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Speaker breaks House convention

House adjourned only till 2 p.m. for death of LJP member Ramchandra Paswan

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Breaking away from the tradition of adjourning the House for the entire day if a sitting member dies, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on Monday adjourned the Lok Sabha until 2 p.m. at the death of Lok Janashakti Party (LJP) member Ramchandra Paswan, the younger brother of Union Minister Ram Vilas Paswan.

Congress leader in the Lok Sabha Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury urged Mr. Birla to follow convention and adjourn the House for the entire day without transacting business as a mark of respect.

Opposition leaders, including Trinamool's Saugato Roy, followed it up by meeting the Speaker in his chamber to stress conventions.

"Parliament has started a new convention so that it can resume its normal duties after 2 p.m.," said Union Minister Ram Vilas Paswan. "Ramchandra Paswan had been a voice and a leader of Dalits and the weak. No pol-



Changing the rules: Speaker Om Birla conducting proceedings in the Lok Sabha on Monday. *LSTV/PTI

itics should be done over this".

As Lok Sabha Speaker, Sumitra Mahajan set a precedent on February 1, 2017, by allowing the then Finance Minister Arun Jaitley to present the Union Budget despite sitting member and Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) leader E. Ahmed passing away on Budget day.

Clarifications on replies
However, on any other working day of Parliament, the convention is to adjourn for the day after paying homage

to the departed leader on the floor of the House.

But this is not the only change that the new Speaker has brought to the functioning of the Lok Sabha. He has started a new practice of allowing members to seek clarifications after Union Ministers reply to a debate on subjects that their respective Ministries handle.

For example, last week when Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari was replying to the debate on the Demands for Grants on his Ministry, the Speaker allowed mem-

bers to ask for clarifications.

The same was the case with Rural Development Minister Narendra Singh Tomar when the Lok Sabha was debating about agriculture and rural development.

While it is a norm for Rajya Sabha members to seek clarification from a Minister after a debate, a Minister has to agree for an MP to seek a clarification. But now, Mr. Birla has made it a norm for Ministers to reply to clarifications sought by the members.

Extended Zero Hour

Another change that the Speaker has brought about is to allow as many MPs as possible to raise matters during the Zero Hour, a time slot reserved for MPs to raise issues of importance related to their constituencies or their State.

On July 18, Lok Sabha proceedings went on close to midnight as 162 members were allowed to raise issues under Zero Hour mentions after the Finance Bill was passed.