National Press Day, 16 Nov: 60 years since the Press Council began

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News

National Press Day is observed every year on 16 November to mark the day the Press Council of India (PCI) began functioning in 1966. The Day is regarded as a symbol of a free and responsible press. Set up under a 1965 law on the recommendation of the First Press Commission (chaired by Justice G.S. Rajadhyaksha; report 1954), the Council ceased to exist when that Act was repealed during the Emergency (Press Council (Repeal) Ordinance, December 1975; effective 1 January 1976), and was re-established in 1979 under the Press Council Act, 1978. Retired Supreme Court judge Ranjana Prakash Desai took charge as Chairperson for a second term on 24 April 2026, after the post had been vacant since December 2025, news reports say; she is the Council's first woman chair. The 2025 theme was 'Safeguarding Press Credibility Amidst Rising Misinformation' (PCI website). No theme for 2026 had been officially announced on the PCI website as of 15 November. The Press and Registration of Periodicals Act, 2023 (in force from 1 March 2024) has replaced the colonial PRB Act of 1867.

Key facts for the exam

Point	Details
Date	16 November – PCI began work (1966)
Recommended by	First Press Commission (Justice G.S. Rajadhyaksha; report 1954)
Law	Press Council Act, 1978 (1965 Act repealed by a Dec 1975 ordinance)

Point	Details
Nature	Statutory, quasi-judicial autonomous body
Composition	Chairperson + 28 members; chair usually a retired SC judge
Chair chosen by	Rajya Sabha Chairman, Lok Sabha Speaker and one Council member
Present chair	Justice (retd) Ranjana Prakash Desai – 2nd term from 24 Apr 2026
2025 theme	Safeguarding Press Credibility Amidst Rising Misinformation
2026 theme	Not officially announced (as of 15 Nov)
Registration	PRP Act, 2023 – Press Registrar General of India (PRGI, formerly RNI)

Background

- Polity: Press freedom is not mentioned separately; the Supreme Court has read it into the freedom of speech and expression under Article 19(1)(a). In 1950, in Romesh Thappar v. State of Madras, the Court struck down the Madras Government's ban on the journal 'Cross Roads'; in response the First Amendment (1951) added grounds such as 'public order' to Article 19(2).
- PCI's powers: After inquiring into complaints it can warn, admonish or censure a newspaper, news agency, editor or journalist (Section 14), but cannot impose penalties. It can also act against authorities to protect press freedom. Electronic media such as television lie outside its remit. Distinguish it from 3 May, UNESCO's World Press Freedom Day.
- History: India's first newspaper was James Augustus Hicky's 'Hicky's Bengal Gazette' (29 Jan 1780, Calcutta). Lord Lytton's Vernacular Press Act (1878) curbed Indian-language papers; his successor Lord Ripon repealed it. The PRB Act of 1867 remained in force for over 150 years.

Tamil Nadu link: The first newspaper of the Madras Presidency was the 'Madras Courier', started by Richard Johnston on 12 October 1785. 'The Hindu' (1878) and G. Subramania Iyer's 'Swadesamitran' (1882) began in Madras; poet Subramania Bharati worked for 'Swadesamitran' and 'India'. The first major constitutional case on press freedom, Romesh Thappar v. State of Madras (1950), arose from a Madras State ban order.

Frequently asked questions

What is this news about?

National Press Day is observed every year on 16 November to mark the day the Press Council of India (PCI) began functioning in 1966. The Day is regarded as a symbol of a free and responsible press.

What are the key facts to remember for the exam?

Date: 16 November – PCI began work (1966); Recommended by: First Press Commission (Justice G.S. Rajadhyaksha; report 1954); Law: Press Council Act, 1978 (1965 Act repealed by a Dec 1975 ordinance); Nature: Statutory, quasi-judicial autonomous body.

What is the background to this news?

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Practice questions (with answers)

1. Which body, chaired by Justice G.S. Rajadhyaksha, recommended setting up the Press Council of India?

A) Second Press Commission

B) First Press Commission

C) Sarkaria Commission

D) Law Commission

Answer: B – Explanation: The First Press Commission (set up 1952; report 1954). Following it, the PCI began work on 16 Nov 1966.

2. Which 1950 case struck down the Madras State ban on the journal 'Cross Roads', upholding Article 19(1)(a)?

A) Romesh Thappar v. Madras

B) Brij Bhushan v. Delhi

C) A.K. Gopalan v. Madras

D) Sakal Papers v. UoI

Answer: A – Explanation: Romesh Thappar v. State of Madras – freedom of expression includes freedom of circulation; it led to the First Amendment of 1951.

3. Which was India's first newspaper, published from Calcutta in 1780?

A) Hicky's Bengal Gazette

B) Samachar Darpan

C) Bombay Samachar

D) Bengal Hurkaru

Answer: A – Explanation: James Augustus Hicky – 29 Jan 1780; also called the 'Calcutta General Advertiser'. Bombay Samachar (Gujarati) began in 1822.

4. Which was the first newspaper of the Madras Presidency, started by Richard Johnston in 1785?

A) The Madras Mail

B) Madras Courier

C) Madras Gazette

D) The Hindu

Answer: B – Explanation: Madras Courier – 12 Oct 1785. The Madras Gazette began in 1795, The Madras Mail in 1868 and The Hindu in 1878.

5. Which Viceroy repealed the Vernacular Press Act, 1878, that curbed Indian-language newspapers?

A) Lord Lytton

B) Lord Dufferin

C) Lord Curzon

D) Lord Ripon

Answer: D – Explanation: Lord Ripon (Viceroy 1880–84) repealed it; his 1882 resolution made him the 'father of local self-government'. Lytton had enacted it.

Sources: Press Council of India – National Press Day page (presscouncil.nic.in); Gazette of India S.O. 2088(E), 24 Apr 2026 (Chairperson); PIB backgrounder (16 Nov 2025); India Code – Press Council Act, 1978; Britannica (Vernacular Press Act). © Shanmugam IAS Academy.