

## **Presidential Address in the Parliament**

### **What is the issue?**

As the first Parliament session of 2021 begins with President Ram Nath Kovind addressing members of the Parliament, it is pertinent to know about the practice of Presidential address.

### **How did this practice originate?**

- In the United Kingdom, the history of the monarch addressing the Parliament goes back to the 16th century.
- In the United States, President George Washington addressed Congress for the first time in 1790.
- In India, the practice of the President addressing Parliament can be traced back to the Government of India Act of 1919.
- This law gave the Governor-General the right of addressing the Legislative Assembly and the Council of State.
  - The law did not have a provision for a joint address.
  - But the Governor-General did address the Assembly and the Council together on multiple occasions.
- There was no address by him to the Constituent Assembly (Legislative) from 1947 to 1950.
- After the Constitution came into force, President Rajendra Prasad addressed members of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha for the first time on January 31, 1950.

### **What does the Constitution specify?**

- The Constitution gives the President the power to address either House or a joint sitting of the two Houses of Parliament.
- Article 87 provides two special occasions on which the President addresses a joint sitting.
  1. to address the opening session of a new legislature after a general election
  2. to address the first sitting of Parliament each year
- A session of a new or continuing legislature cannot begin without fulfilling this requirement.
- When the Constitution came into force, the President was required to

address each session of Parliament.

- So during the provisional Parliament in 1950, President Prasad gave an address before every session.
- The First Amendment to the Constitution in 1951 changed this position and made the President's address once a year.
- The President's address is one of the most solemn occasions in the Parliamentary calendar.
- It is the only occasion in the year when the entire Parliament, i.e. the President, Lok Sabha, and Rajya Sabha come together.
- The Lok Sabha Secretariat prepares extensively for this annual event associated with ceremony and protocol.

### **What is the speech about?**

- There is no set format for the President's speech.
- The Constitution states that the President shall "inform Parliament of the cause of the summons".
- The address of the President follows a general structure in which it -
  - highlights the government's accomplishments from the previous year
  - sets the broad governance agenda for the coming year

### **How is it finalised?**

- The speech that the President reads is the viewpoint of the government and is written by it.
- Usually, in December, the Prime Minister's Office asks the various ministries to start sending in their inputs for the speech.
- A message also goes out from the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs asking ministries to send information about any legislative proposals that need to be included in the President's address.
- All this information is aggregated and shaped into a speech, which is then sent to the President.
- The government uses the President's address to make policy and legislative announcements.

### **What is the further procedure?**

- In the days following the President's address, a motion is moved in the two Houses thanking the President for his address.
- This is an occasion for MPs in the two Houses to have a broad debate on governance in the country.
- The Prime Minister replies to this 'motion of thanks' in both Houses, and responds to the issues raised by the MPs.

- The motion is then put to vote and MPs can express their disagreement by moving amendments to the motion.
  - Opposition MPs have been successful in getting amendments passed to the motion of thanks in Rajya Sabha on five occasions (1980, 1989, 2001, 2015, and 2016).
  - They have been less successful in Lok Sabha.
  - For example in 2018, Lok Sabha MPs tabled 845 amendments of which 375 were moved and negatived (rejected).

**Source: The Indian Express**

