BACKGROUNDERS
Press Information Bureau
Government of India

UNION PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

A Century of Meritocracy and Inclusion

30 September 2026

On 1 October 2026, the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) completes one hundred years. Its institutional journey began on 1 October 1926, when India's first Public Service Commission was constituted as an advisory body whose Chairman and Members were appointed by the Secretary of State in London. Over the century that followed, the Commission evolved in structure, status and responsibilities, becoming what it is today: an independent constitutional body.

The Road to 1926

The principle that entry into public service should rest on merit rather than patronage took formal shape in **1855**, when the Indian Civil Service (ICS) examination was instituted in London, replacing the East India Company's system of nomination with open competition. For most Indians, however, the door remained nearly impossible to open. The examination was held only in London, in English, and tested candidates on subjects such as Greek and Latin, not because these were needed to govern a district in Bengal or Punjab, but because they favoured those educated in the British system.

In **1862**, **Satyendranath Tagore**, elder brother of Rabindranath Tagore, sailed from Calcutta to England to sit an examination his own country would not let him take at home. He cleared it in 1863 and joined the service in 1864, becoming the first Indian in what the British called the "heaven-born service". He served for over thirty years in the Bombay Presidency. Six years after his success, Surendranath Banerjee, Behari Lal Gupta and Romesh Chunder Dutt followed. The maximum age for the examination was, however, progressively reduced from 23 to 19, leaving Indian candidates little time to prepare. By 1919, only **78 of the 1,255** ICS officers were Indian.

Sustained nationalist demands brought gradual change. The **Government of India Act, 1919**, enacted after the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms, provided for a Public Service Commission. In **1922**, the ICS examination was held in India for the first time, at Allahabad, while continuing to be held in London. In **1924**, the **Lee Commission,**chaired by Arthur Hamilton Lee, recommended the immediate establishment of a statutory Public Service Commission. It also proposed that, of every ten new entrants, four would be British, four would be Indian and two would be Indians promoted from the provincial services. On paper, this was a path to parity; in practice, it guaranteed 40 per cent of every intake to the British by birth rather than by competition. Eventually, in 1928, the ICS examination centre in India moved to Delhi.

The Commission was established under the Public Service Commission (Functions) Rules, 1926, framed under Sections 96B and 96C of the 1919 Act. Sir Ross Barker, a member of the Home Civil Service of the United Kingdom, was its first Chairman and was assisted by four Members. The Commission was housed at **Metcalfe House, Delhi**. Its limited powers drew sustained criticism from leaders of the freedom

movement. Yet a permanent recruiting body now existed in India, based and staffed in India, which is why the Commission dates its history from 1926.

The Constitutional Mandate

On **22 August 1949**, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Chairman of the Drafting Committee, moved the draft articles on the Union and State Public Service Commissions in the Constituent Assembly. These provisions became **Articles 315–323 of Part XIV** of the Constitution. In his valedictory address on 26 November 1949, Dr. Rajendra Prasad emphasised that the independence of the Public Service Commissions was essential to ensure impartiality in public appointments.

Article	What it provides
315	Public Service Commissions for the Union and for the States, with provision for a Joint Commission for two or more States
316	Chairman and Members appointed by the President
317	Removal or suspension of a Member only by order of the President, after an inquiry by the Supreme Court
318	Power to make regulations on the conditions of service of Members and staff
319	Restrictions on holding office after ceasing to be a Member; the Chairman is ineligible for further employment under the Government of India or a State
320	Functions: conducting examinations for appointment to the services of the Union and advising on methods of recruitment, promotions and disciplinary matters
321	Power of Parliament or a State Legislature to extend the Commission's functions
322	Expenses of the Commission charged on the Consolidated Fund of India
323	Annual report to the President; cases in which the Commission's advice was not accepted, together with the reasons, laid before Parliament

What the Commission does

- **Recruitment by examination:** The Commission conducts the Civil Services, Indian Forest Service, Engineering Services, Combined Medical Services, National Defence Academy & Naval Academy, Combined Defence Services and Central Armed Police Forces (Assistant Commandants) examinations, among others.
- **Recruitment by selection:** The Commission conducts interviews and recruitment tests for specialist posts requisitioned by Ministries and Departments.
- **Advice to Government:** The Commission advises on Recruitment Rules, promotions through Departmental Promotion Committees, induction into the All India Services and disciplinary cases. In 2023–24, it processed the records of 24,581 officers for promotion, and 532 officers were inducted into the All India Services.
- **Police leadership:** Since 2012–13, pursuant to the Supreme Court's order of 22 September 2006 in Prakash Singh vs Union of India, the Commission has empanelled senior IPS officers for appointment to the post of Director General of Police/Head of Police Force in the States.

Landmark Events: 1926–2026

Foundations: 1926–1949

Year	Milestone
1935	The Government of India Act, 1935, transfers the power of appointment to the Governor-General, provides for a Federal PSC and Provincial PSCs, and makes consultation with the Commission mandatory on recruitment, appointments, promotions, disciplinary cases and service rules.
1937	Renamed the Federal Public Service Commission.
1938	Combined Competitive Examinations begin for several services, marking the start of unified, multi-service recruitment.
1940	Indians (625) outnumber Europeans (575) in the ICS for the first time.
1947	Shri H.K. Kripalani becomes the first Indian Chairman. First examination after Independence held in December; the ICS gives way to the IAS.
1948	First batch of Indian Foreign Service officers recruited through the combined examination.

Building the Republic's Services: 1950–1979

Year	Milestone
1950	The Federal PSC becomes the Union Public Service Commission on 26 January, with Shri R.N. Banerjee as Chairman.
1950–51	First regular recruitment to the All India Services under the Constitution: 29 candidates recommended for the IAS and 31 for the IPS.
1951	All India Services Act enacted.
1966	Indian Forest Service constituted as the third All India Service; first selection in 1967.
1976	Golden Jubilee. Applications cross one lakh for the first time. The D.S. Kothari Committee proposes a three-stage examination.
1977	First Combined Medical Services Examination.
1978	Commission adopts computers to process applications, answer sheets and records.
1979	Three-stage Civil Services Examination (Preliminary, Main and Interview) introduced. Eighth Schedule languages formalised in the Main Examination.

Reform and Modernisation: 1985–2010

Year	Milestone
1985	Sanctioned strength raised to a Chairman and ten Members.
1988–89	Satish Chandra Committee recommends more centres, a 200-mark essay, negative marking in the Preliminary Examination and more marks for the interview.
1989	Optical Mark Recognition (OMR) technology introduced.
1992	Smt. Rose Millian Bathew Kharbuli becomes the first woman Chairperson.

Year	Milestone
1993	Interview marks raised from 250 to 300.
1994	Medical Science added as an optional subject.
2000	Online Recruitment Application (ORA) system launched, following the SAMPERA common application form (1999–2000); by 2010, applications for several examinations were fully online.
2003	First Central Police Forces (Assistant Commandants) Examination held.
2005	New office building, 'Ayog Sachivalaya', inaugurated.
2009	Foundation Day Lecture series on 'Governance and Public Service' inaugurated by President Smt. Pratibha Devisingh Patil; Indian Corporate Law Service added to the Civil Services Examination.
2010	UPSC hosts the Conference of Chiefs of Public Service Commissions of SAARC countries.

Digital, Transparent and Inclusive: 2011–2026

Year	Milestone
2011	Civil Services Aptitude Test (CSAT) and Single Window System introduced.
2013	Civil Services (Main) Examination restructured: four General Studies papers, including Ethics, Integrity and Aptitude, and one optional subject. First Computer-Based Recruitment Tests conducted. IFoS screening conducted through the CS (Preliminary) Examination.
2015	CSAT made a qualifying paper (33 per cent).
2017	Engineering Services Examination becomes a three-stage examination; seven-day online window for representations on questions.
2018	Query-Based Marks Information System.
2019	Dedicated Control Room for year-round monitoring of examinations.
2021	Women admitted for the first time to the NDA & NA Examination (II), 2021, held on 14 November 2021.
2022	Existing Group A Railway services under the Civil Services Examination unified as the Indian Railway Management Service.

Facts and Figures

The scale of the Commission

The scale and complexity of UPSC's work have increased significantly over the years. Applications for examinations and recruitment by selection grew from **42,727 in 1950–51** to a peak of **45,10,044 in 2022–23**, an increase of more than a hundredfold. In that year, the Commission conducted 15 examinations (33,51,916 applications) and received 233 requisitions for 4,411 posts under recruitment by selection (11,58,128 applications).

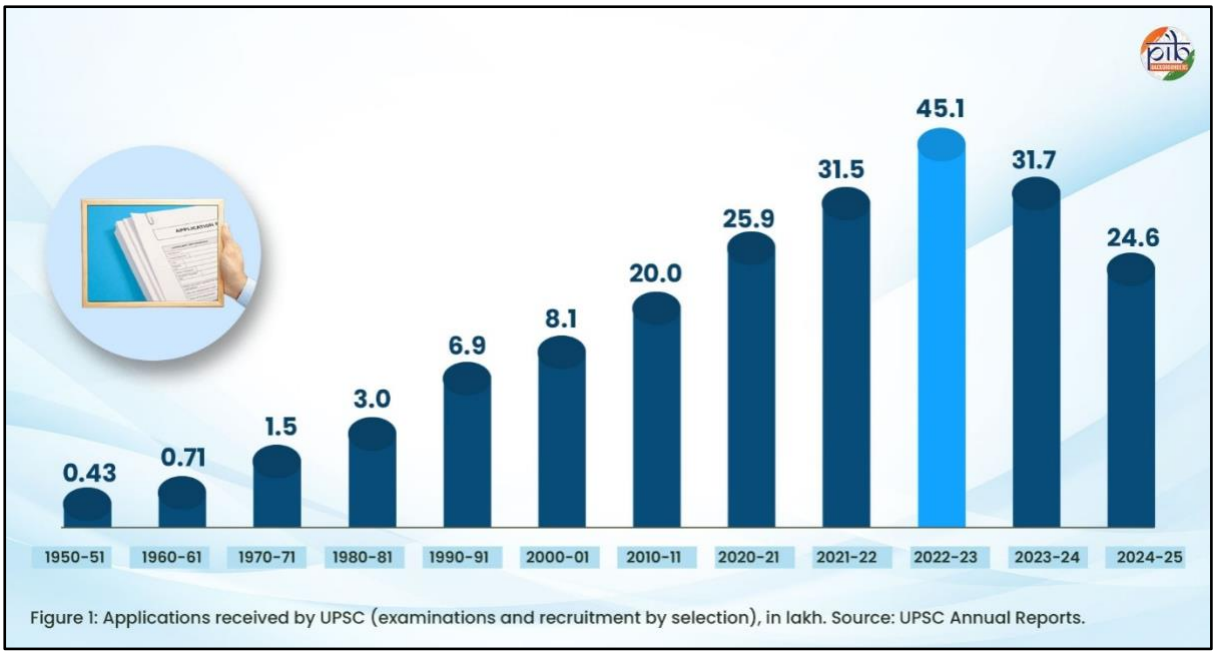


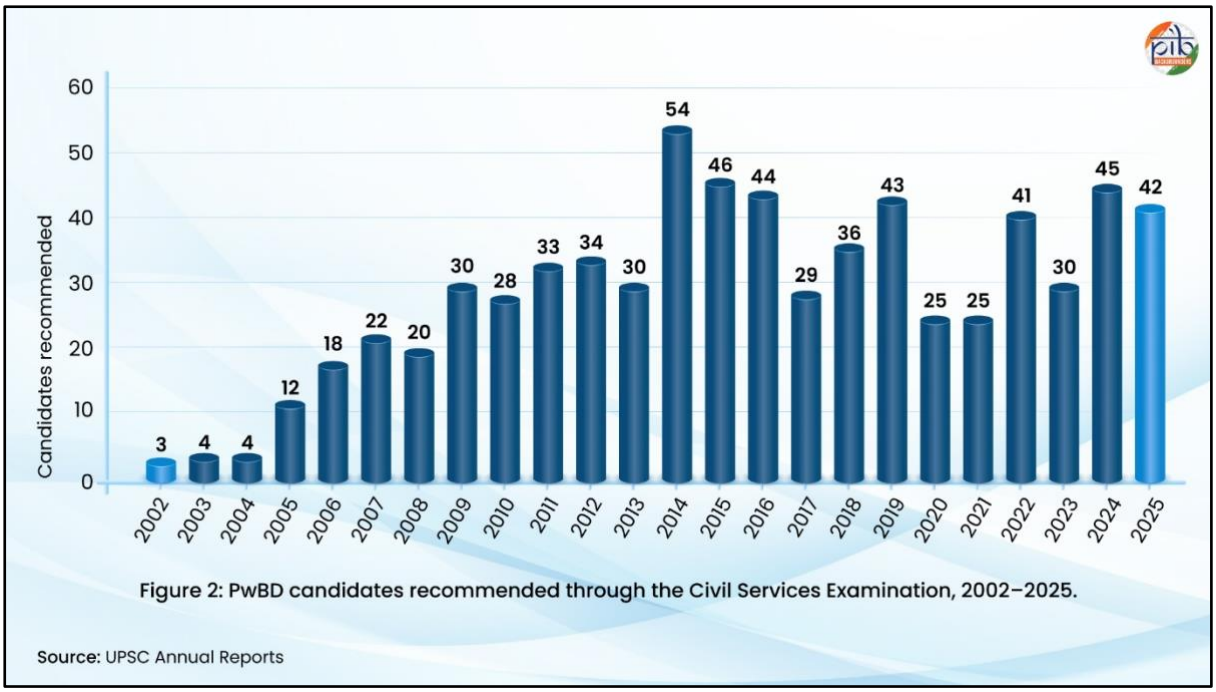
Figure 1: Applications received by UPSC (examinations and recruitment by selection), in lakh. Source: UPSC Annual Reports.

Then and Now

Indicator	Then	Now	Change
Examination centres	8 **(1950)**	86 **(2026)**	Over 10×
Women recommended in the Civil Services Examination	3 of 83 **(1952)**	299 of 958 **(2025)**	About 100×
SC candidates recommended in the Civil Services Examination	9 **(1955)**	158 **(2025)**	About 18×
ST candidates recommended in the Civil Services Examination	2 **(1956–57)**	73 **(2025)**	About 37×
SC applicants, all examinations	1,180**(1956–57)**	4,51,243 **(2023–24)**	About 382×
ST applicants, all examinations	82**(1956–57)**	1,47,106 **(2023–24)**	About 1,794×
PwBD candidates recommended in the Civil Services Examination	3 **(2002)**	42 **(2025)**	14×
Disciplinary cases advised on	53 **(1950–51)**	446 **(2023–24)**	About 8×

Inclusion in numbers

- **Women:** Between 1949 and 1951, only one woman was selected for the Indian Foreign Service and two women for the IAS. Women made up 3.6 per cent of those recommended in 1952 and 31.2 per cent in CSE 2025, when they also secured 11 of the top 25 ranks.
- **Indian languages at the interview:** In 1970–71, the Commission informed the Government that the Personality Test could be conducted only in English. The position changed in 1980–81. Candidates may now answer in an Indian language with an interpreter provided by the Commission; 803 did so in 2010–11 and 307 in 2023–24.



Anecdotes

Short stories from the Commission's century.

Where the 'steel frame' speech was made

Metcalfe House, built in 1835 by Sir Thomas Metcalfe, has a second claim to history. On 21 April 1947, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel addressed the first batch of civil service probationers there and described the civil services as the "steel frame of India". The date is now observed every year as Civil Services Day.

A Maharaja's transit house

Dholpur House on Shahjahan Road was built in 1920 in the Art Deco style by Maharaja Rana Udaybhanu Singh of Dholpur as his residence during visits to Delhi. After Dholpur State merged with the Union on 7 April 1949, the building became government property. Three years later, in 1952, it became the Commission's permanent headquarters.

One among eighty

In 1972, Kiran Bedi became the first woman selected by the Commission for the Indian Police Service, a service that had never had a woman officer. She was the only woman selected against the eighty vacancies that year.

Forms in the newspaper

In 1989, when postal delays made it difficult for application forms to reach remote areas, the Commission printed them directly in newspapers. In 1984, when heavy snowfall cut off Kangra, it extended the application deadline by two weeks for affected aspirants.

A sun on a stamp

On 8 November 1977, the Posts and Telegraphs Department issued a 25-paise stamp for the Commission's Golden Jubilee. It showed the sun (symbolising impartiality and equal opportunity for all) with the national tricolour. For the Platinum Jubilee, inaugurated by Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee on 14 December 2001, the Department of Posts issued a First Day Cover.

DID YOU KNOW?

- The UPSC Museum, opened on 11 November 2016, is free and open to the public on weekdays from 9:30 am to 6:30 pm; a 360-degree virtual tour is available on the Commission's website.
- The age limits have changed over time. As late as 1988, an expert committee recommended keeping the Civil Services Examination age range at 21 to 26 years. The upper age limits of 32 years for the General category, 35 for OBC and 37 for SC and ST candidates, with up to ten additional years for Persons with Disabilities, were fixed in 2014.
- Candidates who had appeared in the Civil Services Examination 2011 were given one more attempt in CSE 2015, regardless of their age or previous attempts.
- The Commission has not always recruited only for the Union. In 1960–61, it agreed to recruit for bodies such as the Delhi Municipal Corporation, the Employees' State Insurance Corporation and the Territorial Councils of the Union Territories.
- Open competition lapsed during the Second World War. The London examination was held for the last time in 1939; recruitment in 1940, 1941 and 1942 was through direct nomination, and recruitment through the British Civil Service Commission stopped altogether after 1943.
- In the draft Constitution, the provisions on Public Service Commissions were numbered Articles 284 and 285 when Dr. B.R. Ambedkar moved them in the Constituent Assembly.

Case Studies: How the Machinery Works

Every morning in Mumbai, around 5,000 dabbawalas collect nearly two lakh home-cooked lunches and deliver each to the right desk by lunchtime, using nothing more than a colour code chalked on the lid. The Commission solves a comparable problem every year, with far higher stakes: the right question paper must reach the right candidate at the right minute, and every answer must then be judged on merit alone. The following case studies explain how.

Case Study 1: The right paper to the right candidate

A candidate makes only one choice: the city. Within that city, the system allots the venue and the room, so that by the day of the examination, every candidate has a unique address (city, venue, room, candidate) known in advance only to the system. Candidates in the same room may be writing different papers; in the Civil Services (Main) Examination alone, candidates choose from 48 optional subjects. Each sealed packet must therefore carry exactly the papers needed at that venue, sorted room by room.

Case Study 2: Setting a paper no one has seen

Question papers are built from question banks prepared by academic experts who work anonymously under a strict code of confidentiality. No single expert sets a whole paper, and no expert knows which questions will be used, or when. In constructing a paper, the Commission ensures that it covers the entire syllabus, that its difficulty is balanced, and that no question has been asked in any previous UPSC examination.

The whole apparatus rests on the principle of 'need to know': no single person, not even the Chairman, sees the full picture.

Case Study 3: Securing the examination hall

In collaboration with the National e-Governance Division, the Commission piloted **AI-enabled facial authentication** (matching a candidate's live image with the application photograph) at selected centres in Gurugram during the NDA & NA (II) and CDS (II) Examinations on 14 September 2025. It was implemented at scale during the Civil Services (Preliminary) Examination on 24 May 2026. All of the approximately 5.50 lakh candidates underwent facial authentication using invigilators' mobile phones, with the process taking about 6–8 seconds per candidate.

Ahead of the CS (Preliminary) Examination 2026, a scan of fifteen years of candidate data led to the identification and rejection of **569 applicants** who had furnished false information to claim extra attempts.

Case Study 4: Recruiting at the speed of need

The Commission has repeatedly scaled up when the nation required it, without lowering its standards. In July 1948, a Special Recruitment Board recruited experienced personnel aged 27 to 45 to the IAS and IPS on the basis of records and interviews. In 1956–57, a special drive screened over 22,000 candidates. In 1958, a Special Recruitment Board selected 197 scientists and technologists, including applicants from overseas, for a national Pool whose strength rose to 500 by 1962. During the 1962 emergency, an Emergency Commission filled 1,353 defence-related posts in two months.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, with train services disrupted, the Commission reimbursed interview candidates for their airfares as a one-time measure, requested the States to allow candidates with e-summon letters to move through restricted zones, helped with lodging and transport, and handed each candidate a sealed kit containing a mask, a face shield, sanitiser and gloves.

Case Study 5: Inclusion by design

Access comes first. The Commission introduced scribes for visually impaired candidates in 1994. Today, Persons with Benchmark Disabilities are entitled to a scribe and extra time. They are also allotted the centre of their choice, may bring an escort and receive assistance from a facilitator at interviews. Women candidates receive fee exemptions. Age relaxations have been extended to candidates whose preparation was disrupted by events beyond their control. These relaxations have covered freedom fighters of the Goa liberation (1961–62), Indians displaced by the Bangladesh Liberation War and the Uganda-Zanzibar crisis (1971–72), and Indians affected by the Gulf War (1991).

Fairness follows: the evaluation system, from written papers to the interview board, is blind to identity. The Commission did not write the policy of reservation, but it built the national platform that implementsit, including the Economically Weaker Sections category from CSE 2019 and a separate transgender category in its Online Recruitment Application form from 2020.

Case Study 6: Merit beyond the merit list: Pratibha Setu

Candidates who clear every stage of an examination but narrowly miss the final list are not lost to public service. Under the Public Disclosure Scheme, in force since 20 August 2018 and first used for the Combined Medical Services Examination, 2017, the details of candidates willing to participate were made available to employers. The scheme was revamped and renamed **Pratibha Setu** on 9 June 2025. It connects these candidates with verified employers, including Ministries, PSUs, autonomous bodies and private organisations.

Recent Updates

When	Development	Details
May 2025	Universal Registration Number	The revamped portal at upsconline.nic.in replaces One-Time Registration and provides a persistent identity across all examinations; profiles can be completed in advance.
2025	Randomised interview boards	Introduced in the Combined Medical Services Examination, 2025; software determines the calling sequence.
2025	Email alerts for institutions	Educational and professional institutions can subscribe to alerts on recruitment advertisements by writing to ra-upsc@gov.in.
2026	Candidate Helpdesk	30-channel IP-based call centre with two levels of escalation; more than 50,000 calls handled.
2026	New examination centres	Bhubaneswar, Kanpur and Meerut added for CS (P) 2026; Alwar, Hisar and Kinnaur added for NDA & NA (II) 2026, taking the number of centres to 86.
2026	Provisional answer key	Provisional answer key for the Civil Services (Preliminary) Examination published soon after the examination; representations submitted through the online QPRep portal.
2026	Online DPC system	A paperless platform is under development for Departmental Promotion Committee proposals from about 101 Ministries, Departments and organisations.
2026	Technology and security	Officers trained in emerging technologies, including AI, through NIELIT; High-Level Network Committee constituted for IT infrastructure and cybersecurity.

The Commission Today

The Commission has been headed by **Chairman Dr. Ajay Kumar** since 15 May 2025. Its eight Members are Lt. Gen. Raj Shukla (Retd.), Ms. Suman Sharma, Shri Bidyut Behari Swain, Dr. Dinesh Dasa, Shri Sheel Vardhan Singh, Shri Sanjay Verma, Smt. Sujata Chaturvedi and Smt. Anuradha Prasad. Three of the eight Members are women, reflecting how far the institution has travelled in a hundred years.

> *"An institution that has endured for a hundred years does so not because it resists change, but because it knows what must never change."*
>
> **— Dr. Ajay Kumar, Chairman, UPSC**

For a hundred years, the Commission has carried one of the nation's most consequential responsibilities: to recognise merit, uphold fairness and ensure that opportunity reaches beyond privilege, geography, language or circumstance. A century ago, the struggle was for the right of Indians to compete. Today, the task is to ensure that this right genuinely reaches every deserving Indian who wishes to serve the nation.

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