

Glimpses of the First Republic Day Celebrations

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Unforgettable scenes of enthusiasm and rejoicing marked the beginning of a new era in Indian History when the Republic of India was born with the swearing in of Dr. Rajendra Prasad as the first President.

At the most solemn ceremony, held in the brilliantly lit and high domes of Durbar Hall at Government House, India was declared a Sovereign Democratic Republic exactly at eighteen minutes past ten on the morning of Thursday, January 26, 1950. Six minutes later, Dr. Rajendra Prasad sworn in as the President.

The birth of Indian Republic and the installation of its first President were announced by a salute of 31 guns shortly after 10-30 a.m.

The simple and yet grand ceremony of the Durbar Hall, the excitement of hundreds of thousands of people lining the five-mile route through which the President drove in state and the spectacularly colourful parade at Irwin Stadium, where the President hoisted the Union Flag and took the salute, will remain in the peoples' memory for long.

The swearing-in ceremony at Government House and the accompanying functions were very impressive. The retiring Governor-General, Mr. C. Rajagopalachari, read out the proclamation of the Republic of "India, that is, Bharat".

"Whereas the people of India, having into a Sovereign Democratic Republic, adopted, enacted and gave to themselves on the twenty-sixth day of November, 1949, in their Constituent Assembly the Constitution of India;

"And whereas it has been declared by the said Constitution that India, that is, Bharat, shall be a Union of States comprising within the Union the territories which were hitherto the Governor's provinces, the Indian States and the Chief Commissioners' provinces;

"And whereas this, the twenty sixth day of January 1950, has been fixed for the commencement of the said Constitution;

"Now, therefore, it is hereby proclaimed that on the from this, the twenty sixth day of January, 1950, India, that is Bharat, shall be a Sovereign Democratic Republic, and the Union and its component units, the States, shall exercise all powers and functions of government and administration in accordance with the provisions of the said Constitution."

Then the President took the oath of office and made a brief speech, first in Hindi and then in English. In the course of his speech he said:

"Today for the first time in our long and chequered history we find the whole of this vast land from Kashmir in the north to Cape Comorin in the South, from Kathiawad and Cutch in the west Coconada and Kamrup in the east, brought together under the jurisdiction of one Constitution and one Union which takes over the responsibility for the welfare of more than 320 million men and women that inhabit it. Its administration will now be carried on by its people and for its people. This country has great natural resources, and now has come to it the

great opportunity to make its vast population happy and prosperous and to make it own contribution to the establishment of peace in the world.”

The state drive started exactly at 2-30 p.m. The thirty-five year old coach specially renovated for the occasion bearing the new emblem of Asoka’s capital and drawn by six sturdy Australian horses carried the President and drove out of Government House at a slow trot, escorted by the President’s bodyguard.

All along the route the President was welcomed by shouts of “Jai”. Thousands of people had assembled and had occupied the streets, roofs, tree tops and all available vantage points along the route right from Government House to the Irwin Stadium.

The President responded to the greetings of the people with folded hands. The drive ended exactly at 3-45 p.m. at Irwin Stadium where three thousand Officers and men of the three Armed Services of India and the Police with massed bands had taken positions for the Ceremonial Parade. Here 15,000 people watched one of the most magnificent military parades in India’s recent history.

Standing in an Army jeep and accompanied, Brig. J.S. Dhillon, the President inspected the Parade and went round the main stands, later taking the Salute at the march past.

Consisting of the units of the Navy, Infantry and Cavalry Regiments, Services Contingents, the Air Force, a Boys’ units of the Punjab Regiment and the Police, the Parade combined colour with precision, which the appreciative crowd acknowledge with repeated cheers. Seven massed bands, representing the Navy, the Army, the Air Force and the Police, provided music, the quality of which fitted with the general excellent pattern of the entire ceremony.

Among the most impressive items in the programme was the firing of “feu-de-joie”, combined with the National Anthem, while at a little distance guns boomed a salute of the President. Millions of people participated in the celebrations on this historic occasion all over India and the proclamation of Indian Republic was read out in all the States of the Indian Union.

Indians overseas did not lag behind in expressing their enthusiasm on this memorable occasion; wherever in the world there was a group of Indians, they celebrated the occasion in a befitting manner.

Messages of goodwill were received from the heads of States of almost all the countries of the world.❖
