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The Union Legislature

In Focus

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THE CONSTITUTION OF INDIA

The Constituent Assembly was entrusted with the drafting of a Constitution for the governance of India. Dr B R Ambedkar was chairperson of the Drafting Committee. Meanwhile India became independent on August 15, 1947, and on January 26, 1950 the Constitution of India, adopted, enacted and given by the people of India to the people of India, came into force.

A Federation of States

Article 1 of the Constitution states that India shall be a Union of States. The feature recognised the great diversity of cultures, languages, religions, geography and climate. It gave power to individual states yet maintained the unity of the country.

The term 'Union of States' implies that the states may not secede. India is a federation of states because:

- it has a written Constitution.
- it has two sets of governments, one that functions at the state level, the other that functions at the central or Union level. The Central Government functions from the capital, New Delhi.
- the Constitution divides powers or subjects for legislation between the Union Government and the State Government.
- it has provided for a Supreme Court, located in New Delhi, to be the final interpreter of the Constitution.

To appreciate the systems by which India is administered by the government, let us begin with the structure of the government which has these branches.



THE PARLIAMENT OF INDIA

Parliament or *Sansad* is the common term used to refer to both the Houses of the Union Legislature, i.e., the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha functioning as one unit.



The Parliament of India

The Structure of the Union Parliament

The President is the supreme head of the Indian Union and therefore, the nation. He/She represents the spirit of the nation. The role of the President is more ceremonial than functional. India's first President, Dr Rajendra Prasad, was a great scholar. India had Presidents from different religions as well as from backward classes to emphasise that our nation believes in regional diversity and social equality. The President is the head of the Indian Union as well as an integral part of the Parliament. The President of India is elected indirectly by representatives of the states and union.

The Union Legislature comprises the Lok Sabha (the House of the People) and the Rajya Sabha (the House of the States). These two bodies make up the vital organs of our country's parliamentary democracy.

The Lok Sabha

Term

The Lok Sabha is elected for a term of five years. Its life can be extended for one year at a time during a national emergency. It can be dissolved earlier than its term by the President on the advice of the Prime Minister. It can be voted out of power by a debate and vote on a no-confidence motion. During the 13th Lok Sabha, Bhartiya Janata Party lost a no-confidence motion by one vote and had to resign.



Lok Sabha

Composition

The House may have not more than 552 members; 530 elected from the states, 20 from Union Territories and not more than 2 members nominated from the Anglo-Indian Community. At present, the strength of the Lok Sabha is 545.

Election

Election to the Lok Sabha is by universal adult franchise. Every Indian citizen above the age of 18 can vote for his/her representative in the Lok Sabha. The election is direct but by secret ballot, so that nobody is threatened or coerced into voting for a particular party or an individual. The Election Commission, an autonomous body elected by the President of India, organises, manages and oversees the entire process of election.

What's More

The provision for the Anglo-Indian community was included at the behest of the British Government to protect their nationals who had decided to stay back.