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Iran made preparations to mine the Strait of Hormuz, U.S. sources say

Reuters

WASHINGTON

The Iranian military loaded naval mines onto vessels in the Persian Gulf last month, a move that intensified concerns in Washington that Tehran was gearing up to blockade the Strait of Hormuz following Israel's strikes on sites across Iran, according to two U.S. officials.

The previously unreported preparations, which were detected by U.S. intelligence, occurred some time after Israel launched its missile attack against Iran on June 13, said the officials, who requested anonymity. The loading of the mines – which have not been deployed in the strait – suggests that Tehran may have been serious about closing



An aerial view of Iranian shores and the island of Qeshm in Strait of Hormuz, a key route for global oil and gas shipments. REUTERS

one of the world's busiest shipping lanes, a move that would have escalated an already-spiralling conflict and severely hobbled global commerce.

About one-fifth of global oil and gas shipments pass through the Strait of Hormuz and a blockage would likely have spiked world energy prices.

Global benchmark oil prices have instead fallen more than 10% since the U.S. strikes on Iran's nuclear facilities.

On June 22, shortly after the U.S. bombed three of Iran's key nuclear sites in a bid to cripple Tehran's nuclear programme, Iran's Parliament reportedly backed a measure to block

the strait.

Iran has over the years threatened to close the strait but has never followed through on that threat.

The sources did not disclose how the United States determined that the mines had been put on the Iranian vessels.

The two officials said the U.S. government has not ruled out the possibility that loading the mines was a ruse. The Iranians could have prepared the mines to convince Washington that Tehran was serious about closing the strait, but without intending to do so, the officials said.

Iran's military could have also simply been making necessary preparations in the event that Iran's leaders gave the order.



A deliberate strategy to usher in a communal order

In the eve of the 75th anniversary of the Indian Constitution, the Supreme Court of India reaffirmed the foundational character of the Indian Republic by upholding the inclusion of the words “secular” and “socialist” in the Constitution’s Preamble. These words, introduced through the Constitution (42nd Amendment) Act, 1976, by the Indira Gandhi-led government during the Emergency, have been the target of repeated political and legal attacks by right-wing forces. Dismissing a batch of petitions challenging these additions, a Bench of the Supreme Court recently upheld the addition of these words, arguing that the mere absence of these terms in the original Preamble adopted on November 26, 1949, cannot invalidate their inclusion.

This legal reaffirmation was a powerful signal from the judiciary. But the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the ideological backbone of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), chose to launch a fresh offensive on the very idea of India as enshrined in the Constitution. RSS General Secretary Dattatreya Hosabale made a brazen demand: the removal of “secular” and “socialist” from the Preamble, which, according to him, were alien to Dr. B.R. Ambedkar’s constitutional vision.

The Vice-President of India, Jagdeep Dhankhar, went a step further, terming the insertion of these words as “sacrilege to the spirit of Sanatan”. It is no coincidence that these statements are being made from some of the highest offices of the land. This is not an intellectual debate. This is a deliberate political strategy to delegitimise the modern, plural, democratic republic of India and to usher in a communal and hierarchical order.

An agenda, from fringe to mainstream

When the Constitution was being framed, the Constituent Assembly, emphatically and unanimously, supported the idea of a secular state. Not a single member argued for a theocratic state. The idea of India was built on the foundations of unity in diversity – a rejection of colonial divide-and-rule, of communal politics, and of caste and religious supremacy. Today, the RSS-BJP establishment is working relentlessly to dismantle that consensus and impose the idea of



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a Hindu Rashtra. This agenda has moved from fringe rhetoric to the political mainstream. On the day of the consecration of the Ram temple in Ayodhya, Prime Minister Narendra Modi made a provocative statement equating ‘Ram with Rashtra and Dev with Desh’. This kind of fusion of religion and state is exactly what the framers of the Constitution warned against. It is also directly in contradiction to the Supreme Court’s ruling that secularism is a part of the basic structure of the Constitution – something that cannot be amended or erased, even by Parliament.

Leaders and their warnings

The warnings of our national leaders resonate even more forcefully today. In 1931, Mahatma Gandhi, in his resolution on Fundamental Rights, insisted that the state must remain neutral in religious matters. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar too reflected this in the line, “The State shall not recognise any religion as State religion.” What is particularly instructive, and ironic, is that the Hindu Mahasabha, which boycotted the freedom movement and opposed secular nationalism, included a similar provision in its 1944 Hindustan Free State Act.

The Constituent Assembly Debates further highlight the intent of India’s founding generation. On August 27, 1947, Govind Ballabh Pant posed a direct question: “Do you want a real national secular State or a theocratic State?” He warned that if India became a theocracy, it could only be a Hindu state, raising questions about the status and security of those who would be excluded from such a polity. Jaspal Roy Kapoor, on November 21, 1949, noted that Gandhi had made it clear: religion should be a personal matter. On November 22, 1949, Begum Aizaz Rasul called secularism “the most outstanding feature” of the Constitution and expressed hope that it would remain “guarded and unsullied”. On October 14, 1949, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel reassured the nation that the Constitution of free India would not be “disfigured by any provision on a communal basis.” And on November 23, T.J.M. Wilson warned that the clouds threatening India’s secular character were already forming. These warnings were not alarmist but were deeply perceptive, and speak with urgency to our times.

The present RSS-led campaign is also aimed at discrediting and eliminating the socialist orientation of the Constitution. Dr. Ambedkar, in the Constituent Assembly, clearly noted that the Directive Principles of State Policy enshrined in Part IV of the Constitution were rooted in socialist ideals.

The Supreme Court’s recent decision, rightly interpreted the term “socialist” in the Preamble as synonymous with a welfare state. This vision resonates with B.R. Ambedkar’s own emphasis on the social and economic transformation of India – an end to caste exploitation, landlessness, poverty, and discrimination. Socialism means creating conditions for equality and justice – not the importation of any foreign ideology, but the realisation of the promises of the freedom struggle. In this regard, B.R. Ambedkar issued perhaps the most unambiguous warning ever – in *Pakistan or the Partition of India*, he wrote: “If Hindu Raj does become a fact, it will, no doubt, be the greatest calamity for this country... Hindu Raj must be prevented at any cost.”

That cost is now upon us. The RSS’s demand to remove the terms “secular” and “socialist” from the Constitution is part of a long-term project to dismantle the very edifice of the modern Indian Republic and to institutionalise a new order built on religious supremacy, caste hierarchy, market fundamentalism, and political authoritarianism.

The need for resistance

This must be resisted – through public awareness, legal challenge, political mobilisation, and mass democratic struggle. The Constitution is not just a legal document. It is a political, social, and moral covenant forged in the crucible of our freedom struggle. It embodies the dreams of countless martyrs, revolutionaries, and constitutionalists who envisioned an India that belonged to all its people. To defend secularism and socialism today is to defend democracy itself. It is to defend the right of every citizen – regardless of faith, caste, class, or gender – to live with dignity, equality, and freedom. The Republic must be protected, nourished, and, if necessary, defended against those who seek to destroy it from within. Let us rise to that responsibility, with courage, with clarity, and with collective resolve.

The attack by
right-wing forces
on the
Constitution
must be resisted
through public
awareness, legal
challenge,
political
mobilisation,
and democratic
struggle



Settled semantics

Nothing of worth will be gained by removing two words from the Preamble

The call for the removal of the words “secular” and “socialist” from the Preamble to the Constitution of India is no longer a fringe fantasy. With someone as senior and influential as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) General Secretary Dattatreya Hosabale making a public statement in support of the idea, it has now acquired a new urgency and prominence in national politics. The words “secular” and “socialist” were introduced through the 42nd Amendment to the Constitution, during the Emergency under Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1976. And the Janata Party government, which included RSS-affiliated leaders, that replaced Indira Gandhi and reversed a lot of the changes made in the Constitution during the Emergency let these words stay. These concepts were so central to the Constitution of the new Republic that its original authors did not think it was even necessary to use these words in the Preamble. When a conflict over India’s national identity began to emerge during the 1970s, Indira Gandhi thought it would be appropriate and also politically rewarding to make these amendments. The Hindutva camp never really opposed these concepts historically. Gandhian Socialism was a part of the core tenets of the Jan Sangh, the earlier avatar of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Hindutva proponents accused their rivals of following ‘pseudo secularism,’ and by implication, claimed to be genuine secularists.

The words “secular” and “socialist” have attained meanings specific to the Indian context over the years. Secularism is not a rejection of Indian civilisational heritage or any religion, but a commitment to equal treatment of all faiths by the state. Indira Gandhi had been viewed as someone pandering to Hindu sentiments. Socialism is not about hostility to private property or enterprise, but a pragmatic appreciation of the fact that the state must take proactive measures to tackle poverty and expand opportunities for the deprived sections of society. The words ‘secularism’ and ‘socialism’ reflect a broad consensus in Indian politics that has held for decades. There is nothing to be achieved by raking up a meaningless debate on these words. Perhaps the debate itself is the objective: to push a divisive agenda without providing any ideological, legal or practical reasoning for this demand. India’s challenge is not about these two words, but its continuing struggle to tackle discrimination, poverty and underdevelopment, which are often influenced by the caste and religious origins of its citizens. The Sangh Parivar, and the BJP, could serve the country better by focusing on these challenges rather than wasting energy on divisive debates on settled semantics.



Two democracies and the echoes of tyranny

Yesterday, on July 4, the United States observed its Independence Day. A quarter of a millennium ago, the American people declared their resolve to live not under kings but under laws. They fought to build a government accountable to the people, not one that claimed to rule in their name. In their Declaration of Independence, the Founders wrote that “when a long train of abuses and usurpations” reveals a design to reduce the people “under absolute Despotism,” it is not only their right but also their duty to resist. In that tradition, a conservative Federal judge, Judge J. Michael Luttig marks the occasion with a solemn warning: the ideals of 1776 are not self-perpetuating. Judge Luttig’s modern “27 truths” remind Americans that self-government is not guaranteed by parchment or precedent. It must be defended daily, especially against those who seek to crown themselves in defiance of the Constitution. Tyranny, once foreign, now threatens from within.

India’s democratic backsliding

Luttig’s warning is not hyperbole. It is a reflection of global experience, including India’s democratic backsliding 50 years ago. India’s Emergency under Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, on June 25, 1975, suspended civil liberties, censored the press, imprisoned over 1,00,000 citizens, and reduced Parliament and the courts to shadows of themselves. It did not come through violence or revolution. It came through law. Indira Gandhi claimed she was saving democracy. In fact, she was suffocating it.

In his book, *Emergency Chronicles: Indira Gandhi and Democracy’s Turning Point*, historian Gyan Prakash exposed how democratic institutions can die not with a bang, but with a nod. There was no coup. No tanks.

The Army Chief, General T.N. Raina, a fellow Kashmiri, was asked for his support, but he refused to get into the politics of the day – rightly so. Indira Gandhi did not openly defy the Constitution but exploited its weaknesses. After a court found her guilty of electoral fraud and barred her from office, she declared an “internal disturbance” and triggered Article 352 of the Indian Constitution. Overnight, dissent became treason. Rights became privileges. And power became personal.

The real tragedy was not just what Indira Gandhi did. It was how effortlessly she did it. Judges, Ministers, civil servants, even journalists – people entrusted with guarding democracy – chose loyalty over law. The Supreme Court ruled that during the Emergency, even the right to life could be suspended. Only one judge, Justice H.R. Khanna, dissented. He was never appointed Chief Justice, punishment for his integrity.

H.V. Kamath saw it coming. The former civil



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The same dynamics that enabled the Emergency in India now threaten the U.S.; the lesson is that tyranny thrives when institutions become hollow

servant-turned-freedom fighter and member of India’s Constituent Assembly, he had almost pleaded that the Emergency’s provisions being embedded in the Constitution were too dangerous. In 1949, he compared India’s draft provisions to Germany’s Weimar Constitution, which Hitler had exploited to build his dictatorship. H.V. Kamath said, “First, the grand affirmation... and surmounting that edifice is the arch of the great negation.” He begged for checks and balances. He begged for the Constitution to protect future generations, but was ignored.

When Indira Gandhi declared internal Emergency 26 years later, the mechanism H.V. Kamath had feared came to life. Dissenters were detained under the Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA), a preventive detention law. Police abducted students in broad daylight. Sanjay Gandhi, who was unelected and unaccountable, operated a parallel state, pushing brutal sterilisation campaigns and slum demolitions. Entire neighbourhoods in Delhi were razed. Protesters were shot. Families were displaced. Inmates were tortured. All of it was “legal”. None of it was democratic.

When the Emergency ended in 1977, India voted Indira Gandhi out in a landslide. The Janata government passed the 44th Amendment to prevent such abuses from recurring. But the deeper damage to political culture, to institutions, to the idea that constitutionalism alone can protect democracy remains. India moved on, but never fully reckoned with how close it came to authoritarian collapse.

Similar dynamics in the U.S.

Which brings us back to the United States. The parallels are unmistakable. U.S. President Donald Trump has not declared an Emergency. He does not need to. He has a majority in both Houses of Congress and a 6-3 conservative majority in the Supreme Court, which legalises all his actions. He can weaponise the Justice Department to prosecute his opponents, threaten to strip immigrants of their citizenship and residency status, and even threaten to “terminate” parts of the Constitution. He seeks not to hold power, but to own it. As Judge Luttig notes, this is not reform. It is monarchy by another name.

And just like in India, the institutions meant to stop him have mostly failed. Congress hesitated. Republicans enabled. Courts delayed. Media rationalised. Many shrugged, waited, and hoped someone else would act. In this way, guardrails do not just erode under outside pressure. They rot from within.

Americans must confront a hard truth: the same dynamics that enabled the Emergency in India now threaten the American republic. As H.V. Kamath warned, Constitutions do not protect liberty on their own. They must be

guarded by people with the courage to say no. If Congress (Parliament) refuses to assert its role; if courts bend under partisan pressure; if the press becomes passive; if law enforcement serves power instead of the public – then the law ceases to be king. And we begin the slow coronation of another.

There is a historical irony here too deep to ignore. Years after Indira Gandhi imprisoned her opponents and suffocated the Constitution, her grandson, Rahul Gandhi, now brandishes that very Constitution as a talisman against rising authoritarianism in India. At protest rallies, he holds up Ambedkar’s book, invoking the very document Indira Gandhi once bent to her will. Where once the Constitution was used to silence dissent, it is now Rahul Gandhi’s weapon to preserve it.

A call to be vigilant

There is a lesson here that transcends families and nations: every generation must reclaim democracy for itself. The battles our forebears fought – against monarchy, against colonialism, against Emergency – are not relics. They are warnings. They are calls to vigilance. The Constitution is not an heirloom. It is a mandate. It must be re-defended, reinterpreted, and reaffirmed by each generation.

It is easy to celebrate Independence Day with fireworks and fanfare. But the revolution was not a party. It was an act of resistance against arbitrary rule. Thomas Paine wrote, “Let the law be king”. Not presidents. Not parties. Not mobs. But the law. And only when the people demand it. We must resist the normalisation of revenge politics, the erosion of checks and balances, and the authoritarian cult of personality. Democracy is not just a system of rules. It is a culture of restraint. Of limits. Of humility before power. The Emergency in India failed because the people ultimately remembered what had been stolen from them. History never repeats exactly as it happened. But it does echo. The Emergency’s lesson is not that tyranny is foreign. It is that tyranny is familiar, legal and welcomed when institutions go hollow.

Today, both India and America are democracies by form. But their futures depend on substance. On how citizens, courts, journalists, legislators and civil servants act when faced with leaders who believe they are above the law. The difference between a republic and a monarchy is not just procedure. It is accountability. When a king breaks the law, it becomes policy. When a President or Prime Minister does, it becomes a test.

India failed that test in 1975. We cannot afford to fail it again. We must defend the law as if it were our crown. Because if we do not, someone else will wear it. And they will not take it off.



CJI assures 'complete transparency' in collegium system

The Hindu Bureau

MUMBAI

Chief Justice of India B.R. Gavai on Friday said the collegium system for appointment of judges would uphold the principles of merit, transparency, and inclusive representation, and the process would not be compromised by external pressures.

Speaking at a felicitation event hosted by the Bombay Bar Association in his honour, the CJI said, "We will adopt a procedure of complete transparency. Merit will never be compromised. We will have representatives from all sections of society."

He noted that efforts to increase transparency within the collegium had already been under way during the tenure of his predecessor, Justice Sanjiv Khanna. He also addressed recent concerns raised publicly by Justice Dipankar Datta about alleged interference in the collegium's functioning, stating that all names recommended would be duly followed up and considered fairly.

Reflecting on his own elevation to the Supreme Court in 2019, CJI Gavai revealed that not all members of the collegium were initially in support. "One of the collegium judges had



Justice B.R. Gavai

some reservations, thinking my elevation might lead to unrest among senior members of the Mumbai Bar," he said. "But several senior lawyers met the judge in Delhi and clarified the matter."

He expressed gratitude to the Bombay Bar Association, saying, "I will always remain indebted. My elevation to the Supreme Court, and now as Chief Justice of India, would not have been possible without the Bar's support."

The Chief Justice also clarified that the Supreme Court should not be viewed as being centred around one individual. "The Supreme Court is not a CJI-centric court. The Chief Justice is only the first among equals," he said.

"...Let my work speak for itself when I retire six months from now," he added.



Govt. has 'no position' on Dalai Lama succession, insists MEA; China warns against interference

Suhasini Haidar
NEW DELHI

In its first official statement over the Dalai Lama's succession plan announcement, the External Affairs Ministry on Friday said the government "does not take any position" on such religious issues.

The statement appeared to distance the government from the comments made on Thursday by Minority Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju, who had openly backed the Tibetan spiritual leader's right to decide his successor.

On Friday, Mr. Rijiju clarified that he had spoken as a "follower and a devotee", as he is a practising Buddhist himself, even as the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) sent out a strong statement, warning India about "interfe-



Contentious issue: China says appointment must be made by the Beijing government via process dating back to the Qing dynasty. AFP

rence" in China's "domestic affairs".

"We have seen reports relating to the statement made by His Holiness the Dalai Lama about the continuation of the Dalai Lama institution," External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said, while adding: "Government of India does not take

any position or speak on matters concerning beliefs and practices of faith and religion."

He said the government has "always upheld freedom of religion for all in India and will continue to do so", indicating its support for the Tibetan community living in India led by the Dalai Lama to practise

their faith.

The External Affairs Ministry statement followed an announcement by the Dalai Lama, who turns 90 on July 6, asserting that the line of Tibetan Buddhism's most senior pontiff would continue after him.

In his announcement, the Dalai Lama told Buddhist leaders gathered for the birthday celebrations in Dharamshala that his successor, or reincarnation, would be identified by the Gaden Phodrang Trust set up by him, in consultation with other leaders, as the "sole authority".

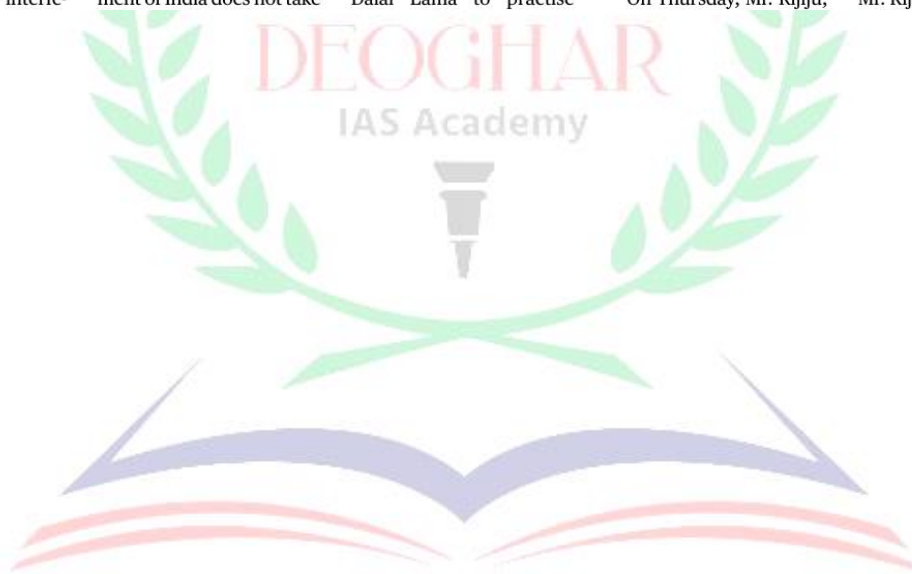
The Chinese government insists any appointment must be approved by the government in Beijing, citing a traditional "golden urn" process dating back to the Qing dynasty.

On Thursday, Mr. Rijiju,

one of the Ministers who will attend the Dalai Lama's birthday celebrations, had said that "nobody else has the right to decide" on the succession issue except the Dalai Lama "and the conventions in place".

In a sharp response to the statement as reported by *Reuters*, the Chinese MFA on Friday said that China hopes India "will stop using Tibet issues to interfere in domestic affairs and avoid affecting the development of ties".

Speaking to journalists on Friday, Mr. Rijiju repeated his support for the Dalai Lama's statement, but added that "those who believe in His Holiness the Dalai Lama, all want that he should decide matters according to his wishes". "I speak as a follower (*anuyayi*), I am a devotee," Mr. Rijiju said.



Modi hails 35 million diaspora as India's pride

Sixth generation Indian-origin citizens of Trinidad and Tobago will receive the OCI card soon, says PM

PM refers to close cultural link between Girmitya community in the Caribbean nation and India

He hails the country for being the first to adopt India's UPI system in the Caribbean

Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

Thirty-five million members of the Indian diaspora spread across the world are India's "pride", said Prime Minister Narendra Modi at an event of the people of Indian origin in Trinidad and Tobago on Friday. Addressing the event, Mr. Modi outlined various cultural, educational and financial measures that India is undertaking to strengthen links between the homeland and the diasporic Indians and announced that sixth generation Indian-origin citizens of Trinidad and Tobago will receive the Overseas Citizens of India (OCI) card soon.

"We deeply value the strength and support of our diaspora. With over 35 million people spread across the world, the In-

dian diaspora is our pride. As I have often said, each one of you is a *Rashtrdoot* – an ambassador of India's values, culture and heritage," said Mr. Modi, highlighting the religious connection of the community with India and the Maha Kumbh that took place in Prayagraj earlier this year.

Mr. Modi said the Government of India was working to strengthen ties with the Girmityas – the former indentured labourers who were taken from India during the colonial period to Indo-Pacific islands such as Mauritius, Fiji, southern Africa and the Caribbeans.

'Mapping the past'

The Prime Minister referred to the close cultural connection between the strong Girmitya community of Trinidad and Tobago and India, especially with Bihar, which is recognised



Warm welcome: Prime Minister Narendra Modi is welcomed by the Indian diaspora at the airport in Port of Spain on Thursday. Trinidad and Tobago Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar is also seen. DPR PMO

– along with eastern Uttar Pradesh – as the homeland of much of the Bhojpuri-speaking members of the

Indian diaspora in the Caribbeans, southern Africa and in the Pacific islands of Fiji and Indian Ocean is-

lands like Mauritius. Mr. Modi announced that the Government of India was "mapping the past" and

reiterated that a number of initiatives were launched during the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas to "honour and connect with the Girmitya community across the world".

"We are actively working on creating a comprehensive database of the Girmitya community. Documenting the villages and cities in India from which their ancestors migrated, identifying the places where they have settled, studying and preserving the legacy of the Girmitya ancestors, and working to organise World Girmitya Conferences regularly," said Mr. Modi, documenting the various works being undertaken to connect India with the diaspora. He congratulated Trinidad and Tobago for being the first country in the Caribbean to adopt India's UPI (Unified Payments Interface) system that would

help in transfer of finance between the two sides.

Sixth generation Indian-origin citizens of Trinidad and Tobago will receive the Overseas Citizens of India (OCI) card, the Prime Minister said at the public event in capital Port of Spain. The announcement is the first such outreach by India to the Caribbean nation which is marking the 180th anniversary of the arrival of the Girmityas – in 2025.

"Today, I am happy to announce that OCI cards will now be given to the sixth generation of the Indian diaspora in Trinidad and Tobago. You are not just connected by blood or surname. You are connected by belonging," said Mr. Modi. "India embraces" the people of Trinidad and Tobago whose ancestors were brought from India during the colonial era, he said.

