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Leader of the Opposition (LoP) in India

1. Meaning of Leader of Opposition

- The **Leader of Opposition (LoP)** is a **Member of Parliament** who leads the **largest opposition party** (not in government) in a House of Parliament.
- He/She represents the **organized and official opposition** to the ruling government.
- The LoP is responsible for:
 - Criticising government policies
 - Offering alternative policies
 - Ensuring accountability and transparency
- **Ivor Jennings** called the LoP the “**Alternative Prime Minister**”.

2. Leader of the Opposition in the Indian Parliament

India has a **Leader of the Opposition in each House**:

- **Lok Sabha**
- **Rajya Sabha**

3. Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha

- The LoP in Lok Sabha is:
 - A member of the Lok Sabha
 - Leader of the **largest opposition party**
 - **Recognised by the Speaker of the Lok Sabha**
- Functions:
 - Leads opposition during debates
 - Questions government actions
 - Presents alternative viewpoints on policies

4. Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha

- The LoP in the Rajya Sabha is:
 - A member of the Rajya Sabha
 - Leader of the **largest opposition party**
 - **Recognised by the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha (Vice-President of India)**
- Functions are similar to Lok Sabha LoP.

5. Constitutional and Legal Status

- **Not mentioned in the Constitution of India**
- Given **statutory status** under:
 - **Salary and Allowances of Leaders of Opposition in Parliament Act, 1977**

- Rank:
 - **Equivalent to a Cabinet Minister**
 - Entitled to a similar salary, allowances, and facilities
- First official recognition of LoP:
 - **1969**

6. Criteria for Recognition of Leader of Opposition

As per rules and conventions:

- The opposition party must have:
 - **At least 1/10th (10%) of the total membership** of the House
- Recognition is done by:
 - Speaker (Lok Sabha)
 - Chairman (Rajya Sabha)
- If two opposition parties have equal strength:
 - The Presiding Officer may recognise **any one leader**
- The decision of the Presiding Officer is:
 - **Final and binding**

Prelims Fact: If no opposition party meets the 10% rule → **No LoP is recognised.**

7. Role of Leader of Opposition

The LoP performs several key democratic functions:

Parliamentary Role

- Provides **constructive criticism** of government policies
- Leads opposition during:
 - Debates
 - Discussions
 - Question Hour
- Influences legislative agenda

Democratic Role

- Acts as a **check on executive power**
- Ensures **checks and balances**
- Protects **minority and dissenting voices**

Political Role

- Presents **alternative policies**
- Prepares opposition to act as an **alternative government**
- Acts as a **bridge between the government and the opposition**

8. Significance of the Leader of the Opposition

The LoP strengthens democracy in multiple ways:

- **Checks and Balances:** Prevents misuse of power
- **Policy Alternatives:** Improves the quality of decision-making
- **Guardian of Minority Rights:** Represents non-ruling voices
- **Committee Role:** Ensures balanced representation in parliamentary committees
- **Healthy Debate:** Promotes informed and robust discussions
- **Democratic Stability:** Enhances accountability and transparency

9. Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha (Important Timeline)

Key Highlights (Prelims-Relevant):

- First LoP: **Ram Subhag Singh (1969)**
- Long vacant periods:
 - **1970–1977**
 - **1979–1989**
 - **2014–2024**
- Current LoP:
 - **Rahul Gandhi (2024–Present)** – 18th Lok Sabha

10. Shadow Cabinet

- Exists in the **British Parliamentary System**
- Opposition forms a **Shadow Cabinet**:
 - Each member “shadows” a minister
- Purpose:
 - Prepare for future governance
 - Act as an **alternative government**
- Reinforces why LoP is called:
 - **“Alternative Prime Minister”**

11. Quick Pointers

- LoP is a **statutory post**, not constitutional
- Minimum strength required: **10% of the House**
- Rank equivalent to: **Cabinet Minister**
- USA equivalent term: **Minority Leader**
- Recognised by:
 - Speaker (Lok Sabha)
 - Chairman (Rajya Sabha)