

What is the process of choosing a Republic Day Chief Guest in India?

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In news

Prime Minister Boris Johnson of the United Kingdom will be the Chief Guest at the forthcoming Republic Day parade.

Other leaders of UK who have been Chief Guests at past Republic Day parades

- Prime Minister Johnson is the sixth leader from the UK to be Chief Guest at the Republic Day celebrations. The last British leader to be Chief Guest was Prime Minister John Major in 1993.
- Members of the British royal family have been Chief Guests at past Republic Day parades – Prince Philip in 1959 and Queen Elizabeth II in 1961.
- Britain's Chancellor of the Exchequer Rop Butler (1956, along with Japan's former Chief Justice Kotaro Tanaka), and then Chief of Defence Staff Lord Louis Mountbatten (1964) have also been Chief Guests in the past.

Significance of Chief Guest at the Republic Day parade

- The visit of the Chief Guest at the Republic Day parade is similar to a State visit by any foreign high dignitary, given the ceremony involved, it is the highest honour that India accords to a guest in protocol terms
- The Chief Guest is given the ceremonial guard of honour at Rashtrapati Bhavan, he attends the reception in the evening hosted by the President of India, he lays a wreath at Rajghat, there is a banquet in his honour, a

lunch hosted by the Prime Minister, and calls by the Vice-President and the External Affairs Minister.

- The centrepiece of the visit is that the Chief Guest accompanies the President of India, flanked by the horse-mounted President's Bodyguards, to the saluting base on Rajpath from where the President reviews the Republic Day parade.

How does India choose the Chief Guest for Republic Day?

- The Indian Government extends its invitation to a Head of State or Government after careful consideration. This process commences almost six months ahead of Republic Day
- Factors considered while choosing the Chief guest
 - the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) considers a number of issues, the most important of which is the nature of India's relationship with the country concerned.
 - Other factors include political, economic, and commercial relations, the neighbourhood, military cooperation, prominence in regional groupings, or past association in the Non Aligned Movement, in which newly independent countries united in a common struggle against colonialism, apartheid, and the domination of the developed countries.
- All these considerations often point in different directions and choosing a Chief Guest, therefore, often poses a challenge.
- The MEA, after deliberations, seeks the Prime Minister's approval, after which the clearance of Rashtrapati Bhavan is sought.
- Thereafter, India's ambassadors in the concerned countries try to ascertain discreetly the potential Chief Guests' programme and availability for Republic Day
- Once this laborious process has been completed, the

territorial divisions in the MEA work towards meaningful talks and agreements, while the Chief of Protocol works on the details of the programme and logistics.

- The Protocol Chief explains to his counterpart from the visitor's side the detailed programme which, for the Republic Day ceremonies, has to be followed minute-by-minute with military precision.
- All aspects of the visit are gone through, such as security, logistics, medical requirements, if necessary, with the active cooperation of the concerned Departments of the Government of India and the governments of the states which the Chief Guest may visit before coming to New Delhi, or after Republic Day.

Important Republic Day Chief Guests so far

The list includes an impressive list of world leaders, and reflects both India's foreign policy priorities and the way the world has perceived it over the decades.

- 1950: President Sukarno, Indonesia
- 1961: Queen Elizabeth II, United Kingdom
- 1995: President Nelson Mandela, South Africa
- 2006: King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz al-Saud, Saudi Arabia
- 2007: President Vladimir Putin, Russia
- 2014: Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, Japan
- 2015: President Barack Obama, United States
- 2016: President François Hollande, France
- 2017: Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, United Arab Emirates
- 2018: Ten Chief Guests, Heads of ASEAN States:
- 2019: President Cyril Ramaphosa, South Africa
- 2020: President Jair Bolsonaro, Brazil
- 2021: Prime Minister Boris Johnson, United Kingdom