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India's 77th Republic Day 2026 — EU Chief Guests, Padma Awards, Ashoka Chakra, and the LR-AShM Hypersonic Missile

28 January 2026

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CURATED & WRITTEN BY

Bharat Choudhary

UPSC Educator & Content Creator •

[linkedin.com/in/epicbharat](https://www.linkedin.com/in/epicbharat)

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India's 77th Republic Day 2026 — EU Chief Guests, Padma Awards, Ashoka Chakra, and the LR-AShM Hypersonic Missile

28 January 2026

WHY IN NEWS

India celebrated its 77th Republic Day on January 26, 2026 — an edition marked by historic firsts: both top EU leaders served as chief guests simultaneously, DRDO unveiled its Long Range Anti-Ship Hypersonic Missile (LR-AShM), Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla received the Ashoka Chakra for India's first ISS mission, and 131 Padma Awards were announced including 16 posthumous recipients.

77TH REPUBLIC DAY — SETTING THE CONTEXT

January 26, 2026 marked the **76th anniversary** of the Constitution of India coming into force (the Constitution was adopted on November 26, 1949 but came into force on January 26, 1950 — hence the “Republic”). The Republic Day parade is India's grandest military and cultural spectacle.

Venue: Kartavya Path, New Delhi (renamed from Rajpath in September 2022; the name means “Duty Path” — a shift from the colonial “Rajpath” meaning “King's Way”).

Theme for 2026: “150 Years of Vande Mataram”

Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay composed *Vande Mataram* in **1876**

Published in his novel *Anandmath* in **1882**

First sung at the Indian National Congress session in **1896** (by Rabindranath Tagore, according to some accounts)

Declared the **National Song** (not National Anthem); Jana Gana Mana is the National Anthem

First two stanzas recognised as the National Song; Fundamental Duty to respect it under Article 51A(a)

The 150-year theme aligned with 2026 being India's 75th year as a Republic

EU LEADERSHIP AS CHIEF GUESTS — A HISTORIC FIRST

In an unprecedented diplomatic gesture, **both** the EU's top leaders attended Republic Day 2026 as chief guests:

Person	Position
António Costa	President of the European Council (Portugal; first Portuguese to hold this office; assumed October 2024)
Ursula von der Leyen	President of the European Commission (Germany; second term; assumed December 2024)

Why this is historically significant:

First time the EU (as a collective entity rather than individual nations) served as Republic Day chief guest

First time an EU military contingent participated in a Republic Day parade outside Europe

The choice signals India’s recognition of the EU as a **geopolitical actor**, not merely an economic bloc

India has traditionally invited heads of individual states (US President, French President, Russian President)

The EU visit coincided with the **16th EU-India Summit** (January 27), at which the India-EU Security and Defence Partnership was signed and the India-EU FTA was concluded

EU structure — UPSC note:

European Council: Body of heads of state/government of EU member states; sets EU’s political direction; President is António Costa; decisions by consensus

European Commission: EU’s executive body; proposes legislation; enforces EU law; President is Ursula von der Leyen; acts like a “government”

High Representative for Foreign Affairs: Kaja Kallas (Estonia) — EU’s “foreign minister”; also VP of Commission

THE REPUBLIC DAY PARADE — KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Ceremony:

President Droupadi Murmu unfurled the National Flag; traditional 21-gun salute by **105mm Light Field Guns** (1721 Ceremonial Battery, 172 Field Regiment)

Parade Commander: Lieutenant General Bhavnish Kumar

Special musical piece composed by **M.M. Keeravani** (Oscar-winning composer of *Naatu Naatu* for RRR, 2022)

Military highlights:

Debut of the newly raised **Bhairav Battalion** in the Republic Day parade

DRDO's LR-AShM (Long Range Anti-Ship Hypersonic Missile) made its first public appearance (see next section)

30 tableaux from States, UTs, and Central Ministries

Post-Republic Day events:

Bharat Parv: January 26–31 at Red Fort — cultural showcase of India's diversity

Beating Retreat ceremony: January 29, 2026 at Vijay Chowk (marks end of Republic Day festivities; traditionally features buglers, illuminated North/South Block)

At-Home Reception at Rashtrapati Bhavan: January 26

DRDO'S LR-ASHM — INDIA'S HYPERSONIC SEA-DENIAL MISSILE

One of the most significant showcases at Republic Day 2026 was the first public display of the **Long Range Anti-Ship Hypersonic Missile (LR-AShM)**.

What Makes a Missile "Hypersonic"?

The term **hypersonic** refers to speeds of **Mach 5 or above** (5 times the speed of sound; sound travels ~343 m/s at sea level, so Mach 5 = ~6,174 km/h). Traditional ballistic missiles also travel at hypersonic speeds, but what distinguishes *hypersonic weapons* (HGVs and HCMs) is their **maneuverability during flight** — unlike a ballistic trajectory, they can change direction unpredictably, making interception by existing missile defence systems extremely difficult.

LR-AShM Technical Specifications

Parameter	Data
Type	Hypersonic Cruise Missile (Anti-Ship)
Developer	DRDO, Ministry of Defence
Speed	Average Mach 5+ (initial acceleration to ~Mach 10)
Range	~1,500 km (variants: up to 3,500 km planned)
Propulsion	Two-stage solid rocket motor
Flight profile	Quasi-ballistic + atmospheric "skips" + low-altitude terminal phase
Target	Ships of all classes (destroyers, carriers, frigates)
Purpose	Sea-denial in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR)

Why Sea-Denial Matters for India

India's maritime strategy in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is built around two complementary concepts:

Power projection: India's own carrier battle groups, submarines, and overseas naval presence

Sea denial: Preventing adversarial navies (especially China's growing IOR presence) from operating freely near India's coasts and in key chokepoints

The LR-AShM dramatically enhances sea-denial capability by threatening any surface vessel within a 1,500 km radius — effectively covering the entire northern Indian Ocean, the Arabian Sea, and the Bay of Bengal from land-based launch platforms.

Hypersonic Nations Club

The display of LR-AShM places India in the **elite group of nations** with operational or near-operational hypersonic weapons:

Russia: Kinzhal (Mach 10; air-launched), Avangard (HGV), Zircon (anti-ship)

China: DF-ZF (HGV), YJ-21 (carrier-killer hypersonic anti-ship)

USA: LRHW (Dark Eagle), HACM (air-launched)

North Korea: Hwasong-8 (HGV, tested)

India: LR-AShM (sea-denial), HSTDV (hypersonic technology demonstrator tested successfully 2020)

India tested the **HSTDV (Hypersonic Technology Demonstrator Vehicle)** successfully in September 2020 — the enabling technology for LR-AShM.

PADMA AWARDS 2026 — COMPLETE ANALYSIS

Padma Awards are India's highest civilian honours, instituted in **1954**. They are awarded by the **President of India** on the recommendation of the Padma Awards Committee (chaired by the **Cabinet Secretary**).

Constitutional Note: Article 18 of the Constitution abolishes titles of honour. The Supreme Court has clarified that Padma Awards are *not* "titles" within the meaning of Article 18 — they do not become part of the recipient's name and carry no official privilege.

2026 Awards at a Glance

Category	Count	Breakdown
Padma Vibhushan	5	Highest civilian honour; exceptional/distinguished service
Padma Bhushan	13	Distinguished service of a high order
Padma Shri	113	Distinguished service in any field
Total	131	(2 duo cases counted as individual awards)
Posthumous	16	
Women	19	
International	6	

Padma Vibhushan 2026 (5 recipients)

Recipient	Field	State	Note
Dharmendra Singh Deol	Art (Cinema)	Punjab	Posthumous; iconic Bollywood actor
V.S. Achuthanandan	Public Affairs	Kerala	Posthumous; former CM Kerala; CPI(M) leader
Justice K.T. Thomas	Law	Kerala	Former Supreme Court Judge
P. Narayanan	Education	Tamil Nadu	Educationist
N. Rajam	Art (Music)	Uttar Pradesh	Violinist, Banaras gharana

Notable Padma Bhushan 2026 (selected from 13)

Recipient	Field	Note
Shibhu Soren	Public Affairs	JMM (Jharkhand Mukti Morcha) founder; posthumous; "Guruji"
Bhagat Singh Koshyari	Public Affairs	Former Governor, Maharashtra; Former CM, Uttarakhand
Mammootty	Art (Cinema)	Malayalam film legend
Alka Yagnik	Art (Music)	Veteran Bollywood playback singer
Uday Kotak	Trade & Industry	Kotak Mahindra Bank founder

Notable Padma Shri 2026 (selected from 113)

Recipient	Field	Achievement
Rohit Sharma	Sports	Former Indian cricket captain
Harmanpreet Kaur Bhullar	Sports	Indian women's cricket team captain
Praveen Kumar	Sports	Para-high jump; Paris 2024 gold medallist
Savita Punia	Sports	Women's hockey goalkeeper
Baldev Singh	Sports	Indian women's hockey team coach

State Representation

Maharashtra (15) > Tamil Nadu (13) > UP (11) = West Bengal (11) > Kerala (8)

GALLANTRY AWARDS 2026 — ASHOKA CHAKRA FOR INDIA'S ISS ASTRONAUT

Republic Day 2026 also saw India's most prestigious peacetime gallantry award — the **Ashoka Chakra** — go to an astronaut for the first time in India's history.

The Ashoka Chakra

Award	Category	Equivalent
Param Vir Chakra (PVC)	Wartime gallantry	Highest military honour; 21 recipients since 1947
Maha Vir Chakra (MVC)	Wartime gallantry	Second highest
Vir Chakra	Wartime gallantry	Third
Ashoka Chakra	Peacetime gallantry	Highest peacetime military honour
Kirti Chakra	Peacetime gallantry	Second
Shaurya Chakra	Peacetime gallantry	Third

Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla — Ashoka Chakra

Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla (Indian Air Force) received the Ashoka Chakra for being the first Indian to set foot on the **International Space Station (ISS)** as part of **Axiom Mission 4 (Axiom-4)**.

Axiom Mission 4 (Axiom-4):

Launched by **Axiom Space** (US private space company) in partnership with NASA

First mission to carry an Indian astronaut to the ISS

Shukla's mission marks India's participation in crewed ISS operations

Part of India's growing **civil space cooperation with the USA** (iCET framework, Artemis Accords)

Historical context — Indians in space:

Wing Commander Rakesh Sharma (1984) — First Indian in space; Soviet *Soyuz T-11* mission; Indo-Soviet collaboration; famous exchange with Indira Gandhi (“Saare Jahan Se Achha”)

Kalpana Chawla (1997, 2003) — Indian-origin American astronaut; died in Columbia Space Shuttle disaster, February 1, 2003

Sunita Williams — Indian-origin American astronaut; multiple ISS missions

Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla (2026) — First Indian to reach ISS

Other notable awards:

Kirti Chakra: Group Captain **Prashanth Balakrishnan Nair** — one of the four Gaganyaan astronauts

Shaurya Chakra: Lieutenant Commander **Dilna K.** and Lieutenant Commander **Roopa A.** — **first women naval officers** to receive the Shaurya Chakra

Total gallantry awards 2026: 70 Armed Forces personnel (6 posthumous) + 301 defence decorations + 982 police/fire/home guard personnel.

VANDE MATARAM — UPSC BACKGROUND NOTE

Since the Republic Day theme revolved around *Vande Mataram*:

Composition history:

Written by **Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay** (also spelled Chattopadhyaya/Chatterjee)

Composed: **1876** at Kantalpara (now in Bangladesh)

Published: **1882** in the novel *Anandmath* (a fictional novel set during the Sannyasi Rebellion, 1760s)

First sung at INC session: **1896** (Calcutta, by Rabindranath Tagore/others)

Status and controversy:

National Song (not National Anthem; the distinction is important)

The first two stanzas are the officially recognised National Song; later stanzas contain references to Hindu goddesses which caused controversy

Tagore's view: Even Tagore had reservations about the later stanzas; supported the first two

Muslim League objection: Object to some stanzas on theological grounds; led to resolution adopting only first two stanzas

Constitutional provisions: Fundamental Duty under Article 51A to respect and preserve national symbols including national song

UPSC RELEVANCE

Republic Day 2026 date (January 26); Kartavya Path; EU chief guests (António Costa + Ursula von der Leyen); theme “150 Years of Vande Mataram”; EU European Council vs European Commission distinction; Kaja Kallas (EU HR/VP); LR-AShM (Mach 5+, ~1,500 km range, DRDO, sea-denial); Ashoka Chakra (highest peacetime gallantry) — Shubhanshu Shukla, Axiom-4, first Indian on ISS; Rakesh Sharma 1984 (first Indian in space, Soyuz T-11); Padma Awards 2026 (131, 5 Padma Vibhushan, 16 posthumous); Padma Awards instituted 1954; Vande Mataram composed 1876, published Anandmath 1882; National Song ≠ National Anthem; Article 51A(a).

*Vande Mataram controversy — communal harmony, composite nationalism; India’s cultural symbols. **GS-2:** India-EU strategic partnership; EU structure; India’s strategic partnerships (Quad, EU, BRICS); gallantry award system; Padma Awards and civilian recognition. **GS-3:** Hypersonic missile technology; sea-denial strategy in Indian Ocean; DRDO and defence indigenisation; India’s human spaceflight programme; NASA-ISRO cooperation; Axiom Space and private space companies.*

★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGEPEDIA

77TH REPUBLIC DAY 2026:

Date: **January 26, 2026** | Venue: **Kartavya Path** (renamed from Rajpath, September 2022)

Theme: “**150 Years of Vande Mataram**”

Chief Guests: **António Costa** (European Council President) + **Ursula von der Leyen** (European Commission President)

Constitution came into force: **January 26, 1950** | Adopted: November 26, 1949

Parade Commander: Lt Gen **Bhavnish Kumar**

Music: **M.M. Keeravani** (Oscar for *Naatu Naatu*, RRR, 2022)

New unit: **Bhairav Battalion** (debut)

Beating Retreat: **January 29**, Vijay Chowk

LR-ASHM:

Full form: **Long Range Anti-Ship Hypersonic Missile**

Developer: **DRDO**, Ministry of Defence

Speed: **Mach 5+** average (Mach 10 peak); Range: **~1,500 km**

Propulsion: Two-stage solid rocket motor

Predecessor tech: **HSTDV** — Hypersonic Technology Demonstrator Vehicle (DRDO; tested successfully **2020**)

Hypersonic = **Mach 5+** (≥ 5 times speed of sound)

PADMA AWARDS:

Instituted: **1954** | Given by: **President of India**

Padma Awards Committee: Chaired by **Cabinet Secretary**

2026: **131** total (5 PV + 13 PB + 113 PS); Women: **19**; International: **6**; Posthumous: **16**

Padma Vibhushan recipients: Dharmendra Singh Deol, V.S. Achuthanandan, Justice K.T. Thomas, P. Narayanan, N. Rajam

Constitutional status: Not “titles” under **Article 18** (SC clarification)

GALLANTRY AWARDS:

Highest wartime: **Param Vir Chakra** | Highest peacetime: **Ashoka Chakra**

Ashoka Chakra 2026: **Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla** (IAF) — Axiom Mission 4, first Indian on ISS

Second Indian in space (first: **Rakesh Sharma**, 1984, Soyuz T-11)

Kirti Chakra: Group Captain **Prashanth Balakrishnan Nair** (Gaganyaan astronaut)

First women naval Shaurya Chakra: Lt Cdr **Dilna K.** + Lt Cdr **Roopa A.**

VANDE MATARAM:

Author: **Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay**

Composed: **1876** | Published in *Anandmath*: **1882**

First sung at INC: **1896** (Calcutta Congress session)

Status: **National Song** (not National Anthem — Jana Gana Mana is the anthem)

FD: Article **51A(a)** — respect for national symbols including national song

OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

EU structure: European Council (heads of govt, António Costa president) ≠ European Commission (executive, von der Leyen president) ≠ Council of the European Union (sectoral ministers) ≠ European Council ≠ Council of Europe (separate body, not EU)

Kartavya Path: 3 km stretch from Rashtrapati Bhavan to India Gate; renamed September 8, 2022

Bharat Parv: Annual event at Red Fort, January 26–31; cultural exhibitions + food festival

Axiom Space: Houston-based private space company; Axiom-1 (2022), Axiom-2 (2023), Axiom-3 (2024), Axiom-4 (2025/2026)

Gaganyaan astronauts (4): Prashanth Balakrishnan Nair, Ajit Krishnan, Angad Pratap, Shubhanshu Shukla

Shaurya Chakra: Named after Hindu goddess Durga; established 1952; upgraded/renamed from “Ashoka Chakra Class III” in 1967

JMM (Jharkhand Mukti Morcha): Founded **1972** by Shibhu Soren and others

Sources: PIB, DRDO, President of India, The Hindu, Indian Express

CURATED & WRITTEN BY

Bharat Choudhary

UPSC Educator & Content Creator

 linkedin.com/in/epicbharat

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