

Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC)

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In news

Recently, opposition parties pressed for a Joint Parliamentary Committee to probe into the allegations of corruption in the purchase of Rafale fighter jets.

What is a Joint Parliamentary Committee(JPC)?

- JPC is set up to examine a particular bill presented before the Parliament, or for the purpose of investigating cases of financial irregularities in any government activity.
- The JPC is **an ad-hoc body, set up for a given period of time** and is **aimed at addressing a specific issue**.

What is the process to set up a JPC?

In order to set up a JPC, a motion is passed in one House and supported by the other House.

Another way to form a Joint Parliamentary committee is that two presiding chiefs of both houses can write to each other, communicate with each other and form the joint parliamentary committee.

Its composition

The committee's members are decided by Parliament. The number of members can vary. There are twice as many Lok Sabha members as the Rajya Sabha. For example, if the Joint Parliamentary committee has 10 Lok Sabha Members then 5 members will be from Rajya Sabha.

Powers & functions of JPC

- It is authorised to collect evidence in oral or written form or demand documents in connection with the matter.
- A JPC can obtain evidence of experts, public bodies, associations, individuals or interested parties suo motu or on requests made by them.
- If a witness fails to appear before a JPC in response to summons, his conduct constitutes contempt of the House.
- The proceedings and findings of the committee are confidential, except in matters of public interest.
- The government can take the decision to withhold a document if it is considered prejudicial to the safety or interest of the State.
- The Speaker has the final word in case of a dispute over calling for evidence.
- The committee can invite interested parties for inquiry and summon people to appear before it. In the usual course of proceedings, the committee does not summon ministers to give evidence.
- The committee gets disbanded following the submission of its report to Parliament.

Earlier cases of JPC probe

The Joint Parliamentary Committees have been set up several times to probe various matters including:

1. Bofors scandal (1987)
2. Harshad Mehta Stock market scam (1992)
3. Ketan Parekh share market scam (2001)
4. Soft drink pesticide issue (2003)
5. 2G spectrum case (2011)
6. VVIP Chopper scam (2013)
7. Land Acquisition (2015)
8. NRC (2016)
9. Personal Data Protection Bill(2019)

Effectiveness of JPC's recommendations

- JPC recommendations **have persuasive value** but the committee cannot force the government to take any action on the basis of its report.
- The government may decide to launch fresh investigations on the basis of a JPC report. However, the discretion to do so rests entirely with the government.
- The **government is required to report on the follow-up action taken on the basis** of the recommendations of the JPC and other committees.
- The committees then submit 'Action Taken Reports' in Parliament on the basis of the government's reply.
- These reports can be discussed in Parliament and the government can be questioned on the basis of the same.

A brief note on Rafale deal

- The Rafale deal for 36 fighter jets worth 7.8 billion Euros was signed in 2016 between the Indian government and French aircraft manufacturer Dassault Aviation.
- The deal has a 50% offset clause to be executed by Dassault Aviation and its partners in partnership with Indian companies.
- The basic cost of the aircraft is about Rs. 680 crore.
- This deal is India's biggest-ever procurement.
- Besides the missile systems, the Rafale jets will come with various India-specific modifications, including Israeli helmet-mounted displays, radar warning receivers, low band jammers, 10-hour flight data recording, infra-red search and tracking systems among others