

Referring a Bill to Parliamentary Standing Committees

What is the issue?

Due to continuous disruptions and adjournments in the Parliament, referring the bills to the Standing Committees may be counterproductive adding to the delay.

What are Parliamentary Committees?

- A committee can be called a Parliamentary committee if it is appointed or elected by the house or nominated by the Speaker or the Chairman.
- It has a secretariat provided by the Lok Sabha/Rajya Sabha secretariat.
- They are regulated as per rules made by the two Houses under **Article 118(1)** of the Constitution.
- The recommendations of the Committees are **not binding**.
- Parliamentary Committees are of two kinds.
 - **Standing Committees**- Permanent and regular committees which are constituted from time to time and their work goes on, more or less, on a continuous basis.
 - **Ad hoc Committees**- Appointed for a specific purpose and they cease to exist when they finish the task assigned to them and submit a report.



What is the role of Parliamentary Committees?

- **Time management**- Since Committees meet throughout the year, they help in making up the lack of time available on the floor of the House.
- **Technical expertise**- The Committees provide a forum where members can engage with domain experts and government officials to understand matters better.
- **Ensures accountability**- The main purpose is to ensure the accountability of Government to Parliament through more detailed consideration.
- **Consensus building**- Committees also provide a forum for building consensus across political parties.
- **Examination of Budget**- Besides bills, the Departmentally Related Standing Committees (DRSCs) also examine the budget.
- **Examination of policy issues**- Committees also examine policy issues in their respective Ministries, and make suggestions to the government.
- **Strengthening the legislative process**- The purpose of the Committee is to strengthen the administration and the country's legislative process.
- **Cordiality**- The committee meetings are in camera and, therefore, the meetings are held in a comparatively congenial atmosphere than they would be in Parliament.

What is the current issue?

- **Parliamentary disruptions-** The Government is worried about the disruptions in Parliament that furthers the delay in referring the bills to the Standing Committees.
- In the monsoon session of Parliament 2022,
 - The Lok Sabha's productivity was 47%
 - The Rajya Sabha's productivity was 42%
- The percentage of Bills having been referred to the DRSCs during the tenures of the 14th (2004-2009), 15th (2009-2014) and 16th Lok Sabhas (2014-2019) has been 60%, 71% and 27%, respectively.
- **Committee versus Parliament-** It is not obligatory for the Government to agree to refer each Bill to the DRSC.
- It has been alleged that Bills which are not being referred to the parliamentary committees, are not examined properly and remain just a bureaucratically conceived piece of legislation.
- For instance, the three Farm Bills were passed without being referred to the DRSC and had to be withdrawn later.

What changes could be suggested for consideration of Bills?

- **Compulsory reference-** The Speaker of the Lok Sabha and the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha have powers to refer Bills to a DRSC of Parliament.
- This process of reference of Bills to these committees can be made compulsory with certain exemptions.
- **Non-applicability of whip-** To make all discussions in the Parliamentary Standing Committee free, it may be provided that during the discussions of the committee meetings, no whip of the party would apply to them.
- **Fixed timeline-** The committees can be given a fixed timeline to come up with the recommendation failing which the Bill may be put up before the House concerned directly.
- **Inclusion of experts-** To ensure quality work, field experts may be invited as their domain knowledge would help introduce latest developments and trends in that field from worldwide.
- **Inter-sessional time management-** The Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs can collaborate with the committee chairmen to get the parliamentary works organised during the inter-sessional period.
- **Suggestions in Budget -** The committees should not limit themselves to just discussion but should also come up with suggestions to take up new initiatives and people-friendly measures.

References

1. <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/an-essential-pit-stop-in-parliamentary-business/article65895581.ece?homepage=true>
2. <https://prsindia.org/theprsblog/importance-parliamentary-committees>
3. <http://164.100.47.194/Loksabha/Committee/CommitteeHome.aspx>

Quick facts

Departmentally Related Standing Committees (DRSCs)

- There are 24 Departmentally Related Standing Committees (DRSCs), each of which oversees a set of Ministries.
- DRSCs are permanent Committees that were set up first in 1993.
- They are reconstituted every year and are headed by a Chairperson.
- They consist of 21 Members from Lok Sabha and 10 from Rajya Sabha.
- The DRSCs primarily look at three things for examination - Bills, Budgets and Subject specific issues.

Whip

- A whip is an official of a political party who acts as the party's 'enforcer' inside the legislative assembly or house of parliament.

