NEXT IAS

DAILY EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

TOPIC

'We the People' and 18th Lok Sabha

'WE THE PEOPLE' AND 18TH LOK SABHA

Context

- The 18th Lok Sabha has been sworn in, and the country is witnessing a new chapter in its democratic journey. While the focus is on the 543 elected representatives who will shape the nation's destiny, it's essential to remember that the Lok Sabha is not just about the MPs – it's also about the people who elected them.

About Parliamentary Form of Government

- It is a democratic system where the Executive branch derives its legitimacy and authority from the Legislative branch (Parliament).

- In this model, the head of government (usually the Prime Minister) is accountable to the Parliament and can be removed through a vote of no confidence.

- In a Parliamentary form of Government, the day-to-day working of the system places significant demands on the time and resources of various Ministries and Departments.

- The **Constitution of India** outlines provisions related to the parliamentary form of government.

Key Features of a Parliamentary System

- **Parliament:** The Constitution establishes the Parliament of India as the supreme legislative body. It consists of **two houses:** the **Lok Sabha** (House of the People) and the **Rajya Sabha** (Council of States).
  - The Lok Sabha members are directly elected by the people, while Rajya Sabha members are indirectly elected by the State legislatures.

- **Prime Minister:** The Prime Minister is the head of the government.
  - The President appoints the Prime Minister, usually the leader of the majority party in the Lok Sabha.
  - The Prime Minister leads the Council of Ministers and exercises executive powers.

- **President's Role:** The President is the constitutional head of state. The President's role is largely ceremonial, but they sign bills into law and appoint the Prime Minister.

- **No Dual Executive:** Unlike the presidential system, India has a single executive (the Prime Minister). The President's powers are limited by the advice of the Council of Ministers.

- **Council of Ministers:** The Council of Ministers includes ministers responsible for various government departments.
  - The PM selects cabinet ministers, sets policies, and represents the country internationally.
  - The Cabinet is the core group of ministers. It formulates policies and decisions.
  - They assist the Prime Minister in decision-making and policy implementation.

- **Collective Responsibility:** The Council of Ministers is collectively responsible to the Lok Sabha.
  - If the Lok Sabha passes a vote of no confidence, the entire Council of Ministers must resign.

- **Fusion of Powers:** In a parliamentary system, the executive (cabinet) and legislative (parliament) branches are closely linked. The prime minister is usually a member of the parliament and derives authority from it.

- **Bicameral Legislature:** Most parliamentary systems have a bicameral legislature consisting of an upper house (e.g., Rajya Sabha in India) and a lower house (e.g., Lok Sabha in India).
  - Bills must be passed by both houses to become law.

- **Question Hour:** During the Question Hour, Members of Parliament (MPs) can ask questions related to government policies and actions.
  - Ministers provide answers and are held accountable.

How does India's Parliamentary System differ from a Presidential System?

- A Parliamentary System has a dual executive, with a real executive (Prime Minister) and a nominal executive (President).
  - In a Presidential System only one executive, the President is both the Head of State and Government.
- In a Parliamentary system, the Executive is responsible for the legislature and its acts.
  - In a Presidential system, the Executive is not responsible to the Legislature for its policies and acts.
- In a Parliamentary System, the head of government needs to be a member of the legislative body.
  - In a Presidential System, the president does not need to be a member of the legislative body.
- A Parliamentary System has a less rigid structure, allowing for easy removal of the government.
  - A Presidential system has a more rigid structure, with a fixed tenure for the President.

Advantages of a Parliamentary System

- **Accountability and Oversight:** The government is directly accountable to the parliament. Regular question sessions, debates, and motions ensure transparency and scrutiny.
  - MPs scrutinise government actions, budgets, and policies.
- **Stable Governance**: The majority party or coalition usually enjoys a stable mandate, reducing the risk of frequent elections. This stability promotes long-term policy planning.
- **Efficient Decision-Making:** The fusion of powers enables quick decision-making. The government can swiftly respond to crises or urgent matters.
  - **Quick decision-making** due to the close relationship between the executive and legislative branches.
- **Representation:** The parliament represents diverse interests, allowing for broader participation in governance. Minority parties have a voice and can influence policies.
- **No Gridlock:** Unlike presidential systems, where executive-legislative conflicts can lead to gridlock, parliamentary systems facilitate smoother functioning.
- **Flexible Executive:** The PM can dissolve the lower house and call for fresh elections.
  - This flexibility allows for quick responses to changing situations.

Associated Challenges and Concerns

- **No Fixed Term for Government:** Unlike presidential systems, there is no fixed term for the government.
  - The government remains in power as long as it enjoys the confidence of the Parliament.
- **Lack of Separation of Powers:** In a parliamentary system, the Executive (government) and Legislative (parliament) branches are not fully separated, which can lead to potential conflicts of interest and a lack of effective checks and balances.
- **Accumulation of Power:** The ruling party often holds significant power, which can undermine democratic principles. The concentration of power in the hands of the ruling majority may limit critical validation from the opposition.
- **Instability:** Parliamentary governments can be prone to frequent changes due to elections or no-confidence motions. Changing demographics or public attitudes may bring in a new government with different policy priorities
- **Dominance of the Majority Party:** The majority party often has excessive power, limiting checks and balances.
- **Instability in Coalitions:** In coalition governments, disagreements among parties can lead to instability.

Way Forward: Enhancing the Efficiency and Participation

- **Transparency and Accountability:** Strengthen transparency mechanisms to ensure citizens have access to information about government activities.

- ◆ Promote accountability by holding elected representatives and officials responsible for their actions.
- **Effective Legislative Process:** Streamline legislative procedures to expedite the passage of bills.
  - ◆ Encourage informed debates and discussions in Parliament to improve the quality of legislation.
- **Committee System:** Empower parliamentary committees to scrutinise bills, policies, and government actions.
  - ◆ Enhance the role of committees in examining budget allocations and monitoring implementation.
- **Public Engagement:** Foster public participation through consultations, town halls, and public hearings.
  - ◆ Use technology to engage citizens in policy formulation and decision-making.
- **Capacity Building:** Invest in training programs for parliamentarians, bureaucrats, and support staff.
  - ◆ Enhance their understanding of legislative processes, governance, and policy analysis.
- **Digital Transformation:** Leverage technology for efficient information dissemination, e-governance, and online citizen engagement.
  - ◆ Digitise parliamentary proceedings and documents for wider accessibility.
- **Collaboration with Civil Society:** Engage civil society organisations, academia, and experts in policy discussions.
  - ◆ Tap into their expertise and diverse perspectives.

Conclusion

- The parliamentary form of government emphasises collective responsibility, accountability, and flexibility. It has been successfully adopted by several countries, including **India, the United Kingdom, and Canada.**
- In the words of **Dr. BR Ambedkar**, 'Democracy is not a merely a form of government, it is a way of life'.
- The responsibility is not just on the MPs alone. As citizens, we must stay informed, engage in constructive dialogue, and hold our representatives accountable for their actions, and participate in the decision-making process.

Mains Practice Question

[Q] What are the key features of India's parliamentary system, and how does it differ from a presidential system? How does it impact governance, representation, and stability in the country?

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