

Consultative Committees in Indian Parliament

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What's in today's article?

- **Background (Origin of consultative committees)**
- **About Consultative Committees (Purpose, Functions, Process, Criteria, etc.)**
- **News Summary**

Why in News?

- Parliamentary Committees have become so dysfunctional that the Union government has had to invite members to join a couple of ministerial consultative committees at the earliest, to ensure that they are “kept alive”.

Background on Consultative Committees:

- The concept of the consultative committees in Indian Parliament was **first proposed by the then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in 1954.**
- He felt that there should be some kind of Standing Advisory Consultative Committees of Parliament to provide opportunities to Members to have some glimpse into the working of the Government.
- It was felt that this might also help in reducing the number of questions asked by Members.
- With this in view, informal Consultative Committees were constituted for the various Ministries/Departments of the Government of India in the year 1954.

About Consultative Committees:

- In 1969, discussions were held with Leaders of Opposition Parties/Groups in Parliament.
- As per decisions taken during these discussions, detailed guidelines were drawn up for constitution and functioning of these committees.
- **Objective -**
 - To provide a forum for informal discussion between MPs, on one hand, and Ministers and senior officers of the Government on the other hand on the policies, principles and programmes of the Government and the manner of their implementation.
 - Discussions at the meetings of these committees are held in a free and frank manner, cutting across party lines.

About the Process of Consultative Committees:

- Consultative Committees for various Ministries/ Departments are normally constituted after general election to the Lok Sabha and as and when necessary, thereafter.
- The constitution of these committees is generally timed with the summoning of the Budget Session of Parliament.
- The **membership of these committees is voluntary** and is left to the choice of the Members/Leaders of their parties/groups in the respective Houses.
- A **Member of Parliament can be nominated on only one Consultative Committee.**
- Members of Parliament belonging to both Houses are **nominated** on these committees by the **Minister of Parliamentary Affairs.**

What is the minimum/maximum criteria to constitute consultative committees?

- The Consultative Committee for a Ministry/Department is not constituted if a **minimum of 10 Members** have not given their option for being nominated on that committee.
- The **maximum limit of membership on a Consultative Committee is 40** from both the Houses.
- Each Consultative Committee is **expected to hold one meeting each during the session and inter-session period**.

News Summary:

- At present, membership on the consultative committees for the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution and Ministry of Minority Affairs, has fallen below 10, which is insufficient for any consultative committee to remain in existence.
- Therefore, the Minister of Parliamentary Affairs asked the MPs to furnish their willingness for nomination on the consultative committees of the above-mentioned ministries.

Performance of Consultative Committees in recent years:

- For the **17th Lok Sabha**, consultative committees were constituted on 31st October, 2019 and then later due to the **Covid-19 Pandemic**, the requisite numbers of meeting of these committees could not be held during 2020.
- The Ministries of Finance, Minority Affairs, Women and Child Welfare, Coal and Mines, Culture and Tourism, IT and Communication, etc. did not have a single meeting in 2019.
- Railways panel has had just one meeting in December 2019 and had no other meetings through 2020 and 2021.

Q1) When are the consultative committees constituted?

Consultative Committees for various Ministries/ Departments are normally constituted after general election to the Lok Sabha and as and when necessary, thereafter.

Q2) How many members does a consultative committee have?

Consultative committee has a minimum of 10 and a maximum of 40 members.

Source: Why are parliamentary standing committees necessary?

Source: <https://vajiramandravi.com/current-affairs/consultative-committees-in-indian-parliament/>

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