
UNIT 2 LEGISLATURE REPORTING

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2.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you will be able to:

- explain the different procedures of a House which a Court reporter covering its proceedings must know;
- discuss the significance of the privileges of Parliament;
- state the importance of the question hour and the zero hour for a reporter;
- discuss the functions of the important committees of legislatures; and
- describe the meaning of call attention, adjournment and no confidence motions.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This is Unit 2 of Block 2. This block deals with specialised reporting. In the previous Unit, i.e. Unit 1, we have discussed Court Reporting. In this Unit 2, we will deal with legislative reporting. In the next unit, i.e. Unit 3, we will discuss reporting on science and technology.

Activity 1

When Parliament is in session, collect clippings of a week of Parliament reports from the newspaper you subscribe to and then evaluate them as per the following points:

- Objective
- Balance

2.2 IMPORTANCE OF LEGISLATURE REPORTING

Legislature Reporting, an essential part of mass media function, is a significant feature of Parliamentary democracy. Both people and the government are benefited by legislature reporting. Parliament or a State Legislature, Vidhan Sabha and Vidhan Parishad, is called "legislature". "Legislature" literally means — that which legislates or makes laws.

Legislature reporting involves reporting day-to-day proceedings of these bodies. This task of reporting involves multifarious activities of legislatures, including the complex process of legislature, and debates on subjects of public importance. Besides, the job also includes writing for the media about several other features that go to make Parliamentary proceedings. In this Unit, we shall look at every feature of legislative proceedings, which the media report day in and day out.

Reporting the proceedings of a legislature is a highly responsible job. Normally, an experienced reporter is sent to cover parliamentary proceedings. This is to ensure that the reporter has the requisite ability as well as the maturity to take on the task.

It is perhaps pertinent here to mention that the knowledge of shorthand is advantageous for reporting parliament proceedings. Legislature reporting often involves taking copious notes of speeches made by ministers and members in both the Houses of Legislature. The exact quotes from what the Prime Minister or a Chief Minister or ministers or members, say in the legislatures are of crucial importance for the quality and credibility of a reporter's dispatch. The reporter who knows shorthand has a clear advantage. However, you should know that a tape-recorder cannot be taken in the press gallery of a legislature.

2.3 BASIC STRUCTURE OF THE PARLIAMENT AND THE STATE LEGISLATURES

To be able to report parliament proceedings competently, it will help you to have an understanding of the basic structure of parliament or a state legislature.

The Constitution of India provides for a bicameral Parliament consisting of the President and the two Houses — Lok Sabha (the House of the People) and Rajya Sabha (the Council of States). The Lok Sabha is composed of representatives of the people chosen by direct election. The maximum strength of this House now envisaged by the Constitution is 547. Out of these, up to 525 members come from the states, up to 20 members from the Union territories and not more than two members of the Anglo-Indian community to be nominated by the President of India if in his opinion that community is not adequately represented in the House.

Lok Sabha, unless sooner dissolved, continues for five years from the date of its first meeting. However, during the operation of an Emergency, the term may be extended for a period not exceeding one year at a time by a parliamentary legislation.

Rajya Sabha consists of about 250 members. Of these, twelve are nominated by the President for their special knowledge or practical experience in such matters as literature, science, law, education, art and social service. The remaining seats are allocated to the various states and Union territories, roughly in proportion to their population. Each state is, however, represented by at least one member. The representatives of each state are elected by the members of the legislative assemblies of states in accordance with the system of proportional representation.

Parliament and state legislatures become great sources of news when in session. The Government makes all the major announcements in Parliament. Political news also comes from in and around the House in session as political parties express their views on various issues. The relative strength of the political parties is also tested on the floor of the House. There are moves and counter-moves by ruling and opposition parties which are grist to the newsperson's mill.

As a reporter covering Parliament, you should know the rules and procedures of legislatures. By and large, these are the same for both the parliament and the state legislatures.

Like parliament, there are some states which have a bicameral legislature — assembly and the council, i.e. Vidhan Sabha and Vidhan Parishad. The assembly in the state is the equivalent of the Lok Sabha, and the Council is the equivalent of the Rajya Sabha. There are states which have only the Vidhan Sabha and no Vidhan Parishad.

Here it is also essential to know the rights, privileges, immunities and amenities bestowed on members of both the Houses of Parliament

Check Your Progress 1

- Note:** a) Use the space provided below for your answers.
 b) Wherever required, tick the right answer.
 c) Check your answers with the ones given at the end of this unit.

1) Why is legislature reporting important in a democratic country?

.....

2) For a legislature reporter, why is it important to know the relative strength of political parties in the House?

.....

3) The states, which have unicameral legislatures, have only Vidhan Parishads.

[] Correct [] Incorrect

4) Is the President of India an essential part of our Parliament?

[] Yes [] No

5) Are all the members of Rajya Sabha elected ones?

[] Yes [] No

2.4 ESSENTIALS OF PARLIAMENTARY PROCEEDINGS

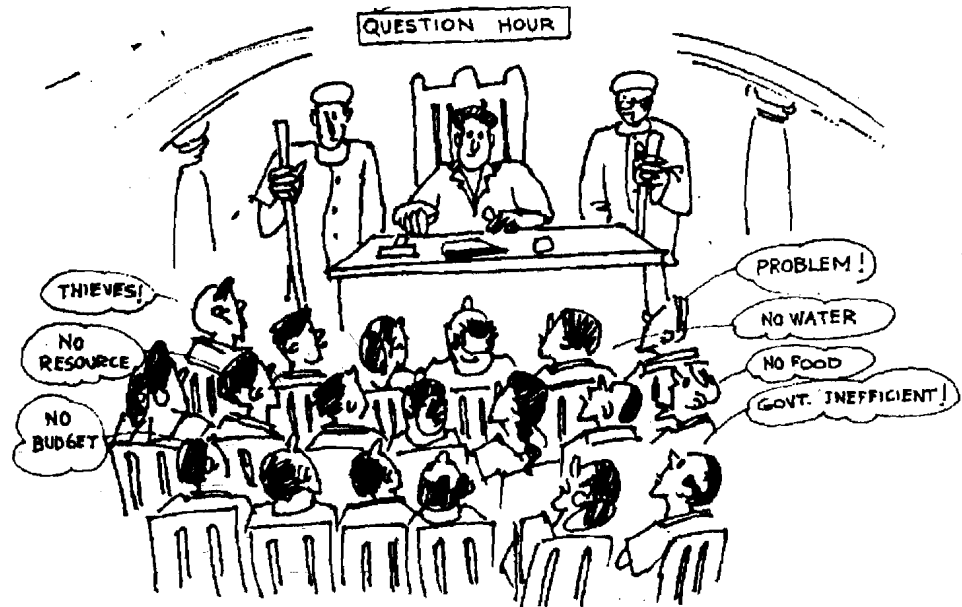
Now, let us look at the various features essential for the parliamentary proceedings. These can be roughly listed, on a normal day of proceedings, as under :

- I Question Hour
- II Papers to be laid on the Table of the House

III Zero Hour

IV Legislative Business

Both houses of parliament have a properly planned procedure of functioning. Normally, the first hour of every sitting of the house is the Question Hour. Afterwards, the House takes up miscellaneous times of work before proceeding to the main business of the day. They may consist of one or more of the following: adjournment motions, questions involving breaches of privileges, papers to be laid on the Table of the House, communication of any message from the upper or lower house, intimation regarding President's assent to Bills, calling attention notices, presentation of reports of parliamentary committees, presentation of petitions — miscellaneous statements by ministries, motions regarding elections to committee, bills to be withdrawn or introduced.



2.5 QUESTION HOUR

The first hour of every legislature sitting is normally devoted to questions. Questions are of three types : 1. starred question 2. unstarred question 3. short notice question.

2.5.1 Starred Questions

A starred question is the one to which a member desires an oral answer in the House. Other members can ask supplementary questions which are relevant to the main question. For this, a member will have to attract the attention of the presiding officer by raising his hand. Generally, the answer to the main question which is listed, is in written form with explanatory statement, wherever necessary. But supplementaries will have to be answered orally by the minister concerned.

2.5.2 Unstarred Questions

An "unstarred question" is one to which an oral answer is not called for in the House and on which no supplementary questions can be asked. To such a question, a written answer is deemed to have been laid on the "Table of the House" 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.

2.5.3 Short Notice Questions

A short notice question is one which relates to a matter of urgent public importance, and can be asked with the consent of the Minister concerned, at a shorter notice than the period of notice prescribed for an ordinary questions.

While 20 questions can be listed for oral answer on a day, as many as 230 questions can be listed for written answers.

Written answers thereof yield a great deal of information concerning various states and other Central government departments/ministeries as the questions are asked by members belonging to each region of the country. The reporter who does the written questions has to carefully scan through all the answers to sift really newsy matter out of them.

It is through questions in Parliament, that the government remains in touch with the people in as much as members are enabled to ventilate the grievances of the public in matters concerning the 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 ample public importance.

No wonder, therefore, seasoned parliamentary correspondents are generally entrusted with the task of covering the "question hour".

The government is put on trial, as it were, during the "question hour". Every minister, whose turn it is to answer questions has to stand up and explain his ministry/department/administration's acts of commission and omission. The reporter should remain alert when the minister answers or tries to answer probing questions by members on matters of national importance. This is where shorthand comes into play. A reporter with the knowledge of shorthand is able to take down what the minister replies quickly. He can file his report straight away once the Question Hour is over. But others may have to consult the official reporter's notes before filing their stories. This will be a time-consuming affair and will greatly affect the quality of one's report.

Sometimes, important decisions by the government may be found in written answers which might escape the attention of the reporter if he is not alert.

For example, a few years ago, the government's signing of an agreement with Britain for the purchase of the aircraft carrier *Hermes* at a cost of 63 million was revealed in a written answer. With proper background, a lengthy, informative news story can be weaved out of this by an experienced reporter. Here is an example:

Hermes Sailed in — Unstarred

Express News Services

New Delhi, April 24. The Government confirmed today that it had signed an agreement with Britain for the purchase of the aircraft carrier *Hermes* at a cost of 603 million pounds.

The announcement was sneaked into unstarred questions in the Rajya Sabha in a style characteristic of the defence ministry on Wednesday. The defence ministry would not confirm or deny news reports from London that such a deal had been signed on April 19. The Indian people learnt of a major agreement to acquire a second aircraft carrier from British government officials.

The minister of state of defence, Mr. Arun Singh, told Mr. Kalpnath Rai, Mr. L.K. Advani, Mr. K.K. Birla, Mr. Suresh Kalmadi and Mr. D.G. Prashant in written replies on Thursday that a memorandum of understanding was concluded on March 12 this year for the purchase of *Hermes*. The cost of the package was likely to be about 603 million inclusive of docking and refit, spares, stores and services.

Mr. Singh said that a second aircraft carrier was considered desirable in the light of the threat perceived. *Hermes* has the facilities for operating Sea Harrier aircraft and Sea King helicopter which are already part of the Indian Navy's air arm. *Hermes* will be fully operational when it joins the Indian Navy and is expected to serve till the end of the century.

This is not the first time that the defence ministry has sneaked a major announcement through the unstarred question in Parliament. It did this in the case of the purchase of eleven Sea Harriers last year at a cost of 150 million.

Several weeks ago news reports appeared that the government had signed an agreement to buy Swedish 155 mm guns for the army. In this case also, news of the agreement was provided by the Swedish company concerned to a news agency.

Asked about it, the defence ministry spokesman would only say: "I have not been asked to deny it." No official announcement has been made on this so far.

The way the Hermes announcement was made—five days after agreement was actually signed—goes against the assurance the Prime Minister gave during his reply to the defence debate in the Lok Sabha.

Mr. Rajiv Gandhi said much had been made about the secrecy of defence contracts dealings and assessments. He said he had a feeling that documents were being classified. "There is no intention at any time to keep the Parliament or the country in the dark about any details," he said but added that performance limitations and evaluation reports of equipment could not be revealed.

Members of Parliament have expressed concern about the secrecy surrounding such deals because they involve hundreds of crores of the tax payer's money and there have been a number of instances in the past of the defence ministry bungling these deals.

Thus, parliament questions cover all the ministries and give authentic information. They should be kept by the correspondent for future use as they may provide leads to other stories. The questions provide basic data on almost all subjects that deal with the nation or state's economy and development and various other projects. This information can be analysed to yield many good stories.

Activity 2

- From the following written questions and answers, prepare properly structured news items:
- Make a good background story out of one of them.

Rajya Sabha

Starred Question No. *387

To be Answered on the 4th August 1992/13th Sravana, 1914 (Saka) Proposal to Set Up Independent Authority for Auditing Nationalised Banks

QUESTION

*387. SHRI SURESH KALMADI:

Will the Minister of Finance be pleased to state:

- a) whether there is any proposal under Government's consideration to set up an independent authority to audit and monitor the operations of nationalized banks;
- b) if so, what are the details thereof; and
- c) what exactly will be the powers and functions of the new audit authority?

ANSWER

Minister of State in the Ministry of Finance (Shri Dalbir Singh)

(a), (b) and (c): There is no proposal to set up an Independent authority for audit of nationalised banks. However, in the light of the recommendations of the Narasimham Committee, it is proposed to set up, under the aegis of Reserve Bank of India, an independent agency for the supervision and control of the financial system, including the banking sector.

Rajya Sabha

Unstarred Question No. 3733

To be Answered on the 11th August, 1992/20 Sravana 1914 (Saka) Bank Officials Reaction over RBIs Supervision Over Bank Functioning

3733. SHRI KRISHNA KUMAR BIRLA:

Will the Minister of Finance be pleased to state:

- a) whether the Government attention has been drawn to a news-item captioned "Bankers sore over attempts to shield RBI officials" as reported in the Economic Times dated 10th June 1992;

- b) if so, whether the senior officials of a few Nationalised Banks have criticised RBI for its failure to supervise the functioning of banks;
- c) what further steps does the Government propose to take to make RBI effective in supervising functioning of other banks?

ANSWER**Minister of State in the Ministry of Finance (Shri Dalbir Singh)**

- a) Yes, Sir.
- b) Indian Bank' Association (IBA) have reported that they are not aware of any such reaction from Senior Bankers.
- c) The Government is considering the establishment of a high power supervisory Board consisting of 4 to 5 full time members, with the Governor, Reserve Bank of India as the Chairman. The Board will coordinate the work of supervision of banks, financial institutions and other financial agencies in the country. It will lay down operating guidelines, look after supervision and enforce compliance.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: a) Use the space provided below for writing your answers.

b) Wherever required tick the right answer.

c) Check your answers with the ones given at the end of this unit.

- 1) a) The first hour after lunch period is question hour.
 Correct Incorrect
- b) Supplementary questions can be asked in respect of starred questions.
 Correct Incorrect

2) What is a Short Notice Question?

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- 3) The story regarding purchase of the aircraft carrier 'Hermes' did come to light through an Unstarred question.
 Correct Incorrect
- 4) Approximately how many questions can be listed for oral answers in a day?
 20 40 60

2.6 PAPERS LAID ON TABLE

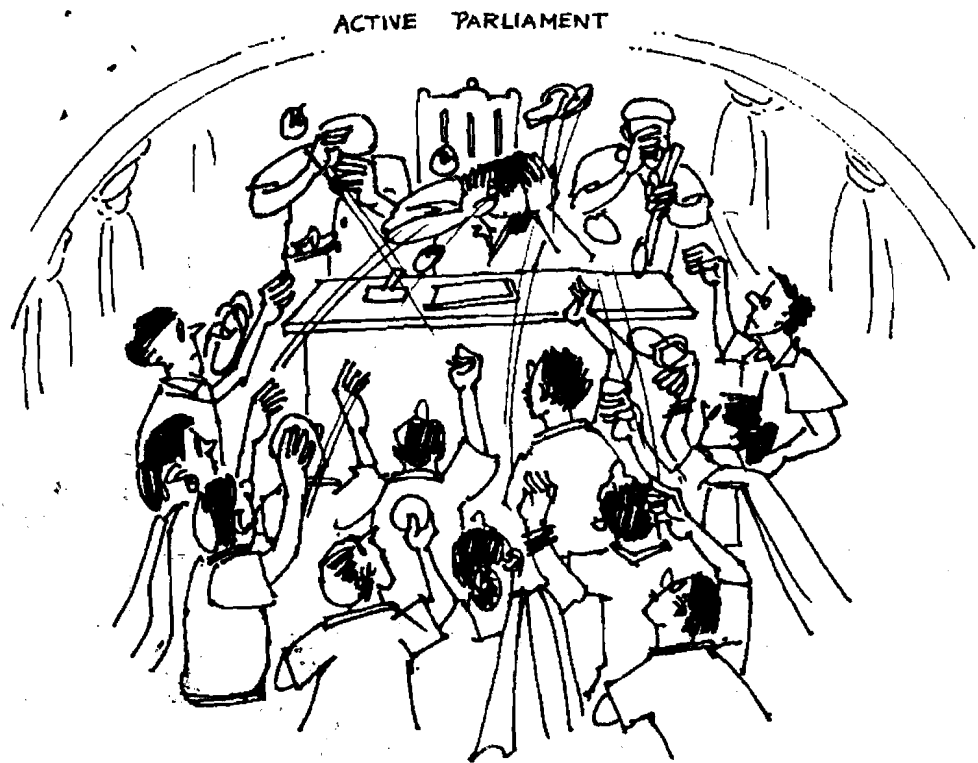
After the Question Hour is over, which is of one hour duration, the House will take up papers to be laid on the Table. These are official documents relating to various ministries and departments and are tabled by the ministers concerned. These papers often yield good stories. The documents may be annual reports of important government organisations, institutions of science and technology and other bodies which have come into being by an act of parliament.

The papers may also include reports of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), the committee on public undertaking, action taken reports of various ministries, and so on. You, as a reporter in charge of papers laid on the Table, should carefully read the agenda paper of the House. It lists all the official papers to be laid on the Table. As soon as they are tabled, the documents are made available to journalists by the secretariat of the Lok Sabha or the Raiva Sabha, depending on which House the papers are tabled.

A recent example of such a document yielding good news story was the report of the Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) on the Bofors gun deal. You may have seen many news stories in newspapers made from this report.

2.7 ZERO HOUR

The Zero Hour which follows immediately is the most challenging for a young reporter. For, this is the time when members belonging to various parties spring on their feet and try to draw the attention of the Chair to the issues they think important and need the Government's response. It becomes very difficult to pick up the works of the members as many speak at the same time. All your attention should be centred on what is happening and you must note down as quickly as possible what the members say. If they are really important, you can make a story out of them or else you can ignore them.



The presiding officer, however, would restore order and allow members to speak one after another. Normally, he succeeds, but there are times when he is unable to control the members as they raise the issues of some scandal or the other on which the entire Opposition may be united to put the government on the mat. Many such instances can be cited from recent history — the Bofors gun deal, the Ayodhya issue and the securities scam. You may have seen several reports speaking of “pandemonium” or “bedlam” in the House over these issues. The reporter, with his notes and a fair background knowledge of the issues raised, will be able to write a good copy. It is also important for the reporter to be thorough with the morning newspapers, at least with the stories likely to figure in Parliament later in the day.

Activity 3

You may be aware of the regular morning telecast of the proceedings of both houses of Parliament. You must have watched some of these telecasts. One gets a lot of ideas about the procedure and proceeding of the Parliament by watching these telecasts. One also gets an idea on what type of people we send to the Parliament to represent us.

Now, before you proceed further with this unit, engage yourself in an activity which will require watching of a day's question hour on TV. Therefore:

- Watch the morning telecast of Doordarshan on the Parliament proceeding

- While watching, write in your note book the main points being discussed by the members of the Parliament

- Take note of the behaviour of the members

Having watched the telecast, write a report on it as if you are writing for a newspaper.

2.8 LEGISLATIVE BUSINESS

The general nature of the business of the legislature include the following: Besides, the main legislative business of the house, which is introduction and passage of bills into laws, it also deals with the: financial business presentation, discussion and passage of the general and railway budgets. Voting on the various demands for grants followed by passing of Appropriation and Finance Bills; motions and resolutions brought forward by the government and private members; discussion on matters of urgent public importance; debate in the house on matters requiring decisions of the house; and publication of debates of the houses.

As stated above, legislative business consists of introduction, consideration and passing of government bills. After a bill is passed by both Houses, it goes for the Presidential assent, following which it becomes an act of parliament.

A bill, which is a legislative proposal, has to pass through the following stages before it becomes an act.

2.8.1 Introduction of the Bill

The bill can be introduced in either House by a minister in charge of the subject of the Bill. While introducing the Bill, the minister explains the purpose and background of the Bill. Once the House, that is the majority of members, gives leave to the minister for introduction, the Bill is deemed to have been introduced.

2.8.2 General Discussion

At the second stage, a general discussion takes place on the bill as a whole followed by a clause by clause consideration of the bill. At this stage it is open to the House to decide to refer the bill to a select committee of the House or a joint committee of the two Houses. The committee then gives a close and detailed scrutiny clause-by-clause and makes such amendments therein as it deems necessary.

2.8.3 Voting

When all the clauses and schedules of the bill have been considered and voted upon by the House, the minister in charge moves that the bill be passed. Generally, a bill is passed by a voice vote. But on other occasions, a division may take place and the bill may be passed or rejected by a majority of the members present and voting.

Constitution Amendment Bill

A constitution amendment bill, at times, requires the support of the majority of the total membership of the House and two-thirds of the members actually present and voting.

Check Your Progress 3

Note: a) Use the space provided below for writing your answers.

b) Wherever required, tick the right answers.

c) Check your answers with the ones given at the end of this unit.

1) What is meant by papers laid on the Table of the House?

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2) i) Is the House informed before a paper is laid on its table?
[] Yes [] No

ii) Are the papers laid on the table of the House made available to legislature reporter?
[] Yes [] No

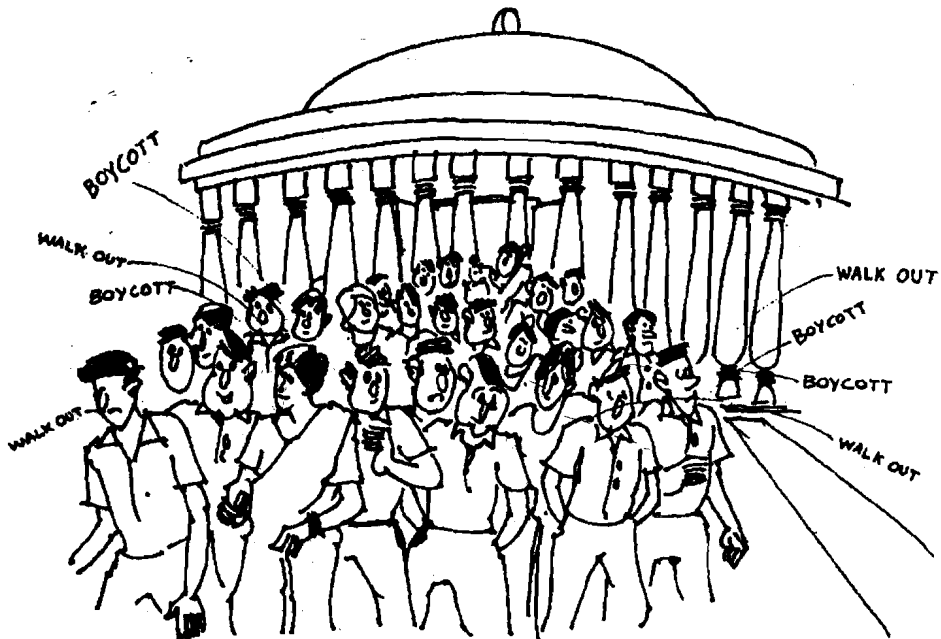
3) i) A government bill can be initiated only in Lok Sabha.
[] Correct [] Incorrect

ii) In extraordinary circumstances, can a Bill be passed by a House, without putting it to voting?
[] Yes [] No

4) Does all Constitution Amendment Bills require the support of two-third of the members of Lok Sabha actually present and voting?
[] Yes [] No

2.9 CALL ATTENTION MOTION

Call attention notice, essentially an Indian procedural innovation, enables a member to draw the attention of the government to development of public importance and to elicit government views thereon.



2.10 RAISING OF ISSUES UNDER RULE 377

Under this rule, a member can raise any issue which he thinks is of public interest. The member is allowed to make a brief speech.

2.11 ADJOURNMENT MOTION

This is a motion by any member to demand the adjournment of all other business in the House to discuss the issue he may raise. To raise a discussion on the issue, the member must ensure that his motion is supported by the majority of members present.

2.12 NO-CONFIDENCE MOTION

The motion is at times brought by the Opposition to express its lack of confidence in the government. After the motion is allowed, a detailed discussion takes place. After the discussion, voting may take place. Generally, the motion is defeated because the government has greater strength in the House. In extraordinary situations, a no-confidence motion may be carried through and in which case the government stands defeated and has to resign.

2.13 SPECIAL DEBATES

Special debate on a subject of national importance is allowed by the Speaker at times. Almost each member of the House is given a chance to speak in the debate.

2.14 BUDGET

It is the annual financial statement laid before both the Houses and embodies the estimated receipts and expenditure of the government in respect of the forthcoming financial year. The finance bill is that which seeks to give effect to the government's taxation proposals and is introduced in the Lok Sabha immediately after the presentation of the budget.

2.15 BREACH OF PRIVILEGE

Privileges of Parliament and that of the State legislatures have already been discussed in Block V of our Course II. The Block V dealt with media ethics and law. However, a legislature reporter needs to know more about these privileges.

Article 361-A of the Constitution of India protects publication of proceedings of Parliament and state legislatures from any civil and criminal action. No person commits any civil or criminal offence, if he publishes substantially true reports of the proceedings of a House. However, if the publication has been done with malice, the protection conferred by Article 361-A does not apply. Publication of the expurgated portion of the proceedings of a House, is breach of its privilege. Similarly, publication of those proceedings is disallowed which are held in camera. Article 361-A was inserted in the Constitution in 1977. Before this, a substantial and true report of the proceedings of either House of Parliament was protected by Parliamentary Proceedings (Protection of Publication) Act 1956, popularly known as Firoze Gandhi Act. However, during the period of internal emergency, the Act was repealed. Later the emergency Article 361-A was inserted through a Constitution Amendment bill. Article 361-A has wider scope than what the Firoze Gandhi Act had. Article 361-A covers publication of proceedings of Parliament as well as that of the state legislature, whereas Firoze Gandhi Act covered only the House of Parliament.

The House is the custodian of its own privilege and is empowered to take action against a reporter, if his conduct or writing is in breach of its privileges. Since the scope of parliamentary privilege has not been codified, the reporter has to use abundant caution in reporting the proceedings. Minor lapses may be overlooked by the legislature but it is bound to take note of serious transgressions.

Deliberate distortion of speeches, aspersions cast on a member's behaviour in the House, and imputation of motives to him for his speech or behaviour in the House are serious transgression of the privileges of the members.

It is one of the privileges of Parliament and state legislatures to exclude any stranger, including press reporters, from the sittings of the House and from the press gallery.

Reporting the legislature's proceedings by the media is extremely useful for the common people in a democratic set-up. For, it is through the day-to-day reporting of the legislature's activities that electorates perceive as to what these elected representatives are doing in Parliament and other legislatures. Journalists, therefore, have to be on the constant look out for publishing important decisions taken or not taken in these Houses. In doing so,

journalists are sometimes likely to err on the wrong side of the law. As stated earlier, members of the legislatures have a large number of rights, privileges and immunities which protect them against attacks by people and organisations including the media. Thus, with a view to ensuring that media do not cast aspersions on their conduct or adversely comment on their report in a House, a number of common laws have been provided. These laws govern the powers and privileges of legislatures in so far as these common journalists' work may interfere with the right to the freedom of the press or reporters. Though Indian parliament or legislatures have so far not fully codified their rights and privileges, they generally follow the conventions and traditions of the British House of Commons. Many of these Parliamentary practices are described in the "Parliamentary Practice" by May.

According to Durga Das Basu, a journalist may encounter privileges of parliament in a number of ways:

- by violating any of the privileges of Parliament, e.g., relating to publication of proceedings;
- by violating any of the rules of procedure made by a house of legislature in exercise of the power conferred by Articles 118 and 208 of the Constitution of India, e.g., relating to admission and withdrawal of strangers;
- by publishing comments or any other statements which undermine the dignity of the house or the confidence of the public in the legislature, and are, accordingly punishable by parliament as contempt of parliament, which is analogous to the power of a court of record, to punish for "Contempt of Court".

The representative of the press are generally provided facilities to cover the proceedings of legislature from the press gallery by issuing an accreditation card to press persons. The accreditation card can be withdrawn by the Speaker without assigning any reason. Normally, a card is withdrawn, if a journalist is found to be "misrepresenting proceedings of the house in the press, or publication or of any matter not intended for the public, or casting aspersions against the Speaker."

The reporters should however study parliamentary privileges and Article 361-A of the Constitution of India to safeguard themselves against any default that may occur in reporting proceedings of a legislature.

It must be stated here that though by and large press persons are quite careful in reporting the proceedings of the legislatures in India, at times newspapers and legislatures have been at loggerhead over the matter of parliamentary privileges vis-a-vis freedom of the press. In the Blitz case (1961), its editor R.K. Karanjia was reprimanded by the House for his derogatory criticism of Lok Sabha member J.B. Kripalani. This was the first time after the independence that a well known editor was called to the Bar of the House and reprimanded.

Before appearing before the House, Karanjia tried to seek Supreme Court help, but failed.

Also, some cases occurred against journalists and newspapers in some state legislatures including those of Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Tamil Nadu.

Check Your Progress 4

- Note:**
- a) Use the space provided below for writing your answers.
 - b) Wherever required, tick the correct answers.
 - c) Check your answers with the ones given at the end of this unit.

1) What is meant by adjournment motion?

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2) Which Article of Our Constitution protects the publication of substantial true reports of the proceedings of the Parliament and that of the state legislature?
 Article 352 A
 Article 361 A
 Article 368 A
 Article 372

3) The Parliament has its privileges. Does the press also have privileges vis-a-vis Parliament.
 Yes No

4) Can the Lok Sabha Speaker withdraw the pass issued to a press reporter to sit in the press gallery?
 Yes No

5) Briefly describe any case when a reporter or editor has been reprimanded by the Lok Sabha.

.....

2.16 COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

A mention was made earlier about the various committees of the House. As you would know by now, the legislatures have to handle a lot of work of a varied nature and the time at its disposal is normally short. Therefore, it is not in a position to allot adequate time for its consideration on all the legislative and other matters that come up before it. A good deal of legislative business is thus transacted by what are called parliamentary committees.

A legislature, particularly the Parliament, has two kinds of committees. Ad hoc committees and parliamentary committees. Ad hoc committees are appointed for a particular purpose; they cease to exist after executing the task assigned to them. The principal ad hoc committees are: the select committee, and joint committee on bills. The Parliament, in the past, has appointed for specific purposes, committees such as the railway convention committee, committee on draft five-year plans, etc.

In addition, legislatures have regular committees which are permanently there, but are reconstituted from time to time. These are: business advisory committee, committee on petitions, privileges committee, committee on welfare of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, rules committee, etc.

However, there are yet other kinds of committees which function as parliament's "Watch Dogs" over the executive. These are: committee on subordinate legislation, the committee on government assurances, the estimates committee, the public account committee, and the committee on public undertakings.

2.17 COMPOSITION AND FUNCTIONS OF THE COMMITTEES

Most of these committees appointed by the legislature play an important part in exercising a check over governmental expenditure and in the general discharge of the public functions. It is, therefore, necessary for those reporting legislative proceedings to keep track of the

reports these committees submit, on the task they are entrusted with, by the house. The reports and the functioning of these committees, also make good news. It is useful for reporters to know the composition and the discussions among the members of these committees, for they also make good news quite often. Moreover, often the business transacted by these committees adds up to the overall legislature reporting by a correspondent.

Check Your Progress 5

- Note:** a) Use the space provided below for writing your answer.
b) Wherever required, tick the right answer.
c) Check your answers with the ones given at the end of this unit.

1) Name any four Committees of parliament.

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2) Is reporting of the work done by these committees necessary? If yes, why?

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2.18 LET US SUM UP

A reporter covering any legislature in India should have a knowledge of the privileges and functioning of the House and its different committees. He should report the proceedings without malice and the report should be true.

A reporter should know the significance of the question hour and the zero hour. He should also have a fairly good idea of how different bills and motions are processed in the Parliament or State Legislatures. The more a reporter knows about the procedures of the House, the easier it is for him to cover the House for his newspaper or news agency. He should also keep an eye on all the papers laid on the table of the House. Replies to starred and unstarred questions may also give a clue to some big story of national importance. In fact, almost every day a reporter may get loads of official documents from the secretariat of the House he is covering. These documents may be the source of various stories.

A large part of the legislature's business is done by its various committees. For a reporter, it is always advisable to know the functions and composition of these committees. These committees and their reports are also a source of various sorts of information, necessary for newspapers.

In this unit, we discussed only legislature reporting. In the next unit, i.e. Unit 3 of this Block, we will discuss science and technology reporting.

2.19 FURTHER READING

Basu, Durga Das *Law of the Press in India* (1990, Second edition) New Delhi: Printice-Hall of India Pvt. Ltd.

Bakshi, P.M. *Press Law* (1986) New Delhi: T R F Institute for Social Research and Education.

2.20 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS : MODEL ANSWERS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Through legislature reports, people as well as government officials obtain a lot of information on the functioning of the government and the Parliament.
- 2) It helps in analysing the voting patterns in the House.
- 3) Incorrect
- 4) Yes
- 5) No.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) a) Incorrect
b) Correct
- 2) A short notice question, relates to a matter of urgent public importance and can be asked at a shorter notice than prescribed for an ordinary question.
- 3) Correct
- 4) 20

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Papers laid on the table of the House are official documents presented by the government to the members of the House with a view to inform them about their subject matter.
- 2) (i) Yes (ii) Yes
- 3) (i) Incorrect (ii) No.
- 4) No.

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) An adjournment motion can be taken up by the House adjourning all other business, if it is supported by a majority of the members present.
- 2) Article 368 A
- 3) No
- 4) Yes
- 5) In 1961, R.K. Karanjia, editor of Blitz, Bombay, was reprimanded by Lok Sabha for breaching privileges of the House through the columns of his newspapers.

Check Your Progress 5

- 1) a) Select Committee
b) Business Advisory Committee
c) Public Accounts Committee
d) Committee on Public Undertakings.
- 2) Reporting of these committee's work is necessary because the Parliament is short of time. A lot of work, which the Parliament should do, is done by these committees.