Virtual Credential Ceremony of Foreign Diplomats

Why in news?

In a first, President Ram Nath Kovind accepted the credentials of foreign diplomats of as many as 7 countries in a virtual ceremony, given the COVID-19 situation.

What is the credential ceremony all about?

- A Letter of Credence is a formal document appointing a diplomat as Ambassador or High Commissioner to another sovereign state.
- The present ceremony involved diplomats from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Senegal, Trinidad & Tobago, Mauritius, Australia, Cote d'Ivoire and Rwanda.
- They presented their credentials (Letters of Credence) before the President via video conference.
- Each of these letters is addressed from one head of state to another.
- President Ram Nath Kovind formally accepted each Letter of Credence.
- This marked the beginning of the ambassadorship of each of those foreign diplomats, in India.
- The letters were officially handed over to the MEA (Ministry of External Affairs) to be delivered to the President of India.
- Initially, the ambassadors were to present their credentials from their respective embassies.
- However, all seven were escorted to the Jawahar Bhavan headquarters of the MEA (Ministry of External Affairs).

How does it take place generally?

- The presentation of credentials is a spectacular and elaborate ceremony with strict rules and rituals.
- Under normal circumstances, it is hosted at the majestic Ashoka Hall inside the Rashtrapati Bhavan.
- The envoys come to Rashtrapati Bhavan accompanied by a foreign ministry official.
- They have to sit in a specific seat in the car with the protocol officer next to them.
- The diplomat is received at the forecourt of the presidential palace by the

commander of the Presidential Guard.
- There is a guard of honour in the middle arc of the main entrance.
- Alongside, the police band plays the national anthem of the diplomat's country.
- This exercise conducted as usual credential ceremony in Rashtrapati Bhawan could not be arranged due to the spread of COVID-19.

How has the procedure evolved?

- Various considerations as time, duties etc gave way for demands on abandoning the elaborate procedure, which led to few alterations.
- The open carriage was abandoned on security considerations.
- Over the years, the contents and wording of the letter of credence have been retained in most countries.
- However, its practical content stands diluted and changed.
- It was argued that the head of state should not be burdened with too many of these duties.
- Individual presentation was thus replaced by group disposal.

What is the significance?

- Largely, symbols and rituals have been, and are, essential parts of international diplomacy.
- In this sense, ritual becomes a power source and has been used down the ages to project images of power.
- The anthropologist Clifford Geetz had observed that "in ritual, the world as lived and the world as imagined get fused under the agency of a single set of symbolic forms that turn out to be the same world."
- The world of practical diplomacy understands this and continues to practise it.

Source: The Hindu, Hindustan Times

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