Rajya Sabha – 'Rules of Procedure' Reforms

What is the issue?

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- Vice President (and RS Chairman) Mr. Venkaiah Naidu appointed a two-member committee for suggesting reforms to the rules of the Upper House.
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- V.K. Agnihotri, former secretary general of RS, is heading the committee.
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What is the salience of Rules of Procedure?

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- Both Houses of Parliament have their own rules of procedure and these rules govern every detail of how the Houses function on a daily basis.
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- They determine MPs' participation in parliamentary proceedings while making laws, passing budgets, questioning the government and representing us.
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- In the seven decades since independence, governance has become complicated and the subjects of laws are more technical.
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- But the rules governing the functioning of the Rajya Sabha have not kept pace with the times, thereby proving to be a retardant.
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- There was hence a need for reforming them and the Agnihotri committee has been constituted with a mandate to submit its report within 3 months.
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How did the current Rules of Procedure of Rajya Sabha evolve?

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- When Rajya Shaba commenced for the 1st time in early 1952, it didn't have rules of its own and rather relied on the constitutional assembly.
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- Subsequently, a committee of 15 MPs were constituted from with the Rajya Shaba to evolve its own rules of procedure, which was finalised in late 1952.
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- But only in 1964, Rajya Sabha got its rules codified into Article 118(1) of the constitution – which continues till now with minor alterations.
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- Periodic reviews have been carried out and the last such review for the Rajya Sabha happened in 2009.
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What are the critical issues facing Agnihotri Committee?

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- The Agnihotri committee has to address four fundamental issues that are currently plaguing our parliamentary system.
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- **Firstly -** It seems that the two Houses of Parliament meet mostly for transacting government business (stifling of the opposition voices).
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- The committee will have to balance completion of government business with discussions raised by other political parties.
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- **Secondly -** The existing mechanisms (like Question Hour) for securing the government's accountability to Parliament have lost their edge.
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- Measures for completely overhauling these mechanisms are required.
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- **Thirdly –** As issues facing Parliament are now more complex and technical, strengthening the deliberative prowess of the houses is needed.
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- **Finally –** Disruptions in parliament has become increasingly regular.
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- Hence, suggesting solutions for protecting the sanctity of parliamentary proceedings is needed.
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Source: Indian Express

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