



Parliament Committees

For Prelims: Parliament Committees, Article 105, Article 118, Speaker, Rajya Sabha, Lok Sabha

For Mains: Parliament Committees and its Significance

Why in News?

Recently, reorganization of 22 Standing Committees took place.

What are Committees of Parliament?

▪ About:

- A Parliamentary Committee is a panel of MPs that is **appointed or elected by the House or nominated by the Speaker/Chairman**.
- The committee works under the **direction of the Speaker/Chairman** and it presents its report to the House or to the Speaker/Chairman.
- Parliamentary Committees have their origins in the British Parliament.
- They draw their authority from **Article 105 and Article 118**.
 - Article 105 deals with the privileges of MPs.
 - Article 118 gives Parliament authority to make rules to regulate its procedure and conduct of business.

▪ Need:

- A Bill is introduced in either House of Parliament to begin legislative business but the process of lawmaking is often complex, and Parliament has limited time for detailed discussions.
- Also, the **political polarisation and shrinking middle ground** has been leading to increasingly rancorous and inconclusive debates in Parliament.
 - Due to these issues, a great deal of legislative business ends up taking place in the Parliamentary Committees instead.

What are the Various Committees of Parliament?

- India's Parliament has multiple types of committees. They can be differentiated on the basis of their work, their membership and the length of their tenure.
- However, broadly there are **two types of Parliamentary Committees**- Standing Committees and Ad Hoc Committees.
 - The Standing Committees are permanent (constituted every year or periodically) and work on a continuous basis.
 - Standing Committees can be classified into the following six categories:
 - Financial Committees
 - **Departmental Standing Committees**
 - Committees to Enquire
 - Committees to Scrutinise and Control
 - Committees Relating to the Day-to-Day Business of the House

- House-Keeping Committees or Service Committees
- While the Ad Hoc Committees are temporary and cease to exist on completion of the task assigned to them.
 - They are further subdivided into Inquiry Committees and Advisory Committees.
 - The principal Ad hoc Committees are the Select and Joint Committees on Bills.

What is the Significance of Parliamentary Committees?

- **Provides Legislative Expertise:**
 - Most MPs are not subject matter experts on the topics being discussed — they are generalists who understand the pulse of the people but rely on advice from experts and stakeholders before making decisions.
 - **Parliamentary committees are meant to help MPs seek expertise** and give them time to think about issues in detail.
- **Acting as a Mini-Parliament:**
 - These committees act as a mini-parliament, as they have **MPs representing different parties are elected into them** through a system of the single transferable vote, in roughly the same proportion as their strength in Parliament.
- **Instrument for Detailed Scrutiny:**
 - When bills are referred to these committees, **they are examined closely and inputs are sought from various external stakeholders**, including the public.
- **Provides a Check on the Government:**
 - Although committee recommendations are **not binding on the government, their reports create a public record of the consultations** that took place and put pressure on the government to reconsider its stand on debatable provisions.
 - By virtue of being closed-door and away from the public eye, discussions in committee meetings are also more collaborative, with MPs feeling less pressured to posture for media galleries.

Why is the Sidelining of the Parliamentary Committees an Issue?

- **Weakening of Parliamentary System Government:**
 - A parliamentary democracy **works on the doctrine of fusion of powers between parliament and the executive**, but the Parliament is supposed to maintain oversight of the government and keep its power in check.
 - Thus, by circumventing the Parliamentary committees in the passing of significant legislation, there is a risk of weakening democracy.
- **Enforcing Brute Majority:**
 - In the Indian system, it is not mandatory for bills to be sent to committees. It's left to the discretion of the Chair — the Speaker in the Lok Sabha and Chairperson in the Rajya Sabha.
 - By giving discretionary power to the Chair, the system has been specially rendered weak in a Lok Sabha where the ruling party has a brute majority.

Way Forward

- Mandating scrutiny for the significant bills passed is by no means a hurdle to the legislative process, rather it is necessary to uphold the quality of legislation, and by extension, the quality of governance.
- Thus, a strong parliamentary committee system is required to ensure Parliament's sanctity in the law-making process.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Q. With reference to the Parliament of India, which of the following Parliamentary Committees scrutinizes and reports to the House whether the powers to make regulations, rules, sub-rules, by-laws, etc., conferred by the Constitution or delegated by the Parliament are being properly exercised by the Executive within the scope of such delegation? (2018)

- (a) Committee on Government Assurances
- (b) Committee on Subordinate Legislation
- (c) Rules Committee
- (d) Business Advisory Committee

Ans: (b)

Exp:

- Committee on Government Assurance: The functions of the Committee on Government Assurances are to scrutinize the assurances, promises, and undertakings etc., given by the Ministers, from time to time on the floor of the House. For Lok Sabha it is a 15 member body, whereas Rajya Sabha has 10 members.
- Committee on Subordinate Legislation: The functions of the Committee on Subordinate Legislation are to scrutinize and report to the House whether the powers to make regulations, rules, and sub-rules, bye-laws etc. conferred by the Constitution or delegated by Parliament are being properly exercised within such delegation. For both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha it is a 15 member body.
- Rules Committee: Its function is to consider matters of procedure and conduct of business in the House and to recommend any amendments or additions to these rules that may be deemed necessary. For Lok Sabha it is a 15 member body, whereas Rajya Sabha has 16 members. The committee is headed by the Chairman or the Speaker, as the case may be, for Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha respectively.
- Business Advisory Committee: The function of the Committee is to recommend the time that should be allotted for the discussion of such government legislative and other business as the Speaker, in consultation with the Leader of the House, may direct to be referred to the Committee. It is a 15 member body in Lok Sabha headed by the Speaker of the House. Therefore, option (b) is the correct answer.

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