

DEPUTY SPEAKER: POLITY

NEWS: The importance of the Deputy Speaker

WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

The Deputy Speaker's post in the Lok Sabha has been vacant for over six years, raising concerns over constitutional non-compliance and weakening of democratic functioning. This delay violates Article 93 and undermines parliamentary balance between ruling and opposition parties.

Context: Vacancy in Deputy Speaker's Office

- The post of Deputy Speaker of the Lok Sabha has remained unfilled for more than six years, specifically throughout the 17th Lok Sabha (2019–2024).
- This marks the longest-ever vacancy of this constitutional office in independent India.
- Such a prolonged vacancy raises critical concerns about the government's compliance with constitutional mandates and reflects poorly on democratic health and legislative functioning.

Role and Position of the Deputy Speaker

- The Deputy Speaker is the second-highest constitutional functionary in the Lok Sabha after the Speaker.
- Acts as the **Presiding Officer** in the absence of the Speaker.
- Has the authority to regulate the proceedings of the House and maintain order, similar to the Speaker when presiding.

Constitutional Provisions (Article 95(1))

- Article 95(1) of the Indian Constitution states that if the Speaker is absent or the office is vacant, the Deputy Speaker shall perform the duties of the Speaker.
- Thus, the Deputy Speaker becomes crucial in situations of transition, resignation, absence, or illness of the Speaker.

Functions When Speaker is Absent

- Presides over sittings of the Lok Sabha.
- Presides over **joint sittings of both Houses of Parliament** under Article 108, in case the Speaker is not available.
- Exercises all powers of the Speaker when officiating.

Election of the Deputy Speaker

- The Deputy Speaker is elected by the **Lok Sabha from among its own members**.
- The election process is governed by:

- **Article 93:** Mandates that the Lok Sabha shall "as soon as may be" elect both a Speaker and a Deputy Speaker.
- **Rule 8 of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha:** Specifies that the date of election shall be fixed by the Speaker.

Convention vs Constitution

- By convention, the Deputy Speaker is usually elected from the **Opposition party** or alliance to maintain political balance in the House.
- The Speaker typically belongs to the ruling party or coalition.
- However, this is **not mandated** by the Constitution.
- Example: Between 1952 and 1969, the first four Deputy Speakers were from the **ruling party**, not the Opposition.

Tenure Anomaly in the 17th Lok Sabha

- During the entire tenure of the 17th Lok Sabha (2019–2024), **no Deputy Speaker was elected**.
- This marks a significant constitutional lapse and undermines parliamentary practices and democratic spirit.
- Such a gap can leave a critical leadership vacuum during procedural crises.

Powers and Functions of the Deputy Speaker

- When presiding over the House:
 - Has all the powers and responsibilities of the Speaker.
 - Cannot vote in the first instance.
 - Can **only exercise a casting vote** in case of a tie in votes.
- When not presiding:
 - Functions like an ordinary Member of Parliament (MP).
 - Can participate in debates, raise issues, and vote on all matters.
- **Special privilege:**
 - If appointed to any **Parliamentary Committee**, the Deputy Speaker **automatically becomes the Chairperson** of that Committee.

Removal of the Deputy Speaker

- Can be removed by a **resolution passed in the Lok Sabha** by an **effective majority**:

- Effective majority = Majority of the total membership of the House, **excluding vacant seats**.
- A **14-day advance notice** must be given before moving the removal resolution.
- During discussion on the removal motion, the Deputy Speaker is **not allowed to preside**, though he/she may be present.

Constitutional and Democratic Concerns Due to Vacancy

- Violates the spirit and letter of **Article 93**, which mandates timely appointment.
- Undermines the **principle of checks and balances** in parliamentary functioning.
- Erodes the tradition of Opposition representation in House leadership roles.
- Weakens preparedness during a potential **vacuum of power**, especially if the Speaker resigns or is incapacitated.
- Could lead to **institutional paralysis** during emergencies or crises due to absence of backup leadership.

Concluding Observations

- The office of Deputy Speaker is a **constitutional necessity**, not a matter of political discretion.
- Its prolonged vacancy disrupts the **democratic architecture** of Parliament and reduces the legitimacy of legislative processes.
- The Government must ensure that the **spirit of constitutional provisions is upheld**, and institutional roles are not left unfulfilled due to political expediency.
- Timely election to this post would **strengthen democracy**, reinforce Opposition participation, and ensure smooth legislative operations.

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/the-importance-of-the-deputy-speaker/article69630621.ece>