

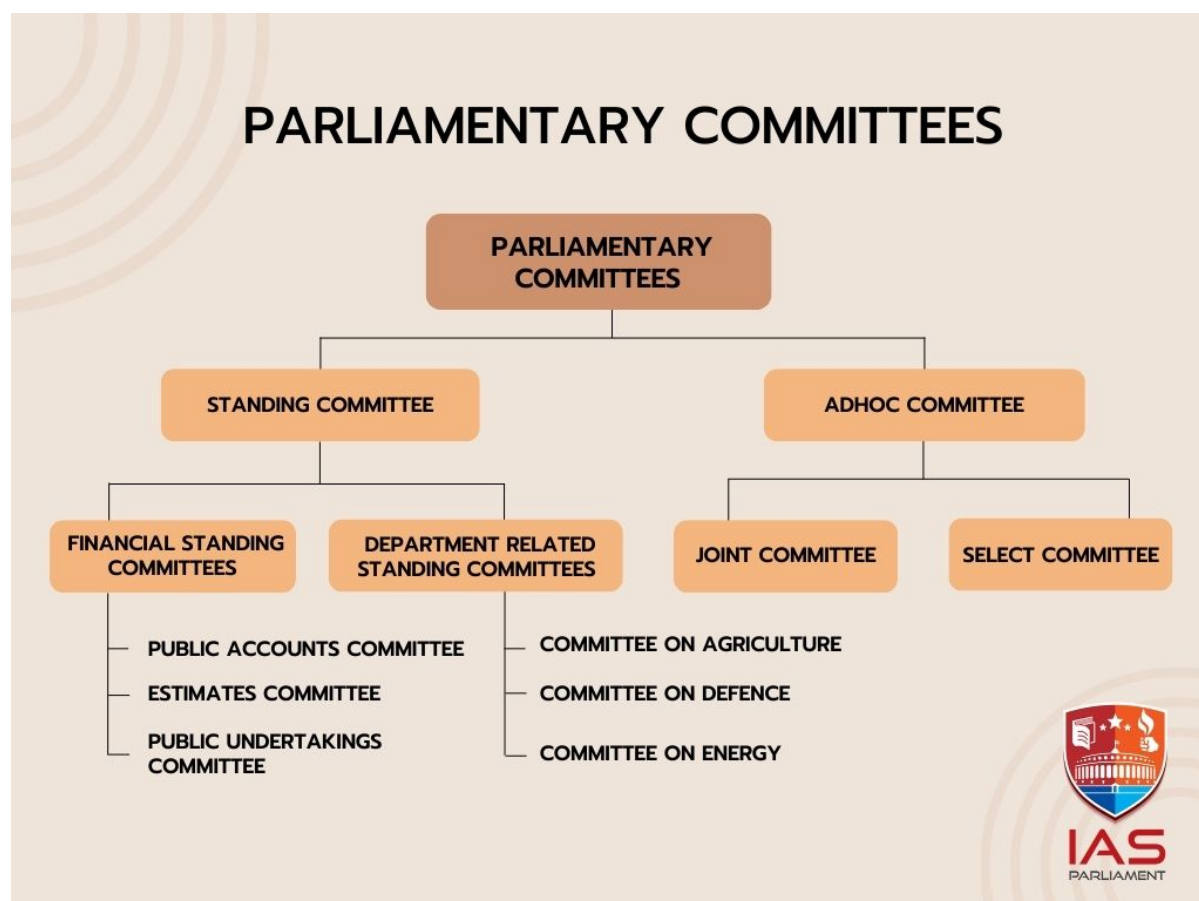
## Referring a Bill to Parliamentary Standing Committees

### 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.