

Senate of Pakistan

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Prior to 1973, the Parliament in Pakistan had only one Chamber, i.e., National Assembly, which was the supreme legislative body of the country. After introduction of 1973 Constitution which was adopted on 12 April 1973, a bicameral *Majlis-e-Shoora (Parliament)* consisting of the National Assembly and the Senate was constituted. The Senate, which is popularly called the Upper House, primarily functions as a legislative body. It came into existence on 6 August 1973, when the Members took oath of the office and signed the Roll of Members.

Senate as a legislative body, derives equal representation from all the four federating units regardless of their size and population. The Federally Administrated Tribal Areas (FATA) and the federal capital area are also represented in the Senate which has a total membership of 87. The provincial assemblies of the four provinces elect 19 Members each from their respective provinces. i.e., 14 general seats and five seats reserved for Ulema, religious scholars, professionals and technocrats. The federally administered tribal areas are represented by eight elected by the Members of the National Assembly hailing from the tribal areas whereas the federal capital has three seats in the Upper House of the parliament. The entire membership of the National Assembly constitutes the electoral college for the election of the Senate seats reserved for the federal capital area.

The Senate of Pakistan is a permanent legislative institution and symbolises a process of continuity in the national affairs. About one-half of the Members are elected for a six year term after every three years and mid-term vacancy in the Senate, caused by the death, incapacitation, disqualification or removal of a member, is filled in through the election by the respective electoral college and the member so elected holds office for the un-expired term of the original member who vacated the seat. The qualifications of a member of the Senate are that he/she should not be less than thirty years of age and should be registered as a voter in an area or the province from where he seeks election. A candidate must also possess such other qualifications as are laid down in Article 62 and 63 of the Constitution.

Chairman and Deputy Chairman

The Chairman and the Deputy Chairman hold office for a term of three years. They are elected by the senators, through a secret ballot, by a majority vote, after every election to the Senate or as and when a vacancy occurs (Art. 60). The Chairman, under the Constitution acts as President of Pakistan during the absence abroad of the president or after the office of the President becomes vacant by resignation, death or removal, and holds the office of President till the election of the President in accordance with the relevant clauses of the Constitution (Art. 49).

The Senate being a part of the legislature i.e., the Majlis-e-Shoora (Parliament), is component to pass the bills transmitted to it by the National Assembly after their approval. A bill to amend the Constitution can also be initiated in the Senate, like other legislative bills and the Senate after passing a bill is competent to transmit it to the other house, i.e., the National Assembly. Hence the bill passed by the Houses is presented to the president for assent. When a bill receives assent of the President it becomes a law. All the legislative bills can be originated from either of the two Houses which have to pass these bills with simple majority except a Constitutional Amendment Bill where two-thirds majority of the total membership of the House is required for its passage. Where there is some disagreement between the two Houses on a passage of a bill, the matter is referred to a joint sitting of the Parliament but no such provision is there in the case of disagreement on a Constitutional Amendment Bill.

The Senate has no powers to entertain and pass money bills. This power belongs exclusively to the National Assembly hence the National Budget Statement or any other money bill is not laid before the Senate.

Committee System

The Senate of Pakistan has an efficient committee system which has established glowing traditions of the sovereignty of the Parliament over the years and has dealt with a wide range of issues of national importance and public interest like those relating to the foreign policy of the country, the internal as well as the external security, law and order, the Enforcement of Sharia, the Cotton Policy etc. The proceedings of the committees have created a lot of

awareness in the masses and have added to their interest in matters of national and international importance.

There are 21 Standing Committees of the Senate. The Chairman of each committee is elected from amongst the Members of the respective committee whereas the Minister of the relevant Ministry/Division is an ex-officio member of that committee. The practice is to uphold the concept of the parliamentary accountability.

Functional Committee

The Functional Committee include the Committee on Government Assurances, Committee on Problems of Less-Developed Areas and Committee on Human Rights.

Committee on Government Assurances

This Committee looks after the implementation and actions on the assurances, commitments and promises made by the Ministers on the floor of the House whereas the Committee on Problems of Less-Developed Areas helps promote a balanced development in different parts of the country and identifies the areas of difficulty and bottlenecks.

Committee on Human Rights

The Senate constituted this committee on 5 July, 1992, under rule 242 of the Procedure and Conduct of Business in the Senate, 1988 for reviewing, on a continuous basis the over-all human rights situation in Pakistan.

The Library Committee is established to improve the library services and look after the research and reference work to cater to the needs of the Members of the Senate.

In addition to these committees, there is a Committee on Rules of Procedure and Privilege which considers matters regarding procedure and conduct of business in the House and disposes of the Privilege Motions moved by the Senators. The House Committee deals with matters like issuance of admission cards for the galleries and looks after the boarding and lodging of the Senators.

The Finance Committee approves and regulates the expenditure incurred on the functioning of the Senate and its establishment (Art. 88).

Record of Proceedings

A verbatim record of the proceedings of the Senate is maintained in printed form. It is kept for record and is also supplied to the Members. More over, a Journal of the sittings of the Senate is also maintained. It contains a comprehensive synopsis of every sitting and is compiled on a regular basis.

Automation Program

The Senate has also opted for automation of its legislative and other secretarial activities in collaboration with the Asia Foundation. The speed and quality of work and overall performance of the Secretariat has considerably improved by the installation of the computer network/technology.

Senate Library

Senate has a small but comprehensive library which is exclusively meant for Senators. It has a collection of 10,000 volumes including books on Islam, politics, international affairs, parliamentary practice and procedure, economics, Constitutions and Constitutional law, education, history and biographies.

We also subscribe to foreign and local newspapers and journals for use of Members and officers of the Senate. The library is fully automated. We mainly depend on the National Assembly Library which is bigger in size and staff and has been equipped with the latest books and publications.