

CHAPTER 22 Cabinet Committees

The Cabinet works through various committees. These committees are called as Cabinet Committees. The features, list and functions of these committees are explained below.

FEATURES OF CABINET COMMITTEES

The following are the features of Cabinet Committees:

1. They are extra-constitutional in emergence. In other words, they are not mentioned in the Constitution. However, the Rules of Business provide for their establishment.
2. They are of two types—standing and *ad hoc*. The former are of a permanent nature while the latter are of a temporary nature. The *ad hoc* committees are constituted from time to time to deal with special problems. They are disbanded after their task is completed.¹
3. They are set up by the Prime Minister according to the exigencies of the time and requirements of the situation. Hence, their number, nomenclature, and composition varies from time to time.
4. Their membership varies from one committee to another committee. They usually include only Cabinet Ministers. Sometimes, the non-cabinet ministers can also be appointed as their members. Further, the non-cabinet ministers can also attend the meetings of the Cabinet Committees as special invitees.
5. They not only include the Ministers in charge of subjects covered by them but also include other senior Ministers.
6. They are mostly headed by the Prime Minister. Some times other senior Cabinet Ministers also acts as their Chairman. But, in case the Prime Minister is a member of a committee, he/she invariably presides over it.
7. They not only sort out issues and formulate proposals for the consideration of the Cabinet, but also take decisions. However, the Cabinet can review their decisions.
8. They are an organisational device to reduce the enormous workload of the Cabinet. They also facilitate in-depth examination of policy issues and effective coordination. They are based on the principles of division of labour and effective delegation.

LIST OF CABINET COMMITTEES

At present, the following 8 Cabinet Committees are functional:

1. Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs
2. Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs
3. Appointments Committee of the Cabinet
4. Cabinet Committee on Parliamentary Affairs
5. Cabinet Committee on Security
6. Cabinet Committee on Accommodation
7. Cabinet Committee on Investment and Growth
8. Cabinet Committee on Employment and Skill Development

¹For example, the Emergency Committee was set-up in 1962 after the Chinese invasion.

FUNCTIONS OF CABINET COMMITTEES

The following are the functions of the cabinet committees:

1. The Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs deals with all policy matters pertaining to domestic and foreign affairs.
2. The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs directs and coordinates the governmental activities in the economic sphere.
3. The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet decides all higher level appointments in the Central Secretariat, Public Enterprises, Banks and Financial Institutions.
4. The Cabinet Committee on Parliamentary Affairs looks after the progress of government business in the Parliament.
5. The Cabinet Committee on Security deals with all issues relating to defence, law and order, internal security and atomic energy.
6. The Cabinet Committee on Accommodation deals with all issues regarding the allotment of government accommodation to the Members of Parliament, central government employees, other persons and various organisations.
7. The Cabinet Committee on Investment and Growth deals with all policy matters aimed at accelerating capital inflows, export promotion, import substitution and improving ease of doing business.
8. The Cabinet Committee on Employment and Skill Development deals with all issues related to developing skills, enhancing employability of workforce and increasing women workforce participation.

Of all the Cabinet Committees, the most powerful is the Political Affairs Committee, often described as a "Super-Cabinet".

GROUPS OF MINISTERS

In addition to cabinet committees, several Groups of Ministers (GoMs) are constituted to look into different issues/subjects. Some of

these GoMs are empowered to take decisions on behalf of the Cabinet whereas the others make recommendations to the Cabinet.²

The institution of GoMs has become a viable and effective instrument of coordination among the ministries. These are *ad hoc* bodies formed to give recommendations to the cabinet on certain emergent issues and critical problem areas. Ministers heading the concerned ministries are inducted into the relevant GoMs and when the advice is crystallised they are disbanded.³

The Second Administrative Reforms Commission of India (2005–2009) made the following observations and recommendations with respect to the working of the GoMs⁴:

1. The Commission observed that the constitution of a large number of GoMs has resulted in many GoMs not being able to meet regularly to complete their work thus leading to significant delays on many major issues.
2. The Commission felt that more selective use of the institution of GoMs would perhaps lead to more effective coordination particularly if they are empowered to arrive at a decision on behalf of the Cabinet with time limits that are prescribed for completing the work entrusted to them.
3. The Commission recommended that there is need to ensure that the existing coordination mechanism of GoMs function effectively and helps in early resolution of issues. Selective, but effective use of GoMs with clear mandate and prescribed time limits would be helpful.

²Second Administrative Reforms Commission, Government of India, Report on Organizational Structure of Government of India, 2009, p. 136. This commission was headed by Veerappa Moily, a senior Congress leader and former Karnataka Chief Minister.

³Ramesh K. Arora and Rajni Goyal, *Indian Public Administration*, New Age International Publishers, Third Edition, 2013, pp. 238–239.

⁴Second Administrative Reforms Commission, Government of India, Report on Organisational Structure of Government of India, 2009, pp. 136–137 and 140.