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Q6(b)

The role of the President of India becomes more significant during a minority government and a coalition government. Explain

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2021 · PSIR GS 1 · 15 marks · Principal Organs of the Union Government

Principal Organs of the Union Government: Envisaged role and actual working of the Executive, Legislature and Supreme Court.

Core demand of the question

- The role of the President of India becomes more significant during a minority government and a coalition government. Explain. (15 marks)

Revision summary

A majority Cabinet reduces the President to advice-bound head of state.

Minority and coalition politics make formation and dissolution live presidential tasks.

The 1989-91 hung Parliament is the classic national case.

Floor tests, letters of support, and caretaker advice are the working tools.

The office does not become a second government; it becomes a necessary referee.

Introduction

In a single-party majority the President is mostly a constitutional head who acts on Cabinet advice. When no clear majority exists, the President must choose a Prime Minister, test majority, and sometimes refuse a premature dissolution. That is when the office becomes politically significant.

Body

The normal and the exceptional

- **Article 74** binds the President to aid and advice of the Council of Ministers, with a once-only return of a decision.
- **J. S. Mill's** representative government assumes a working majority that can be held to account. Hung Houses break that assumption.
- Coalition and minority cabinets are internally weak. The head of state then referees formation, not only ceremony.

Hung Parliament 1989-91 as the teaching case

- After 1989, no party had a majority. Presidential invitation, outside support, and the fall of the V. P. Singh and Chandra Shekhar governments made Rashtrapati Bhavan the site of arithmetic.
- **Similar moments followed in the 1990s:** short-lived coalitions, letters of support, and floor tests.

- The President's significance was the power to decide who gets the first chance, how long to wait for a trial of strength, and whether to dissolve.
- This is legal-rational discretion at the edge of convention, in **Weber**'s terms, not a return to a colonial Governor-General's pleasure.

What the President actually does

- Appoints as Prime Minister the person most likely to command the Lok Sabha, then requires a **floor test** rather than private letters alone, a lesson courts later underlined.
- Can press for majority proof when a coalition frays.
- Dissolution advice from a caretaker or a defeated ministry need not be automatic.
- Coalition programmes and Common Minimum Programmes increase the President's moral audience, because the Cabinet's own mandate is bargained.

Limits

- The President is not a rival executive. Once a ministry has confidence, advice binds.
- Misuse would be partisan delay or refusal of a clear majority, which would itself need **Kesavananda**-level constitutional morality to condemn.
- State Governors show the same logic in hung Assemblies, often more controversially.

Flow diagram

Hung House -> President
President -> Invite likely majority
President -> Floor test
President -> Dissolution discretion
Clear majority -> Advice binds

Conclusion

The President's role expands when electoral arithmetic does not yield a stable majority, as in 1989-91. Formation, **floor test**, and dissolution become live discretions. In a single-party majority the same office recedes into advice-bound form. Significance tracks the weakness of the Cabinet, not a change in the written scheme of a republic.

Facts & figures

1989-91

Hung Lok Sabha; National Front and Chandra Shekhar minority phases after Rajiv **Gandhi**'s majority ended.

Article 74

Council of Ministers to aid and advise the President; advice is binding after one return.

Floor test

The parliamentary method to prove majority, preferred over opaque letters.

Article 75

Prime Minister appointed by the President; ministers hold office during the President's pleasure, read with collective responsibility.

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