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NATION CELEBRATED ITS 70TH REPUBLIC DAY WITH GRAND MILITARY PARADE

New Delhi: The nation celebrated its 70th Republic Day today with a grand military parade and exhibition of its history, cultural diversity and strategic weaponry at Rajpath in New Delhi.

Thousands of spectators, including foreign dignitaries and the country's top political and military brass, attended the celebrations.

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa's presence as Chief Guest was significant in view of the parade highlighting Mahatma Gandhi's contribution to India's freedom struggle. Gandhiji had joined the struggle after a 21-year stay in South Africa.

The ceremony began with Prime Minister NarendraModi leading the nation in paying homage to the fallen soldiers by laying a wreath at the Amar JawanJyoti at India Gate.
President Ram NathKovind

unfurled the tri-colour to a 21 gun salute.

The President conferred the

Ashoka Chakra India's highest peacetime gallantry award to Lance NaikNazir Ahmad Wani, a militant-turned-soldier who laid down his life fighting a group of terrorists in Shopian in Kashmir in November. Wani's wife Mahajabeen and mother Raja Bano received the

Amajor highlight of the parade was participation of four Indian National Army veterans -- Parmanand, Lalti Ram, Hira Singh and Bhagmal, all aged over 90 years -- for the first time.

Main Battle Tank of the Indian Army, T-90 Bhishma, Infantry Combat Vehicle Ballway Machine Pikate, K-9 Vajra-T, Ultra Light Howitzer and Akash weapon system were other highlights of the parade.

'Nari Shakti' was on full display with an all-woman Assam Rifles contingent creating history by participating for the first time in the parade, which was led by Major Khushboo Kanwar. Contingents of the Navy, Army

Service Corps and a unit of Corps of Signals (transportable satellite terminal) were also led by women officers. Atotal of 22 tableaux, 16 from states and union territories and six from central government ministries and departments, were part of the cultural parade.

The tableau of Maharashtra portrayed 'Quit India movement' while the tableau of Andaman and Nicobar showcased Gandhiji's role among the inmates of the cellular jail in Andaman. Jallianwala Bagh was the theme of Punjab tableau, which will evoke memories of the watershed moment in the independence struggle. Tableau of Gujarat depicted Mahatma Gandhi's historical 'Dandi March', which shook the foundation of the British empire.Twenty-six children - six girls and 20 boys awardees of PradhanMantriRashtriyaBalPu ruskar for their exceptional achievement also graced the occasion

The grand finale was a spec-

tacular flypast by the Air Force. The flypast commenced with the 'Rudra' formation comprising three helicopters in 'Vic' formation, followed by the 'Hercules' formation. Three Sukhoi 30 MKI of the Air Force executed the Trishul manoeu-

The ceremony culminated with the national anthem and release of balloons.

The parade was watched by Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu, former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and the country's top political and military brass.

Reports of Republic Day celebrations have also been received from different states and Indian missions abroad. President Kovind, Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu and Prime Minister Modi have greeted the people on the occasion.

In his address to the nation last evening, MrKovind said, Republic Day is an occasion to reaffirm commitment to liberty, fraternity and equality across our society and among all our citizens and above all celebrate India and the spirit of being Indian.

In a series of tweets, the Vice President urged citizens to renew their solemn pledge to build a strong, confident, peaceful and economically prosperous nation. MrModi also extended his best wishes to the people of the country.

State Chief minister Ashok Gehlot on Saturday said the state government will work for development with an open mind.

"We will accept healthy criticism made in public interest with open heart. The state employees are an integral part of government and play vital role in the development of the country and the state. The state government will take care of the employees' welfare," said Gehlot, while addressing the employees at the state secretariat in Jaipur.

Referring to the Republic Day, he said, "The day is symbol of our commitment towards constitutional values. No state can be run with hatred and distrust, but with love, brotherhood and harmony. Every citizen should work for the country with the feeling of unity."

Gehlot said, "When the country got freedom, even a needle used to come from outside. There was no electricity, com-

puter or internet. We were behind in science, but today the way country has developed, it is due to the contribution of our great leaders." The CM said 216 candidates who had passed the clerk grade-ii recruitment examination in 2011 could be regularised soon.

Besides, dependents of 88 government employees seeking appointments on com-

pensatory grounds will be given relaxation in age and typing

Addressing the gathering after hoisting the tricolor at BadiChaupar in Jaipur, the CM appealed to the citizens to strengthen brotherhood and harmony. "The day reminds us of the contribution of known and unknown martyrs, freedom fighters and constitution makers," he said.

