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Rashtrapati Bhavan Unveils Bust of C. Rajagopalachari, Replacing Lutyens' Statue

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President Droupadi Murmu unveiled the bust of C. Rajagopalachari at Rashtrapati Bhavan, replacing the bust of Edwin Lutyens, the British architect who designed Rashtrapati Bhavan.

Key Details on the Replacement

The bust of C. Rajagopalachari has been installed at the Grand Open Staircase near Ashok Mandap, replacing the bust of Sir Edwin Lutyens that stood there for decades.

President Murmu stated that the change is part of steps to shed vestiges of the colonial mindset and to honour Indian culture, heritage and freedom-fighters.

The unveiling was attended by dignitaries including Vice-President C. P. Radhakrishnan, J. P. Nadda, S. Jaishankar, Dharmendra Pradhan and Gajendra Singh Shekhawat.

About Chakravarti Rajagopalachari

Born: December 1878, Rajagopalachari was an Indian freedom fighter, jurist and statesman.

He was a close associate of Mahatma Gandhi and participated in major movements including the Non-Cooperation Movement and Civil Disobedience Movement.

Rajagopalachari became the first and only Indian Governor-General of independent India (1948–50) before the post was abolished when India became a republic.

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He also served as Chief Minister of Madras State and was awarded the Bharat Ratna in 1954 for his contributions to public life.

About Edwin Lutyens and the Colonial Context

Sir Edwin Lutyens was a renowned British architect who, along with Sir Herbert Baker, designed major parts of New Delhi, including Rashtrapati Bhavan, India Gate, North Block and South Block. His work symbolised British imperial architecture in India.

The replacement of his bust is seen as part of an effort to shift focus from colonial symbols to Indian heritage in national institutions.

Significance of the Move

Decolonisation of Public Spaces

The replacement has been framed as “mental decolonisation” — a symbolic effort to remove colonial remnants and foreground Indian figures in national monuments.

The placement of Rajagopalachari’s bust opposite the statue of Mahatma Gandhi reflects an emphasis on Indian leadership and values in places that historically commemorated colonial legacies.

Rajaji Utsav and Heritage Celebration

‘Rajaji Utsav’ was organised at Rashtrapati Bhavan to celebrate Rajagopalachari’s life, featuring exhibitions on his work and philosophy, open to the public shortly after the unveiling.

Contemporary Responses

The move has drawn praise from leaders across political spectrums, including Shashi Tharoor, for recognising an important figure from India’s freedom struggle and governance history.

Conversely, there has been some regret expressed by descendents of Lutyens, who viewed his architectural legacy as historically significant though tied to the colonial period.

About Rashtrapati Bhavan

Rashtrapati Bhavan is the official residence of the President of India, constructed as the Viceroy’s House during British rule and completed in 1929. It is a key symbol of India’s democratic republic and national heritage.

Decolonisation in India’s Public Memory

India has recently undertaken various steps to recontextualise colonial symbols, such as:

Removal or replacement of colonial-era statues and portraits in national institutions,

Renaming of public spaces and cultural initiatives highlighting Indian historical figures.

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