

## CHAPTER 4

# Executive

CBSE Class 11 · Political Science · Indian Constitution at Work · Chapter 4

CBSE · Political Science · Class 11

### WHAT THIS CHAPTER DOES

**A**

Define the executive and place it among the three organs of government.

**B**

Distinguish the parliamentary and presidential systems, and explain why India is parliamentary.

Boards prep that builds confidence, not anxiety.

**TODAY'S MISSION**

# Today's mission

1

Define the executive and place it among the three organs of government.

2

Distinguish the parliamentary and presidential systems, and explain why India is parliamentary.

3

Explain the powers and nominal position of the President, and the real role of the PM and Council of Ministers.

4

Explain collective responsibility and the role of the civil services — and score 7/8 on this chapter.

## WHY THIS MATTERS

# Why this chapter matters

1

The executive is the organ you actually see governing — it implements every law the legislature makes.

2

6-8 marks in every Class 11 paper, with predictable questions (systems, presidential powers, collective responsibility).

3

It corrects the most common civic misconception in India: that the President, not the Prime Minister, runs the country.

TOPIC

**A**

**What is the executive — and which system does India follow?**

TOPIC

# The idea of the executive

## WHAT THE EXECUTIVE IS

The executive is the organ of government responsible for implementing the laws made by the legislature and for the day-to-day administration of the country. While the legislature makes laws and the judiciary interprets them, it is the executive that actually puts them into action —

## POLITICAL VS PERMANENT EXECUTIVE

The political executive consists of the people's elected representatives — the Prime Minister and the Council of Ministers — who hold office only as long as they enjoy popular support, and who take the final, accountable decisions. The permanent executive consists of professional

## TWO SYSTEMS OF GOVERNMENT

Modern democracies organise their executive in one of two broad ways. In the PARLIAMENTARY system the executive is drawn from, and is continuously responsible to, the legislature; the head of state and the head of government are different persons. In the

## WHY INDIA CHOSE PARLIAMENTARY

The framers of the Indian Constitution preferred the parliamentary system at both the Union and State levels because it ensures that the executive remains continuously answerable to the elected representatives of the people, rather than being insulated for a fixed

TOPIC

**B**

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# Parliamentary vs presidential — the key contrast

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TOPIC

# Comparing the two models

## HEAD OF STATE VS HEAD OF GOVERNMENT

The most visible difference is in who heads the executive. In the parliamentary system the two roles are SEPARATED: the head of state (in India, the President) is a largely ceremonial figure symbolising the nation, while the head of government (the Prime

## RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LEGISLATURE

In a parliamentary system the executive is born out of the legislature: the Prime Minister and ministers are themselves members of Parliament and remain in office only while they command a majority in the lower house. In a presidential system the executive and legislature are elected

## ACCOUNTABILITY AND TENURE

Accountability works very differently in the two systems. A parliamentary government is accountable to the legislature at all times and can be voted out by a no-confidence motion, so its tenure is not fixed — it lasts only as long as it retains majority

## WHY THIS IS THE FAVOURITE QUESTION

This comparison is the single most examined idea in the chapter. A 3-6 mark question routinely asks you to 'distinguish the parliamentary and presidential systems', and the answer must move across at least three axes: head of state vs head of government, relationship to the

TOPIC

C

# The President — the nominal head

TOPIC

# Election and powers of the President

## HOW THE PRESIDENT IS ELECTED

The President of India is the head of state and is elected **INDIRECTLY**, not by the people directly. The election is conducted by an electoral college made up of the elected members of both Houses of Parliament and the elected members of all the State Legislative Assemblies, through a

## EXECUTIVE AND LEGISLATIVE POWERS

On paper the President holds wide powers. As **EXECUTIVE** head, all executive actions of the Union government are formally taken in the President's name, and the President appoints the Prime Minister, the other ministers, the Governors of States, the judges of the higher

## JUDICIAL, EMERGENCY AND DISCRETIONARY POWERS

The President also has **JUDICIAL** powers — under Article 72 the President can grant pardons, reprieves and remissions of punishment, including in death-sentence cases. In extraordinary situations the President can proclaim a national emergency, a state

## A NOMINAL HEAD — ARTICLE 74

Despite this impressive list, the President is the **NOMINAL** or constitutional head of state, not the real ruler. Article 74 of the Constitution requires that there shall be a Council of Ministers headed by the Prime Minister to **AID AND ADVISE** the President, and that the

**WORKED EXAMPLE**

# Tracing where the power actually lies

- 1** The Constitution lists impressive powers in the President's name — appointments, assent to bills, emergencies, pardons.
- 2** Article 74 then binds the President to act on the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers headed by the PM.
- 3** So a power 'of the President' is, in practice, exercised on the decision of the Prime Minister and the Cabinet.
- 4** Conclusion: the President is the **NOMINAL** head (reigns); the Prime Minister and Council are the **REAL** executive (rule).

**TRY IT · SOLVE BEFORE YOU PEEK**

A student writes: 'The President of India is directly elected by the people and is the most powerful person who runs the government.' Identify the two errors.

**SOLUTION**

**ANSWER** Error 1: The President is elected **INDIRECTLY** by an electoral college of elected MPs and MLAs, not directly by the people. Error 2: The President is the **NOMINAL** head; the real executive power lies with the Prime Minister and the Council of Ministers (Article 74).

TOPIC

**D**

# The Prime Minister and the Council of Ministers

TOPIC

# Prime Minister and Council of Ministers

## APPOINTMENT OF THE PM AND MINISTERS

The Prime Minister is the real head of the executive. There is no separate national election for the post: the President APPOINTS as Prime Minister the leader of the party or coalition that commands a majority in the Lok Sabha. On the advice of the Prime Minister, the

## THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS

The Council of Ministers is the body that actually formulates and carries out government policy. It is usually arranged in ranks — Cabinet Ministers (the senior members who take the big decisions in the Cabinet), Ministers of State, and Deputy Ministers — with the

## COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY

The cornerstone of the parliamentary system is the principle of COLLECTIVE responsibility: the Council of Ministers is jointly answerable to the Lok Sabha for all its actions. This means that if the Lok Sabha passes a vote of no-confidence, the ENTIRE Council —

## WHY THE PM IS THE REAL HEAD

The Prime Minister is called the real head of the executive for several connected reasons. He or she leads the majority in the Lok Sabha, chairs the Cabinet and steers its decisions, advises the President on the appointment of all ministers and on most major matters, and acts

TOPIC

**E**

# President-PM relationship and the permanent executive

TOPIC

# Working together — and the civil services

## PRESIDENT AND PRIME MINISTER

The President and the Prime Minister together represent the two faces of the Union executive: the President is the head of STATE who symbolises the nation, while the Prime Minister is the head of GOVERNMENT who actually runs it. Their relationship is defined by Article 74 — the

## THE PERMANENT EXECUTIVE — BUREAUCRACY

Behind the political executive stands the permanent executive — the bureaucracy or civil services, made up of trained, professional officials such as the IAS, IPS and other services. These officials are politically NEUTRAL: they serve whichever government is elected

## UPSC AND NEUTRALITY

To keep the civil services impartial and competent, recruitment to the All-India Services and the higher Central Services is conducted by an independent constitutional body, the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC). Because officers are selected on merit through open

## THE WHOLE EXECUTIVE AS ONE STRUCTURE

It helps to picture the executive as a single layered structure. At the top is the President — the nominal head who symbolises the nation. Below sits the Prime Minister — the real head — supported by the Council of Ministers, the elected political executive that decides policy and

**THEOREM · LOAD-BEARING RESULT**

# Why India's executive is parliamentary and accountable

India's executive is parliamentary: the President is the nominal head, the Prime Minister and Council of Ministers are the real executive, and they remain in power only while they hold the confidence of the Lok Sabha through the principle of collective responsibility.

**STATEMENT**

Under the Indian Constitution (i) all executive power formally vests in the President but is exercised, under Article 74, on the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers headed by the

**WHY THIS MATTERS**

- This is the central claim of the chapter: real executive power flows from the elected legislature, not from a fixed-term head of state
- The parliamentary design ties the government's survival to continuous accountability before the people's representatives.

**WATCH OUT FOR**

**NOTE** Do not say the President governs the country or is directly elected, and do not call India presidential because it has a President. The examiner wants the nominal-vs-real distinction and the Article 74 / collective-responsibility chain for full marks.

**WORKED EXAMPLE**

# Distinguish the parliamentary and presidential systems

- 1** Point 1 — Head of state vs head of government: parliamentary separates them (President + PM); presidential fuses them in one elected President.
- 2** Point 2 — Relationship to legislature: parliamentary executive is drawn from and responsible to the legislature; presidential executive is separately elected and distinct.
- 3** Point 3 — Accountability/tenure: parliamentary government can be removed by a no-confidence motion and has no fixed term; presidential executive serves a fixed term.
- 4** Point 4 — Conclude: India follows the parliamentary system to keep the executive continuously accountable to the people's representatives.

## TOPIC

# Who is the real head of the executive

## TRAP → TRUTH

× **MISTAKE** The President of India is the most powerful person and runs the government.

✓ **CORRECT** The President is the NOMINAL (constitutional / titular) head — the formal chief whose powers are exercised on the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers (Article 74). The REAL executive power lies with the Prime Minister and the Council of Ministers. The President reigns but does not rule day-to-day.

## TOPIC

# How the President is chosen

## TRAP → TRUTH

- × **MISTAKE** The President is directly elected by all the citizens of India, like the Lok Sabha.
- ✓ **CORRECT** The President is elected INDIRECTLY by an electoral college of the elected members of both Houses of Parliament and the elected members of the State Legislative Assemblies, through a system of proportional representation by single transferable vote. The people do not vote directly for the President.

## TOPIC

# India's system of government

## TRAP → TRUTH

× **MISTAKE** India has a presidential system because it has a President.

✓ **CORRECT** India has a PARLIAMENTARY system. Having a President does NOT make a country presidential. In a parliamentary system the real executive (PM + Council of Ministers) is drawn from and answerable to the legislature; in a presidential system (e.g. USA) the President is both head of state and head of government and is not part of the legislature. India's President is only the head of state.

## TOPIC

# Collective responsibility

## TRAP → TRUTH

× **MISTAKE** Each minister is responsible only for his or her own department to the Lok Sabha.

✓ **CORRECT** Ministers are INDIVIDUALLY responsible for their departments, but the principle of COLLECTIVE responsibility means the entire Council of Ministers is jointly answerable to the Lok Sabha. If the Lok Sabha passes a no-confidence motion, the WHOLE Council of Ministers must resign, not just one minister. They 'sink or swim together'.

## TOPIC

# President's discretion

## TRAP → TRUTH

- × **MISTAKE** The President has no powers of his own and is a complete rubber stamp.
- ✓ **CORRECT** Normally the President acts on ministerial advice, but the Constitution leaves a narrow band of DISCRETIONARY situations — e.g. appointing a Prime Minister when no party has a clear majority (a hung Parliament), or returning a bill once for reconsideration (suspensive veto), or asking the Council to reconsider its advice once. So the President is not entirely powerless, especially in moments of political uncertainty.

## TOPIC

# The Prime Minister's appointment

## TRAP → TRUTH

- × **MISTAKE** The Prime Minister is elected separately by the people in a national election.
- ✓ **CORRECT** There is no separate national election for Prime Minister. The President APPOINTS as Prime Minister the leader of the party or coalition that commands a majority in the Lok Sabha. The PM is then collectively responsible to the Lok Sabha and stays in office only as long as that majority lasts.

## TOPIC

# The bureaucracy

## TRAP → TRUTH

- × **MISTAKE** Civil servants make the major policy decisions and the ministers merely sign papers.
- ✓ **CORRECT** Civil servants are the PERMANENT executive — politically neutral, trained professionals who ADVISE ministers and IMPLEMENT policies, but the political executive (ministers) takes the final policy decisions and is answerable to the legislature. Recruitment to the All-India and Central services is conducted by an independent UPSC to keep the bureaucracy impartial.

TOPPER TEMPLATE · MARK-BY-MARK

# 4-mark question: 'Distinguish between the parliamentary and presidential systems of

**1 HEAD OF STATE VS HEAD OF GOVERNMENT**  
1 m

'In a PARLIAMENTARY system the offices of head of state and head of government are separate — in India the President is head of state and the Prime Minister is head of government. In a PRESIDENTIAL system one person, the President (as in the USA), is BOTH head of state and head of government.'

**2 RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LEGISLATURE**  
1 m

'In a parliamentary system the executive is drawn FROM the legislature and is collectively responsible to it; in a presidential system the executive is elected separately and is NOT part of the legislature (separation of powers).'

**3 ACCOUNTABILITY AND TENURE**  
1 m

'In a parliamentary system the government survives only while it holds the confidence of the lower house and can be removed by a no-confidence motion; a presidential executive serves a fixed term and cannot be voted out mid-term by the legislature.'

**4 INDIA'S CHOICE**  
1 m

'India adopted the parliamentary system at both the Union and the State level because it ensures continuous accountability of the executive to the elected representatives of the people.'

TOPPER TEMPLATE · MARK-BY-MARK

# 5-6 mark question: 'Explain the powers of the President of India / Discuss the position of the

**1 EXECUTIVE AND LEGISLATIVE POWERS**

2 m

'EXECUTIVE: all executive actions of the Union are taken in the President's name; the President appoints the Prime Minister, other ministers, Governors, judges and Ambassadors. LEGISLATIVE: the President summons and prorogues Parliament, addresses it, and every bill becomes law only with the President's assent; the President can return a bill once (suspensive veto).'

**2 JUDICIAL, EMERGENCY AND DISCRETIONARY POWERS**

2 m

'JUDICIAL: the President can grant pardons and reprieves (Article 72). EMERGENCY: the President can proclaim a national, state or financial emergency. DISCRETIONARY: in a hung Parliament the President chooses whom to appoint as PM, and may ask the Council of Ministers to reconsider its advice once.'

**3 POSITION — NOMINAL HEAD BOUND BY ARTICLE 74**

2 m

'Despite this long list, the President is the NOMINAL head: under Article 74 the President must normally act on the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers headed by the Prime Minister. Real power lies with the PM and the Council. The President is thus a constitutional head who symbolises the unity of the nation rather than an active ruler.'

TOPPER TEMPLATE · MARK-BY-MARK

# 3-4 mark question: 'Explain the principle of collective responsibility.'

- 1** **DEFINITION**  
1 m

'Collective responsibility means the Council of Ministers as a whole is jointly answerable to the Lok Sabha for all its decisions and policies, not merely each minister for his own department.'
- 2** **SINK OR SWIM TOGETHER**  
1 m

'If the Lok Sabha passes a vote of no-confidence against the Council of Ministers, the ENTIRE Council — including the Prime Minister — must resign. They stand or fall together.'
- 3** **CABINET SOLIDARITY**  
1 m

'Every minister is bound to publicly support a cabinet decision; a minister who cannot agree must resign rather than oppose it in public. This is what keeps the government united before Parliament and the people.'
- 4** **WHY IT MATTERS**  
1 m

'Collective responsibility is the keystone of the parliamentary system; it ensures the executive is continuously accountable to the elected legislature.'

**PYQ PATTERNS**

# Top PYQ patterns to drill

**#1**

Distinguish between the parliamentary and presidential systems of government. (3-6 marks)

Almost every year (CBSE SQP 2019, 2021, 2023; School Annual 2020, 2022)

**#2**

Explain the powers of the President of India / Is the President a real or nominal executive? (5-6 marks)

CBSE SQP 2020, 2022; School Annual 2019, 2023

**#3**

Explain the principle of collective responsibility of the Council of Ministers. (3-4 marks)

CBSE SQP 2021; School Annual 2022, 2024

**#4**

VSA

Who appoints the Prime Minister? What is the tenure of the President? Who conducts civil service

**MARKS DISTRIBUTION**

# 10-year marks distribution

**10-YEAR PYQ MARKS DISTRIBUTION**

Meaning of executive + parliamentary vs presidential systems



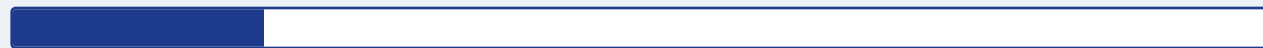
**18%**

President — election, powers, position as nominal head



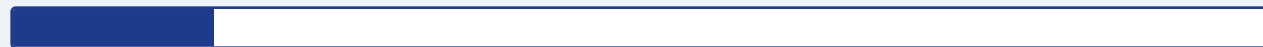
**24%**

Prime Minister and Council of Ministers — appointment, real executive



**20%**

Collective responsibility and PM-President relationship



**16%**

Bureaucracy / civil services / UPSC



**12%**

**RECAP · MEMORISE THESE**

# 5-line revision

**1** Executive & systems — The executive implements laws; India follows the **PARLIAMENTARY** system (exec drawn from and answerable to the legislature), not the presidential one — having a President does not make it presidential.

**2** Nominal vs real — President = nominal head, elected **INDIRECTLY** by an electoral college, with executive/legislative/judicial/emergency/discretionary powers exercised on ministerial advice (Art 74). PM + Council of Ministers = real executive.

**3** Responsibility & bureaucracy — **Collective responsibility**: the whole Council answers to the Lok Sabha and resigns together on a no-confidence vote. The permanent executive (civil services, recruited by UPSC) is neutral and works

**WHAT'S NEXT**

# What's next

- Chapter 5 — Legislature (the law-making organ the executive is drawn from and answerable to).
- Sit the 15-MCQ Quick Drill (companion PDF) — under 20 minutes, target  $\geq 12/15$ .
- Then the full Board-Pattern Paper — 30 marks, 60 minutes, real exam pattern.

# You now know who really runs the government — and how.

Prove it. Take the drill, sit the paper, master the chapter.

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