



INFORMATION BULLETIN

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PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

The Constitution provides for an Address by the President to either House of Parliament or both Houses assembled together. The provision for Address by the Head of State to Parliament goes back to the year 1921 when the Central Legislature was set up for the first time under the Government of India Act, 1919. In the year 1950, when the Constitution came into force, three sessions of the Provisional Parliament were held. It was felt that to have President's Address as many as three times in a year involved repetitions and expenditure of time on discussions of the Address. Besides, such a procedure involved some administrative difficulties. Hence, the Constitution was amended [The Constitution (First Amendment) Act, 1951] to provide for the President's Address only at the commencement of the first session after each general election to Lok Sabha and at the commencement of the first session each year.

Constitutional Provisions

Under article 86 (1) of the Constitution, the President may address either House of Parliament or both Houses assembled together, and for that purpose require the attendance of members. Article 87(1) provides that at the commencement of the first session after each general election to the House of the People and at the commencement of the first session of each year, the President shall address both Houses of Parliament assembled together and inform the Parliament of the causes of its summons.

Contents of the Address

The Presidential address assumes a very important place as a policy statement of the Government. This Address is drafted by the Government as it contains a review of the activities and achievements of the Government during the previous year and sets out the policies which it wishes to pursue with regard to important national and international issues. It also indicates the main items of legislative business which are proposed to be brought before Parliament during the sessions to be held that year.

Date and Time for the Address

In the case of the first session after each general election to Lok Sabha, the President addresses both Houses of Parliament assembled together after the members have made and subscribed the oath or affirmation and the Speaker has been elected. It generally takes two to three days to complete these preliminaries. While forwarding to the Speaker, the proposal regarding commencement of the first session of a new Lok Sabha or the first session of the year, the Minister of Parliamentary Affairs (or the Leader of the House, in case the Prime Minister is not the Leader of the House) also suggests the date and time at which the President may address both Houses of Parliament assembled together. The President's order summoning either House of Parliament does not make any mention of the Address by the President nor is the information regarding the Address contained in the summons issued to members. Members are informed about the date, time and venue of the President's address through a paragraph in the Bulletin.

In 1977, Lok Sabha was dissolved on 18 January. The first session of Rajya Sabha in that year was held on 28 February, but there was no address by the President. After the general elections, Lok Sabha was constituted on 23 March 1977. The Vice-President (Shri B.D. Jatti) acting as President, addressed both the Houses assembled together on 28 March 1977. In 1980 and 1985, the President addressed both the Houses of Parliament assembled together only once *i.e.* on 23 January 1980 and 17 January 1985, respectively.

Significance of the Occasion

The President's Address to both Houses of Parliament assembled together is the most solemn and formal act under the Constitution. Utmost dignity and decorum befitting that occasion is maintained. It is, therefore, expected of a member not to do anything by words or action which would mar the solemnity or dignity of the occasion. Members are also requested through a Bulletin not to leave the Central Hall during the Address. Any action on the part of a member which creates disturbance is punishable by the House to which he belongs.

Ceremonies connected with the Address

Certain ceremonies are observed in connection with the President's Address. Members assemble in the Central Hall of Parliament at least five minutes before the arrival of the President. The President arrives at the Parliament House in the State coach or in the car and is received by the Chairman, Rajya Sabha, the Prime Minister, the Speaker, Lok Sabha, the Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and the Secretaries-General of the two Houses. Thereafter, the President is conducted to the Central Hall in a procession. As soon as the Presidential procession enters the Central Hall, the Marshal announces the arrival of the President. Simultaneously two trumpeters positioned in the Gallery above the dais sound the fanfare till the President reaches his seat on the dais. All the members then rise in their places and remain standing until the President has taken his seat. Immediately thereafter, the National Anthem is played by the band of Rashtrapati Bhavan which is positioned in one of the Lobbies of the Central Hall. The President then reads the Address in Hindi or

English. The other version of the Address is read out by the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha. After the conclusion of the Address, the National Anthem is played again. The President thereafter leaves the Central Hall in a procession which is formed in the same manner as at the time of his arrival. The members remain standing till the procession leaves the Central Hall.

Laying of a Copy of the Address on the Table

In order that the Address delivered by the President forms part of, and is incorporated in the proceedings of the House, both the Houses meet separately in their respective Chambers half-an-hour after conclusion of the Address, when a copy each of the Hindi and the English versions of the Address, duly authenticated by the President, is laid on the Table by the Secretary-General. Thereafter, copies of the Address in Hindi and English are made available to members in the Lobby and through the Publications Counter.

Discussion on the President's Address by Motion of Thanks

The discussion on the Address is held a few days after the delivery of the Address. The actual allocation of time for discussion on the Address is, however, made by the House on the recommendation of the Business Advisory Committee after the President has delivered the Address. Generally three days are allotted for discussion. On the days allotted for the discussion, the House is at liberty to discuss matters referred to in the Address. Time allotted by the House is distributed amongst various parties and groups proportionately to their respective strength. Members may be called alternately from the Opposition and the ruling party to maintain balance and lively debate. Under Rule 17 of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha, discussion on matters referred to in the President's Address takes place on a Motion of Thanks moved by a member and seconded by another member.

The form of the Motion is:—

“That the Members of Lok Sabha assembled in this session are deeply grateful to the President for the Address which he has been pleased to deliver to both the Houses of Parliament assembled together on [] date.”

Scope of Discussion

The scope of discussion on the Address is very wide and the members are free to speak on all sorts of national or international problems. Even matters which are not specifically mentioned in the Address are brought into discussion through amendments to Motion of Thanks. The only limitations are that members cannot refer to matters which are not the direct responsibility of the Central Government and that the name of the President cannot be brought in during the debate since the Government and not the President is responsible for the contents of the Address.

Amendments to Motion of Thanks on President's Address

Notices of amendments to Motion of Thanks on the President's Address can be tabled after the President has delivered his Address. During the discussion, a large number of amendments are moved by members highlighting certain issues which the President's Address failed to take note of or criticizing the policy enunciated in the Address or making suggestions for Government action. As the President's Address is a review of the Government's policies, the members of the ruling party usually reiterate the contents of the Address and do not, as a matter of convention, table notices of amendments to the Motion of Thanks on the President's Address.

Members whose amendments have been admitted and circulated are called to move the

amendments standing in their names, if they so desire. This is done by way of an announcement from the Chair that Members whose amendments to the Motion of Thanks have been circulated, may, if they desire to move their amendments, sent slips at the Table within 15 minutes indicating the serial numbers of the amendments they would like to move. Only those amendments are treated as moved. Then members participate in the discussion. At the end of the discussion, the Prime Minister or in his absence any other Minister replies to the debate. The mover or the seconder has no right to reply. Thereafter, amendments are disposed of and then the Motion of thanks is put to vote and adopted.

Conveying Motion of Thanks Adopted by the House to the President

After the Motion of Thanks is adopted, it is conveyed to the President direct by the Speaker through a letter.

Message from the President

In reply to the Speaker's letter, the President acknowledges, the receipt of the same conveying that he has received with expression of thanks by the members of the Lok Sabha for the Address which he delivered to both Houses of the Parliament assembled together. On receipt of the message, the Speaker reads it out to the House.

Prepared by Shri Satya Vijay Ram, Joint Director and Smt. Urmila Sharma, Deputy Director under the supervision of Shri P.K.Misra, Additional Secretary and Shri S. Kafil Ahmed, Director on the basis of published sources. It is intended to serve only as a background aid.