Syllabus subtopic: Parliament and State Legislatures – structure, functioning, conduct of business, powers & privileges and issues arising out of these.

News: On the occasion of its 250th session, Rajya Sabha MPs have made the following suggestions:

1. Giving all States, irrespective of their population and size, an equal number of seats in the Rajya Sabha.
2. All members, irrespective of their parties’ strength in the House, the same amount of time to speak in debates.

Prelims focus: Rajya Sabha- elections, composition and functions.

Mains focus: significance of Rajya sabha, issues, challenges and solutions.

Need for Rajya Sabha:

1. The Upper House of the Indian Parliament traces its direct history to the first bicameral legislature introduced in British India in 1919 as a consequence of the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms.
2. Unlike the US Senate which ensures equal representation for all federal units (each state having two representatives), India’s Rajya Sabha does have more members from populous states.
3. Even though Indian states are ‘mere administrative units’ which don’t enjoy a constitutionally-assured permanence, their continued existence over all these years and the constitutional separation of power has given them the nature of autonomous units in their own spheres. Therefore, the ‘state-wise’ identity cannot be ruled out completely.
4. India’s Rajya Sabha has equal powers to the Lok Sabha except for money bills, where it has no jurisdiction.

Arguments that favour abolishing Rajya Sabha

1. The contemporary argument against it comes from two primary angles:
2. The first one suggests that a Lok Sabha that has representation from several regional parties more than adequately represents a federal country.
3. The second argument charges that the Rajya Sabha has become a haven for losers in elections, crony capitalists, compromised journalists and party fundraisers.

What can be done?

It is virtually impossible to abolish the Rajya Sabha without adopting a new Indian Constitution.
The bicameral nature of the Indian Parliament is likely to be interpreted as a “basic structure” of the Indian Constitution, rendering it incapable of being amended. Even if this were to be tested, it would be ensnared in a judicial process for a very long time. It is much more practical to try and reform the Rajya Sabha than seeking to abolish it.

Reforms needed:

1. Have members of the Rajya Sabha be directly elected by the citizens of a state. This will reduce cronyism and patronage appointments.
2. This step should be combined with equal representation for each state (say, five members) so that large states do not dominate the proceedings in the House.
3. This streamlined Rajya Sabha should remain deliberative, but there should be deadlines set for responding to bills initiated in the Lok Sabha.