

## **DISHONOUR OF A NEGOTIABLE INSTRUMENT**

When a negotiable instrument is dishonoured, the holder must give a notice of dishonour to all the previous parties in order to make them liable. A negotiable instrument can be dishonoured either by non- acceptance or by non-payment. A cheque and a promissory note can only be dishonoured by non-payment but a bill of exchange can be dishonoured either by non-acceptance or by non-payment.

### **Dishonour by Non-Acceptance** (Section 91)

A bill of exchange can be dishonoured by non-acceptance in the following ways:

1. If a bill is presented to the drawee for acceptance and he does not accept it within 48 hours from the time of presentment for acceptance. When there are several drawees even if one of them makes a default in acceptance, the bill is deemed to be dishonoured unless these several drawees are partners. Ordinarily when there are a number of drawees all of them must accept the same, but when the drawees are partners acceptance by one of them means acceptance by all.
2. When the drawee is a fictitious person or if he cannot be traced after reasonable search.
3. When the drawee is incompetent to contract, the bill is treated as dishonoured.
4. When a bill is accepted with a qualified acceptance, the holder may treat the bill of exchange having been dishonoured.
5. When the drawee has either become insolvent or is dead.
6. When presentment for acceptance is excused and the bill is not accepted. Where a drawee in case of need is named in a bill or in any indorsement thereon, the bill is not dishonoured until it has been dishonoured by such drawee.

### **Dishonour by Non-Payment** (Section 92)

A bill after being accepted has got to be presented for payment on the date of its maturity. If the acceptor fails to make payment when it is due, the bill is dishonoured by non-payment. In the case of a promissory note if the maker fails to make payment on the due date the note is dishonoured by non-payment. A cheque is dishonoured by non-payment as soon as a banker refuses to pay.

An instrument is also dishonoured by non-payment when presentment for payment is excused and the instrument when overdue remains unpaid.

## **Effect of Dishonour**

When a negotiable instrument is dishonoured either by non-acceptance or by non-payment, the other parties thereto can be charged with liability. For example, if the acceptor of a bill dishonours the bill, the holder may bring an action against the drawer and the indorsers. There is a duty cast upon the holder towards those whom he wants to make liable to give notice of dishonour to them.

### **Notice of dishonour**

Notice of dishonour means the actual notification of the dishonour of the instrument by non-acceptance or by non-payment. When a negotiable instrument is refused acceptance or payment notice of such refusal must immediately be given to parties to whom the holder wishes to make liable. Failure to give notice of the dishonour by the holder would discharge all parties other than the maker or the acceptor (Sec. 93).

### **Notice by whom**

Where a negotiable instrument is dishonoured either by non- acceptance or by non-payment, the holder of the instrument or some party to it who is liable thereon must give a notice of dishonour to all the prior parties whom he wants to make liable on the instrument (Section 93). The agent of any such party may also be given notice of dishonour. A notice given by a stranger is not valid.

### **Notice to whom**

Notice of dishonour must be given to all parties to whom the holder seeks to make liable. No notice need be given to a maker, acceptor or drawee, who is the principal debtors.

### **Mode of notice**

The notice of dishonour may be oral or written or partly oral and partly written. It may be sent by post. It may be in any form but it must inform the party to whom it is given either in express terms or by reasonable intendment that the instrument has been dishonoured and in what way it has been dishonoured and that the person served with the notice will be held liable thereon.

### **What is reasonable time?**

It is not possible to lay down any hard and fast rule for determining what reasonable time is. In determining what is reasonable time, regard shall be had to the nature of the instrument, the usual course the dealings with respect to similar instrument, the distance between the parties and the

nature of communication between them. In calculating reasonable time, public holidays shall be excluded.

### **Place of notice**

The place of business or (in case such party has no place of business) at the residence of the party for whom it is intended, is the place where the notice is to be given. If the person who is to give the notice does not know the address of the person to whom the notice is to be given, he must make reasonable efforts to find the latter's address. But if the party entitled to the notice cannot after due search be found, notice of dishonour is dispensed with.

## **NOTING AND PROTESTING**

When a negotiable instrument is dishonoured the holder may sue his prior parties i.e. the drawer and the indorsers after he has given a notice of dishonour to them. The holder may need an authentic evidence of the fact that a negotiable instrument has been dishonoured. When a cheque is dishonoured generally the bank who refuses payment returns back the cheque giving reasons in writing for the dishonour of the cheque. Sections 99 and 100 provide convenient methods of authenticating the fact of dishonour of a bill of exchange and a promissory note by means of 'noting' and 'protest'.

### **Noting**

As soon as a bill of exchange or a promissory note is dishonoured, the holder can after giving the parties due notice of dishonour, sue the parties liable thereon. Section 99 provides a mode of authenticating the fact of the bill having been dishonoured. Such mode is by noting the instrument. Noting is a minute recorded by a notary public on the dishonoured instrument or on a paper attached to such instrument. When a bill is to be noted, the bill is taken to a notary public who represents it for acceptance or payment as the case may be and if the drawee or acceptor still refuses to accept or pay the bill, the bill is noted as stated above.

Noting should specify in the instrument, (a) the fact of dishonour, (b) the date of dishonour, (c) the reason for such dishonour, if any (d) the notary's charges, (e) a reference to the notary's register and (f) the notary's initials.

Noting should be made by the notary within a reasonable time after dishonour. Noting and protesting is not compulsory but foreign bills must be protested for dishonour when such protest is required by the law of the place where they are drawn. Cheques do not require noting and protesting. Noting by itself has no legal effect. Still it has some advantages. If noting is done within a reasonable time protest may be drawn later on. Noting without protest is sufficient to allow a bill to be accepted for honour.

## **Protest**

Protest is a formal certificate of the notary public attesting the dishonour of the bill by non-acceptance or by non-payment. After noting, the next step for notary is to draw a certificate of protest, which is a formal declaration on the bill or a copy thereof. The chief advantage of protest is that the court on proof of the protest shall presume the fact of dishonour.

Besides the protest for non-acceptance and for non-payment the holder may protest the bill for better security. When the acceptor of a bill becomes insolvent or suspends payment before the date of maturity, or when he absconds the holder may protest it in order to obtain better security for the amount due. For this purpose, the holder may employ a notary public to make the demand on the acceptor and if refused, protest may be made. Notice of protest may be given to prior parties. When promissory notes and bills of exchange are required to be protested, notice of protest must be given instead of notice of dishonour. (Sec. 102)

Inland bills may or may not be protested. But foreign bills must be protested for dishonour when such protest is required by the law of the place where they are drawn (Sec. 104).

Where a bill is required to be protested under the Act within a specified time, it is sufficient if it is 'noted for protest' within such time. The formal protest may be given at anytime after the noting (Sec. 104A)

## **Contents of Protest**

Section 101 of the Act lays down the contents of a regular and perfect protest which are as follows:

1. The instrument itself or a literal transcript of the instrument; and of everything written or printed thereupon.
2. The name of the person for whom and against whom the instrument has been protested.
3. The fact of and reasons for dishonour i.e. a statement that payment or acceptance or better security, as the case may be, has been demanded of such person by the notary public from the person concerned and he refused to give it or did not answer or that he could not be found.
4. The time and place of demand and dishonour.
5. The signature of the notary public.
6. In the case of acceptance for honour or payment for honour the person by whom or for whom such acceptance or payment was offered and affected.