

## QUESTIONS

Members have a right to ask questions to elicit information on matters of public importance within the special cognizance of the Ministers concerned. The questions are of four types:—

- (i) Starred Questions
- (ii) Unstarred Questions
- (iii) Short Notice Questions
- (iv) Questions to Private Members

(i) A Starred Question is one to which a member desires an oral answer from the Minister in the House and is required to be distinguished by the member with an asterisk. Answer to such a question may be followed by supplementary questions by members.

(ii) An Unstarred Question is one to which written answer is desired by the member and is deemed to be laid on the Table of the House by Minister. Thus it is not called for oral answer in the House and no supplementary question can be asked thereon.

(iii) A member may give a notice of question on a matter of public importance and of urgent character for oral answer at a notice less than 10 days. Such a question is known as 'Short Notice Question'.

(iv) A Question may also be addressed to a Private Member (Under Rule 40 of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha), provided that the subject-matter of the question relates to some Bill, Resolution or other matter connected with the business of the House for which that Member is responsible. The procedure in regard to such questions is same as that followed in the case of questions addressed to a Minister with such variations as the Speaker may consider necessary.

#### **Starred and Unstarred Questions**

#### **Allotment of days for Questions**

2. Immediately on fixation of the dates of sittings of a session of Lok Sabha, allotment is made of the days available for the answering of questions relating to the various Ministries/Departments of Government of India.

For this purpose, various Ministries are divided into five Groups and fixed days are allotted to Groups of Ministries during the week. Members are informed of this allotment through paragraph in Lok Sabha Bulletin-Part II issued with the summons for the session. There is no Question Hour on Saturday, if a sitting is fixed for that day. Also on the day when President addresses both Houses assembled together or on the day when general

budget is presented in the House and during the period when the session is extended beyond the scheduled programme of sittings, there is no Question Hour.

#### **Notices of Questions**

3. A member has to give a minimum of 15 clear days' notice of a question. Member can give notices of questions following the day on which summons are issued. However, under special circumstances the Speaker can relax the required minimum notice period of fifteen clear days to protect the interest of the Members.

4. The notices of questions should be addressed to the Secretary-General, Lok Sabha, in prescribed forms available in the Parliamentary Notice Office. Besides the text of the question, the notice should state clearly the 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. Where members table more than one notice of questions for the same day, they may indicate the order of preference *inter-se*.

5. The name of the member should be written in block letters at the top of the notices of Questions. Similarly, the member's division number should also be

indicated. Every notice of a question has to be individually signed by the member. Notice of questions bearing only stamped/carbon signatures of the members are treated as unsigned notices and are referred back to the members. Notices of questions tabled by members bearing signatures which do not tally with the specimen signatures and their genuineness is in doubt, are treated as invalid and returned to the members concerned requesting them to put their signatures which may tally with the specimen provided by them. Likewise, questions written in illegible hand are liable to be referred back to the members.

6. If a notice is signed by more than one member, it is deemed to have been given by the first signatory only. Each notice of a question should, therefore, be signed by one member only. Notice of each question should be given separately.

7. As an initiative towards e-Parliament and paperless Secretariat, an e-portal namely Members' Portal was launched in 2016. Members who wish to submit their notices of Questions online may do so as intimated vide Bulletin Part-II, Para No. 3739 dated 17 July, 2016.

#### **Ballot of Questions**

8. A ballot is held in respect of all notices received in the Secretariat upto 1000 hours on the fifteenth day

before the respective date of answer through computerised auto ballot system to determine their *inter-se* priority. Separate ballots are held for Starred and Unstarred Questions and results of ballots are uploaded on the Lok Sabha homepage under 'Questions'. As this information has been put under restricted circulation, a login page has been created for the purpose which can be accessed by the Members. Hard copies of the results are also placed in the Parliamentary Notice Office of Lok Sabha for the information of members. Para regarding the same is also printed in the Bulletin-Part II. Starred and Unstarred Questions are numbered separately according to the priority gained by them at the ballot and entered in separate diaries in computer.

9. A member shall be allowed to give not more than five notices of questions both for oral and written answers, in all, for any day. Notices received in excess of five from a member for a day shall be considered for ballot for subsequent day(s) concerning that Ministry during the period of that session only. Members who intend to give notices for the entire session may do so by indicating their *inter-se* preference. In case, no such preferences are indicated, notices of questions in excess of five per day shall be considered for subsequent day(s) on the basis of point of time of their receipt. However, the existing overall limit of five admitted questions per day per Member shall continue.

10. In order to enable the members to address their questions to the Ministers concerned correctly, a booklet entitled 'Demarcation of Responsibilities in Government of India' clearly specifying the subjects for which a Ministry/Department of Government of India is responsible, is supplied to the members at the beginning of each Lok Sabha. Subsequent amendments thereto are also notified to the members.

#### **Admissibility of Questions**

11. A question is primarily asked for the purpose of obtaining information on a matter of public importance. Admissibility of Questions is governed by Rules, Directions by the Speaker and Precedents. Mere seniority in the ballot does not guarantee that the question will be admitted unless found admissible as per rules. The following types of questions are not admitted :

- (i) questions which are not clearly and precisely expressed and are too general and incapable of any specific answer or are in the nature of a leading question;
- (ii) question containing arguments, inferences or defamatory statements or otherwise referring to the character or conduct of any person, except in her/his official or public capacity;

- (iii) questions seeking expression of opinion or the solution of an abstract legal question or of a hypothetical proposition;
- (iv) questions which are in substance repetition of those answered previously or in regard to which information is available in accessible documents or in ordinary works of reference;
- (v) questions, the subject-matter of which is pending before any court of law or any other tribunal or body set up under law or is under consideration before a Parliamentary Committee;
- (vi) questions making discourteous references to foreign countries with whom India has friendly relations;
- (vii) questions raising policy matters too large to be dealt with within the limits of answer to question;
- (viii) questions seeking information about matters which are in their nature secret, such as composition of Cabinet Committees, Cabinet discussions, or advice given to the President in relation to any matter in respect of which there is a constitutional obligation not to disclose information;

- (ix) questions which ordinarily exceed 150 words;
- (x) questions relating to a matter of day-to-day administration or which tend to further the interest of an individual or a few individuals;
- (xi) questions which relate to petitions and Memoranda received by Ministers, which are not of public importance;
- (xii) questions, the subject-matter of which is primarily within the jurisdiction of Chief Election Commissioner, Comptroller and Auditor General, Courts and other such functionaries;
- (xiii) questions which tend to encourage fissiparous and divisive tendencies and weaken the unity and integrity of the country; and
- (xiv) questions which relate to a matter within the jurisdiction of the Speaker.

12. Questions seeking detailed information of statistical nature or otherwise, those concerning matters of local interest, staff matters including service grievance and those of interest to a limited section of the people or which relate to representation in the services of communities protected under the Constitution such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes in which no question of policy is

involved, may be admitted for written answer, that is, as Unstarred Questions. Similarly, questions, the replies of which are likely to be very lengthy, are also admitted as Unstarred Questions.

13. Questions relating to statutory corporations and limited companies in which Government has financial or controlling interest, are admitted only where their subject-matter relates to a matter of policy or to an act of omission on the part of the Minister, or if they raise a matter of public interest. Questions, which clearly relate to day-to-day administration and tend to throw work on the Ministries, corporations and limited companies, incommensurate with the result to be achieved, or may interfere in the autonomy, are normally disallowed.

Information in respect of working of such statutory corporations and limited companies may be obtained by the members directly from these corporations/limited companies. However, the matters on which such information is asked by members directly from these companies etc. should be normally those on which the questions in Lok Sabha would be permissible, but for the autonomy of the corporations etc. to which the matter relates.

14. Questions relating to State matters, which are not primarily the concern of the Government of India, or matters under the control of bodies not primarily

responsible to the Government of India, are not admitted. Similarly, questions relating to information on matters, which are, or have been the subject of correspondence between the Union Government and the State Governments, are not generally admissible.

15. However, notices of questions about the implementation etc., of Centrally Sponsored Schemes like Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, Mid Day Meal Scheme, Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Gramin Awaas Yojana, Indira Awaas Yojana, National Social Assistance Programme, Accelerated Rural Water Supply Programme, Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme, etc. are admitted, but information sought in such questions should be restricted to State level only. Information about block or district-wise outlays/expenditure/physical targets/achievements of such programmes is primarily the concern of State Governments. Therefore, questions seeking such information at block or district levels are ordinarily not admitted.

16. Where a reference is made to a member in connection with the notice of a question and no reply is received or a reply received from the member is too late for the consideration of the Speaker, such notice shall be treated as lapsed.

### **Question Lists**

17. In Lok Sabha, the list of Starred Questions is printed on green paper and the list of Unstarred Questions on white paper.

18. Admitted questions are arranged in order of priority obtained by the member in ballot and the order/ of preference indicated in the notice, and if no such order is indicated by the member, any one of her/his questions is placed on the list of questions for oral answer in the order in which notices are received in point of time. The total number of questions in a Starred List for a day is 20. This limit of 20 questions may, however, be exceeded by the number of transferred or postponed questions from list of questions of earlier dates that are added to the List. All admitted Starred Questions, which do not find a place in the Starred List of Questions, may be considered for Unstarred List of that day. The total number of questions in the Unstarred List of any one day does not normally exceed 230. This number may be exceeded by a maximum of 25 questions pertaining to States under President's Rule. The lists of Starred and Unstarred Questions are circulated to members and Ministries five days in advance of the date of answer. The soft copies of lists of questions are made available on the website of Lok Sabha *i.e.*, <http://loksabha.nic.in> six (06) days prior to the date of answer.

### **Status of Notices of Questions**

18A. After the lists of questions are circulated to Members and Ministries, the status of each of the notices of questions tabled by the Members is made available on the Lok Sabha homepage under 'Questions'. Since this information is meant for the use of members only, a login page has been created for the purpose.

### **Transfer/Postponement of Questions**

19. Transfer of Questions from a particular group to another group is not ordinarily permissible once the list of Questions has been printed as it causes inconvenience to the Members. However, in special circumstances, the Branch can put up a note in such cases to obtain the specific order of the Speaker. If the Speaker agrees to the proposal for transfer after the printing of the list, then the Question will be deleted from the printed list by means of a corrigendum and included in the list of questions for a subsequent date on which the Ministry, which has accepted transfer, will answer the Question. The Ministries concerned and Member will be informed accordingly. Similarly where postponement of a question printed in a Starred List is sought from one date to another by Minister concerned, it is also carried out through a corrigendum after ascertaining the convenience of the member concerned and such a postponed question has the same position in the Starred List of the subsequent date as it

had in the list of the previous date. A question printed in the Starred List can also be transferred at the request of the Member concerned, but it is put down at the end of the list of the day to which it has been postponed. Members/Ministries concerned are always informed about transfer/postponement of their question in advance.

#### **Answering of Questions**

20. Copies of answers to Starred Questions are placed in the Parliamentary Notice Office as also in the Outer Lobby of the Lok Sabha Chamber for reference by members half an hour before the commencement of the Question Hour for the day for which the questions have been put down for answer. The contents of answers should be treated as confidential and not released for publication until the questions are actually asked and answered in the House. The answer should be considered as provisional, when made available in advance and taken as final in the form in which the questions are actually answered with such corrections as may have been made by the concerned Minister.

21. The member in whose name the question stands (first name) may ask two supplementaries only and other members may ask one supplementary each, if permitted by the Chair.

22. In the event of a Member being absent or does not want to ask the question, the Speaker may direct that the answer to the question be given and may allow other Members to ask supplementaries thereon.

#### **Short Notice Questions**

##### **Notice**

23. The notice for a Short Notice Question should be addressed to the Secretary-General in the prescribed form available in the Parliamentary Notice Office. Brief reasons for asking the question at short notice should invariably be stated at the appropriate place of the form. Where such reasons are not stated, the notice is returned to the member. A general statement that the matter is of "wide public importance" or "public interest", is not considered adequate for this purpose.

24. The name of the member should be written in block letters below the signature. The member's Division number should also be indicated. Notice bearing stamped signature of the member is treated as unsigned notice. Unsigned notice of Short Notice Question is not accepted and returned to the member. Question written in illegible hand is liable to be returned to the member.

25. If a notice is signed by more than one member, it will be deemed to have been given by the first signatory only. Each notice of a question may, therefore, be signed by only one member.

### **Admissibility**

26. Besides, being subject to the rules as to the form and content as for ordinary questions, the admissibility of a Short Notice Question is judged on two additional criteria; its subject-matter must be urgent, and the Minister concerned should agree to answer it. Therefore, even if the Minister concerned agrees to answer a Short Notice Question, but the Speaker is of opinion that the question is not of an urgent nature, the question cannot be admitted as a 'Short Notice Question'.

27. The inability of a member to give normal notice due to the remainder of a session being less than 10 days cannot be a valid reason for tabling a Short Notice Question. Similarly, if notice of Short Notice Question is given before the commencement of a session so much in advance that it may be for a day not before the expiry of 10 days, such a question is treated as an ordinary question.

28. Where necessary, the Minister concerned may be requested to furnish facts to enable the Speaker to decide about the admissibility of the Short Notice Question.

29. When the Speaker is satisfied that the subject-matter of the Short Notice Question is urgent, an enquiry is made from the Minister concerned if she/he is in a position to answer it. If the Minister agrees, a date

convenient to the Minister as well as to the member is fixed for answer. An entry is made in the List of Business for the date agreed to by the Minister and member concerned. The text of the admitted Short Notice Question is printed in a separate List on light pink paper in order to distinguish from lists Starred and Unstarred Questions. It is circulated to members not more than two days before the date for its answer.

30. When two or more members give Short Notice Question on the same subject and one of them admitted, names of not more than four members are clubbed to it. A ballot is held to select the members whose names are to be clubbed in case the number exceeds four.

31. In case members have any objection to their names being added to another member(s) question or to the contents and form of question, they should inform the Secretary-General immediately on receipt of the printed list so that necessary action including issue of corrigendum, etc. may be taken in time.

32. In case the Minister does not agree to answer Short Notice Question and the Speaker holds that its subject-matter is of sufficient public importance to be answered orally in the House, she/he may direct that the question be placed as the first question on the list of Starred Questions for the day on which it would be due for answer in normal course.

33. When a Short Notice Question of a member is admitted by the Speaker as Starred Question to be placed as the first question in the list of Starred Questions, member's other Starred Question, if already included in the list, will be deleted.

#### **Answering of Short Notice Question**

34. Normally one Short Notice Question is put down for answer on any one day. After the Question Hour, or if there is no Question Hour as soon as the sitting of Lok Sabha commences and formal business on the agenda, if any, is over, the Speaker calls the member to ask her/his Short Notice Question and Minister to answer. If the first member is absent, the Speaker calls the next member in the list and if none of the members whose names appear for Short Notice Question is present, and no member has been authorised on her/his behalf, the Speaker directs the answer to be laid on the Table. However, if the Minister wants to answer Short Notice Question on the ground that it is of public importance, the Speaker may allow the Minister to read question as well as the answer.

35. Copies of answer to Short Notice Question are placed in the Parliamentary Notice Office as also in the Outer Lobby of the Lok Sabha Chamber for reference by members half an hour before the commencement of the

Question Hour for the day for which the Short Notice Question has been put down for answer. The contents of answer should be treated as confidential and not released for publication until the question is actually asked and answered in the House. The answer should be considered as provisional when made available in advance and taken as final in the form in which the Short Notice Question is actually answered with such corrections as may have been made by the Minister.

36. The member in whose name the Short Notice Question stands (first name) may ask two supplementaries only and other members may ask one supplementary each only, if permitted by the Chair.

37. Lok Sabha adjourning without transacting normal business on a particular day, the Short Notice Question admitted for that day is not postponed, but reply to the Short Notice Question is deemed to have been laid on the Table of Lok Sabha on the next sitting and printed in the debates of that day.

*[Procedure regarding Questions is governed by Rules 32 to 54 of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha and Directions 10 to 18 of Directions by the Speaker.]*

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QUESTIONS



LOK SABHA SECRETARIAT  
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## **PREFACE**

This Abstract is part of the Parliamentary Procedure Abstracts Series and describes the procedure regarding Questions. It is based on the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha, Directions issued by the Speaker under the Rules of Procedure and the decisions/rulings given by the Chair from time-to-time. It is intended to serve as a handy guide for ready reference.

The information contained in this Abstract is, however, not exhaustive. It will, therefore, be prudent to refer to and rely on the original sources for full information.

NEW DELHI

*Secretary General*