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Remaking the nuclear order in West Asia

While both the U.S. and Israel agree that Iran cannot be allowed to have a bomb, Mr. Netanyahu goes one step forward to deny Iran any nuclear capabilities. However, for Iran, nuclear deterrence assumes a greater importance now, even if there is a change of regime

WORLD INSIGHT

Rakesh Sood

There is hardly any political leader who understands the laws of political survival better than Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Realising that he is in a morass with respect to Gaza, as Hamas has not yet been dismantled even though its leaders have been killed, and all hostages have not been brought home resulting in growing domestic pressure, Mr. Netanyahu employed an old tactic – distract attention from an ongoing crisis by creating another one.

Israel's surprise strikes on Iran, launched on June 13, created a new and larger crisis. The military action has been successful, with the U.S. finally coming on board. For the moment, PM Netanyahu is firmly back in the driver's seat. But this has also opened a Pandora's box of what next.

Israel's calculations

Mr. Netanyahu wants to keep Israel as the only nuclear power in the region. He is convinced that the Libyan model, where the nuclear programme was completely dismantled, is the only acceptable option, preferably with a change of regime. In 2015, he opposed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) primarily because it conceded a limited uranium enrichment right to Iran.

Since mid-April, five rounds of talks took place between U.S. Special Envoy Steve Witkoff and Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, with a sixth round due on June 15 in Muscat. After stumbling over the issue of Iran insisting on its right to enrichment as a party to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), some progress was registered on the idea of a regional nuclear fuel consortium to provide fuel for the reactors in the region. Its location remained under discussion, making Mr. Netanyahu nervous.

On June 11, Mr. Netanyahu barely survived a motion in the Knesset tabled by the opposition seeking to dissolve parliament, leading to early elections that are currently due in October 2026. PM Netanyahu has been facing domestic opposition since early 2023 due to his attempts at pushing through controversial judicial reforms that were widely seen as curbing judicial independence. The Hamas attack on October 7 had provided him a reprieve that has lasted nearly two years. Given Mr. Netanyahu's multiple domestic legal challenges, a continuing war is his "get-out-of-jail" card.

During the 20-month war, the leadership of Hamas and Hezbollah has been decapitated, and a change of regime in Damascus last December has doused Iran's "ring of fire." On two occasions in 2024, Israel directly engaged with Iran and, in the process, knocked out its air defences around Tehran and other critical installations.

Having buried the two-state solution, and with Iran at its weakest, Mr. Netanyahu must have felt that this was the ideal time to neutralise Iranian nuclear and missile threats. The Iranians are known for their frustratingly convoluted negotiating style and given U.S. President Donald Trump's impatience, Mr. Netanyahu was able to convince him that a little military pressure would make them more accommodating.

Iran's miscalculations

As recently as March 26, U.S. Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard in her



Cost of war: Workers repair the main entrance of Evin Prison after it was hit by an Israeli airstrike on June 23, on July 1, in Tehran, Iran. GETTY IMAGES

annual intelligence threat assessment to Congress stated, "the Intelligence Community continues to assess that Iran is not building a nuclear weapon and Supreme Leader Khamenei has not authorised the nuclear weapons programme that he suspended in 2003".

While Mr. Netanyahu's suggestion that sustained military pressure may bring about a regime change in Tehran has some support from Iran-hawks in Washington, it is anathema to Mr. Trump's MAGA support base, who are wary of entanglements abroad. The U.S. interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq in 2001 and 2003 respectively, were messy and costly, leaving behind a legacy of instability. Iran is three times larger, and Iranians are a people with a deep sense of nationalism based on their civilisational history. The current theocratic regime may be weak and its replacement may be less religious, but not less nationalist, and it would therefore push ahead with the nuclear deterrent.

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The entry of the U.S.

When the U.S. began to withdraw non-essential staff from its embassies in the region in early June, it was anticipating Israel's likely military action. In the past, U.S. reluctance to get involved had prevented Israel from military strikes but this time, Mr. Netanyahu took a gamble and it paid off. Impressed with the success of Israel's military actions, Mr. Trump ordered supportive strikes on June 22, with B-2 bombers dropping GBU-57 'bunker-busters' on Fordow and Natanz, and Tomahawk cruise missiles on Isfahan.

Following the token retaliation by Iran the following day, Mr. Trump declared an end to the "12-day-war".

Israel thus claimed victory. Mr. Trump declared the underground sites "obliterated," the Gulf states heaved a sigh of relief, and for Iran's Supreme Leader, regime survival was a victory. Iran suffered over 600 casualties, and all its air defences and half its stock of missile launchers, were destroyed. It failed to take down a single Israeli aircraft though it did bring down some drones. Of the 500 missiles that Iran fired, over 30 were able to get through causing 30 casualties.

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Iran's nuclear capability

Iran has had an ambitious civilian nuclear programme going back to the 1950s. It joined the NPT in 1970. Initially, the Islamic regime was uninterested in the nuclear programme, seeing it as a part of Western influence. This changed after the Iran-Iraq war and in the 1990s, it began developing a clandestine enrichment

capability. The 2002 disclosures by a group of Iranian exiles, followed by the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, led the Supreme Leader to shift direction and aim for threshold status rather than develop a full-fledged nuclear weapon. The centrifuges and higher levels of enrichment also provided for bargaining space as Iran could negotiate for sanctions relief with the U.S.

Today, the situation has changed. Iran's proxies (except for the Houthis) have been decimated and its missile and drone capabilities found wanting. The threshold state is no longer a safe place. Therefore, a nuclear deterrent assumes greater importance, even if there is a change of regime.

Questions remain about the extent of damage to the underground centrifuge sites as well as the fate of the 400 kg of the 60% enriched uranium stockpile. While the scale of the attacks makes resumption of Iran-U.S. talks tricky, Iran has raised the stakes by terminating the IAEA inspector's access to its nuclear sites. Mr. Trump would like to conclude a deal with Iran to build on his success with the ceasefire. He would do well to remember the U.S. scholar Thomas Schelling's advice that successful coercion requires both a credible threat as well as credible reassurance, if Iran is to be 'persuaded' during any future talks.

There has always been a difference between the U.S. and Israeli positions. While both agree that Iran cannot be allowed to have a bomb, Mr. Netanyahu goes one step forward to deny Iran any nuclear capabilities. However, since Mr. Trump has obliged him with the June 22 strikes, he may find it difficult to deny Mr. Trump his Iran deal provided the Iranians play the game.

Rakesh Sood is a former diplomat and is Distinguished Fellow at the Council For Strategic and Defence Research.

THE GIST

Mr. Netanyahu wants to keep Israel as the only nuclear power in the region. He is convinced that the Libyan model, where the nuclear programme was completely dismantled, is the only acceptable option, preferably with a change of regime.

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Women MSMEs still struggle for credit despite schemes

Limited access to formal credit and the widening credit gap continue to prevent women entrepreneurs from achieving their financial goals

DATA POINT

B. Renuka Ramakrishna

Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) have become instrumental in shaping India's generating employment, creating revenue, and in global outreach. In 2024, MSMEs contributed nearly 30% to the GDP. The aim is to raise this to 35% in the current year. This vast sector also provides opportunities for many women-led enterprises. The government has implemented several financial schemes specifically designed to promote women's participation.

However, the issues and challenges faced by women-led MSMEs are often inadequately addressed. The problems of limited access to formal credit and the widening credit gap continue to prevent these entrepreneurs from achieving their financial goals. While ensuring adequate credit availability to MSMEs has long been a key policy objective, gaps between banks and beneficiaries often persist at the implementation stage.

Women-owned businesses account for up to 20% of all MSMEs registered in India. This level of female participation remains low despite the handful of schemes aimed at encouraging self-employment and financial independence. What is more striking is that women-led MSMEs contribute only about 10% of the total turnover, while receiving around 11-15% of the total investment in the sector (Chart 1). These numbers highlight the persistent gaps in both financial inclusion and credit accessibility for women in the MSME ecosystem.

According to reports by the Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI), women face significant discrimination in fund disbursement, with a credit gap of around 35% – meaning that over a third of their financial requirements go unmet – compared to a

the 20% credit gap faced by men (Chart 2). The credit gap refers to the difference between the amount of credit requested by the borrower and the amount actually received. These inadequate funds are one of the major challenges for women in the MSME sector, affecting about 26% of them, followed closely by the challenge of high competition.

The Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana (PMMY), launched nearly a decade ago to support individuals seeking self-employment, has also enabled women to open loan accounts and fund their MSMEs. PMMY offers collateral-free loans to MSMEs operating in the non-farm sector. As of 2024, women owned 42,492,281 loan accounts under PMMY out of a total of 66,777,013 accounts, which is approximately 64%. This shows that women form a significant group seeking financial assistance.

However, the sanctioned amount tells a different story. Of the total ₹5,41,012.86 crore allocated for that year's target, only ₹2,25,887.08 crore (about 41%) was directed towards women-led MSMEs. This disparity points to an economic inefficiency in delivering highly liquid, low-cost, and easily accessible loans to the underserved sections of the sector.

These underperforming schemes are pushing women to rely on informal sources of credit, which are often riskier and unreliable. These challenges are not confined to MSMEs alone; they also affect informal micro-enterprises (IMEs) run by women. Informal businesses are typically excluded from formal credit processes due to the lack of legal documentation and collateral. To address this gap, the government launched the Udyam Assist Portal, which helps such IMEs become eligible for priority sector lending by facilitating their formal recognition.

This year, over 1.86 crore IMEs have been registered through the portal. Notably, 70.5% of these are owned by women. This achieve-

ment has significantly boosted employment, with women-led IMEs contributing 70.8% to employment generation within this segment (Chart 3).

However, despite being registered, these businesses continue to face challenges in accessing formal credit. Dr. Ashwin Ram, Professor at RV University, said the main reasons for this are lack of awareness and limited access to formal credit. He said, "A majority of first-generation women entrepreneurs, particularly in smaller towns and rural areas, have low financial literacy and are not well informed about various government schemes and their benefits. There is also little support from traditional commercial banks and local government agencies to educate and assist women entrepreneurs in availing financial subsidies."

Women entrepreneurs are also often perceived as risky borrowers, largely because they lack adequate collateral or property ownership. In India, a significant proportion of women run micro and small businesses predominantly in the informal sector, which further discourages them from seeking finance through formal institutions. According to the International Finance Corporation, it takes a man an average of two visits to a bank to get a loan sanctioned, whereas women typically need to make at least four.

Amid these discriminatory barriers, the Reserve Bank of India has cut the repo rate to 5.50%, the lowest since 2022, and reduced the Cash Reserve Ratio by 100 basis points. This policy is aimed at injecting more liquidity into the economy, leaving commercial banks with greater funds to extend as loans to the public. Both banks and women entrepreneurs are in a favourable position, with increased liquidity at their disposal.

The government's schemes have been launched with a strong intent, but their implementation has often fallen short due to administrative inefficiencies.

Gender gap in MSMEs

The data for the charts were taken from Reserve Bank of India, Press Information Bureau, SIDBI, NITI Aayog, Micro Units Development & Refinance Agency Ltd. (MUDRA)

Chart 1: The share of women-led MSMEs, share of women employed in MSMEs, share of investment attracted by women-led MSMEs and share of turnover of women-led MSMEs

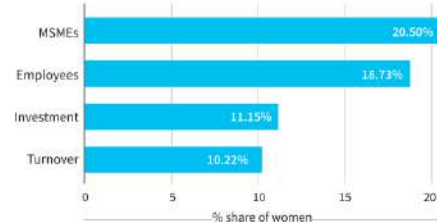
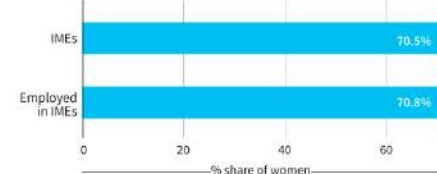


Chart 2: The credit gap across genders. Credit gap refers to the difference between the amount of credit requested by the borrower and the amount actually received



Chart 3: The share of women-led informal micro-enterprises (IMEs) and share of women employed in IMEs



B Renuka Ramakrishna is interning with The Hindu Data Team

The free fall of moral leadership

In an era of global conflicts and democratic decline, the question of political leadership in the democratic world has acquired a heightened significance. Intensified rivalries in several parts of the world represent a failure of leadership. The unconscionable ambivalence of world leaders in standing up for principle over expediency, and their abject surrender to hegemonic power, speaks for itself. The tragedies of Ukraine, Gaza, and the Israel-Iran conflict show the ravages of war caused by the insolence of power, untamed by humanitarian interdicts.

Justice above raw power

Despite the fragile ceasefire brokered by U.S. President Donald Trump from a position of overarching military superiority, the footprints of these hostilities will remain visible symbols of an oppressive exercise of military power that has taken thousands of innocent lives. Those responsible for the catastrophe have clearly forgotten the abiding lesson of history that people carrying a festering wound in their souls find closure only when injustice is avenged. Lasting peace in West Asia will remain hostage to an indelible sense of injustice and moral outrage.

It is, therefore, imperative to foster leadership that values justice above raw power. In the deeply distressing trans border conflicts that have driven the world perilously close to a global war, the moral and intellectual impoverishment of the principal actors has raised concerns about the failure of contemporary democracies to yield inspiring leadership, answerable to the 'injunctions of conscience'. The pretence of a functional rules-based international order helmed by the United Nations Charter stands demolished yet again, reconfirming the impotence of international law in outlawing the use of force in relations between nations. The illegal



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India's economic heft, nuclear capabilities, and regional power status should enable it to espouse international morality without compromising its strategic autonomy or without alienating key allies

invasion of Iraq and parts of Ukraine are no more than footnotes of history.

Lessons to learn

But there are lessons to be learned. The world needs leadership, driven by a search for global consensus and subject to the discipline of international law to address the defining challenges of our times, including the settlement of territorial disputes. This is a particularly important reminder for those who claim to lead the democratic world and propound the necessity of a credible international legal order.

Democratic leadership is about walking alone in defence of principle, where necessary. It is about holding on to the truth against all odds and empowering the weak. It is about uniting people in trying times and advancing human dignity by removing disparities. Inspirational leadership is about an unremitting endeavour to create favourable conditions of social and political existence that can optimise the realisation of human potential in an environment of peace and harmony. And as shown in the tortuous process of securing a fragile truce between Israel and Iran, deceit and two-facedness annul leadership.

Leadership does not emerge out of a vacuum. As Karl Marx reminded us famously, 'Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please... [they do so] under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.' The French statesman Chateaubriand proclaimed that 'the leader of the nation must be the leader of the times', so that his exertions mirror the aspirations of the people and invest politics with a moral purpose larger than himself. The current global conflicts present an opportunity for democracies to look inwards for correction and to reinforce their appeal.

In defence of justice

Indian democracy, which has

survived several vicissitudes and a 'thousand mutinies', has been enriched by the exertions and selflessness of several of its towering leaders. They were led by Mahatma Gandhi, who defined for us the meaning of transformative leadership. The Mahatma's promise of politics, impervious to the trappings of power and rooted instead in the moral imagination of the people yearning for freedom and dignity, enabled him to forge a sustainable non-violent struggle against injustice. He accomplished the 'will of his age', defined it for the people, and personified it.

As a proud inheritor of the Gandhian legacy of morality-driven politics and drawing strength from its civilisational ethos of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbham', India must stand out in defence of justice everywhere. It must flex its moral muscle for shaping a just world order. Its economic heft, nuclear capabilities, and regional power status should enable India to espouse international morality without compromising its strategic autonomy or without alienating key allies.

In these defying times, we must summon our tallest leaders to collectively energise Indian democracy. They must establish the exceptionality of their leadership in the service of national goals and global peace. Our leaders must 'reinforce the tone of modesty', introduce dignity at the centre of political processes, revive the spirit of collegiality, be seen as symbols of hope in times of fracture and fear, and re-purpose their politics beyond the pursuit of raw power.

At this juncture of the nation's history, when domestic and external challenges threaten the social accord and disruptive shifts in the power pendulum are testing the societal equilibrium, we need leadership that is strong and compassionate, resolute but conciliatory, and decisive while striving for democratic consensus on critical issues.

Rising seas, shifting lives and a test of democratic values

The intensifying impacts of climate change are reshaping India's coastline resulting in an environmental phenomenon and also profound social and economic rupture. Across the eastern and western seaboard, communities that are historically dependent on agriculture, fishing, and coastal ecosystems are being displaced by rising seas, saltwater intrusion, and the cumulative effects of unregulated development. This has triggered migration, pushing displaced populations into precarious urban labour markets without legal protection or adequate state support.

In Odisha, once thriving coastal settlements such as Satabhaya have been swallowed by the sea, forcing villagers to relocate to government resettlement colonies that often fail to provide sustainable livelihoods. In Karnataka's Honnavar taluk, traditional fishing communities face dispossession as ports, tourism projects, and mangrove destruction accelerate coastal degradation. Similar patterns are unfolding in Tamil Nadu's Nagapattinam, Gujarat's Kutch region, and the flood-prone lowlands of Kerala.

Projects and environmental degradation

Industrial and infrastructural expansion along coastal zones – from port development under the Sagarmala programme to energy projects and commercial aquaculture – have compounded ecological degradation. Mangrove forests, sand dunes and wetlands that historically buffered coastal communities have been systematically cleared.

Environmental clearances for many projects have overlooked cumulative climate risks, leading to a development model that intensifies ecological and social vulnerabilities. The displaced populations are increasingly getting absorbed into the informal economy as construction workers, brick kiln labourers and domestic workers in urban centres such as Bhubaneswar, Chennai, Hyderabad and Mumbai.

These migration patterns often result in systemic labour exploitation, which include debt bondage (displaced families take wage advances to survive, tying them into exploitative labour conditions); lack of legal protections (informal



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Climate change is affecting India's coastal communities with a deep social and economic impact

workers have little or no access to rights under India's labour laws, such as the Building and Other Construction Workers' (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1996) and gendered exploitation (displaced women entering domestic work face heightened risks of abuse, underpayment, and trafficking).

Legal lacunae on climate displacement

The absence of a coherent legal framework on climate-induced migration exacerbates this crisis. While Article 21 of the Constitution guarantees the right to life and dignity, there is no specific legislation that addresses the rights of those displaced by slow-onset climate disasters. Existing frameworks such as the Disaster Management Act, 2005, the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, and the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) Notifications, including the diluted CRZ 2019, are limited either to disaster response or environmental conservation, without adequately factoring in the socio-economic dimensions of displacement.

The National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) and State Action Plans recognise vulnerability, but lack targeted strategies for the rehabilitation of displaced populations or integration into labour markets.

The CRZ Notification, 2019, intended to streamline clearances and promote sustainable coastal management, has often been critiqued for prioritising tourism and industrial development over the rights of coastal communities. Across States, the dilution of zoning regulations has led to a surge in commercial projects in fragile coastal belts, displacing traditional fishing communities without their informed consent – a principle enshrined in national law and international environmental standards. Even India's landmark Labour Codes are silent on extending specific protections to climate migrants.

Environmental justice jurisprudence from the Supreme Court of India – in *M.C. Mehta vs Union of India* (1987) and *Indian Council for Enviro-Legal Action vs Union of India* (1996) – has recognised the intrinsic link between the environment and fundamental human rights. Yet, the translation of

these principles into robust, community-centric legal frameworks on climate displacement remains lacking.

The story of displacement is also the story of resilience. Coastal communities, particularly fisherfolk unions and indigenous groups, have resisted ecologically destructive projects with remarkable tenacity. The protests against the Adani ports expansion at Ennore Creek, Tamil Nadu, the Pattuvam Mangrove Protection Movement in Kerala, and the Save Satabhaya campaign in Odisha underscore how grass-roots mobilisations have challenged mainstream development narratives.

However, environmental defenders face intimidation, surveillance and criminalisation which are antithetical to India's constitutional commitment to protect the rights to protest and association. New challenges also emerge as climate change is weaponised to justify "managed retreat" without participatory planning or safeguards for the displaced.

Towards a rights-based framework

Recognition of climate migrants within national migration and urban planning policies is essential. There is a need for a rights-based approach that guarantees decent work, housing, education and health care. Labour codes must be revised to explicitly extend protections to climate migrants, especially in sectors such as construction and domestic work where informality is rampant. Similarly, coastal zone management must be revisited to prioritise ecological sustainability and community rights over commercial interests. India's commitment to achieving Sustainable Development Goal Target 8.7 – eliminating forced labour and ensuring decent work for all – is contingent upon addressing the new vulnerabilities created by climate displacement.

If climate change is the defining challenge of our era, responding to climate-induced displacement must be at the core of India's adaptation strategy. Protecting the rights, dignity, and livelihoods of those most impacted is not just an environmental necessity. It is a test of India's democratic and constitutional values.



Batting for prevention

A One Health programme is essential
to prevent zoonotic spillover

With two cases of Nipah virus detected in Kerala – including one fatality owing to the infection – the attention is rightfully, once again, on a preventable infectious disease that could leave havoc in its trail. An adolescent girl from Malappuram succumbed to the virus on July 1, and a 38-year-old woman from Palakkad is battling for life in the hospital. In the big picture, as many as 425 people who are in the contact lists of the two Nipah-infected persons in three districts in Kerala have been identified and are under surveillance. Of these, 228 are from Malappuram district, where Patient Zero was identified this time, 110 in Palakkad and 87 in Kozhikode. In Palakkad, one contact is being treated in isolation, while 12 people are currently undergoing treatment in Malappuram – five of them are in the intensive care unit. One of them tested negative for the infection, and the results for the others are awaited. Over 140 of those on the contact list are said to be health workers. While the health machinery in Kerala is engaged in tracing the original source of the infection, it is also tasked, particularly in the three districts of Malappuram, Palakkad and Kozhikode, to trace contacts, isolate them to prevent further spread, contain infection and treat all those who show symptoms. India has recorded several outbreaks of the virus since 2001, a year when 45 of the 66 people infected died in West Bengal. In 2018, it surged in Kerala, with 17 of the 19 cases with laboratory-confirmed Nipah infection dying without responding to treatment. Kerala continues to report outbreaks regularly since then.

What renders even a single case of significant concern to get the entire health-care machinery in a tizzy? Nipah is a transmissible viral infection with a high mortality rate, ranging between 40% and 75%, which implies that if the infection spreads, then, a number of people are likely to die. Future research might add an effective tool to the armamentarium to effectively treat Nipah infections without mortality, but as of now, the course of action is vested only in prevention and awareness generation. Nipah is transmitted by fruit bats which are the natural reservoirs of the virus. It is suspected that consuming contaminated fruits, bitten or licked by bats, may play a role in spreading the virus. It is also equally important to cast a watchful eye on climate change-related factors, particularly anthropogenic activity that is destroying natural habitats, and initiate a robust One Health programme that will weigh not just Nipah but also other pathogens that are capable of zoonotic spillover, transitioning from animals to humans and causing great harm.



Keep it simple

The ECI's conflicting signals endanger Bihar's voter registration process

The Election Commission of India's (ECI) Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of Electoral Rolls in Bihar, while touted as a smooth process with significant form submissions, is riddled with contradictions and poses a serious threat to voter enfranchisement. Despite claims of progress, with over 11% of the estimated electorate submitting forms, conflicting statements from the ECI highlight deep-seated issues. Initially, the CEO, Bihar, through advertisements, suggested a lenient approach towards electors who did not have the stipulated 11 documents. They were told that they could submit enumeration forms to booth-level officers and provide documents later, or even get verified without mandatory documents, with verification through local investigations by Electoral Registration Officers. However, the CEC clarified that earlier orders mandating document submission by July 25, 2025, stand, with a claims and objections period from August 1 to September 1 for those who fail to comply. This shift in stance and reliance on local-level investigations for verification present inherent problems. Leaving verification to the discretion of local electoral officers increases the possibility of misuse and bias. Such an ad hoc approach risks wrongful inclusions or exclusions, undermining the integrity of the electoral roll.

Instead, the ECI should adopt a more pragmatic and robust approach by accepting more universally available identity documents such as Aadhaar, ration cards, and MGNREGA job cards. The ubiquity of Aadhaar, and its mandatory requirement for numerous government services, makes it an ideal proof of identity. Similarly, ration cards and MGNREGA job cards are widely held, particularly among agrarian populations, as they are central to India's welfare initiatives. Bihar's historical challenges in birth registration, school enrolment, and broader documentation mean that a significant number of genuine electors may lack any of the 11 indicative documents. The onus is on the state and its institutions, including the ECI, to facilitate their participation. The current rigid documentary requirements place an undue burden on voters, especially the marginalised and underprivileged, who already face significant hurdles in engaging with bureaucracy, and risks widespread disenfranchisement. The current Bihar exercise seems to be treating every voter as a potential non-citizen unless proven otherwise. To uphold the principle of universal adult franchise and prevent large-scale exclusion, the ECI must urgently reconsider its SIR even as the Supreme Court is due to hear petitions challenging this exercise. The ECI should immediately broaden the acceptable forms of identification, ensuring that all eligible citizens have the opportunity to exercise their constitutional right to vote.



Fostering a commitment to stop maternal deaths

In childbirth in India, why should 93 women lose their life while one lakh women have a safe delivery? For the time period 2019-21, the Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) estimate for India was 93, in other words, the proportion of maternal deaths per 1,00,000 live births, reported under the Sample Registration System (SRS). "Maternal death is the death of a woman while pregnant or within 42 days of termination of pregnancy, irrespective of the duration and site of the pregnancy, from any cause related to or aggravated by the pregnancy or its management, but not from accidental or incidental causes". But the MMR in India has declined over the years – it was 103 in 2017-19, then 97 in 2018-20 and now 93 in 2019-21.

To understand the maternal mortality situation better, States have been categorised into three: "Empowered Action Group" (EAG) States that comprise Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Assam; "Southern" States which include Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu; and "Other" States that cover the remaining States/Union Territories.

In the group of "Southern" States, Kerala has the lowest MMR (20) and Karnataka the highest (63). The rest of the data is Andhra Pradesh (46) Telangana (45) and Tamil Nadu (49). In the EAG States, Assam has a very high MMR (167); the rest of the data is Jharkhand (51), and Madhya Pradesh (175). Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand are in the 100-151 range. In the category of "Other" States, Maharashtra is 38 and Gujarat 53; the rest of the data is Punjab 98, Haryana 106 and West Bengal 109.

We need to have a differential approach in strategy to reduce maternal deaths in the different clusters of States. In this, addressing three issues is fundamental. There are "three delays" that lead to a mother dying, according to Deborah Maine of Columbia University – I had incorporated this in the training module on 'Safe Motherhood in India' in 1992.

Key factors that endanger a life

The first delay is in recognising impending danger and making a decision to rush and seek expert care. The husband and other family members often experience inertia, thinking that all deliveries are a natural process and so the mother-to-be can wait. Or they may not have enough money or other issues at the family level that prevent them from going to a hospital. If the educational level of family members and their financial position are weak, delaying decision making is detrimental. But empowered, neighbourhood mothers and women's self-help-groups have resulted in a remarkable change; no longer is a mother-to-be neglected by lethargic family members. Ever since Accredited



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Social Health Activists (ASHA) began networking with Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANM) since 2005 (when the National Rural Health Mission (NHRM) was launched), institutional over home deliveries have become the better option. The financial incentives for the mother and ASHA were the turning point.

The second delay is in transportation. From remote rural hamlets and forest settlements or faraway islands it may take many hours, or an overnight journey for a mother-to-be to reach a health facility with a skilled birth attendant (midwife/staff nurse) or a doctor or an obstetrician. Many women die on the way. However, the 108 ambulance system and other Emergency transport mechanisms under the National Health Mission has made a difference.

Other problems

The third delay, an unpardonable one, is in initiating specialised care at the health facility. The excuses are plenty and difficult to justify – a delay in attending to a woman in the emergency room; a delay in reaching the obstetrician; a delay in getting a blood donor, in laboratory support, the operation theatre not being ready, an anaesthetist not being available is a list that can go on. The concept of the operationalisation of a 'minimum four FRUs [first referral units] per district of two million population, is crucial. The "first level referral unit" with specialists such as an obstetrician, anaesthetist, paediatrician, blood bank and operation theatre was aimed at preventing maternal death at the doorstep of a hospital.

Unfortunately, this has not worked out as expected since 1992. There are problems such as 66% vacancies of specialists in 5,491 community health centres out of which 2,856 are supposed to be FRUs in 714 districts. The lack of blood banks or blood storage units in these designated FRUs was another reason for many mothers not receiving adequate blood transfusion within two hours of the onset of massive bleeding after delivery, leading to fatalities.

The biggest killer is bleeding after delivery. This could be due to inadequate and timely contraction of an overstretched uterus with a baby of three-kilogram weight floating in amniotic fluids. When the placenta is separated after delivery, the raw opened surfaces of the uterine wall will bleed profusely unless it immediately contracts. From a total reserve of five litres of blood, more than half is lost in such a short duration, resulting in the mother going into shock and death. If there is underlying anaemia, which has not been treated with iron folic acid supplements in pregnancy, it will also result in tragedy. Thus, there is a need for immediate blood transfusion and emergency surgical care.

The next emergency is obstructed labour where the contracted bony pelvis of an already

stunted young mother (who is also malnourished and has low body mass index) does not allow the normally grown baby to emerge. Prolonged labour can lead to foetal distress and a lethal rupture of the uterus. This can be avoided by a Caesarean section. Thus, there is a need for a well-equipped operation theatre and obstetrician/ surgeon and an anaesthetist on call.

The third medical cause is hypertensive disorders of pregnancy that are not recognised and treated on time. They can result in a dire emergency with convulsions and coma and very little time to medically control high blood pressure. There are some home deliveries by untrained birth attendants which lead to trauma and puerperal infection, resulting in sepsis and death. Antibiotics could have saved their lives, but the patient is admitted to hospital late. A failure of contraceptive devices, resulting in unwanted pregnancies and crude abortion techniques by quacks, also leads to sepsis and death. In EAG States, associated illnesses such as malaria, chronic urinary tract infections and tuberculosis are also high risk factors.

The focus areas for States

The prescription for averting maternal deaths is early registration and routine antenatal care and ensuring institutional delivery. Many of these systemic deficiencies will be highlighted in the mandatory reporting and audit of all maternal deaths under the NHM. While the EAG States have to focus on the implementation of basic tasks, the southern States group and probably Jharkhand, Maharashtra and Gujarat need to fine tune the quality of their emergency and basic obstetric care.

The Kerala model of a Confidential Review of Maternal deaths, initiated by Dr. V.P. Paily, has some analytical leads on how Kerala can further reduce its already low MMR of 20. It is a model other southern States can emulate. The use of uterine artery clamps on the lower segment, application of suction canula to overcome atonicity of the uterus, and a sharp lookout for and energetic management of amniotic fluid embolism, diffused intravascular coagulation, hepatic failure secondary to fatty liver cirrhosis are strategies taught to obstetricians, which even developed countries have yet to practise routinely. They even address antenatal depression and post-partum psychosis as there were a few cases of pregnant mothers ending their life.

Finally, if there is a commitment and a will to stop preventable maternal deaths there is no limit to the varieties of proactive interventions.

The writer acknowledges inputs on the Confidential Review of Maternal Deaths in Kerala from Dr. Smithy Sanel, a Spokesperson of the Kerala Federation of Obstetrics and Gynaecology

The Maternal Mortality Ratio for India is on the decline, but there are States that need to focus on basic and systemic issues



Ahead of COP30, Bonn climate talks fumble the pressure test

The gathering set the groundwork for COP30 in Brazil. Beyond setting the agenda, the talks could be considered a litmus test to gauge how seriously countries are committed to implementing past pledges and how prepared they are to scale up ambition in the face of a shrinking climate window

Indu K. Murthy

As the world braces for another climate summit in November this year, the Subsidiary Bodies meeting in Bonn, Germany, brought together negotiators, scientists, policymakers, and civil society actors to tackle the complex, behind-the-scenes work that shapes the outcome of the Conference of the Parties (COP) summit.

Held annually in Bonn, this mid-year gathering sets the technical and political groundwork for the ensuing COPs, with the 30th Session of the COP (COP30) scheduled for later this year in Belém, Brazil. Beyond setting the agenda, Bonn could be considered a litmus test to gauge how seriously countries are committed to implementing past pledges and how prepared they are to scale up ambition in the face of a rapidly closing climate window.

Sadly, this year's Bonn conference was marked by delays, deep disagreements, and mounting frustration, especially over procedural priorities and climate finance. As global temperatures continue to break records, the urgency to act was palpable – as was the resistance to revisiting entrenched political differences.

Delayed start, deep divisions

The conference got off to a slow start as agenda adoption, a procedural step, was stalled by disputes over finance and trade measures. The Like-Minded Developing Countries (LMDCs, including India) demanded the inclusion of Article 91 of the Paris Agreement, which obligates developed countries to provide climate finance and unilateral trade measures, such as carbon border taxes, on the agenda. India, along with the LMDCs, continues to see carbon border taxes as unfair, undermining principles of equity and common but differentiated responsibilities.

Both these propositions were opposed by developed nations, particularly the European Union, which argued that finance issues were being addressed under other agenda items. Eventually, a compromise was reached to address these issues: not as standalone agenda items but through informal consultations. Disappointed with developed countries' reluctance to discuss the legal obligations to provide financial support to developing countries, the LMDCs stated their intention to revisit this contentious issue at COP30.

This prolonged deadlock delayed the start of formal negotiations by nearly two days and underscored the persistent divide. While developing nations pushed for historical responsibilities to be acknowledged and operationalised, developed countries advocated forward-looking frameworks and voluntary support mechanisms.

An elusive agreement

One of the most intensely negotiated themes at Bonn was the Global Goal on Adaptation, which aims to reduce vulnerability to climate change, enhance adaptive capacity, and strengthen resilience. There were also discussions on integrating the National Adaptation Plan progress into the goal, which the G77+China rooted for.

One of the key drawbacks of the goal thus far has been the lack of metrics. At Bonn, about 490 indicators from a list of nearly 9,000 were shortlisted, with the aim of consolidating them further to about 100. These indicators will be used to track adaptation actions under health, water, agriculture, and infrastructure, among others. India emphasised that adaptation must not be assessed through a uniform lens and backed indicators that are flexible, context-sensitive, and don't overburden national reporting.

However, differences and tensions arose over whether and how to include indicators on the means of implementation, including finance, capacity, and technology transfer. Many developing countries and regional blocs, such as the African Group and Independent Alliance of Latin America and the Caribbean (AILAC), stressed that without finance-related indicators, adaptation efforts will remain an unfunded mandate.

However, countries like Japan and Australia pushed back against including finance-related indicators. Additionally, the African Group and AILAC were opposed to including indicators to track domestic finance allocation and development assistance, while Australia supported their inclusion, emphasising the importance of tracking national adaptation processes.

The process to refine indicators was



Members of the G-77/China huddle to find a way forward on the Global Goal on Adaptation, on June 25, 2024. (KARA NORTH)

this contentious. Countries including Australia warned against micromanaging expert groups tasked with technical work, while others demanded clear guidance and tight timelines. Towards the end of the conference, parties agreed on a globally applicable headline indicator set, which would be complemented by regionally or nationally tailored context-specific sub-indicators. Guidance on indicators to reflect the means of implementation wasn't agreed on, however.

'Safe space' debate

The Mitigation Work Programme (MWP) – created to scale up action to meet the 1.5°C target – also came under scrutiny. While many parties acknowledged the usefulness of dialogues under the MWP, several questioned its ability to deliver actual emissions reductions.

The debate between parties was on how a constructive and inclusive environment, a.k.a. safe space, could be provided for the MWP discussions: some advocated a push to ramp up ambitions, while others wanted to limit their scope. Developing countries emphasised that many of them have already set ambitious Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) targets but lack the financial and technical support to implement them.

The LMDCs, including India, and the African and Arab Groups, warned against the MWP being used to impose new commitments and urged that it remain a facilitative, non-punitive process. The Philippines called for the MWP to facilitate, promote, and enhance international cooperation.

Further, a proposal was made to develop a digital platform to share mitigation tools and experiences. While Brazil, supported by Egypt, argued that this could help connect fragmented initiatives, the Alliance of Small Island States and the EU cautioned about the duplication of existing platforms, which could take attention away from scaling up ambitions.

L&D, just transition, gender

The review of the Warsaw International Mechanism on Loss and Damage (L&D) made some headway, with proposals emerging on integrating L&D into NDCs and streamlining technical assistance. However, funding gaps and questions

This year's Bonn conference was marked by delays, deep disagreements, and mounting frustration, especially over procedural priorities and climate finance. As global temperatures continue to break records, the urgency to act was palpable, as was the resistance to revisiting entrenched political differences

about how the Santiago Network – a UN initiative linking vulnerable developing nations with technical support to tackle climate impacts, focusing on loss and damage reduction – would operate continued to cloud consensus.

In this session, interventions by observers emphasised the need to consider non-economic L&D, scale up finance, and align L&D efforts with human rights obligations. India and other developing countries called for streamlining access to technical support and adequate and scaled-up funding for responding to climate-induced losses.

In discussions under the Just Transition Work Programme, parties emphasised that just transition must be anchored in equity, development rights, and national contexts. Social dialogue, labour rights, and meaningful stakeholder engagement, especially that of Indigenous Peoples, were highlighted as foundational to just transition. Parties also flagged the economic impacts of unilateral measures, such as carbon border taxes (tariffs imposed on imported goods based on their carbon footprint) and trade barriers, and the role of critical minerals in energy transition. Parties agreed to address these issues through linked agenda items, and this would remain a bone of contention at COP30.

A new dispute emerged at Bonn in connection with the development of a new Gender Action Plan. There were differences of opinion on terminology (gender diversity and intersectionality). Key areas of focus proposed for the Plan included unpaid care work, sexual and reproductive health, and addressing gender-based violence, signalling the need for a framework that responds to evolving realities. In this context, the roles of gender-disaggregated data, traditional

knowledge systems, and gender-responsive budgeting were also discussed.

Climate finance gridlock

Climate finance loomed large across almost every negotiation track. The issues of how much funding is available, where it is going, where it will go, and how predictable it is remained a recurring theme across discussions on adaptation, mitigation, and L&D.

The presidency-led consultation on the 'Baku to Belém' roadmap aims to operationalise a target to mobilise \$1.3 trillion annually in climate finance. But deep disagreements emerged over the structure of finance – grants vs. loans, public v. private, and mitigation v. adaptation – and who should be held responsible for raising the money.

Developing countries pushed for transparent and clear burden-sharing frameworks among developed countries, with the G77 and China calling for tackling systemic barriers to finance. Small Island Developing States, represented by AOSIS, demanded earmarked and fast-disbursing funds tailored to their unique vulnerabilities. The Least Developed Countries sought a tripling of adaptation finance by 2030 compared to 2022 levels and a greater reliance on grants. Several groups, including AILAC, the Environmental Integrity Group, and the Arab Group, also stressed the importance of tracking progress, scaling non-debt instruments, and innovating revenue streams, such as taxes on financial transactions. The EU noted the need for the roadmap to be a transparent platform engaging external stakeholders and building on existing initiatives.

Taken together, these inputs reflect a clear call for an inclusive and accountable roadmap that's responsive to diverse regional needs.

Meanwhile, concerns emerged over the credibility of climate finance reporting by developed countries on their planned financial contributions, per Article 9.5 of the Paris Agreement. Several developing countries highlighted discrepancies between planned or promised contributions and actual disbursements and called for reforms to improve transparency and accountability.

On the service arrangements of the Adaptation Fund, parties led by AOSIS requested that the World Bank, currently an Interim Trustee of the Fund, be named the Permanent Trustee of the Adaptation Fund.

With COP30 in Belém just months away, the Bonn Climate Conference was both a teaser and a pressure test. On the positive side, parties made incremental progress on technical workstreams like adaptation indicators, transparency frameworks, and Article 6 (on cooperative mechanisms). But the underlying political tensions around equity and finance remain unresolved. Bonn 2025 reaffirmed that while the science is unequivocal, politics will determine the pace of action.

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UNFCCC Executive Secretary Simon Stiell speaks with Adnan Ajlouni, SBSTA Chair, and Julia Gerdner, SBSTA Chair, at the Bonn climate talks, 25/06/24. (KARA NORTH)

ISRO chief, officials speak to astronaut Shubhanshu Shukla

The Hindu Bureau

BENGALURU

Indian astronaut Shubhanshu Shukla, currently aboard the International Space Station (ISS) as part of the Axiom-4 mission, had a telephone conversation with Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) Chairman V. Narayanan and senior officials of the space agency.

The conversation took place on Sunday. During the call, Dr. Narayanan expressed keen interest in Group Captain Shukla's well-being and enquired about the various scientific experiments being conducted on the ISS.

The Chairman emphasised the significance of documenting all experiments and activities meticulously after Mr. Shukla's return to earth, as this will provide valuable insights and inputs for the development of Gaganyaan, India's



Shubhanshu Shukla poses for a photo with a panoramic view of earth as background. ANI

human spaceflight programme.

The Gaganyaan programme aims to demonstrate India's capability to launch a crewed spacecraft into low earth orbit, and the experience and knowledge gained from this mission will be crucial for its success. Mr. Shukla's ISS mission has been executed under the ISRO-Axiom Spaceflight agreement.

Other participants in

the discussion included Dr. Unnikrishnan Nair, Director of Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC) and Chairman of the Program Management Council for Human Space Programme, M. Mohan, Director of Liquid Propulsion Systems Centre (LPSC), Padmakumar E.S., Director of ISRO Inertial Systems Unit (II-SU), M. Ganesh Pillai, Scientific Secretary of ISRO, and N. Vedachalam, former Director of LPSC. These officials also interact with Mr. Shukla during the call.

They discussed various aspects of the mission. The ISRO said the astronaut expressed his heartfelt gratitude to Prime Minister Narendra Modi for providing him this incredible opportunity to represent India on the ISS. He acknowledged the efforts of the Chairman and the team at the ISRO in ensuring his safe travel to the ISS.

In SIR challenge, Supreme Court refers to 1977 judgment on Election Commission's powers

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

Even as a pitched legal battle lies ahead for the special intensive revision (SIR) exercise in Bihar, the Supreme Court on Monday drew petitioners' attention to a judgment which observed that the Constitution does not "exalt" the Election Commission as a "law unto itself".

As Opposition parties joined forces in the court, claiming the SIR of electoral rolls would inflict an ugly dent on the rights of crores from the marginalised sections of Bihar society, and even disenfranchise them, Justice Sudhanshu Dhulia, heading a Division Bench, referred to the court's 1977 judgment in *M.S. Gill versus Chief Election Commis-*

sioner, which said the "little, large Indian shall not be hijacked from the course of free and fair elections... A free and fair election based on universal adult franchise is the basic".

The judgment was discussing the ambit of the power of the EC under Article 324 of the Constitution. The Article gives the poll body the power of "superintendence, direction and control" over "all elections".

'Norms of fairness'

However, Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer, who authored the 1977 judgment, said an Election Commissioner was still subject to the "norms of fairness and cannot act arbitrarily".

"Article 324 does not exalt the Election Commis-



sion into a law unto itself... Unchecked power is alien to our system... It is well-established that when a high functionary like the Commissioner is vested with wide powers, the law expects him to act fairly and legally. Discretion vested in a high functionary may be reasonably trusted to be used properly, not perversely. If it is misused, certainly the court has power to strike down that act," Justice Iyer, who was

Article 324 does not exalt the EC into a law unto itself... Unchecked power is alien to our system... If it is misused, certainly the court has power to strike down that act
SC JUDGMENT OF 1977

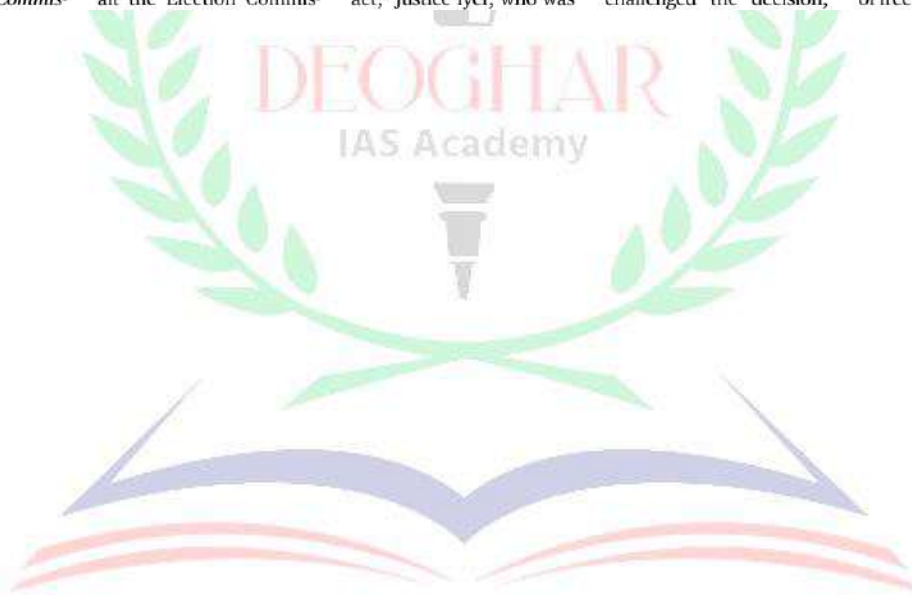
part of the five-judge Constitution Bench, had emphasised in the judgment, which may come up prominently for discussion in the next hearing scheduled for July 10.

The verdict was based on a reference after the EC cancelled the election to the 13-Ferozepur Lok Sabha constituency in Punjab in 1977 after mob violence broke out and ordered fresh election. Mr. Gill had challenged the decision,

claiming the violence was orchestrated to thwart his probable win. The court upheld the EC's power to cancel the election and order fresh polls under Article 324 of the Constitution.

However, the court said the power of the EC under Article 324 to do whatever was necessary to conduct an election, for that matter, any election, must not end up creating a "constitutional despot". The terms "superintendence, direction and control" as well as "conduct of all elections" were the "broadest" of terms, Justice Iyer said.

These terms opened doors to "myriad maybes, too mystic to be precisely presaged". The EC could explain away certain actions by justifying them as necessary to reach the goal of free and fair election.



'Don't violate Supreme Court judgment on Chakma-Hajong issue'

The Hindu Bureau

GUWAHATI

A rights activist and member of the core group of the National Human Rights Commission has warned officials in Arunachal Pradesh against violating the Supreme Court's 1996 judgment, seeking the protection of the rights of all Chakma and Hajong people living in the State since the 1960s.

Senior officials and District Magistrates in Arunachal Pradesh could face contempt of court if they held a meeting with representatives of the All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union (AAPSU) on the contentious Chakma-Hajong issue, Suhas Chakma, also director of the Delhi-based Rights and Risks

Analysis Group, said.

In a notification on July 3, the State's Home Department called for a meeting with the AAPSU on Tuesday with a three-point agenda – deportation of illegal immigrants, review and rectification of the voter list/electoral roll, and land records and encroachment by Chakma-Hajong settlers.

The court had directed the State government to protect the life and personal liberty of each Chakma and Hajong person from organised groups, Mr. Chakma said. It also said that quit notices issued by any group, "which tantamount to threats to the life and liberty" of the communities concerned, "should be dealt with in accordance with the law".



India will give new form to BRICS in 2026: Modi

India prioritised issues of Global South during leadership of G-20, and will take BRICS forward in the spirit of humanity first, says PM as New Delhi prepares to take over chairmanship of forum

Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

India will attempt to give a “new form” to BRICS next year, said Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his intervention at the grouping’s summit in Rio De Janeiro on Monday, as the Indian side prepared to take over its leadership from current president Brazil.

“Under India’s BRICS presidency, we will work to define BRICS in a new form. BRICS will mean Building Resilience and Innovation for Cooperation and Sustainability. Just as, during our G-20 chairmanship, we gave priority to the issues of the Global South in the agenda, similarly during our chairmanship of BRICS, we will take this forum forward in the spirit of people-centricity and humanity first,” said Mr. Modi speaking at the session on “Environment, COP-30 and Global Health”.

Mr. Modi dealt with a number of topics, including the post-pandemic recovery of the global economy, and called for global



United for a cause: Prime Minister Narendra Modi with BRICS members, partners and outreach invitee countries during a group picture at the BRICS Summit in Rio de Janeiro on Monday. ANI

cooperation in combating common threats. “The COVID pandemic taught us that viruses do not come taking visas, and solutions, too are not chosen by looking at passports. The solution to common challenges is possible only through joint efforts,” he said.

Earlier, talking at a segment of the BRICS summit, Mr. Modi shared the Indian position on Artificial Intelligence and said, “We believe that AI governance, addressing concerns and encouraging innovation should both receive equal

priority.” Mr. Modi also held a number of bilateral meetings on the sidelines of the BRICS summit.

Among those who met Mr. Modi were President Miguel Diaz-Canel Bermudez of Cuba, Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim of Malaysia, President Yamandu Orsi of Uruguay and President of Bolivia Luis Alberto Arce Catacora. “We talked about the need for improving and diversifying trade linkages on a priority basis. We discussed how we can collaborate in sectors such as digital technology, criti-

cal minerals, healthcare, space and more. Also conveyed my best wishes on the historic occasion of Bolivia’s 200 years of Independence,” Mr. Modi said.

Mr. Modi’s participation in the closing day of the 17th BRICS summit will be followed by a state visit to Brazil that is scheduled to begin on Tuesday at the Alvorado Palace. During his stay in Brasilia, Mr. Modi will hold restricted and delegation-level talks and attend a lunch hosted by President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva.

Web portal, apps to make Census data 'available early': RGI

Vijaita Singh
NEW DELHI

Data from the 2027 Census will be "available early" as the exercise will be conducted digitally, the Registrar-General and Census Commissioner of India (RGI) posted on X on Monday.

The country's "first digital Census" will be conducted in two phases, and "for the first time, technology will be used to collect data and send it electronically to the central server", the RGI said, adding this will "result in early availability of Census data". After the previous Census exercise concluded, it took nearly two to three years for primary data to be available.

The RGI said Census 2027 would offer the option of self-enumeration "through a dedicated web portal". All States have also been asked to appoint nodal officers for the exercise, and "residents will be able to self-enumerate in both phases", the RGI said. "Data will be collected using Mobile Apps (both Android & iOS) in English, Hindi, and regional languages. Enumerators/Supervisors will use their own mobile device for data collection," the RGI added.

The Census will have a focused publicity campaign for nationwide awareness, inclusive participation, last-mile engagement and support for field operations. "It'll emphasise on sharing accurate, authentic & timely information ensuring cohesive & effective outreach effort," the RGI said, while adding that "caste of household members will be



enumerated in the ensuing Census".

According to the constitutional mandate, the first Census after 2026 can be used as the basis to redraw Lok Sabha constituencies. The next general election is due in 2029.

The first phase of Census 2027, Houselisting and Housing Census (HLO), will start from April 2026, followed by the Population Enumeration (PE) phase in February 2027.

For the 2021 Census, 31 questions were notified for the first phase, related to household particulars such as building number; Census house number; predominant material of the roof; floor of the house; name and sex of the head of the household; number of persons residing in the household; main source of drinking water; main source of lighting; access to latrine; main fuel used for cooking; access to radio, TV, laptop, computer and car; main cereal consumed; and mobile number.

On June 16, the RGI notified the process in the Gazette of India.

