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## Bill to Change Stature of Official Languages

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### Why in News

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Recently, a **private member's bill** was introduced in the ongoing Winter Session of the Parliament to give all 22 languages mentioned in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution the stature of national official languages.

### What the Bill Proposes

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This proposed (**Constitutional Amendment**) **Bill** seeks to **amend**:

- **Original Provision: Article 343** of the Constitution, which states that ***the official language of the Union shall be Hindi in Devanagari script.***  
**Proposal:** The bill proposes to substitute this with, "the official language of the Union **in addition to Hindi** in Devanagari script shall be the **languages mentioned in the Eighth Schedule** to this Constitution".
- **Original Provision: Subclause-3 of the Art. 343** which states that "*Parliament may by law provide for the **use of the English language***".  
**Proposal:** The bill seeks to add to this subclause, "Parliament may by law provide for the use of the English language **or the languages mentioned in the Eighth Schedule** to this Constitution".

### Purpose

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As India is known for **unity in diversity**- also enshrined in the **Preamble to the Constitution**, it is necessary that all the regional languages recognized in the Eighth Schedule be encouraged, developed and used as the official language of the Union. This will **promote national integrity**.

### Eighth Schedule and related Constitutional Provisions

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- Part **XVII of the Indian constitution** deals with the official languages in **Articles 343 to 351**.
- The Constitutional provisions related to the Eighth Schedule are:
  - **Article 344:** Article 344(1) provides for the constitution of a **Commission by the President** on expiration of **five years** from the commencement of the Constitution.
  - **Article 351:** It provides for the spread of the Hindi language to develop it so that it may serve as a medium of expression for all the elements of the composite culture of India.

## 22 Official Languages

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- The Eighth Schedule to the Constitution consists of the following 22 languages: (1) Assamese, (2) Bengali, (3) Gujarati, (4) Hindi, (5) Kannada, (6) Kashmiri, (7) Konkani, (8) Malayalam, (9) Manipuri, (10) Marathi, (11) Nepali, (12) Oriya, (13) Punjabi, (14) Sanskrit, (15) Sindhi, (16) Tamil, (17) Telugu, (18) Urdu (19) Bodo, (20) Santhali, (21) Maithili and (22) Dogri.
- Of these languages, **14 were initially included** in the Constitution.
- **Sindhi** language was added by the 21<sup>st</sup> Amendment Act of 1967.
- **Konkani, Manipuri, and Nepali** were included by the 71<sup>st</sup> Amendment Act of 1992.
- **Bodo, Dogri, Maithili, and Santhali** were added by 92<sup>nd</sup> Amendment Act of 2003.

## Committee on Official Languages

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- As the evolution of dialects and languages is dynamic, influenced by socio-political developments, it is **difficult to fix any criterion for languages**, whether to distinguish them from dialects, or for their inclusion in the Eighth Schedule to the Constitution of India.

Consequently two committees viz. the **Pahwa (1996) and Sitakant Mohapatra (2003) Committees** were formed by the government.

- A Committee was set up in September 2003 under the Chairmanship of **Shri Sitakant Mohapatra** to evolve a set of objective criteria for inclusion of more languages in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution.

The Committee submitted its report in 2004, which is still under the government's consideration in consultation with the concerned Minorities/Departments.

## Private Member Bill

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- It refers to the bills introduced by any member of Parliament who is **not a minister**.
- Its introduction in the House requires **one month's prior notice**.
- Its drafting is the responsibility of the member concerned.

- Its rejection by the House has no implication on the parliamentary confidence in the government or its resignation.

**Source: IE**