

Prime Minister

In the scheme of parliamentary system of government provided by the constitution, the President is the nominal executive authority (*de jure* executive) and Prime Minister is the real executive authority (*de facto* executive). In other words, president is the head of the State while Prime Minister is the head of the government.

APPOINTMENT OF THE PRIME MINISTER

The Constitution does not contain any specific procedure for the selection and appointment of the Prime Minister. Article 75 says only that the Prime Minister shall be appointed by the president. However, this does not imply that the president is free to appoint any one as the Prime Minister. In accordance with the conventions of the parliamentary system of government, the President has to appoint the leader of the majority party in the Lok Sabha as the Prime Minister. But, when no party has a clear majority in the Lok Sabha, then the President may exercise his personal discretion in the selection and appointment of the Prime Minister. In such a situation, the President usually appoints the leader of the largest party or coalition in the Lok Sabha as the Prime Minister and asks him to seek a vote of confidence in the House within a month. This discretion was exercised by the President, for the first time in 1979, when Neelam Sanjiva Reddy (the then President) appointed Charan Singh (the coalition leader) as the Prime Minister after the fall of the Janata Party government headed by Morarji Desai.

POWERS AND FUNCTIONS OF THE PRIME MINISTER

The powers and functions of Prime Minister can be studied under the following heads:

In Relation to Council of Ministers

The Prime Minister enjoys the following powers as head of the Union council of ministers:

1. He recommends persons who can be appointed as ministers by the president. The President can appoint only those persons as ministers who are recommended by the Prime Minister.
2. He allocates and reshuffles various portfolios among the ministers.
3. He can ask a minister to resign or advise the President to dismiss him in case of difference of opinion.
4. He presides over the meeting of council of ministers and influences its decisions.
5. He guides, directs, controls, and coordinates the activities of all the ministers.
6. He can bring about the collapse of the council of ministers by resigning from office.

Since the Prime Minister stands at the head of the council of ministers, the other ministers cannot function when the Prime Minister resigns or dies. In other words, the resignation or death of an incumbent Prime Minister automatically dissolves the council of ministers and thereby generates a vacuum. The resignation or death of any other minister, on the other hand, merely creates a vacancy which the Prime Minister may or may not like to fill.

In Relation to the President

The Prime Minister enjoys the following powers in relation to the President:

1. He is the principal channel of communication between the President and the council of ministers. It is the duty of the prime minister :
 - (a) to communicate to the President all decisions of the council of ministers relating to the administration of the affairs of the Union and proposals for legislation;
 - (b) to furnish such information relating to the administration of the affairs of the Union and proposals for legislation as the President may call for; and
 - (c) if the President so requires, to submit for the consideration of the council of ministers any matter on which a decision has been taken by a minister but which has not been considered by the council.

2. He advises the president with regard to the appointment of important officials like attorney general of India, Comptroller and Auditor General of India, chairman and members of the UPSC, election commissioners, chairman and members of the finance commission and so on.

In Relation to Parliament

The Prime Minister is the leader of the Lower House. In this capacity, he enjoys the following powers:

1. He advises the President with regard to summoning and proroguing of the sessions of the Parliament.
2. He can recommend dissolution of the Lok Sabha to President at any time.
3. He announces government policies on the floor of the House.

Other Powers & Functions

In addition to the above-mentioned three major roles, the Prime Minister has various other roles. These are:

1. He is the chairman of the Planning Commission (now NITI Aayog), National Development Council, National Integration Council, Inter-State Council and National Water Resources Council.
2. He plays a significant role in shaping the foreign policy of the country.
3. He is the chief spokesman of the Union government.
4. He is the crisis manager-in-chief at the political level during emergencies.
5. As a leader of the nation, he meets various sections of people in different states and receives memoranda from them regarding their problems, and so on.
6. He is leader of the party in power.
7. He is political head of the services.

Thus, the Prime Minister plays a very significant and highly crucial role in the politico-administrative system of the country. Dr B R Ambedkar stated, 'If any functionary under our constitution is to be compared with the US president, he is the Prime Minister and not the president of the Union'.