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DAILY EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

TOPIC

POST OF DEPUTY SPEAKER: A CONSTITUTIONAL IMPERATIVE

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Context

- The Office of the Deputy Speaker of the Lok Sabha, a crucial constitutional institution, has remained vacant since the constitution of the 17th Lok Sabha in 2019. This prolonged vacancy violates constitutional spirit, disrupts institutional balance, and undermines the ethos of parliamentary democracy.

About

- **Article 93 of the Constitution** mandates that "the House of the People shall, as soon as may be, choose two members to be Speaker and Deputy Speaker."
- However, the **Constitution does not specify a deadline, leading to ambiguity and misuse.**
- The Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha also do not enforce any time-bound election for the Deputy Speaker.
- Thus, while the appointment is a constitutional requirement, the absence of an enforceable timeline has enabled political discretion to overshadow parliamentary propriety.

Historical and Conventional Context

- The institution originated under the **Government of India Act, 1919**, where the Speaker and Deputy Speaker were called the President and Deputy President.
- **Post-independence, G.V. Mavalankar and Ananthasayanam Ayyangar** were the first Speaker and Deputy Speaker of the Lok Sabha, respectively.
- The convention has been to allocate the Deputy Speaker's position to a member of the Opposition to promote bipartisanism.

Roles and Responsibilities

- The Deputy Speaker:
  - Acts as the Presiding Officer in the Speaker's absence.
  - Can chair parliamentary committees.
  - Exercises a casting vote in case of a tie (when presiding).
  - Maintains decorum and upholds the rules of procedure.
  - Is not subordinate to the Speaker, but directly accountable to the House.

Issues Arising from the Vacancy

- **Centralisation of Power:** The Speaker (usually from the ruling party) wields unchecked authority in the absence of a Deputy Speaker from the Opposition.
- **Breakdown of Constitutional Morality:** While legally permissible, indefinite delay reflects a lack of respect for constitutional conventions and democratic ethos.
- **Undermining Consensus Politics:** Keeping the post vacant denies the Opposition a vital institutional voice, affecting deliberative democracy.
- **Functional and Procedural Risks:** In case of the Speaker's sudden resignation or incapacity, lack of a Deputy can create a leadership vacuum.
- **Global Comparisons:** In the UK, Canada, and other Westminster democracies, such posts are filled promptly with bipartisan consultation to maintain continuity and legitimacy.

Reforms and Way Forward

- **Statutory Timeline:** Amend the Rules of Procedure or introduce a law to mandate the election of the Deputy Speaker within a fixed timeframe (e.g., 60 days).
- **Judicial Clarification:** The Supreme Court in 2021 admitted a petition on the delay in appointing the Deputy

Speaker. A definitive ruling could reinforce constitutional accountability.

- **Strengthening Parliamentary Norms:** Codify conventions like offering the Deputy Speakership to the Opposition, to protect democratic balance.
- **Presidential Oversight:** The President, as constitutional guardian, could be empowered to remind or advise the House regarding delays in fulfilling constitutional obligations.

Conclusion

- The Deputy Speaker's prolonged absence is not just an administrative lapse but a systemic malaise reflecting the politicisation of constitutional offices. In a vibrant democracy like India, institutional roles must not be reduced to political bargaining chips.
- Restoring the Deputy Speaker's office promptly and systematically is essential not only for parliamentary continuity, but also for upholding the spirit of the Constitution, the dignity of the Opposition, and the health of India's deliberative democracy.

Source: TH

Mains Practice Question

[Q] Discuss the constitutional significance of the post of Deputy Speaker in the Indian Parliament. Why is this role considered essential rather than symbolic or optional, and how does its vacancy impact the functioning and neutrality of Parliamentary Proceedings?