

NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL

PM Modi Has Every Intention Of Delaying Caste Census: Congress

NEW DELHI, APR 30: The Congress on Thursday said one full year has passed since the government announced a caste census but the details of how this enumeration will be done are still awaited, as it alleged that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has every intention of delaying the exercise.

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said today exactly a year ago, the Modi government had announced that caste enumeration of the entire population will be included in the upcoming Census.

"The recent chronology relating to this dramatic U turn by the Prime Minister is this: On July 21 2021, the Home Minister had answered a question in the Lok Sabha asked by a BJP MP Smt Raksha Nikhil Khadse (now a Minister herself) and said that the Government of In-



dia had decided as a matter of policy not to enumerate caste-wise population," Ramesh said on X.

On September 21 2021, the Modi government filed an affidavit in the Supreme Court stating that any directive by the court to enumerate caste-wise population would be tantamount to interfering with a policy decision already taken by the Modi government, he said.

On April 16, 2023, Congress president Mallikarjun

Kharge wrote to the PM demanding an up-to-date caste census as part of the regular census, Ramesh pointed out.

"On April 28 2024, in a television interview to News18 Network, the prime minister attacked the Congress saying that its demand for a caste census was indicative of 'urban naxal' thought," he said.

The prime minister owes the leadership of the Congress an apology for his accusation, Ramesh said, adding

that more importantly, he owes the people of India an explanation of why he allowed his mind to be contaminated by "urban naxal" thought when he announced a caste census on April 30, 2025.

"A full year has passed. The details of how this caste enumeration will be done are still awaited. There has been no dialogue with Opposition parties and state governments, let alone with experts in this subject," Ramesh said.

"The President of the Indian National Congress had written to the PM again on May 5, 2025 on the issue of the caste census. That letter was not even acknowledged. The issues raised in that letter remain very valid even now," he said.

In fact, they are more relevant after the recently-concluded special session of Parliament where it was evident that the PM has every intention of delaying the caste census, Ramesh claimed.

Nepal's Ministry of Forests inks deal with WWF for biodiversity conservation

KATHMANDU, APR 30: Nepal's Ministry of Forests and Environment and World Wildlife Fund (WWF) have inked an agreement to strengthen collaboration on biodiversity conservation and sustainable development across the Himalayan nation.

The agreement, relating to a Scope of Cooperation (SoC), aligns joint efforts with the country's national priorities and global commitments, including key policies and strategies on biodiversity, forests, climate change, wetlands, agriculture, and sustainable development, as well as the Sustainable Development Goals and national planning frameworks, according to a press statement issued by WWF Nepal on Wednesday.

"These policy frameworks collectively stress the conservation of biological resources as a foundation for Nepal's sustainable development. The SoC further recognises the importance of landscape-level strategies and species conservation action plans in guiding effective, on-the-ground implementation," it said.

WWF said that its collaboration with Nepal reflects a shared commitment to pro-



tect the Himalayan nation's rich biodiversity while improving lives and livelihoods for communities who depend on nature.

"Through this Scope of Cooperation, we aim to scale impactful, science-based and community-driven solutions across conservation landscapes, contributing to Nepal's national priorities and global environmental commitments," remarked Ghana Shyam Gurung, Country Representative, WWF Nepal.

As per the agreement, the Forest Ministry and the WWF Nepal will jointly de-

sign and implement programmes and projects across conservation landscapes and protected areas.

Under the guidance of ministry, "relevant government departments will collaborate closely with WWF Nepal in implementing the SoC. WWF Nepal will also work in coordination with Provincial Ministries of Forests and their entities, including Division Forest Offices (DFOs) and Protected Area Offices (PAOs), as well as other government agencies," it said.

As part of this long-term

partnership, WWF Nepal will disburse up to USD 40 million over a period of ten years, subject to the availability of funds, to support implementation in conservation landscapes and the country's protected area system.

"By aligning resources and expertise, we will enhance the implementation of national policies and ensure that conservation delivers tangible benefits to people and ecosystems alike," Rajendra KC, Chief of Planning, Monitoring and Coordination Division under the forest ministry, said. (PTI)

Indian-origin woman, among 3 activists, fined for staging pro-Palestine protest

SINGAPORE, APR 30: An Indian-origin woman was among three Singaporean activists, fined USD 2,341 each on Thursday for organising a procession outside the Presidential Palace to show solidarity with Palestine, local media reported.

The High Court overturned the acquittal of the three women, Malay-origin Mossammad Sobikun Nahar, 26, Siti Amirah Mohamed Asrori, 30, and Indian-origin Annamalai Kokila Parvathi, 37, accused of organising the procession on February 2, 2024, The Straits Times reported.

Justice See Kee Oon allowed the prosecution's appeal against the acquittal of the three women, who each faced one charge of organising a procession in the perimeter of the Presidential Palace, Istana, a prohibited area, under the Public Order Act (POA).

Their lawyer, Derek Wong, argued for a fine of SGD 3,000, while Deputy Public



Prosecutor (DPP) Hay Hung Chun made no submission on sentence.

The three women had contested the charges in a joint trial that began in July 2025.

Security camera footage presented in court showed a group of around 70 people gathering outside Plaza Singapura, a shopping mall near the Palace, before they walked towards the Istana while holding open umbrellas painted with a watermelon graphic.

The fruit represented the colours of the Palestinian

flag, according to the Singapore daily report.

In acquitting them in October 2025, district judge John Ng said that although the three women had carried out a procession on the day in question, they had not reasonably known that the route was a prohibited area.

The district judge said the prosecution bore the burden of proving the two basic elements of the offence—the physical act and the mental element.

On April 30, arguing to overturn the acquittal, DPP

Hay argued the district judge had made an error of law in applying the correct legal test on the mental element.

DPP Hay said the prosecution had stated very clearly the charges against the three women were not for having actual knowledge, but they "ought reasonably to have known" the route taken was a prohibited area.

The DPP noted the women were aware that the police had issued an advisory stating that events held in relation to the Israel-Hamas conflict would not be permitted.

Another red flag, he said, was that Siti and Sobikun actually knew about a previous event related to the cause that was cancelled.

He said information about public assemblies or processions was available "24/7 in the form of access to statues online".

Wong, argued that the district judge did not make an error and had applied the correct legal test.

Country took long leap in all sectors under Modi's leadership in last decade: Nadda

CHANDIGARH, APR 30: Union Health Minister J P Nadda on Thursday said under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the country has taken a long leap forward across all sectors, particularly in the healthcare sector, in its journey toward realising a 'Viksit Bharat'.

"If I were to speak of these initiatives, I would highlight the strengthening of our health systems, of course in the areas of science, innovation, and technology," Nadda said while addressing the 10th National Summit on Good and Replicable Practices and Innovations in Public Health Systems here.

"We have taken a long leap in the last decade under the dynamic leadership of Prime Minister Modi, and many new initiatives that we have taken," he said.

Nadda said above all is the policy which he frequently refers to, is the comprehensive health policy of 2017.

If we talk about the health policy which was initiated in 1997-98, was a curative health policy, which had been in place for a long time. The focus was on curative part, he said.

But in 2017, when we came out with a new policy that was a comprehensive, holistic and inclusive policy, he said. It has prevention, promo-



tion, curative part, rehabilitative part and geriatric part, he added.

On this occasion, Nadda launched Swasth Bharat and Janani portal, compendium on best practices, integrated training modules for primary healthcare team and Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram (RBSK-2.0).

Speaking about the Ayushman Arogya Mandirs (Health and Wellness Centers), Nadda said around 1.85 lakh such centres have been set up which are the first contact point that connect 1.40 billion people.

"Our effort is to keep in mind the prevention part. Whether it is hypertension, diabetes, oral cancer, breast cancer, or cervical cancer, we have mandated screening for all these conditions at the age of 30," said the health minis-

ter.

He further said due consideration to the Mother and Child Health programme has been given, under which we provide a comprehensive package of 12 services.

"We have expanded Ayushman Arogya Mandirs and now the time for consolidation so that we provide quality support and get quality outcome and this necessitates capacity building," said Nadda.

He informed that out of approximately 1.85 lakh centres, the National Quality Assurance Standards (NQAS) have been implemented in 50,000 centres.

"However, we should not feel satisfied and happy. Still a larger task is left which we have to do," he said.

"We should do continuously audit and we must also

develop methodologies of audit to assess the performance and functioning of our 'Ayushman Arogya Mandirs'," he said.

The Union health minister further informed about the mother and child health programme, saying the rate of institutional deliveries has risen from 79 per cent to 89 per cent.

It is a good increase but we should not become complacent, he added.

Referring to the UN report of 2025, he said Under-5 Mortality Rate has dropped by 79 per cent, while the Infant mortality rate declined by 73 per cent.

On the World Health Organization's (WHO)'s 'World Malaria Report', he said India accounts for one-sixth of the global population and malarial cases were detected in just 0.7 per cent people.

Speaking about the summit, Nadda said it demonstrates the strategic potential for creating an effective health system under the aegis of the National Health Mission.

It is, undoubtedly, a highly effective and practical platform that we all utilize, he added. On this occasion, Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini, Haryana health minister Arti Singh Rao and other senior officials were also present. (PTI)

Minor's Pregnancy: Amend Law On Pregnancy Termination Of Rape Survivors, Says SC

NEW DELHI, APR 30: A minor child cannot be forced to bear a pregnancy, the Supreme Court said on Thursday while pulling up the Centre and asking it to amend the law to permit rape survivors to terminate unwanted pregnancies even beyond 20 weeks.

In a ruling with far reaching implications for rape survivors, including children, and the issue of autonomy over their bodies, a bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi took strong exception to a plea by AIIMS seeking to set aside the apex court order allowing a 15-year-old girl to medically terminate her 30-week pregnancy.

"Please amend your law that when there is pregnancy due to rape etc, then time limitation will not be there. The law needs to be organic and in sync evolving times. Also amend the law so that such trials are completed within a week. Why should the child suffer the pending trauma of the trial also," the CJI said.

The court said in its impassioned observations that this is a case of child rape and the survivor will have a lifelong scar and trauma if termination is not allowed. If the mother does not have permanent disability, termination should be carried out, it said. "This is a curative peti-

tion. Unwanted pregnancy cannot be thrust on a person. Imagine... she is a child. She should be studying now. But we want to make her a mother. Imagine the pain, the humiliation the child has suffered in this," the bench said.

It asked AIIMS to counsel the survivor's parents and said the decision has to be of the person concerned.

"There are children for adoption. In this country we have lot of sympathies... There are deserted, abandoned children on the streets and even mafias on it. We have to look at them. This is an unwanted pregnancy of a 15-year-old child," it said. During the proceedings, an AIIMS doctor told the court that it is not child versus foetus but child versus child.

Additional Solicitor General Aishwarya Bhati, appearing for AIIMS, mentioned the curative plea and said the termination of pregnancy is not possible.

"It will be a live baby with severe deformities. Minor mother will have lifelong health issues and cannot reproduce... This child can be given for adoption. It has been 30 weeks now. It is a viable life now," Bhati said.

Bhati also sought the court's permission for counselling with the teen and her parents.

At this juncture, Justice Bagchi said, "Who has stopped you? What is your Parens patriae (parent of the nation) approach? Give respect to your citizen.

Show data to the parents and if they choose to keep it. Then so be it. "But if they think the mental health is in jeopardy then they will take a call. Please do not press your curative. The curative can come from the parents. Let us not make a fight between state and its citizens. Bring in a psychiatrist and counsellor. Let us not choose for people capable for choosing." It is not for AIIMS, the judge said, to choose for citizens and it can only render medical service.

The top court said the decision on termination has to be that of the survivor and her parents. AIIMS, it said, may help them take an informed decision.

"Explain everything to the child and her parents. If after that they want to change views then we will see," the bench said.

Observing that the reproductive autonomy of a mother-to-be must be accorded the highest importance, a bench of Justices B V Nagarathna and Ujjal Bhuyan last week allowed the 15-year-old to medically terminate her pregnancy of 30 weeks.

The top court also dis-

missed the review plea filed by AIIMS and held that medical termination of unwanted pregnancy cannot be rejected on grounds of advanced stage of pregnancy or normalcy of foetus.

Not allowing the termination on that basis would "render the right to bodily autonomy nugatory", the bench said.

Centre also filed a curative petition, which is the last resort to seek judicial remedy.

In its April 24 order, the apex court had said the minor in this case is 15 years old and the pregnancy is unwanted. Continuing the pregnancy is not in the interest of the pregnant minor, particularly when she has attempted to end her life on two occasions.

"In the circumstances, we direct that the appellant's daughter (minor) is permitted to undergo medical termination of pregnancy. The appellant, on behalf of her minor child, shall furnish an undertaking consenting to the medical termination of pregnancy of her minor daughter."

"We direct that all medical safeguards shall be taken by the attending doctors, nurses and staff of the third respondent—AIIMS—where the procedure is to be conducted. We direct that aforesaid procedure shall be undertaken at the earliest," the bench had said.

Kailash Mansarovar Yatra Through Lipulekh Pass To Begin In June

PITHORAGARH (UTTARAKHAND), Apr 30: The Kailash Mansarovar Yatra through the Uttarakhand's Lipulekh pass will begin in June this year with 500 pilgrims permitted to visit the sacred site in Tibet, officials said on Thursday.

The pilgrims will travel in 10 batches, with each group comprising 50 members, Pithoragarh District Magistrate Ashish Bhatgains said on Thursday.

Bhatgains said the decision came after a meeting in Delhi on April 27, chaired by the joint secretary of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA). "The meeting involved officials from all con-



cerned departments to finalise the yatra framework," the DM said. Bhatgains said the MEA will announce the exact dates for the pilgrimage later. "We have started preparations for the yatra,"

he added. The ministry is yet to decide on the nodal agency and the specific conduct protocols for the pilgrimage, the officials said.

The Kailash Mansarovar Yatra, which resumed last

year after a hiatus of nearly five years, was suspended in 2020 due to the Covid pandemic and subsequently because of the military standoff between India and China in eastern Ladakh. (Agencies)