

# GOVT AGREES TO CASTE DATA IN NEXT CENSUS

Oppn claims victory, says BJP has been compelled to bow to the will of the majority

**PTI, NEW DELHI:** In a major decision, the government on Wednesday announced that caste enumeration will be included in the next census exercise in a 'transparent' manner and slammed the opposition parties for using caste survey as a 'political tool'.

The Congress and other opposition parties have been vociferously demanding a nationwide caste census, making it a major election issue, and some states like Bihar, Telangana and Karnataka have conducted such surveys.

The decision taken by the Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs (CCPA) at its meeting here presided by Prime Minister Narendra

Modi comes ahead of assembly elections in Bihar, where caste is a key political issue and several parties including some BJP allies have been coming out in support of the caste census.

The opposition parties said it is a victory for their long-standing demand and claimed that the BJP has been compelled to bow to the will of the majority.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi had also raised the slogan of "jitni aabadi, utna haq" or proportional representation.

Announcing the decision taken by the CCPA at a news conference, Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said the census comes under the purview of the Centre, but some states have done caste enumeration in the name of surveys "non-transparently" which has created doubts in the society.

Noting that caste was not included in all census operations conducted since Independence, Vaishnaw alleged that the Congress governments have always opposed caste census and the party had used the issue as a political tool.

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## Rahul wants time-line for its implementation

**PTI, NEW DELHI:** Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday said he welcomes the government's 'sudden' decision to include caste enumeration in the forthcoming census after '11 years of opposing it' but asserted that the Centre should give a time-line for its implementation.

Crediting the sustained campaign run by the Congress for the government's announcement on the caste census, Gandhi said his immediate suspicion is that this could go the women's bill way in terms of implementation and demanded a specific date for it.

Asserting that having "successfully pressured" the government to conduct a caste census, Gandhi said the Congress will break the "barrier" of 50 per cent cap on reservations and demand the implementation of Article 15(5), which pertains to reservations in private educational institutions.

"We urge the government to implement it (Article 15(5) promptly," the Leader of Opposition in

### RAHUL'S UNFINISHED BUSINESS



■ Calls for a clear implementation timeline and budget allocation for the caste census

■ Stresses that the census is first step, says the goal is to ensure equitable participation in institutions and power structures

■ Emphasises the need for an inclusive and open

census design, involving stakeholders, not just bureaucrats

■ Reiterates Congress' intent to break the 50% cap on reservations and push for implementation of Article 15(5), allowing reservations in private educational institutions

■ Expresses suspicion that caste census might face indefinite delays like the Women's Reservation Bill

■ Criticises the economic divide, stating Dalits, Adivasis, and OBCs dominate low-wage gig jobs, while the elite few control economic power

the Lok Sabha added.

Gandhi said the Congress is absolutely convinced that the caste census is the first step of a completely new development paradigm in the country, and we are going to push this paradigm one way or the other.

"It doesn't matter what

the BJP thinks. We have shown that we can pressure the BJP into doing the caste census," Gandhi said at a press conference.

Gandhi said the government had previously opposed it (the caste census) for 11 years.

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### BATTLE READY



Vice Chief of the Air Staff Air Marshal Sujeet Dharkar inspects a Guard of Honour, at the Air headquarters in New Delhi, on Wednesday

## Lakhs paid to daily wagers in turtle zone raises corruption stink

Beach cleaning outsourced to pvt firm, but daily wagers were paid ₹31 L for same work

AUGUSTO RODRIGUES

### WHERE DID THE FUNDS GO?

**GALGIBAGA:** The Wildlife and Eco Tourism division in South Goa has come under scrutiny after a payment estimate of nearly Rs 31 lakh was approved for daily wage workers reportedly



employed during the turtle nesting season despite official records indicating that beach cleaning services had already been outsourced to a private agency.

Documents accessed by **O Heraldo** reveal that an estimate was submitted on January 1, 2025, seeking payment for daily wage labourers deployed between December 12, 2024, and February 28, 2025.

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■ Public Information Officer Ankit Kumar (IFS) stated that the work for keeping turtle nesting sites clean is handled by staff from Karnataka Commercial and Industrial Corporation (KCIC), a private firm contracted by the Goa government

■ However, the approved estimate for daily wagers details multiple deployments, including Rs 2,04,120 for the engagement of eight daily wage labourers to clean mangroves along a 3-km stretch of the Galgibaga river in Canacona from December 19, 2024, to

February 28, 2025  
■ Additional payments listed in the estimate include Rs 10.16 lakh for labour deployed across five locations – Galgibaga, Talpona, Cortalim, Madkai, and Kundaim rivers – and Rs 9.18 lakh for 31 workers tasked with beach cleaning and day watch duties at beaches including Cavelossim, Mobor, Zalor, Arrossim, Majorda, Galgibaga, Talpona, Colva and Betalbatim

■ Another group of 26 labourers was reportedly engaged for stranded marine animal rescues at 16 beaches

**HERALD ASKS:** Why were daily wagers and casual workers roped in when KCIC had been contracted by the government for the same work?

## Amal Clooney may face US entry ban

**AGENCY, NEW DELHI:** Amal Clooney, internationally renowned human rights lawyer and wife of actor George Clooney, could face restrictions on entering the United States due to her reported involvement with the International Criminal Court (ICC) in a war crimes case against Israeli leaders, it was reported.

Clooney, a British citizen and a respected figure in international law, has allegedly provided legal advice to the ICC as it examines a case involving Israeli



Amal with her husband George Clooney

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defence Minister Yoav Gallant. The case is tied to alleged war crimes committed during Israel's ongoing military operations in Gaza.

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## Apple dials India as China call drops, amid US tariffs

US-bound iPhones to be sourced from India

**AGENCY, NEW DELHI:** In a major strategic pivot, Apple is rapidly expanding its iPhone manufacturing operations in India as tensions between the United States and China escalate.

With mounting US tariffs on Chinese imports and growing concerns over supply chain disruptions, the tech giant is working to position India as a central hub for iPhone production — particularly for models

destined for the American market.

Two major facilities are currently spearheading this shift. Tata Electronics has commenced iPhone assembly at its Hosur plant in Tamil Nadu, focusing initially on older models. Meanwhile, Foxconn, Apple's long-time Taiwanese partner, is finalising a massive \$2.6 billion facility in Bengaluru. Set to begin operations within days, this

plant is designed to assemble the upcoming iPhone 16 and 16e models, with a production capacity of 300 to 500 units per hour.

Sources indicate that by the end of 2026, Apple aims to manufacture the majority of iPhones sold in the US at Indian plants. In March alone, India shipped \$2 billion worth of iPhones to the US, a record monthly figure.

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## Far from smart: E-buses neither disabled-friendly nor digitally efficient

Contrary to claims made by Smart City CEO Sanjit Rodrigues on Tuesday, a ground check shows inaccessible ramps and overwhelmed drivers

Team Herald

**PANJIM:** A day after Imagine Panaji Smart City Development Limited (IPSCDL) claimed credit for efficiently operating 48 e-buses — highlighting a revenue of Rs 1.93 crore in the first nine months — a reality check on the ground revealed a much starker picture.

One of the long-standing promises made since the launch of the e-bus fleet was that it would be disabled-friendly. IPSCDL CEO Sanjit Rodrigues stated, "All the buses are of low floor and have ramps which open out. If a wheelchair-bound person wants to get in, then each bus has a place for wheel chair inside. You just have to make a request to the driver."

However, conversations with several drivers painted a contrasting picture. While the ramps technically exist, they are rarely used — or functional — due to



### SYSTEM FAILURE

■ E-buses have ramps, but they are rarely used due to lack of support staff

■ Wheelchair users face challenges as there are no conductors to assist with boarding

■ Drivers quitting jobs due to excessive workload of handling ticketing, digital payments and passenger management all by themselves

the lack of support staff.

Speaking to **O Heraldo**, Avelino D'Sa of the Disability Rights Association of Goa (DRAG) said, "They do have a ramp but there is no one to unroll it. If a disabled person wishes to board one of these buses, he or she cannot because there is nobody to as-

sist them. In Panjim, buses operate with a lone driver and he cannot get out of the bus to help the user. In order for it to be disabled-friendly, they should have another person who can take the ramp out and take the wheelchair in."

He stressed the need for



conductors: "There has to be conductors because it is not just a matter of putting the wheel chair inside but one has to climb onto the wheelchair. The conductor-less buses may be feasible for normal persons but in the case of disabled persons, it doesn't help."

A driver echoed the same concerns, noting that driving itself is a specialised responsibility. "Having a conductor is must. If a disabled person tries to board a bus and he requires assistance, then how can the driver leave the steering to help him? When buses are full, what is the driver supposed to do? Will he handle the passengers, issue tickets or drive the vehicle? The work load of a driver increases when there is no conductor. The problem aggravates if the bus is caught in a traffic congestion."

He further said: "If any untoward incident takes place, then driver is blamed. There is so much unemployment, I do not know why this concept is being introduced. At least some youth will get jobs if there are conductors in the buses. Conductor-less buses may work in foreign countries but not here."

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