The President's Address

Why in News?

The President Ram Nath Kovind will address a joint sitting of the two Houses of Parliament during the first day of the Budget Session.

Under what provisions does the President address the legislature?

- The Constitution gives the President and the Governor the power to address a sitting of the legislature.
- The special power is with regard to addressing two occasions.
    1. The opening session of a new legislature after a general election.
    2. The first sitting of the legislature each year.
- A session of a new or a continuing legislature cannot begin without fulfilling this constitutional requirement.
- When the Constitution came into force, the President was required to address each session of Parliament.
- At the suggestion of Speaker G V Mavalankar, the first Constitutional Amendment in 1951 changed this position.
- Besides being a requirement, these addresses are keenly watched as it outlines the government's policy agenda and stand on issues.

Are there parallels in other countries?

- **In the United States**, it is referred to as the "State of the Union".
- The US Constitution specifies that the President from time to time give to Congress information of the State of the Union.
- The US President has the option of simply sending his written speech to Congress instead of personally going to deliver it.
- He also puts forward the position of his administration.
- **In the United Kingdom**, it is referred to as the Queen's Speech and is part of the ceremony to mark the formal start of the parliamentary year.
- The Queen's speech written by the government is read by her in person from the throne in the House of Lords.

What system does Indian President's address follow?

- The President's Address in India is mirrored on the British system.
- During the framing of the Constitution, B R Ambedkar drew a similarity

between the President and the monarch under the English system.
- He said the President is the Head of State but not of the executive.
- He, the symbol of the nation, represents the nation but doesn't rule it.
- His place in the administration is that of a ceremonial device of a seal by which the nation's decisions are made known.
- The Constitution binds the President and the Governor to act on the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers of the Union and state governments respectively, on a majority of issues.
- Therefore, the speech that the President or the Governor reads before the legislature is the viewpoint of the government and is prepared by it.

What is the content of the address?

- The President's speech follows the convention of the British system, where it contains legislative and policy proposals that the government intends to initiate.
- It also recaps the government's accomplishment in the previous years.
- The contents of the speech are put together by aggregating inputs from various ministries of the government.

Are Presidents bound to read the text of the speech?

- The President or a Governor can't refuse to perform the constitutional duty of delivering an address to the legislature.
- But there can be situations when they deviate from the text of the speech prepared by the government.
- So far, there have been no instances of President doing so.
- But there has been an occasion when a Governor skipped a portion of the address to the Assembly.
- In 1969, the Governor of West Bengal skipped two paragraphs of the address prepared by the United Front government.

How have members responded to the addresses over the years?

- The conduct of MLAs during the address has sometimes been an issue.
- The Governor's speech in state legislatures has routinely been interrupted.
- In Parliament, the first instance of interruption of a President's speech happened in 1963.
- President Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan was speaking when some MPs interrupted him for whom a reprimand was issued by the Lok Sabha.
- Over the years, political parties have resolved to treat the President's Address sacrosanct and agreed not to interrupt it.

What procedures follow the address?

- After the President or Governor delivers the address, a debate takes place not only on the contents of the address but also the broad issues of governance in the country.
- This then paves the way for discussion on the Budget.

Source: Indian Express

