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Question Hour to Resume during Budget Session

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Why in News

Question Hour, which had been **suspended by the government during the monsoon session**, will resume when Parliament meets **for the budget session**.

The suspension was done in view of the **Covid-19** pandemic. The government **had also cancelled the winter session of Parliament** citing a rising number of Covid cases.

Key Points

- **Question Hour (Description):**
 - The **first hour of every parliamentary sitting** is slotted for the Question Hour. However, in 2014, the Question Hour was **shifted in the Rajya Sabha** from 11 am to 12 noon.
 - During this one hour, **Members of Parliament (MPs) ask questions to ministers** and hold them accountable for the functioning of their ministries.
 - The **questions can also be asked to the private members** (MPs who are not ministers).
- **Regulation:** It is regulated according to **parliamentary rules**.
The **presiding officers of the both Houses (Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha)** are the final authority with respect to the conduct of Question Hour.
- **Types of Questions:** There are **three** kinds of questions asked:
 - **Starred question** (distinguished by an asterisk): This requires an **oral answer** and hence supplementary questions can follow.
 - **Unstarred question:** This requires a written answer and hence, **supplementary questions cannot follow**.
 - **Short notice question:** It is one that is asked by giving a notice of less than ten days. It is answered orally.

- **Frequency:** Question Hour in both Houses is held **on all days** of the session. But there are two days when an **exception** is made.
 - When the **President** addresses MPs from both Houses.
The President's speech takes place at the beginning of a new Lok Sabha and on the first day of a new Parliament year.
 - On the day the Finance Minister presents the **Budget**.
- **Previous Sessions Without Question Hour:**
In the past too, the Question Hour has been suspended. They were suspended **during national emergencies**.
- **Importance of Question Hour:**
 - **Parliamentarian right:** Asking of questions is an inherent and unfettered parliamentary right of members.
 - **Holds government accountable:**
 - 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**.
 - **Like in trials**, during the Question Hour, every Minister has to answer for their acts of **administrative omission and commission**.
 - **Adaptation of policies:** Through the Question Hour, the Government is able to quickly feel the **pulse of the nation** and adapt its policies and actions accordingly.
 - **Appointment of a Commission:** Sometimes questions may lead to the appointment of a Commission, a **Court of Enquiry** or even Legislation when matters raised by Members are of wide public importance.

Sessions of Parliament

- **Summoning of Parliament:**
 - The summoning of Parliament is specified in **Article 85 of the Constitution**.
 - The **power to convene a session** of Parliament **rests with the government**.
The decision is taken by the **Cabinet Committee on Parliamentary Affairs** which is formalised by the President, in whose name MPs are summoned to meet for a session.

- **Schedule of the Sessions:**

- India does not have a fixed parliamentary calendar.
- However, the gap between two sessions of the Parliament cannot exceed 6 months, which means the **Parliament meets at least two times in one year.**
- By convention (i.e. not provided by the Constitution), Parliament meets for **three sessions** in a year.
 - **Budget session:** The **longest**, Budget Session (1st session), starts towards the end of January, and concludes by the end of April or first week of May.
The session has a recess so that Parliamentary Committees can discuss the budgetary proposals.
 - **Monsoon session:** The second session is the three-week Monsoon Session, which usually begins in July and finishes in August.
 - **Winter Session:** It is the third session held from November to December.

Source: TH