

Current Affairs of the Day

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Monsoon session set for stormy start

- The monsoon session of Parliament, delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, will get under way on Monday with strict safety protocols in place.
- The 18-day session is expected to be stormy, with the Opposition eager to corner the government on its handling of the India-China border issue, the pandemic and the naming of senior Left leaders as co-conspirators in the Delhi riots case by the Delhi police.
- The session, with four-hour sittings for each House in shifts, including on weekends, will not only see the government lining up 11 ordinances, which were cleared during the lockdown, but also tabling up to 45 Bills in both Houses for approval.
- While **Question Hour** has been removed from the business of the day, questions that require written answers will be tabled, and a 30-minute **Zero Hour** for MPs to raise issues of importance has been added.

Value Added Information

What is Question Hour, and what is its significance?

- Question Hour is the liveliest hour in Parliament. It is during this one hour that MPs ask questions of ministers and hold them accountable for the functioning of their ministries.
- Prior to Independence, the first question asked of government was in 1893. It was on the burden cast on village shopkeepers who had to provide supplies to touring government officers.
- The questions that MPs ask are designed to elicit information and trigger suitable action by ministries.
- Over the last 70 years, MPs have successfully used this parliamentary device to shine a light on government functioning.
- Their questions have exposed financial irregularities and brought data and information regarding government functioning to the public domain.
- With the broadcasting since 1991, Question Hour has become one of the most visible aspects of parliamentary functioning.



And what is Zero Hour?

- While Question Hour is strictly regulated, Zero Hour is an Indian innovation. The phrase does not find mention in the rules of procedure.
- The concept of Zero Hour started organically in the first decade of Indian Parliament when MPs felt the need for raising important constituency and national issues.
- During the initial days, Parliament used to break for lunch at 1 pm.
- Therefore, the opportunity for MPs to raise national issues without an advance notice became available at 12 pm and could last for an hour until the House adjourned for lunch.
- This led to the hour being popularly referred to as Zero Hour and the issues being raised during this time as Zero Hour submissions.
- Its importance can be gauged from the support it receives from citizens, media, MPs and presiding officers despite not being part of the rulebook.

How is Question Hour regulated?

- Parliament has comprehensive rules for dealing with every aspect of Question Hour.
- And the presiding officers of the two houses are the final authority with respect to the conduct of Question Hour.
- For example, usually, Question Hour is the first hour of a parliamentary sitting.

What kinds of questions are asked?

- Parliamentary rules provide guidelines on the kind of questions that can be asked by MPs.
- Questions have to be limited to 150 words. They have to be precise and not too general.
- The question should also be related to an area of responsibility of the GoI.



- Questions should not seek information about matters that are secret or are under adjudication before courts.
- It is the presiding officers of the two Houses who finally decide whether a question raised by an MP will be admitted for answering by the government.

How frequently is Question Hour held?

- The process of asking and answering questions starts with identifying the days on which Question Hour will be held.
- At the beginning of Parliament in 1952, Lok Sabha rules provided for Question Hour to be held every day. Rajya Sabha, on the other hand, had a provision for Question Hour for two days a week.
- A few months later, this was changed to four days a week. Then from 1964, Question Hour was taking place in Rajya Sabha on every day of the session.
- Now, Question Hour in both Houses is held on all days of the session.
- But there are two days when an exception is made. There is no Question Hour on the day the President addresses MPs from both Houses in the Central Hall.
- Question Hour is not scheduled either on the day the Finance Minister presents the Budget.

Status quo on LAC after Jaishankar-Wang meet

- There is a freeze on all movement and activities along the **Line of Actual Control (LAC)** in eastern Ladakh after External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar met his Chinese counterpart, Wang Yi, in Moscow on September 10 and agreed on a five-point solution to ease the border tension.

Background:

- India and China have been engaged in a stand-off since April-May when China massed huge troops in **Depsang, Gogra-Hotsprings, Galwan and Pangong Tso**. On June 15, 20 Indian soldiers were killed in clashes in Galwan.
- The official said that in areas such as Depsang, Hot Springs or Galwan, no major activity or mobilisation has been seen since July.



- India has accused China of not adhering to the disengagement and de-escalation plan as agreed during the military and diplomatic-level talks.
- In many sectors, Chinese forces are within India's perception of the LAC.

UN Special Rapporteurs on EIA 2020

- Recently, a group of Special Rapporteurs to the United Nations (UN) has expressed concerns over the draft Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) notification, 2020.

Key takeaways:

- The group has highlighted that the proposed notification appeared to have clauses that obstructed people's rights to a safe, clean and healthy environment.
- There are clauses which exempt several large industries and projects from the public consultation.
- It does not require publication of information or holding of public consultation for projects labelled by the Central government as 'involving strategic considerations'.
- It allows for post-facto approval for projects. It means that the clearances for projects can be awarded even if they have started construction or have been running phase without securing environmental clearances.
- The group has sought the government's response on how the provisions of the notification are consonant with India's obligations under international law.

Indian Government's response:

- The Environment Ministry has held that nothing in the proposed EIA, 2020 violates the UN Declaration of Human Rights and that the rapporteurs' concerns are misplaced.
- It is still a draft and was issued for public consultation.
- The imperfections in the existing EIA would be amended in the new notification.



Project Dolphin announced

- The Indian Prime Minister had announced the government's plan to launch a Project Dolphin in his recent Independence Day Speech.
- **Aim:** To save both river and marine dolphins.
- **Implemented by:** Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.
- Project Dolphin will be on the lines of **Project Tiger**.

Value Added Information

About Gangetic Dolphin:

- Scientific Name: *Platanista gangetica*
- These are generally blind.
- They catch their prey by emitting an ultrasonic sound which reaches the prey.
- These are also called Susu.
- It is found mainly in the Indian subcontinent, particularly in Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna and Karnaphuli-Sangu river systems and in the Ganga's tributaries.
- **Threats:** Construction of dams, Pollution, excessive silting and sand mining.
- It has been recognized by the Indian Government as its National Aquatic Animal
- It is the official animal of the Guwahati, Assam.
- **IUCN Status:** Endangered
- They are included in Appendix I (most endangered) of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES).
- They are also included in Appendix II of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS).
- The National Mission for Clean Ganga celebrates 5th October as National Ganga River Dolphin Day.

Climate Smart Cities Assessment Framework (CSCAF) 2.0 launched

- Recently, Climate Smart Cities Assessment Framework (CSCAF) 2.0 and 'Streets for People Challenge' were launched.
- **Ministry:** Ministry for Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA).

Value Added Information

Climate Smart Cities Assessment Framework (CSCAF) 2.0:

- **Objectives:** (1) To provide a clear roadmap for cities towards combating Climate Change while planning and implementing their actions, including investments; (2) To inculcate a climate-sensitive approach to urban planning and development in India.
- The framework has 28 indicators across five categories namely; (i) Energy and Green Buildings, (ii) Urban Planning, Green Cover & Biodiversity, (iii) Mobility and Air Quality, (iv) Water Management and (v) Waste Management.
- **Implemented by:** The Climate Centre for Cities under National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA) and MoHUA.

Streets for People Challenge:

- It is the response to the need for making the cities more walkable and pedestrian friendly.
- It builds on the advisory issued by the MoHUA.
- It will support cities across the country to develop a unified vision of streets for people in consultation with stakeholders and citizens.
- Fit India Mission, under Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports and the India program of the Institute for Transport Development and Policy (ITDP) have partnered with the Smart Cities Mission to support the challenge.