

# JANUARY 2026 ROUND-UP: The Constitutional Quick-View

**Theme:** *The Month of the Republic & The Judiciary's New Rhythm*

January 2026 was defined by the assertion of India's constitutional identity during the **77th Republic Day** and significant procedural shifts in the Supreme Court under the **Surya Kant Court**. For the Mains aspirant, the key takeaways from this month revolve around **Federalism** (Finance Commission), **Electoral Reforms** (JPC on ONOE), and **Judicial Administration**.

## 1. The 77th Republic Day: A Diplomatic & Constitutional Statement

- **Event:** India celebrated its 77th Republic Day with **Ursula von der Leyen** (President, European Commission) and **António Costa** (President, European Council) as Chief Guests.
- **Mains Relevance:** The theme "**150 Years of Vande Mataram**" underscored the cultural roots of Indian nationalism. From a Polity perspective, the presence of EU leadership signals a shift towards *Shared Democratic Values* as a strategic pillar, aligning with the Preamble's commitment to "Fraternity" and "Sovereignty" in a multipolar world.

## 2. The Judiciary: The 'Surya Kant Era' Reforms

- **Event:** Chief Justice of India **Surya Kant** (who assumed office late 2025) has streamlined the Supreme Court's listing process in January.
- **Mains Relevance:** The CJ's refusal to entertain "**Oral Mentioning**" for same-day listings (except in cases of liberty/hanging) is a major administrative reform to check the "**Master of Roster**" arbitrariness criticism. Furthermore, the constitution of new **Nine-Judge Benches** this month signals a determination to clear the constitutional logjam (pendency of Article 145(3) cases), a crucial point for *Judicial Efficiency* answers.

## 3. Fiscal Federalism: The 16th Finance Commission (Final Lap)

- **Event:** The Union Cabinet finalized its "**Action Taken Report**" (**ATR**) on the **16th Finance Commission's** recommendations (Chaired by Dr. Arvind Panagariya) in late January, ahead of the February 1st tablature.
- **Mains Relevance (Article 280):** Key debates this month focused on the Commission's recommendation to classify **Heatwaves and Lightning** as "National Disasters." If accepted, this alters the **SDRF/NDRF** (Disaster Management Act, 2005) funding pattern, a vital federal adjustment given the "Climate Change" challenge to the State List (Entry 17, Water/Agri).

## 4. Electoral Reform: JPC on 'One Nation, One Election'

- **Event:** The **Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC)** examining the **Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill, 2024** held crucial stakeholder consultations in January.
- **Mains Relevance:** The debate has shifted from "desirability" to "feasibility." The core constitutional friction point remains the **truncation of State Assembly tenures** (violation of Article 172) and whether ratification by 50% of States (Article 368) is sufficient to alter the *Basic Structure* of federal democracy.

## 5. Statutory Overhaul: The 'VBSA' Proposal (Replacing UGC)

- **Event:** In January, the Ministry of Education released the draft framework for the **Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan (VBSA)**. This proposed body is set to replace the UGC, AICTE, and NCTE as a single, unified higher education regulator.
- **Mains Relevance:** This is a direct question on "**Statutory & Regulatory Bodies.**" The key debate is *Centralization vs. Autonomy*. Critics argue the VBSA concentrates too much power in the Centre's hand regarding university grants, potentially bypassing State-run universities' specific needs (Federalism angle).

#### 6. Minority Administration: The 'UMEED' Act Standoff

- **Event:** Several State Assemblies (Kerala, Tamil Nadu) passed resolutions in January against the implementation of the newly notified **UMEED Act** (Unified Waqf Management, Empowerment, Efficiency and Development Act), which replaces the old Waqf Act.
- **Mains Relevance:** This touches upon **Article 25/26 (Freedom of Religion)** and **Concurrent List friction**. The Centre argues it brings transparency and gender justice (women in Waqf boards), while States argue it interferes with the *religious management rights* of minorities and violates the federal division of powers regarding "Charities and Religious Endowments" (Entry 28, Concurrent List).