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Republic Day 2026 – Constitutional History, Purna Swaraj, and India's Democratic Journey

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SUBJECTS COVERED**POLITY****HISTORY & CULTURE****CURATED & WRITTEN BY****Bharat Choudhary**

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WHY IN NEWS

India celebrates its 77th Republic Day on January 26, 2026 — marking 76 years since the Constitution of India came into force. The theme “150 Years of Vande Mataram” underscores the long arc from Bankim Chandra Chatterjee’s 1876 composition to the republic established in 1950.

WHY JANUARY 26?

The choice of January 26 as Republic Day was deliberate and historically resonant — not coincidental.

The Purna Swaraj Connection

The Lahore Session of the Indian National Congress (December 1929):

UPSC RELEVANCE

(Complete Independence) as India’s goal.

The resolution was passed at the stroke of midnight on **December 31, 1929 / January 1, 1930**, with Nehru hoisting the tricolour flag on the banks of the Ravi river at Lahore.

January 26, 1930 — First Independence Day: The Congress declared that **January 26, 1930** would be observed as *Purna Swaraj Diwas* (Independence Day). Across India, people gathered publicly to take an Independence Pledge — affirming their commitment to complete independence from British rule. This was also the day the Indian National Flag was unfurled at thousands of locations.

After actual independence on **August 15, 1947**, the January 26 date was preserved in India’s constitutional calendar to honour its historical significance. When the Constituent Assembly was ready to bring the Constitution into force, **January 26, 1950** was chosen for exactly this reason.

The Constitution’s Journey

Constituent Assembly (1946–1949):

Constituted under the **Cabinet Mission Plan (1946)**

First meeting: **December 9, 1946**

Chaired by: **Dr. B.R. Ambedkar** (Chairman, Drafting Committee); **Dr. Rajendra Prasad** (President of Constituent Assembly)

Total members: 389 (later reduced to 299 after Partition)

Drafting Committee: 7 members; Dr. Ambedkar was the principal architect

Milestone	Date
Constituent Assembly first meets	December 9, 1946
Constitution adopted by Constituent Assembly	November 26, 1949
Constitution Day (Samvidhan Divas)	November 26 (first observed 2015)
Constitution comes into force	January 26, 1950
Republic Day first observed	January 26, 1950
Dr. Rajendra Prasad sworn in as first President	January 26, 1950

What the Constitution replaced: The **Government of India Act, 1935** — the principal constitutional document governing British India, which had also served as the interim framework from independence in 1947 to the Constitution’s commencement in 1950 (with modifications).

THE PREAMBLE — INDIA’S CONSTITUTIONAL IDENTITY

UPSC RELEVANCE

“WE, THE PEOPLE OF INDIA, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a SOVEREIGN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC...”

42nd Constitutional Amendment (1976): During the Emergency, PM Indira Gandhi’s government inserted two words into the Preamble — **“SOCIALIST”** and **“SECULAR”** — changing it to “Sovereign Socialist Secular Democratic Republic.”

42nd Amendment (1976) significance for UPSC:

Added: Socialist, Secular (Preamble)

Added: “Unity and Integrity of the Nation” (Preamble)

Added: Fundamental Duties (Part IV-A, Articles 51A — 10 duties; later 11th added by 86th Amendment 2002)

Extended Parliamentary term from 5 to 6 years (reversed by 44th Amendment 1978)

Reduced Supreme Court power to review constitutional amendments

Key Preamble concepts:

Concept	Meaning
Sovereign	No external authority above India's Constitution
Socialist	Social and economic equality; mixed economy (not Soviet-style; Kesavananda Bharati case 1973 upheld basic structure)
Secular	State has no official religion; equal treatment of all religions (Articles 25–28)
Democratic	Government derives authority from people; universal adult franchise (Article 326)
Republic	Head of state is elected (President), not hereditary

INDIA'S DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS — REPUBLIC DAY ACCOUNTABILITY

Republic Day serves a **constitutional accountability function**: the President of India (Head of State and Supreme Commander of Armed Forces) reviews the military parade — symbolising civilian control over the armed forces.

President as Supreme Commander:

Article 53 — Executive power vested in the President

Article 61 — Impeachment procedure (by Parliament for “violation of the Constitution”)

Article 74 — President acts on aid and advice of Council of Ministers (PM + Cabinet)

Article 111 — President can withhold assent to Bills (but cannot indefinitely withhold after SC ruling in *Supreme Court Advocates-on-Record Association v. Union of India* 2015)

Chief Guest tradition: Since 1950, India has invited foreign heads of state/government as Republic Day chief guests — signalling diplomatic priorities. Notable Republic Day chief guests:

Year	Chief Guest	Country	Significance
1950	President Sukarno	Indonesia	Non-Aligned Movement pioneer
1952	King Mahendra	Nepal	Neighbour; first
1976	PM Jacques Chirac	France	First French PM; Rafale connection decades later
2015	President Barack Obama	USA	First US President as RD chief guest
2024	President Emmanuel Macron	France	Launched India-France Horizon 2047 roadmap
2026	António Costa + Ursula von der Leyen	EU	First time EU as collective chief guest

INDIA'S 75 YEARS AS A REPUBLIC — KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

Since January 26, 1950, India has:

Held 18 General Elections without constitutional breakdown — an achievement for a developing country with massive diversity

Amended the Constitution 106 times (as of 2023) — reflecting democratic responsiveness

Maintained an independent judiciary — Supreme Court's basic structure doctrine (Kesavananda Bharati, 1973) has protected core constitutional values from parliamentary amendment

Achieved universal literacy progress — from ~12% (1950) to ~77% (2023)

Doubled life expectancy — from ~32 years (1950) to ~72 years (2023)

Expanded the vote — from 17 crore voters (1952) to **97 crore+ registered voters** (2024)

ARTICLE 393 AND INDIA'S SELF-DESIGNATION

Article 393 of the Constitution: *“This Constitution may be called the Constitution of India.”*

The Constitution itself chose the name — affirming that India (not Bharat, though both names are used by Article 1: “India, that is Bharat, shall be a Union of States”) is the nation's official name in international and constitutional contexts.

UPSC RELEVANCE

Constituent Assembly first meeting: December 9, 1946; Constitution adopted: November 26, 1949; came into force: January 26, 1950; replaced Government of India Act 1935; Dr. Rajendra Prasad = first President; Dr. B.R. Ambedkar = Drafting Committee Chairman; Lahore INC session December 1929; Purna Swaraj = January 26, 1930; 42nd Amendment 1976 = Socialist + Secular added; 44th Amendment 1978; Article 53 executive power; Article 61 impeachment; Article 74 PM + Council of Ministers; Article 326 universal adult franchise; Article 393; Republic Day chief guests 2015 (Obama) and 2026 (EU).

*Constitutional values — Preamble interpretation; basic structure doctrine (Kesavananda Bharati 1973); civilian control of military; Republic Day's democratic accountability function; India's constitutional amendments — 42nd and 44th (Emergency era). **GS-1:** Freedom movement — Purna Swaraj resolution (1929); Lahore INC session; January 26, 1930 significance; Constituent Assembly composition and functioning.*

★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGEPEDIA

REPUBLIC DAY — CORE CONSTITUTIONAL FACTS:

Constitution adopted: **November 26, 1949** (Constitution Day, first observed as national day 2015)

Constitution in force: **January 26, 1950** (Republic Day)

Replaced: **Government of India Act, 1935**

Constituent Assembly: First meeting **December 9, 1946**; Cabinet Mission Plan (1946)

CA President: **Dr. Rajendra Prasad** | Drafting Committee Chair: **Dr. B.R. Ambedkar**

Total members: 389 (reduced to 299 after Partition)

First President of Republic: **Dr. Rajendra Prasad** (inaugurated January 26, 1950)

WHY JANUARY 26:

Lahore INC Session: December 1929; Presided: **Jawaharlal Nehru**

Purna Swaraj Resolution: Passed midnight December 31, 1929 / January 1, 1930

January 26, 1930: First Purna Swaraj Diwas — Independence pledge taken across India; Nehru hoisted tricolour on banks of Ravi river, Lahore

Constitution deliberately brought into force on this date to honour the event

PREAMBLE AMENDMENTS:

Original (1950): Sovereign Democratic Republic

42nd Amendment (1976): Added “Socialist” and “Secular” → Sovereign Socialist Secular Democratic Republic

Article 1: “India, that is Bharat, shall be a Union of States”

Article 393: Official name = “Constitution of India”

KEY CONSTITUTIONAL ARTICLES:

Article 53: Executive power vested in President

Article 61: Impeachment of President (by Parliament)

Article 74: President acts on Council of Ministers’ advice

Article 326: Universal adult franchise

Article 393: Name of Constitution

INDIA’S REPUBLIC DAY CHIEF GUESTS (SELECTED):

1950: **Sukarno** (Indonesia) | 2015: **Barack Obama** (USA, first US President)

2024: **Emmanuel Macron** (France) | 2026: **António Costa + Ursula von der Leyen** (EU — first collective)

GENERAL ELECTIONS HELD SINCE 1950: 18 (UP TO 2024) CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS: 106 (AS OF 2023) REGISTERED VOTERS 2024 GENERAL ELECTION: ~97 CRORE

OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

Basic Structure Doctrine: Kesavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala (1973) — Parliament cannot amend basic features of Constitution

42nd Amendment (1976) also added Fundamental Duties (Part IV-A, Article 51A) — 10 duties (11th added by 86th Amendment, 2002)

44th Amendment (1978): Reversed some Emergency-era 42nd Amendment changes; restored Supreme Court’s powers; Parliament term back to 5 years

Government of India Act, 1935: Provided for a federal structure, bicameral legislature, provincial autonomy; basis for 1935–1950 governance

Dominion Status vs Purna Swaraj: Before 1929 Lahore resolution, INC goal was Dominion Status (like Canada/Australia within British Empire); Lahore = full independence demand

Sources: PIB, Lok Sabha Secretariat, National Archives of India

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