National Education Day, 11 November: Maulana Azad's birth anniversary

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News

11 November, the birth anniversary of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, independent India's first Education Minister, is observed every year as 'National Education Day'. In 2026 it marks his 138th birth anniversary. The day has been observed since 2008, as announced by the then Ministry of Human Resource Development (now the Ministry of Education). Azad was born in Mecca on 11 November 1888 and served as Education Minister in Nehru's cabinet from 1947 until his death in 1958. His tenure saw the creation of the University Grants Commission (UGC) and IIT Kharagpur (1951), and the University Education Commission (1948) and Secondary Education Commission (1952). The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) was founded in 1950 through his efforts. Schools and colleges mark the day with seminars and essay and speech competitions.

Key facts for the exam

Point	Details
Date	11 November – observed since 2008
In honour of	Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (1888–1958) – independent India's first Education Minister (1947–58)
Born	11 November 1888, Mecca

Point	Details
Journals	Al-Hilal (1912, Calcutta, Urdu weekly); Al-Balagh
Congress President	1923 (aged 35); from the 1940 Ramgarh session to 1946
Bodies of his era	UGC, IIT Kharagpur, Sangeet Natak Akademi, ICCR (1950)
Book	'India Wins Freedom' (published 1959)
Award	Bharat Ratna – 1992 (posthumous)

Background

- History: Azad's Urdu weekly 'Al-Hilal', started in Calcutta in 1912, spread nationalist ideas and was banned in 1914; he then started 'Al-Balagh'. He became Congress President in 1923 at 35. Elected again at the 1940 Ramgarh session, he continued until 1946 because leaders were jailed during the Quit India movement; he led the Congress at the 1945 Simla Conference and in the 1946 Cabinet Mission talks. A firm champion of Hindu–Muslim unity, he opposed Partition.
- Education: Azad stressed free and compulsory education for all up to 14, adult education, women's education and scientific and technical education. The University Education Commission under Dr S. Radhakrishnan (1948–49) and the Secondary Education Commission under A. Lakshmanaswami Mudaliar (1952–53) belong to his tenure. The UGC began in 1953 and became statutory under the 1956 Act; the Sangeet Natak Akademi (1953), Sahitya Akademi and Lalit Kala Akademi (1954) were also founded then.
- Constitution: The 86th Amendment (2002) inserted Article 21A, making free and compulsory education for children aged 6–14 a fundamental right, implemented through the Right to Education Act, 2009. The 42nd Amendment (1976) moved education from the State List to the Concurrent List. The current National Education Policy was released in 2020.

Tamil Nadu link: Under the Tamil Nadu Educational Development Day (Declaration and Celebration) Act, 2006, 15 July – the birthday of former Chief Minister K. Kamaraj – is celebrated as Educational Development Day. A. Lakshmanaswami Mudaliar, who chaired the Secondary Education Commission in Azad's time, was a Madras physician-educationist; S. Radhakrishnan, chair of the University Education Commission, was born at Tiruttani.

Frequently asked questions

What is this news about?

11 November, the birth anniversary of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, independent India's first Education Minister, is observed every year as 'National Education Day'. In 2026 it marks his 138th birth anniversary.

What are the key facts to remember for the exam?

Date: 11 November – observed since 2008; In honour of: Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (1888–1958) – independent India's first Education Minister (1947–58); Born: 11 November 1888, Mecca; Journals: Al-Hilal (1912, Calcutta, Urdu weekly); Al-Balagh.

What is the background to this news?

History: Azad's Urdu weekly 'Al-Hilal', started in Calcutta in 1912, spread nationalist ideas and was banned in 1914; he then started 'Al-Balagh'.

Practice questions (with answers)

1. Which Urdu weekly did Maulana Azad start in Calcutta in 1912, only for it to be banned in 1914?

A) Young India

B) Kesari

C) Al-Hilal

D) Comrade

Answer: C – Explanation: Al-Hilal; after the ban came 'Al-Balagh'. Young India – Gandhi; Kesari – Tilak; Comrade – Mohamed Ali Jauhar (1911).

2. Who chaired the Secondary Education Commission (1952–53), set up when Azad was Education Minister?

A) S. Radhakrishnan

B) A.L. Mudaliar

C) D.S. Kothari

D) Tara Chand

Answer: B – Explanation: A. Lakshmanaswami Mudaliar of Madras. Radhakrishnan led the University Education Commission (1948–49); Kothari the Education Commission (1964–66).

3. At which 1940 Congress session did Azad become party president for a second time?

A) Ramgarh

B) Haripura

C) Tripuri

D) Lahore

Answer: A – Explanation: Ramgarh (now Jharkhand); he stayed on till 1946. Haripura (1938) and Tripuri (1939) – Subhas Bose; Lahore (1929) – Nehru.

4. Which body was founded in 1950 through Azad's efforts to build India's cultural ties with other nations?

A) ICCR

B) Sahitya Akademi

C) NCERT

D) Lalit Kala Akademi

Answer: A – Explanation: The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), under the MEA. Sahitya and Lalit Kala Akademis – 1954; NCERT – 1961.

5. Under a 2006 State law, Tamil Nadu's 'Educational Development Day' on 15 July marks whose birthday?

A) C. Rajagopalachari

B) K. Kamaraj

C) C.N. Annadurai

D) E.V. Ramasamy

Answer: B – Explanation: Kamaraj (born 1903, Virudhunagar) expanded the midday meal scheme and opened schools in villages. National Education Day is 11 November.

Sources: Ministry of Education (PIB release); ICCR; Britannica; INC; The Sentinel; India Code. © Shanmugam IAS Academy.