is allowed to ask one supplementary question.) Thereafter, the **Speaker allows one supplementary each to members** who are able to catch his eye. The number of such members depends on the importance of the question. Then the next question is taken up. **The replies to questions not reached for oral answer during the Question Hour are deemed to have been laid on the Table of Lok Sabha**.

At the end of the Question Hour, *i.e.* after the questions for oral answer have been answered, **Short Notice Question**, if any, for that day is taken up and disposed of in the same way as the questions for oral answers.



### **Half-an-Hour Discussion**

Where answer to a question whether Starred or Un-starred needs elucidation on a matter of fact, any member can table a notice for raising Half-an-Hour Discussion thereon. If the notice is admitted and gets priority in ballot such a discussion may be allowed by the Speaker. During the discussion, the member who has given notice makes a short statement and not more than four other members, who have given advance notice (before 11.00 hours on the day on which discussion is to be held) are permitted to ask a question each for further elucidating any matter of fact. Thereafter, the Minister concerned replies.<sup>3</sup>

Question Hour Videos:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=81v6bvsJHOo>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cwgd4MLCTm4&list=PLQA5K-rpFKVHUfKEE8czy0PP1p8TnpMt6>
- News on the Question Hour on Land Acquisition:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=73p4b78NIHQ&list=PLQA5K-rpFKVHUfKEE8czy0PP1p8TnpMt6&index=2>

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.parliamentofindia.nic.in/ls/intro/p6.htm>



## **THE ZERO HOUR**

Apart from the Question Hour, Parliament allocates **additional time slot for the members to discuss issues**. Although it's **not recognized in our parliamentary procedure**, 'Zero Hour' has now become a norm in both the houses of Parliament.

As the 9th Lok Sabha Speaker, Rabi Ray introduced certain changes in the proceedings of the House to create more **opportunities for the members to raise matters of urgent public importance**. He proposed a mechanism to regulate the proceedings during the 'Zero Hour', raise matters in a more orderly manner and optimize the time of the House.

### **Zero Hour – Rules & Regulations**

Members wishing to raise matters during the "Zero Hour" need to give **notice to the Speaker prior to the start of the daily session**. The notice should **clearly state the subjects they want to raise**. The **Speaker is the final authority** who can either reject or accept such request.

In **Lok Sabha, only 20 matters are allowed** to be raised during the Zero Hour. Again, it is the Speaker who decides which subjects are to be discussed in the first phase (after Question Hour) and which other issues could be taken up during the second phase (after 6 pm/ at the end of the regular business). In **Rajya Sabha, total number of requests is not allowed to exceed seven on a single day**. The total time allocated for Zero Hour is 30 minutes wherein a member gets three minutes to raise the issue. The session should be completed before 1 pm. Moreover, a member is allowed to make only one Zero Hour request during a week.

**It is not mandatory to have a Zero Hour every day during the session.**

### **Proceedings during Zero Hour**

During the Zero Hour, the members of both the Houses get a chance to raise matters of public importance that need immediate attention. **Only after the Minister of Parliamentary Affairs gives assurances on the issues raised during 'Zero Hour', the relevant extracts from the proceedings are sent to the concerned ministry on the same day**. The ministry takes over from there and **initiates actions as deemed fit**. Even if no assurance of action is given, the extracts are sent to the concerned departments. **They may reply to the members after intimating the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs.**<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.elections.in/political-corner/what-is-zero-hour-in-parliament/>



**The Government is not obliged to answer the questions raised during the Zero Hour.**

Zero Hour Videos:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tNLltTcaqHA>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7hPdBsr92Nc>

