

# FLYPAST AND STATE TABLEAUX MARK R-DAY CELEBRATION AT RAJPATH

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Patriotic colours: Illumination at Central Vista as part of the Republic Day celebrations. Sushil Kumar Verma

India celebrated its 73rd Republic Day across the country on Wednesday with the annual parade held at Rajpath here showcasing the nation's cultural diversity and military might with a series of tableaux and cultural performances.

For the second consecutive year, the celebrations were held without a chief guest due to the pandemic, which has seen a surge in cases of the Omicron variant.

This year's parade witnessed a half-hour delay to ensure better visibility, while the biggest fly-past comprising 75 aircraft was a scene to witness for the spectators. Only those who are fully vaccinated were allowed in limited numbers due to the Covid-19 restrictions in place. Compared to a turnout of nearly 25,000 spectators witnessed last year, around 6,000 people attended this year's event due to the ongoing pandemic restrictions.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi paid homage to the armed personnel who lost their lives, at the National War Memorial, following which the celebrations kicked-off with the unfurling of the national flag and by a 21-gun salute.

The number of tableaux at this year's event had been reduced to 21 with States including the poll-bound Uttar Pradesh, Goa and Uttarakhand featuring 12 while nine were featured by Ministries and Departments including the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO). Like every year, the tableaux of the Navy and the Air Force were also showcased.

Last year's celebrations witnessed 32 tableaux with 17 featured by Tamil Nadu and West Bengal, that were left out of this year's event, raising strong opposition from State leaders.

After conferring the Param Vir Chakra and Ashok Chakra, two of the highest gallantry awards, to their recipients, the much-awaited march past began with several Army contingents and indigenous-developed battle tanks charging the atmosphere at Rajpath.

This was followed by a flypast performed by Advanced Light Helicopters developed by the Army Aviation Corps.

## **Military might**

Thereafter, several marching contingents showed their prowess with the fabled Rajput Regiment, led by Lieutenant Varun Pratap Singh of 17 Rajput Regiment, carrying a weapon that was used during the Indo-Pakistan war of 1947-48.

Amidst this, what caught the public's eye was the Parachute Regiment, the paratroopers of the Army, dancing to the tunes of 'Kadam Badaye Jao Kadam Milaye Jao'. They were sporting new combat uniform of the Army. In another first at the parade, the country's first woman Rafale fighter jet pilot Shivangi Singh, was part of the Indian Air Force tableau, becoming the second woman fighter jet pilot to achieve the feat.

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