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78th Army Day 2026 — Jaipur, Digital Transformation, and India's Evolving War Doctrine

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SUBJECTS COVERED

SECURITY & DEFENCE

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78th Army Day 2026 — Jaipur, Digital Transformation, and India's Evolving War Doctrine

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✎ WHY IN NEWS

India celebrated its 78th Army Day on January 15, 2026, in Jaipur — the first time the parade was held outside a cantonment in the city. Chief of Army Staff General Upendra Dwivedi presided over the ceremony with the theme "Year of Networking and Data Centricity," signalling the Indian Army's transition toward AI-enabled, network-centric warfare with integrated battle management systems.

ARMY DAY: HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

January 15 is celebrated annually as **Army Day** in India — marking the day in 1949 when Field Marshal **K.M. Cariappa** took over as the first Indian Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army from General Sir Francis Butcher (the last British C-in-C). This represented the full Indianisation of the Army's command structure after Independence.

2026 marks the 78th Army Day — three-quarters of a century of an independent Indian Army command.

Parade tradition: The Army Day parade has historically been held at Cariappa Parade Ground, Delhi Cantonment. Since 2023, the parade has been rotated to different states to showcase the Army's connection to all regions:

> 2023: Bengaluru (Karnataka)
>
> 2024: Lucknow (Uttar Pradesh)
>
> 2025: Pune (Maharashtra)
>
> 2026: **Jaipur (Rajasthan)** — held on Mahal Road (Akshay Patra Circle to Bombay Hospital) — first time outside a cantonment in Jaipur

THE THEME: NETWORKING AND DATA CENTRICITY

The 2026 theme — **"Year of Networking and Data Centricity"** — reflects the Indian Army's strategic priorities for the year:

Network-Centric Warfare (NCW): Modern military operations require seamless, real-time information sharing between soldiers on the ground, command posts, aerial platforms, and satellite systems. A "networked" army means:

Soldiers with wearable devices transmitting location, health data, and situational awareness

Artillery and missile systems with digital firing solutions (replacing physical calculation tables)

Command posts receiving live drone feeds and satellite imagery in real-time

Enemy signal intercept feeding instantly into electronic warfare systems

Data Centricity: Every sensor, weapon system, and communications device generates data. An army that can collect, process, and act on this data faster than the enemy has a decisive advantage. This is the conceptual basis of what the US calls "JADC2" (Joint All-Domain Command and Control).

India's equivalent: **Integrated Battle Management System (IBMS)** — a project to link all Army sensors and weapons into a common operational picture.

Key digital transformation programmes in the Indian Army:

Army Cloud — secure, military-grade cloud for all defence applications

Combat Readiness Assessment System — real-time tracking of unit readiness

AI-enabled predictive maintenance — vehicles and weapons flagged for maintenance before breakdown using sensor data

Project SANGAM — integrating multiple communication networks (radio, satellite, fibre) into a single resilient mesh

WEAPONS AND SYSTEMS ON DISPLAY

Legacy platforms (still operational):

BrahMos supersonic cruise missile — India-Russia JV; 300 km range; Mach 2.8; air/sea/ground launched

Pinaka MBRL (Multi-Barrel Rocket Launcher) — 45–90 km range; 12 rockets in 44 seconds; now in export orders to Armenia and Egypt

New and emerging systems:

Shaktibaan — medium-power ground-based laser weapon; designed for counter-UAV missions; developed by DRDO

Counter-drone systems — electronic jamming + hard-kill systems against small commercial drones (a lesson from the Russia-Ukraine war where cheap drones caused enormous damage)

Robotic platforms — unmanned ground vehicles for logistics, surveillance, and potentially direct combat support

Drone and UAV ecosystem:

> The 78th Army Day displayed both surveillance UAVs (Israeli-origin Heron TP, indigenised variants) and attack UAVs

> The India-Israel defence cooperation has been central to India's UAV capability: Heron, Searcher, and Harop loitering munitions (kamikaze drones) are all Israeli-origin

> India's indigenous UAV programmes: TAPAS-BH (Medium-Altitude Long-Endurance, DRDO), Archer-NG (private sector), Abhimanyu (urban combat robot)

CHIEF OF ARMY STAFF: GENERAL UPENDRA DWIVEDI

General **Upendra Dwivedi** became the 30th Chief of Army Staff (COAS) of the Indian Army in June 2024.

Prior to becoming COAS, he served as Vice Chief of Army Staff. He is associated with the Jammu & Kashmir Rifles regiment and has served in counter-insurgency operations in J&K and the Northeast.

Under his tenure, the Army has:

> Accelerated the Integrated Battle Groups (IBG) concept — smaller, self-contained, brigade-sized formations that can operate independently in high-altitude warfare

> Pushed for faster indigenisation in ammunition, light vehicles, and infantry weapons

> Advanced the Army's Artificial Intelligence roadmap through the Artificial Intelligence for the Indian Army (AIIA) cell

GALLANTRY AND INSTITUTIONAL AWARDS

Sena Medal (Gallantry): Conferred on individual soldiers for acts of conspicuous bravery or devotion to duty in the face of the enemy (or in peacetime for extraordinary bravery). In the military awards hierarchy:

Award	Description
Param Vir Chakra	Highest military honour; "in the presence of the enemy"
Mahavir Chakra	2nd highest; gallantry in presence of enemy
Vir Chakra	3rd highest; gallantry in presence of enemy
Sena Medal (Gallantry)	Devotion to duty; conspicuous bravery (field)
Vishisht Seva Medal	Distinguished service (not combat-related)

"Bravest of the Brave" award → conferred on **8 Assam Rifles** — the oldest paramilitary force in India (est. 1835), often called the "Sentinels of the Northeast"; operates under both Army and Home Ministry.

26 Certificates for Operation Sindoor — the 60 COAS Certificates of Appreciation included 26 specifically for personnel who served in Operation Sindoor.

INDIA'S MILITARY MODERNISATION: THE BIGGER PICTURE

The 14th Finance Commission-era challenge: India's defence budget as percentage of GDP declined from ~3% in the 1980s to ~1.9-2.0% in 2025-26. Despite this, capital expenditure (for new equipment purchase) has grown:

> **Defence Budget FY26:** Rs 6.21 lakh crore (total); Capex share: ~27%

> **Modernisation allocation:** Rs 1.72 lakh crore for capital acquisition

Indigenisation progress:

> Defence imports declined from 60-70% of all defence procurement in 2014 to ~40% in 2025

> Private sector defence companies (Tata Advanced Systems, L&T Defence, Mahindra Defence) now hold major Army contracts for vehicles, small arms, and ammunition

> Positive Indigenisation Lists: 509 items (as of FY26) — imports prohibited; only domestic procurement allowed

The Northern Front imperative: The 2020 Galwan Valley clash and the Eastern Ladakh standoff (2020-2024) fundamentally changed India's Army modernisation calculus. The new priorities:

> High-altitude warfare capability (logistics, artillery, shelters for 18,000-foot terrain)

> Long-range precision fires (Pralay missile, Pinaka extended range)

> Counter-UAV systems (Chinese drone use in Tibet observed)

> Integrated battle management systems (network centricity)

UPSC RELEVANCE

Army Day (January 15; 78th in 2026; K.M. Cariappa; first Indian C-in-C, 1949; Jaipur parade); Sena Medal (Gallantry award, India); Param Vir Chakra (highest military honour); Integrated Battle Groups (IBG); Shaktibaan (DRDO; ground laser; counter-UAV); BrahMos (India-Russia JV; supersonic cruise; 300 km); Pinaka MBRL (45-90 km; 12 rockets in 44 sec; export); Assam Rifles (oldest paramilitary; 1835; "Sentinels of Northeast"); JADC2 (US doctrine); Positive Indigenisation List (509 items; import ban); Defence Budget FY26 (Rs 6.21 lakh crore; 1.9% GDP)

MAINS GS-3:

"Evaluate the significance of the theme 'Year of Networking and Data Centricity' for Indian Army modernisation. What are the key challenges in implementing network-centric warfare at India's scale?" | "Critically assess India's defence indigenisation progress — what has been achieved and what structural gaps remain?" | "How has the Eastern Ladakh standoff changed India's Army modernisation priorities?"

INTERVIEW:

"The Indian Army has a large force but limited modernisation budget. If you were advising the Defence Minister, what would be the top three investment priorities for the next decade?"

📌 FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGEPEDIA

78TH ARMY DAY 2026:

Date: January 15, 2026 (Army Day = Jan 15 every year)

Significance: January 15, 1949 — General K.M. Cariappa became first Indian C-in-C (replacing British General Butcher)

Venue: Mahal Road, Jaipur (first outside cantonment in Jaipur; 4th outside Delhi)

COAS: General Upendra Dwivedi (30th COAS; since June 2024)

Theme: "Year of Networking and Data Centricity"

Awards: 10 Sena Medals (Gallantry); 49 COAS Unit Citations; 60 Certificates of Appreciation; "Bravest of the Brave" → 8 Assam Rifles

FIELD MARSHAL K.M. CARIAPPA:

Full name: Kodandera Madappa Cariappa

First Indian Commander-in-Chief: January 15, 1949

Field Marshal: one of two (the other being Sam Manekshaw, 1973)

Significance: End of British C-in-C tradition; beginning of Indian Army sovereignty

INDIAN MILITARY AWARDS HIERARCHY:

Param Vir Chakra (PVC): Highest; enemy presence; 21 awardees total

Mahavir Chakra (MVC): 2nd; enemy presence

Vir Chakra (VrC): 3rd; enemy presence

Ashoka Chakra: Highest peacetime gallantry

Sena Medal (Gallantry): Conspicuous bravery / devotion to duty

DEFENCE INDIGENISATION:

Defence exports: Rs 23,622 crore (FY26) vs Rs 686 crore (FY14)

Positive Indigenisation List: 509 items (imports prohibited)

Private sector role: Tata (vehicles, electronics), L&T (artillery, systems), Mahindra (vehicles)

Defence Budget FY26: Rs 6.21 lakh crore; ~1.9% of GDP; Capex ~27%

KEY WEAPONS DISPLAYED:

BrahMos: India-Russia JV (2001); supersonic cruise; Mach 2.8; 300 km range (extended 450+ km); air/sea/land variants

Pinaka MBRL: DRDO; 45-90 km; 12 rockets in 44 seconds; in service + export

Shaktibaan: DRDO; directed energy (laser); counter-UAV

UAV fleet: Heron TP, Searcher (Israel-origin); TAPAS-BH (DRDO indigenous MALE UAV); Harop loitering munition (Israel)

ASSAM RIFLES:

Established: 1835 (as Cachar Levy; oldest paramilitary in India)

Headquarters: Shillong (Meghalaya)

Dual control: Ministry of Defence (operational) + Ministry of Home Affairs (administrative)

Motto: "Friends of the Hill People"

Nickname: "Sentinels of the Northeast"; "Cutting Edge in the Northeast"

Sources: PIB, Indian Army, Business Standard, The Hindu

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