

Republic Day Chief Guest-2023

December 1, 2022

In news– Egypt's President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi will be the chief guest at the Republic Day celebrations in January 2023.

How is the Chief Guest chosen?

- There is a lot of thought that goes behind the selection of the Chief Guest of the Republic Day parade, with the **process commencing nearly six months in advance of the event. All kinds of considerations are taken into account by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA)** before extending the invitation.
- The **most central consideration is the nature of the relationship between India and the country concerned.** Invitation to be the Chief Guest of the Republic Day parade is the ultimate sign of friendship between India and the country of the invitee.
- Political, commercial, military and economic interests of India are crucial drivers of the decision, with MEA seeking to use the occasion to strengthen ties with the country of the invitee in all these respects.
- Another factor that has historically played a role in the choice of the Chief Guest is the **association with the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) which began in the late 1950s, early 1960s.**
- **The first Chief Guest of the parade in 1950 was President Sukarno of Indonesia,** one of the five founding members of the NAM alongside Nasser (Egypt), Nkrumah (Ghana), Tito (Yugoslavia) and Nehru (India).
- **Al-Sisi's invitation invokes the history of the NAM and the close relationship India and Egypt have shared for 75 years.**

What happens after the MEA has zeroed in on its options?

- **After due consideration, the MEA seeks approval of the**

Prime Minister and the President on the matter. If the MEA receives clearance to proceed, it then gets to work. Indian ambassadors in the concerned country try to discreetly ascertain the availability of the potential Chief Guest.

- This is also a reason why the MEA does not just choose one option but a list of potential candidates. Discretion is of utmost importance as no formal invitation has yet been made by India.
- After this process is completed and a candidate is finalised, more official communication between India and the country of the invitee follows. Territorial divisions in the MEA work towards meaningful talks and agreements.
- **The Chief of Protocol works on the details of the programme and logistics. A detailed programme for the trip and the Republic Day ceremonies is shared by the Protocol Chief to his counterpart from the visiting nation.** This programme has to be **followed with military precision.**
- The **planning of the visit involves the Government of India, state governments** which the foreign dignitary might visit, and the government of the concerned country.
- The Chief Guest of the Republic day is a ceremonial honour presented to the head of state of a country but its significance rises beyond purely the ceremonial. Such a visit can open new possibilities and go a long way in furthering India's interests in the world.

Significance of being the Chief Guest at India's Republic Day-

- While similar to any other state visit by a foreign high dignitary, given the grandiosity and importance of the ceremony involved for India, **it is the highest honour that the country accords to a guest in terms of**

protocol.

- The **Chief Guest is front and centre in many ceremonial activities** which have over time become a part of the fabric of the event and the run-up to it.
- They are **given the ceremonial guard of honour at Rashtrapati Bhavan** followed by a **reception hosted by the President of India** in the evening.
- They also **lay a wreath at Rajghat, to honour Mahatma Gandhi**. There is a banquet in their honour, **a lunch hosted by the Prime Minister**, and calls by the Vice-President and the External Affairs Minister.

Some of the previous Republic Day Chief Guests

Following are the first Five and last five guest who participated in Indian Republic Day:

- 1950: President Sukarno, Indonesia.
- 1951: King Tribhuvan Bir Bikram Shah, Nepal.
- 1952 and 1953: No Chief Guest.
- 1954: King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck, Bhutan.
- 1955: Governor General Malik Ghulam Muhammad, Pakistan.
- 2017: Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, United Arab Emirates.
- 2018: Ten Chief Guests, Heads of ASEAN States:
 1. Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah, Brunei.
 2. Prime Minister Hun Sen, Cambodia.
 3. President Joko Widodo, Indonesia.
 4. Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith, Laos.
 5. Prime Minister Najib Razak, Malaysia.
 6. State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, Myanmar.
 7. President Rodrigo Duterte, Philippines.
 8. Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, Singapore.
 9. Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha, Thailand.
 10. Prime Minister Nguyn Xuân Phúc, Vietnam.
- 2019: President Cyril Ramaphosa, South Africa.
- 2020: President Jair Bolsonaro, Brazil.

Who is al-Sisi?

- The Chief Guest for the 2023 Republic Day parade, Abdeh Fatah al-Sisi was Egypt's military chief and defence minister before he took over control from democratically elected Md Morsi after a coup in 2013.
- He went on to win a subsequent election in 2014 on an economic development plank.
- His presidency has thus far received mixed responses with critics pointing at Egypt's current economic distress and violent stifling of opposition voices as causes for concern.
- When he arrives in January next year, al-Sisi will be the **first Egyptian leader to grace the occasion.**