

Writing about my life did not come easily to me: Sonia Gandhi on her upcoming memoir

NEW YORK, AUG 19: Congress leader Sonia Gandhi, whose 544-page memoir will be published in November, has said writing about her life meant opening herself up and sharing experiences she had kept deep inside, as she reflected on the heartbreak and loss that drew her into politics.

"It was heartbreak and loss that threw me into the public world of politics. Up till then I had guarded my privacy fiercely," Gandhi said in a statement issued on Tuesday by publisher Alfred A Knopf, which has its headquarters here.

"Writing about my life did not come easily to me. It meant opening myself up, sharing moments and experiences I had always held deep inside," she said.

Titled 'Belonging: A Journey of Love', the memoir will be released in hardcover and ebook by Knopf on November 10, with an audio edition to be published by Penguin Random House. The publisher said an announced first printing of 100,000 copies has been set.

Gandhi said she wanted the book to be a "testament of my heart's journey through the tender joys and dark despair" that marked her life.

"Much has been written about my family, but few narratives were able to reach



into the truth of their motivations, their actions and even their very human failings," she said, adding that the book was "in many ways" a homage to their "humaneness".

The memoir traces Gandhi's journey from her childhood in post-war Italy to her life in India, where she married Rajiv Gandhi and became the daughter-in-law of then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Booking Historical Guided Tours

Gandhi said that as she gradually removed herself from the political sphere and looked back at what she had witnessed, the "thread of love and loyalty" running through her life became clearer.

She described this journey

as moving from "the simplicity of my childhood in small-town Italy" to the complexity of her years in India.

The book begins in Cambridge, England, in 1965, where Sonia Maino, then a 19-year-old student, falls in love at first sight with Rajiv Gandhi, whom she would later marry.

It recounts her introduction to Indira Gandhi, her efforts to learn Hindi, wear saris and relish Indian cuisine, as well as the tragedies that struck the Gandhi family.

Rajiv Gandhi's younger brother Sanjay Gandhi died in a plane crash, followed by the assassination of Indira Gandhi in 1984. In the wake of his mother's death, Rajiv Gandhi became prime minister and was himself assassinated seven years later while on the campaign trail.

The memoir also covers Sonia Gandhi's eventual entry into politics after years of resisting pressure to do so, and her decision in 2004 to decline the prime minister's post after the Congress-led alliance won the election.

Gandhi said her story also offers readers a unique perspective on the social and political changes she had witnessed over six decades in India, describing it as "the beautiful country of my belonging".

Knopf described 'Belonging' as an intimate account of Gandhi's life and a story of love, family and India, offering a perspective on the country's "tumultuous post-independence history and its present political struggles".

The publisher said the memoir also offers an insider's perspective on India's economic and social changes over six decades, while Gandhi reflects on identity, duty and the meaning of home.

Knopf Executive Vice President, Publisher and Editor-in-Chief Jordan Pavlin said the publishing house was "honoured" to publish the memoir, describing it as an account of Gandhi's life, resilience, family and history. (PTI)

Sri Lanka to ease immigration process to expedite return of refugees from India: Govt tells parliament

COLOMBO, AUG 19: Sri Lanka will simplify immigration procedures to expedite the voluntary return of refugees from India who left the country without valid documents during its decades-long civil war, the government told the parliament on Wednesday.

"The cabinet decided to allow them back in with a security clearance," public security minister Ananda Wijepala said while responding to a query from the opposition, adding that those willing to return needed to get in touch with the Sri Lankan mission in Chennai.

Sri Lankan refugees began arriving in Tamil Nadu in large numbers after ethnic violence in the island nation that started in 1983, and the subsequent escalation of the armed conflict between government forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which went on for nearly three decades.

While around 18,000 of them returned home between 2002 and 2022, approximately 90,000 refugees continue to reside in the southern Indian state. Many of those who remain have



spent decades in India, with questions around livelihoods, documentation and long-term legal status forming part of the challenges surrounding their eventual return. Earlier this month, Sri Lanka's government approved special immigration arrangements to facilitate the return of refugees from India. The measures - aimed at implementing legal hurdles - will be implemented for those returning under the auspices of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Under the approved

arrangements, Sri Lankan nationals who left the country before August 1, 2006, without a passport will be screened by the State Intelligence Service to verify that they have not been accused of murder, treason or other specified offences.

Those cleared through the screening process will be allowed to enter Sri Lanka through an authorised airport or port on temporary passports, and will not be subject to legal proceedings under the country's immigration law for their unauthorised departure.

In May last year, a 75-year-old Sri Lankan Tamil refugee was arrested by immigration authorities at the airport in Jaffna after returning from India, which raised concerns and led the government to chalk out a more streamlined process to facilitate the return of refugees. Opposition leader Shanakiyan Rasamanickam on Wednesday said the opposition parties can be of help if the Government allowed the necessary documentation to be sent to refugees in advance, to which the minister agreed. (PTI)

Manipur: Normal life affected in valley districts on 2nd day of strike over NRC demand

IMPHAL, AUG 19: Normal life was affected on Wednesday with closures of markets, educational institutions and business establishments in five valley districts of Manipur on the second day of a 48-hour statewide strike called by a students' organisation demanding NRC implementation before the census.

Public transport remained off the roads, but a few private vehicles were seen plying in the valley districts.

Strike enforcers in different parts of Imphal East and Imphal West districts blocked the roads with bamboo poles and stone boulders. They staged protests and put up posters with 'No NRC No Census' written on them.

Three other valley districts - Thoubal, Kakching and Bishnupur - saw thin attendance at government offices, while educational institutes remained closed.

The statewide strike called by the Campaign for Just and Free Delimitation (JFD) did not have any effect on hill districts, including



ing Churachandpur.

On Tuesday, state government spokesperson and MLA Sapam Ranjan Singh said a delegation of legislators would go to New Delhi to meet central leaders and apprise them of people's demand for the National Register of Citizens (NRC) before the census.

The self-enumeration phase of Census 2027 was scheduled to begin on August 17. The main house-listing operation will start from September 1 to September 30 this year.

Students, demanding implementation of the NRC in Manipur before the census, staged a demonstration outside the Directorate of Census Operations in Imphal on Sunday, prompting the police to fire tear gas shells to disperse them.

Hundreds of protesters in Imphal East and Imphal West districts also held a torch rally on August 16 evening, demanding implementation of the NRC before any census activity in the state to identify illegal immigrants.

Chief Minister Y Khemchand Singh had on Tuesday said, "The government has been supporting the NRC demand. The assembly too has previously taken a resolution on the issue and conveyed to the Centre."

The assembly had passed a resolution on the issue in 2022.

"I request all to take another form of agitation instead of resorting to bandhs and blockades as these affect daily wage earners and students," Singh added. (PTI)

PM should show he actually cares: Dipke suggests using PM Cares Fund to improve schools

NEW DELHI, AUG 19: Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) founder Abhijeet Dipke on Wednesday said the PM Cares Fund can be used to improve infrastructure in rural schools and build more than 1,000 new high-tech schools.

The national convenor of the CJP, which has launched the 'School Thik Karo' campaign to highlight gaps in rural school infrastructure, claimed children of this country are crying for good roads to their schools, and benches and drinking water in their schools.

The total balance in the Prime Minister's Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations (PM CARES) Fund stood at Rs 8,452 crore as on March 31, 2025, up from Rs 7,173 crore a year ago, according to its latest audit report.

Total payments made during the year 2024-25 stood at Rs 87.85 lakh, as against Rs 15.6 crore in the previous fiscal.

In a video statement on X, Dipke said, "On one hand, Rs 8,500 crore is lying unused



and on the other hand we see that the children of this country are crying for a good road to school, for good benches in school and for drinking water in school. So, why are we not using this money for the schools of these children?"

"Why is this money not being used to build new schools? If we assume that the cost of building a school is approximately Rs 8 crore, a good school with all the facilities, a model school... So, if one school costs Rs 8 crore, then in Rs 8,500 crore, more than 1,000 new high-tech

model schools could be built," he said.

But this is not happening," he added.

On his recent visits to schools in rural parts of Maharashtra, Dipke said their condition is "very bad".

"When I asked the authorities why there were no basic facilities here, I was told that there was a shortage of funds," he said.

He further said, "So on one hand, it is being said that there are no funds and on the other hand Rs 8,500 crore is lying in the PM CARES Fund. So, should this money

not be used for the schools?"

Dipke appealed to people to call on PM Modi to use this money for children's education.

"So, request the PM to please use the PM CARES Fund for the people, for the education (and) for the schools of the poor kids. And the PM should show that he actually cares," he said.

In another post on X, the CJP founder shared two pictures -- one of a dirty toilet and the other of a run-down school building.

"PM CARES Fund can be put to good use," he said.

Of the PM CARES Fund's total balance of Rs 8,452 crore, Rs 7,846 crore is parked in fixed deposits and Rs 605 crore in savings bank accounts, the audit report said.

The fund spent Rs 87.8 lakh on the PM CARES for Children Scheme, which aims to support children who have lost both parents or legal guardian or adoptive parents to the COVID-19 pandemic, sharply down from Rs 15.37 crore in the previous year, it said. (Agencies)

Three Wanted Criminals Deported From Malaysia: Punjab Police

CHANDIGARH, AUG 19: Punjab Police has secured the deportation of three wanted operatives of the Davinder Bambiha gang from Malaysia with the assistance of central agencies, a top police officer said on Wednesday.

The deported accused have been identified as Jaspreet Singh alias Jas Behal, a resident of Faridkot, and Ajay Singh and Pawan-deep Singh, residents of Sri Ganganagar, in Rajasthan, Director General of Police Gaurav Yadav said.

The three were arrested by Punjab Police at the IGI Airport in New Delhi upon their deportation to India from Malaysia and were subsequently brought to Punjab for further investigation. History

The DGP said all the three are key Malaysia-based operatives of the Davinder Bambiha gang, and wanted in multiple cases involving



murder, extortion, explosives and a planned hand-grenade blast in Ludhiana with links to Pakistan's ISI.

Director General of Police, Counter Intelligence, Amit Prasad said the deportation and arrest of these three fugitives is the culmination of a sustained intelligence-led operation, which continued for several months, during which the movements and activities of the fugitives were closely tracked.

The coordinated efforts ul-

timately led to their detention in Malaysia and deportation to India, he said.

Inspector General of Police (IGP) OFTECA Ashish Choudhary said the accused Jaspreet alias Jas Behal travelled to Malaysia in June 2019, where he came into contact with fugitive gangster through which he joined the Davinder Bambiha gang and gradually emerged as an important operative of the gang.

The accused has been for-

mally arrested in connection with the 2025 murder case of Yadwinder Singh and driver of Jeewanjot Singh Chahal alias Jugnu, a former Panjab University Chandigarh leader, he said.

The IGP said accused Ajay Singh and Pawan-deep Singh are also key operatives of the Bambiha gang, who had tasked their ground operatives to carrying out a hand-grenade blast in Ludhiana City in 2025.

However, Ludhiana Commissionerate Police averted the attack with the arrest of their two associates and had recovered one P86 Chinese hand grenade from their possession on October 27, 2025.

Punjab Police had set up an Overseas Fugitive Tracking and Extradition Cell (OFTEC), headed by Inspector General of Police (IGP) Choudhary, to expedite the extradition of foreign-based gangsters. (PTI)

Census 2027 Has 'Deeper Nefarious Purpose': Cong Slams Questionnaire

NEW DELHI, AUG 19: The Congress on Wednesday alleged that the methodology of asking questions on caste in Census 2027 is "deliberately flawed" and the census has a "deeper nefarious purpose".

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh claimed that the micro questions on religion, date of birth and the place of birth of parents have never been asked before.

Ramesh shared a media report on X which claimed that Census 2027 seeks information on religion, date of birth and place of birth up to the village level of both father and mother.

The report claimed that in the census questionnaire, besides the open field option to declare caste, respondents can choose 'does not want to declare caste' and 'no caste'.

In his post, Ramesh said, "The methodology of asking Qs on caste in Census 2027 is deliberately flawed. The micro Qs on religion, date of



birth, place of birth of parents have never been asked before."

He further added, "The census is confidential. Clearly Census 27 has a deeper nefarious purpose."

Congress on Tuesday alleged that the Modi government wants to sabotage the caste census and asked why the Census 2027 does not include a drop-down menu for selecting castes, despite the Centre recommending it in its affidavit to the Supreme Court in September 2021.

The opposition party had claimed that the prime minister made a "complete U-turn" on April 30, 2025, by announcing a caste census, only to now perform a "U-turn on his earlier U-turn".

Ramesh highlighted that on September 21, 2021, the Modi government had filed an affidavit in the Supreme Court, categorically rejecting the plea for a caste census.

"However, para 12 (d) in the affidavit says the following: 'There was no registry of caste prepared prior to the

conduct of the 2011 Census. It would have been ideal for the Registry of Castes that there should have been given a drop-down menu for selection of the castes, which could have made some consistent data available which can be relied upon," Ramesh had said in a post on X.

Ramesh questioned why the 2027 Census does not feature this drop-down menu, which the Modi government had recommended in its affidavit to the Supreme Court in September 2021. (Agencies)