

10 unique initiatives by Pranab Mukherjee as the President

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NEW DELHI: Former president Pranab Mukherjee, who passed away in the national capital after a brief illness, would be remembered for the various initiatives he had taken as the head of the state.

He brought about sweeping changes in the way his predecessors in the Rashtrapati Bhavan had functioned.

Pranab Mukherjee did away with several practices and introduced some new ones to give a new meaning to the President's office.

1. RELAXATIONS OF RULES

Several changes in the rules inside Rashtrapati Bhavan were made on the first anniversary of Pranab Mukherjee's term in 2013. The first announcement was to do away with the honorific 'His Excellency' used for the president and the governors of the states.

The restrictions on visitors and guests were also relaxed to a great extent. Pranab Mukherjee started holding as many functions as possible inside the Rashtrapati Bhavan premises to avoid inconveniences to the common man.

2. MERCY PETITIONS AND ORDINANCES

In all, Pranab Mukherjee promulgated or re-promulgated 26 ordinances - five in the last year - during his tenure. He rejected 30 mercy petitions and commuted four of them. At 45, only R Venkatraman rejected more mercy petitions than Pranab Mukherjee.

3. MAKING RASHTRAPATI BHAVAN ACCESSIBLE

Pranab Mukherjee opened the Rashtrapati Bhavan to the common man and helped make it as a prime tourist destination. A record number of about one lakh tourists visited the Rashtrapati Bhavan, Mughal Gardens and Rashtrapati Bhavan Museum during the last year of his presidency. In-Residence Programme was launched to involve citizens in creative pursuits. Several innovation scholars, writers and artists stayed at Rashtrapati Bhavan. They included writer Paresh Maity and his wife, artist Jayasri Burman, well-known artist and freedom fighter Shahabuddin Ahmed of Bangladesh.

As president, Pranab Mukherjee launched '4S' initiatives for the welfare of the staff, employees and members of their families residing in the President's Estate. For the age group of children between 7 and 15 years, the initiative 'Sanskriti' was launched for their wholesome development. Classes of painting, yoga, storytelling, clay modelling and singing were held inside the Pranab Mukherjee Public Library. Another initiative - 'Samagam' - was launched for senior citizens. It included activities like yoga classes, community singing, counselling services, free health check-ups and board games. A respite centre was opened for special children under the 'Spars'h'. The fourth initiative was named 'Sanskar' and it aimed at meeting the nutritional requirements of children at the Rashtrapati Bhavan Play School.

4. RASHTRAPATI BHAVAN ON TWITTER

The Twitter account of the Rashtrapati Bhavan was opened on July 1, 2014 during the presidency of Pranab Mukherjee. By the time he stepped down from office, Rashtrapati Bhavan had about 33 lakh followers on Twitter.

5. TEACHER PRANAB MUKHERJEE

Pranab Mukherjee perhaps was the first president to teach school children inside the Rashtrapati Bhavan. Five decades before becoming the president, Pranab Mukherjee was a teacher. He used his teaching skills in the last two years of his tenure. A Master's degree holder in history, political science and law, he taught class 11 and 12 students of the Rajendra Prasad Sarvodaya Vidyalaya in the President's Estate.

6. MUSEUM

In a landmark initiative, a state-of-the-art museum was opened in the Rashtrapati Bhavan. A heritage building - the Carriage Halls and the Stables - earlier used for horses and to house buggies, was converted a museum. The museum focuses on the landmark events commencing from Delhi Durbar of 1911 to first president Rajendra Prasad's swearing-in ceremony. There are several other interesting features in the museum. As modernisation of the Rashtrapati Bhavan, an 'E-Pustakalaya' project for barcoding and cataloguing of books was undertaken. For example, by using **e-Granthalaya software**, relating to Automated Library of President's Secretariat (ALPS), around 8310 e-books were uploaded under the e-office platform.

7. PRANAB MUKHERJEE PUBLIC LIBRARY

A Pranab Mukherjee Public Library for the welfare of the residents of the Estate was opened after restoring a dilapidated structure which was waiting to be demolished.

8. CHANGES IN PRESIDENT'S ESTATE

Pranab Mukherjee sought to follow the guidelines of the urban development ministry in making the Rashtrapati Bhavan buildings as green as possible. For instance, the Narmada Residential Complex quarters for the staff of Rashtrapati Bhavan include features like rain water harvesting, LED lights, recycling of waste water, use of fly ash bricks in partitioning walls and solar water heating. Sewage-treated water in underground sump was utilised to water parks and used in the flushing system of water closets.

9. RESTORATION OF PRESIDENTIAL RETREAT AT DEHRADUN

The presidential retreat in Dehradun - Rashtrapati Ashiana - had become a dilapidated structure. However, the heritage building was renovated, restored and retrofitted and inaugurated by Pranab Mukherjee on September 27, 2016. Ashiana was earlier known as Commandant's Bungalow and it encompassed 217.14 acres of land. It was taken on lease by the then Viceroy's Bodyguard in 1836. It was re-designated as Rashtrapati Ashiana in 1975.

10. ROOFTOP SOLAR POWER PANELS

As part of the initiative to make Rashtrapati Bhavan more energy-efficient, rooftop solar power panels were installed in association with Rural Electrification Corporation Limited and Tata Power Delhi Distribution Limited. It had a capacity of approximately 508 KW.