



# ISSUE BRIEF

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## The Indian Republic: Through The Republic Day Parade

The 68<sup>th</sup> Republic Day was celebrated with usual fervour, festivities, and a heightened sense of patriotism. The 90-minute parade at the magnificent Rajpath was sharp, crisp, and almost perfect in its execution. India declared itself a Sovereign, Socialist, Secular, Democratic Republic with the adoption of the Constitution on 26 January 1950, giving its citizens the power to choose their own government and paved the way for democracy. The Republic Day Parade is now

### Key Points

- The Republic Day Parade, now has acquired the stature of national festival celebrated with fervour and great sense of patriotism.
- This issue brief uses the Republic Day Parade as the narrative for articulating the idea that is India in 2017 meshed with historical perspective.
- The strategic congruence between the UAE and India was long overdue and commercial and security issues will further cement the relationship. It also indicates growing outreach of India in its international relations.
- A strong and robust security status is a prerequisite for an investable India and therefore, maintaining a strong security infrastructure is an inescapable necessity. Indigenous defence production can be the backbone of government's flagship programme, Make in India.
- India is a shining example of harmonizing cultural diversity.
- While the nation strives for all inclusive growth, owing to the large demography, the development in India cannot be sequential but simultaneous.
- India has tremendous potential waiting to be unlocked through competent leadership across the spectrum of governance and administration.

The Centre for Land Warfare Studies (CLAWS), New Delhi, is an autonomous think tank dealing with national security and conceptual aspects of land warfare, including conventional and sub-conventional conflict and terrorism. CLAWS conducts research that is futuristic and outlook and policy-oriented in approach.

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a national festival celebrated across the nation in proportionate grandeur in the state capitals, district headquarters, towns and villages.

The Republic Day celebrations itself is an excellent representation of nation's present state in its myriad hues. One has to attend at least one grand parade or follow it on television to tick one's mind on the idea that is India, as seen through the kaleidoscope of the Republic Day Parade. The enthusiasm is palpable as people of all ages, young and old, gender, people from different parts of the nation, and people with special abilities walk miles just to be part of this magnificent display of India's Comprehensive National Power.

The chief guests for the parade invited in the recent times reflects India's growing diplomatic charm. The Chief Guest this year was the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi Prince Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan. In a befitting gesture, the Parade was led by a tri-service contingent of the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The Prince himself looked amazed at the diverse nature of participation, i.e. an old norm for India. He was seen explaining possibly the difficulty in balancing while riding the camel as the camel mounted Border Security Force (BSF) Band marched past the dais. One could discern the enthusiasm as he could identify the desert warrior used as much in the UAE. That is a core value India is blessed with. There is a fraction of every part of the world in India. Super high altitude, mountains, hills, plains, backwaters, vast oceanic vistas, deserts, name a terrain, it is here. Perhaps we, ourselves, fail to appreciate the bountiful geographical diversity. The growing fondness of India and UAE for each other is natural and it is a case of better late than

never. At US\$ 71 billion, India gets back maximum reimbursement from its nationals settled abroad. With Indians making the largest percentage of the expatriates, close to US\$ 15 billion comes from the UAE alone, and this figure is not inclusive of export earnings, foreign direct investment, and foreign institutional investments. With more than 16 million diaspora, India is number one human resource exporter in the world. The Indians abroad are a skilled population making a qualitative difference in their host nations. The government's initiative to reach out to them through their adopted nations as well as directly is already paying rich dividends.

The Parade traditionally opens with the Armed Forces marching in, followed by the contingents of the Central Armed Police Force (CAPF). The Contingents, even in their representative format, are just a small percentage of a very large security apparatus India maintains today. While the nation takes pride, the fact is that a nation that is not out bound in its military affairs and maintains its Armed Forces and CAPFs primarily for defence and internal security, points towards the security challenges India is seized presently with. It is to the credit of the security agencies that it is keeping its nationals and the real estate safe in an era fraught with terrorist threats, ideologue friction, religious intolerance, and land grabs attempts at the borders. Absence of war does not necessarily mean peace, especially in times of asymmetric warfare. It is a well-known fact that a strong and robust security status is an inescapable necessity for an investable India. A guaranteed security environment would draw more and more multinationals to be part of the Indian growth story

and a guaranteed security is a perception built over a sustained incident free period of time. Expenditure on security thus, is a necessary financial commitment.

Most of the spectators while priding themselves as the Army contingents passed by were possibly not even aware that Major Amit Sagar and four soldiers lost their lives in an avalanche in Sonamarg in Jammu and Kashmir, the previous day. 26 January itself turned deadly for the Army as it lost 14 more soldiers to avalanche in Gurez in Jammu and Kashmir. The enemy is not the only enemy for the Armed Forces, sometimes it's a plane crash, it's a blast in a submarine or vagaries of weather which prove more dangerous than the adversary. The local authorities were seen reiterating about the advance information of the likelihood of an avalanche that they had disseminated to everyone—and that's the point. The Army knew it, yet its personnel put nation's security ahead of their own. Soldiering is an honourable profession since time immemorial only for one reason and that is 'It begins where the job ends.' A soldier gets his pay and perks for the job, but soldiering is driven by motivation which among other things also depends a lot on the respect, trust, and affection the nation bestows on him.

The 68<sup>th</sup> Republic Day Parade would have fascinated followers of Make in India. Dhanush, the indigenous medium gun for the artillery was displayed for the first time. An important element of warfare, artillery has been looking for an overhaul for quite some time. Dhanush is likely to be the answer to their quest for up gradation. Three Tejas in Arrow head formation strafed down

the Rajpath displaying India's will to adapt to niche technology in manufacturing fighter aircraft. This augurs well for the domestic defence market. Defence production is a tedious, complex and looped process as those involved are continuously grappling with maintaining the inventory that is reaching obsolescence, keeping abreast of the current technology, and trying to acquire niche technology for future, all of this while trying to stay ahead of the technological curve. The capital budget for defence in 2015-16 was Rs 78,586 crore. Close to 70% of this amount was spent on imported weapons and equipments. One can easily interpret the kind of impetus in the economy and skilled job creation, this kind of money can generate if these requirements were to be met indigenously. It is time Indian companies and Public Sector Units (PSUs) become the leader for defence supply. The security architecture is changing like never before and values, ethos and concept of defence production has to change, else there is a danger of these supporting ancillaries becoming a liability. The final act of the military component was the fly past and *l'attraction principale* was the Vertical Charlie, an aerobatics manouvre in which an aircraft pulls up vertically and carries out rolls before recovering to normal altitude after a low pass. It's a manouvre requiring absolute command over the machine, confidence, and precision. As if to suggest the nation, the Su-30 MKI was flown by the Commanding Officer, leader of the squadron himself. There is enough potential in the nation, it boils down to the Leader.

Tableaus showcasing vast cultural diversity followed in the wake of the marching contingents.

The states represented were across the length and breadth of the country—Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur from the east to Maharashtra and Goa from the west, Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab from the north to Karnataka and Tamil Nadu from the south. The diverse nature of Indian humanity continues to baffle the world. No nation can match the wide spectrum of culture, ethnicity, language, religion, and human stock. How does India find the right balance between central parliamentary democracy and a strong regional governance? What is the common strand running through the idea that is India? While caste and religion by and large have an equitable spread across the nation, the ethnicity and linguistics is peculiar to different regions. Mark Twain noted that with all its historical wealth, civilization, education and a very advanced agricultural system, India was ruled for several centuries rather than being the rulers, as it was not a case of ‘one nation-one language’. Clearly Twain and scholars of his ilk drew a parallel with Europe where the nations are in existence on the principle of ‘one nation-one language’. If they were to come out of their graves, India the nation will shock them back to their resting place. So what has worked for India? First and foremost, the idea of India has existed since the times of Vedas which talked of Bharatvarsha from the mountains (Himalayas) to the ocean (Kanyakumari). Second, India evolved a cultural imagination of a land unified through pilgrimage and myth despite political and regional separation over time.<sup>1</sup> The temples of Kedarnath and Badrinath in Uttarakhand, and Shankaracharya temple in Jammu and Kashmir were established by Adi Shankaracharya who belonged to

Kerala in south India. The concept of power centre or Shakti Peeth runs through the entire Indian landmass (there are more than 50). So we have Kamakhya temple in the far east, Vaishno Devi shrine in the north and many more, geographically spread far and wide across different cultures and yet worshipping the same deity. Muslims going to Haj were called as *hinad* by the Arabs. Third, it was great dynasties like the Guptas, the Mauryas, and later the Mughals who brought bulk of the nation under one roof without disturbing the regional architecture. Fourth, Columbus sailed in search of India and not any state or kingdom boxed in some geographical boundaries. So there existed an idea of a nation India across the continents much before the British established their rule and supposedly brought India under a common administration and governance. Finally, the freedom struggle combined the regional identity and the common nationalistic cause. The political outfits fighting for freedom organized themselves linguistically and did not follow political state boundaries set by the British. Post-independence, after initial reluctance, the policymakers kept redrawing the state boundaries based on linguistics and ethnicity while at the same time strengthened the central political framework through constitution and administration. According to political scientists, territorially concentrated communities if disaffected are more likely to give in to secessionist tendencies; a weakness if bereft of deft political handling can be exploited by our adversaries.<sup>2</sup> So it’s not a coincidence that all secessionist movements in India have arisen along the borders with aid and abetment from some of the unfriendly neighbours.

India, therefore, continues to draw paradox as it develops as a nation as well as an equally strong federal structure, a unique oxymoronic co-existence. Nothing else can exemplify this strange phenomenon than the fact that Amitabh Bachchan, the legendary actor, though belongs to Uttar Pradesh, is the brand ambassador of Gujarat, George Fernandes from Mumbai was the Member of Parliament from Muzzafarpur in Bihar. The people of Tamil Nadu down south accept MS Dhoni as their own as the captain of erstwhile the Indian Premier League (IPL) franchise Chennai Super Kings (CSK) who has roots in Uttarakhand but born and brought up in Jharkhand. But the same people brought the nation to a standstill on the issue of Jallikattu as they look at it as a threat to their cultural and regional identity.

The cultural programme by the children and march past by the National Cadet Corps (NCC) cadets is a reflection of India's success story in education. The literacy rate, which is key to India's socio-economic progress, grew from 18.33 per cent in 1951 to 74.04 per cent in the latest census in 2011. More significantly, the rise in female literacy rate now is higher than the male literacy rate and government's scheme of 'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao' is likely to further bolster the basic right to education. However, the government has to invest proportionate effort in job creation as more literates mean more job aspirations.

During one of the seminars in the national capital, a delegate from Europe, on a study on inclusive economy asked about the prudence of spending huge amount of money on space programmes, bullet trains, acquisition of modern defence wares, etc., when the nation still suffered abject poverty. The answer

was through a simple fictional story. The Prime Minister (PM) stressed in his attempt to make India an economic giant and a superpower. He identified two core issues as major hindrances so he prayed and God listened and let him ask any question related to his sense of uneasiness. The PM pointed at the first hindrance: When will some of the neighbours shun their adversarial attitude towards India? Not in your time, came the quick reply. The PM, exasperated asked the next: When will the last man in my nation be lifted above the poverty line? Not in my time, God answered.

A nation where socio-cultural values run deep leading to family system and bearing a child is, among other things a social necessity, Indians will continue to multiply. So the government of the day has to combine welfare with warfare, acquisition of high-end technology with basic human needs. The development in India cannot be sequential but simultaneous as it was evident in the tableaux of the ministries during the Republic Day Parade. The diverse display was a reflection of government's effort to address all sectors—so there were ministries of social justice and empowerment, new and renewable energy, drinking water and sanitation, and ministries of communication and information technology (IT).

India has a long way to go with several fault lines serving as perpetual hindrances. India continues to have serious levels of widespread hunger and is ranked lowly 97 among 118 developing countries in the Global Hunger Index as calculated in 2016. Neighbours like Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, and China are all ranked above India. The corruption,



lack of credible rule of law, access to basic hygiene, and quality control still plague the nation.

On the evening of 26 January one came across one of the messages—*Good Bye Patriotism; See you on 15 August*. Love for the nation is ever present in all the citizens. It's like love for one's family, child, or spouse. You always love them but not necessarily express it every day and yet on few special occasions you express it and make them feel special. The Republic

Day Parade is not just a parade, it's a festival, and it's a celebration. We celebrate Christmas, Diwali, Id, Gurupurab every year. Let's keep celebrating the idea that is India every year through the Republic Day Parade.

### Notes

1. Diana L Eck, *India: A sacred Geography*.
2. Federalism : Promise and Peril by Ashutosh Varshney

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