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Will the 2027 Census reshape the 2029 poll?

India's long-delayed national census is finally set to return after a staggering 16-year gap. On the surface, the announcement that March 1, 2027, will be the reference date for the population enumeration marks a return to order. The exact schedule for the census has not been notified, which will be done through a gazette notification on June 16, 2025.

But scratch beneath the surface and a far more significant political question arises: Will this census meaningfully shape the 2029 general elections or is it already too late?

This will be the first digital census in India's history and notably, the first to count castes after independence. While this is being touted as a historic corrective, the timing and the likely lag between data collection and implementation leaves much to be desired.

The Union Home Ministry says the census will take place in two phases, with snow-bound regions covered in late 2026 and the rest of the country in early 2027. Yet, what's missing is clarity. The actual schedule remains pending until the gazette notification on June 16, 2025. And if India's past record with census data release is anything to go by, expecting final data before mid-to-late 2028 is optimistic.

Historically, the gap between data collection and publication is 18 to 24 months. Even if the digital tools now promise to expedite the process, time remains tight. For a Delimitation Commission to be constituted, for it to analyse fresh caste and population data, draft proposals, receive feedback, and submit its final report all before early 2029 stretches credibility. As per precedent, the last Delimitation Commission took over five years to complete its task.

The stakes of this census are not limited to updated population figures. It is set to trigger two massive political transformations: the delimitation of Lok Sabha and Assembly constituencies and the implementation of 33% women's reservation in Parliament and state legislatures. Both are constitutionally linked to the first census conducted after 2026.

The Women's Reservation Act, passed in 2023, clearly states that one-third of seats will be reserved for women only after the next delimitation which is tied to this census. In simpler terms: no delimitation, no women's quota.

Now, with the data unlikely to be ready and verified before the 2029 polls, the promise of women's reservation in the next general elections appears practically deferred. The government has not officially confirmed this delay, but internal estimates hint that neither delimitation nor reservation will be ready before 2034.

Another crucial aspect is the caste enumeration. Long demanded by parties like the Congress and regional outfits, caste-based data is seen as a vital corrective to decades of skewed social policies. Critics argue that policy making including reservations, welfare programs and development schemes has rested on outdated or incomplete figures.

India is a deeply caste-based society where opportunities, access, and discrimination are all shaped by one's social identity. A comprehensive caste census can unmask developmental disparities and bring invisible inequalities to light.

However, many fear that the caste data, too, will be politicised, diluted, or delayed beyond utility especially if it threatens the existing balance of power. Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin has already accused the Centre of manipulating census timelines to reduce southern representation in Parliament. His concern stems from the fact that the southern states, having better controlled population growth, may lose seats when delimitation is done purely on numbers.

Indeed, this north-south tension has historical precedent. The 1976 freeze on delimitation was enacted precisely to avoid penalizing southern states for their success in population control. That freeze was lifted for 2026 and now, all eyes are on the 2027 census to set that realignment in motion.

So, will the 2027 census impact the 2029 elections? Unlikely.

At best, we may see preliminary data used in policy debate, but not in redrawing constituencies or reserving seats. For all practical purposes, the 2029 general elections will likely be conducted under the old population map delaying the two landmark reforms the census was supposed to unlock.

While the announcement of the 2027 census reference date is significant, it risks being symbolic unless matched by transparent timelines, efficient implementation, and political will. Without that, the Indian electorate may have to wait until 2034 for a genuinely restructured, representative democracy.

comment



JOSE MARIA MIRANDA

Generally, people have the highest regard for doctors in Goa and they truly deserve it. They combine dedication with knowledge and competence. No wonder, that the people revolted at the public humiliation meted to a senior doctor of GMC



We are all sadly aware that the worst blind and deaf are not the physically impaired but the ones who, having ears and eyes wide open refuse to listen or to see. That is the case with our elected representatives and bureaucrats, who, with few honourable exceptions, are out of touch with reality and with those who elected them and pay their salaries. And, it is rightly said that just like diapers, they need to be changed and for the same reasons. Those of us who shout, scream and write, with slight change of tune and tone, on the same issues, have not gone insane or are not oblivious that no one in authority pays any attention or cares a wee bit for what we say or write or even listens or reads us. But we all feel the need to write or scream because we, unlike our insensitive rulers, are genuinely and emotionally connected and attached to this beautiful land, which God has gifted to us, which was our cradle and will perhaps be our tomb. I

decided to take a short break on burning issues, but come back with a vengeance, never to give up, whatever it costs, until the last destroyer of Goa is kicked out of his/her pedestal.

My last article lamenting our false pride and some of our shortcomings, which are causing immense harm to us, was thankfully well received by many, who acknowledge some hard truths about us. But these are perhaps only those who read and had the humility to accept the reality about us and the disservice we are doing to ourselves. Those who really needed to read it, surely didn't and if they did, they couldn't care a damn and would go about their own ways.

Today, I felt I needed to have a word of gratitude to

People rendering yeoman service to us deserve our gratitude

the many people, in our society, who are engaged in occupations, which render yeoman service to all of us. Some of them are top professionals, who have felt inclined to study hard, for years, and devote their time and energies in serving the humanity. Besides doctors and nurses, we have also teachers, many of whom are, after our parents, responsible for what we are today. They took time off to educate, teach and instill discipline in us. But, apart from these, we have those whom we may sometimes consider belonging to the lower rung of the society and whom we do not pay much heed to, but without whom, we wouldn't be able to survive. They are those involved in menial jobs, those who lift our garbage, clean our roads, clear our drains, sewage manholes, the nauseating slush from our gutters and the rubbish they contain. What would we do without them? Have we ever realized what a tough job it is and the service they render to us? And, mind you, there are very few Goans, if at all there are any, engaged in these operations. The outsiders, the migrants need these jobs, because of the hardships they undergo and which we perhaps have never gone through. Let us treat them with dignity, compassion and love.

We can continue thumping our chests with reports of India having surpassed Japan and likely to overtake Germany shortly as world's fourth largest economy and Goa having the highest or second highest GDP per capita. But what is the condition of poor people in India and what is the level of unemployment, which has forced the exodus of Goans from Goa and illegal migration of Indians to other countries? Can we really boast, when the ground situation is so different? The problem perhaps lies in the corrupt ruling the country without any transparency and accountability.

Let me now come to hospitals, the doctors, the nurses and the menial staff. We may have a lot of complaints about the behavior of the staff in Government hospitals, their negligence and casual, if not

rude approach or attitude, but contrast it with the dedication and competence of some of the doctors. At GMC, obviously, patients are prepared to overlook the former to avail of the latter. I do not want to name any Departments, as I may omit some, but these doctors and surgeons could have made millions elsewhere, but decided to stay put to serve the people of Goa. Very great and noble gesture, indeed, which deserves our gratitude!

Generally, people have the highest regard for doctors in Goa and they truly deserve it. They combine dedication with knowledge and competence. No wonder, that the people revolted at the public humiliation meted to a senior doctor of GMC. The attitude and words spoken by the Health Minister, were atrocious. Some people applauded the CM for reversing the doctor's suspension but was Viswajeet Rane competent to direct suspension or is there a procedure to be followed? Of course, in Sawant's regime anything is possible and permitted. While the protest in solidarity was commendable, their succumbing to CM's pressure ought to have been avoided. It was the only way out for the CM, who, we all know is mortally afraid that Rane may rock his chair, to which he will stick, no matter how low he has to stoop. And the GMC doctors sadly gave in, surely much to the disgust of Dr Kuttikar, who walked away, refusing to talk to the Press.

We may have reservations about some doctors, nurses and other staff at a few hospitals, but let us understand the constraints and circumstances under which they work, the sacrifices they make of staying awake or attending to patients late at night, often forgoing rest and sleep only to be available and succour the patients. Let never attitudes like that of our Health Minister ever overtake us and let us thank God that Goa still has a galaxy of eminent doctors, who make Goa proud and us avail of their competence and skills.

(The author is a retired banker)

Three-storey police station at Old Goa heritage site

It is learnt that members of the Save Old Goa Action Committee (SOGAC) on Monday reportedly objected to the proposed construction of a three-storey building for a police station in Old Goa citing violation of the heritage protection norms as the project site falls within the UNESCO World Heritage buffer zone. The committee has reportedly urged the government to shift the police station to a site outside the protected zone. As per rules of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) no construction is permitted in such protected areas. It is argued that vehicular movement will increase due to the proposed police station which will lead to traffic congestion thereby adversely affecting heritage structures. Anti-social elements and undertrials will be seen being brought and taken while handcuffed which will present an adverse view for the visitors to the heritage site.

The building will be crowded with a number of people who will be visiting the proposed police station. It is learnt that suitable land in Old Goa which is outside the buffer zone had already been acquired specifically for the construction of a police station.

It is learnt that the new building is intended to serve the constituencies of St Cruz and Cumbarjua. Hence a site outside the 300-meter buffer zone can be

earmarked for the same. The project will endanger the integrity of Old Goa's irreplaceable heritage. However the biggest concern is that such a building will set a wrong precedent for more high-rise buildings to come up in the protected area. The government which speaks of protecting heritage sites needs to walk the talk.

Adelmo Fernandes, Vasco

Killing Goa softly!

A Central Government report showed Goa's tree cover came down by -22% over 12 years.

That's approx -1.8% reduction every year for 12 years!

Goans should not be surprised to note that heat, pollution, water tables should have also degraded perhaps in some proportion over these 12 years!

All this destruction is having a huge negative impact on Goa, quality of living and also traditional industries including fishing, agriculture and Tourism!

The politicians can waste all the taxpayers money they want to promote Goa but with rapidly reducing green cover, will this attract or deter tourists?

The ball is in the court of the people of Goa ! Let's act or perish! The politicians should have well established their havens outside so who will ultimately pay the price?

Arwin Mesquita, Colva

letterstotheeditor

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Curated narratives over real justice

Greta Thunberg went all the way from Italy to Gaza where Jews have killed 50,000 Arabs, cleverly skipping Syria, where millions have died because Arabs killed Arabs. So it's not the violence, it is who is killing who that matters.

Greta knows she cannot enter Gaza because IDF will intercept her, which they did. On being intercepted, she smiled at the IDF soldier, took the food they gave her, faced her phone camera and said this - "My name is Greta Thunberg and I am from Sweden. If you see this video, we have been intercepted and kidnapped in international waters by the Israeli occupational forces, or forces that support Israel."

We now have neo-revolutionaries like Greta who prioritise curated narratives over real justice. Symbolic optics are used for moral posturing and virtue signalling. Victims of war are chosen as per political ideologies. Their lives have become a carefully constructed media performance.

This is what is called the virus of wokeness.

Rekha Sarin Trehan, Benaulim

Quality of life more important

This has reference to the report

'India's population touches 1.46 b...' (O Herald June 11, 2025).

Interesting data in the UN demographic report on population and fertility rates in India. India's population has touched 1.46 billion and is expected to peak at 1.7 billion by 2065. Is that some great achievement? The fact is, our country is getting overpopulated even as the total fertility rates have fallen below the replacement rate. Of course, there are many who are struggling to start a family. However, one needs to look at the slums today in cities like Mumbai where there is no limit to the number of children. They have more mouths to feed than they can provide. And then they also want to educate their children. They are indeed struggling to make ends meet. This is one area where we need to work on, limiting children to just one or two. Quality of life is more important than the quantity.

Melville X. D'Souza, Mumbai

Priority of PM and HM

The entire nation is aware that the Pahalgam tragedy in which 21 innocent tourists were massacred by the terrorists happened only and only due to security lapses, in such a celebrated tourist spot, ever densely populated by tourists and that the BJP government at the centre

people'sedit

ECLIPSING OF CAUSE-EFFECT AWARENESS

SRIPRIYA SATISH

The other day, I was watching a viral YouTube comedy reel. Although it didn't make me laugh, it stirred something in me. The video showed an elderly man trying to taste his broth with a spoon. Realising it lacked salt, he added some to the pot. But instead of stirring the broth or taking a fresh spoonful, he tasted the remnants from his previous attempt. Unsurprisingly, it still tasted bland. He added more salt, again tasting only the leftover broth on the spoon. The process repeated until, I presume, the soup was more salt than broth!

While the reel was meant to amuse, it took me down memory lane. I recalled a childhood moment when I was about five. My grandmother, convinced that her missing spectacles would reappear with the right incentive, gave my mischievous cousin half a rupee. Lo and behold, the spectacles were soon "found" in the same cupboard she had searched thoroughly before. My grandmother never suspected that the cousin had hidden them to earn a reward.

Both instances are humorous in hindsight, yet they reflect something deeper: a diminishing awareness of cause and effect. Every effect has a cause, even if it isn't immediately visible. When we fail to make this connection, it can have real consequences in our lives.

Take superstition, for instance. My uncle once declared that a black cat crossing one's path was a bad omen. He also believed that keeping a tortoise as a pet would bring financial misfortune. Also, in villages poor and helpless animals are sacrificed in the name of religion. These beliefs, though culturally widespread, stem from a disconnect between outcome and evidence—further examples of eroding logical thinking.

On a more serious note, environmental degradation stands as a stark reminder of this disconnect. From polluted rivers to choking air, the consequences of human negligence are all around us. Yet when floods or droughts strike, some still claim that "the gods are angry," conveniently ignoring the reality of deforestation, excessive carbon emissions, and unsustainable living. Superstition, in such cases, acts as a veil—one that hides our responsibility. Also, the use of plastics is very hazardous to our environment. In spite of knowing this we, for our convenience, continue using plastics and choke our environment.

The same disconnect is visible in the realm of personal health. As obesity and lifestyle diseases rise, many continue to blame genetics or metabolism, refusing to accept the impact of poor dietary habits and sedentary lifestyles. We also know that India is the diabetic capital of the world. Recognising cause and effect, could empower us to make healthier, more informed choices and healthier choices.

The growing disconnect between cause and effect can easily push us to a more dangerous situation.

What's the solution? We must consciously nurture cause-and-effect thinking from an early age. Schools should encourage children to examine beliefs—both traditional and modern—through the lens of reason and awareness. This doesn't mean discarding cultural traditions but allowing them to coexist with logic rather than override it. Beliefs should be believed with logic.

Where there is a ripple, there's bound to be a splash—and every splash has a source. Interestingly, even many ancient philosophies acknowledge this interdependence, suggesting a pre-existing effect in every cause.

To conclude, in the words of the great scientist Albert Einstein: "Nothing happens until something moves."

and the Home Ministry are solely responsible for the same. Home Minister Amit Shah must have resigned immediately owning responsibility for the man-made tragedy that wiped off sindoor from the foreheads of 21 of our sisters but he preferred to stay put in his seat, despite repeated claims made by the opposition for his exit.

When the country is yet to come out of the unfathomable grief over the gruesome Pahalgam massacre and a close follow up is needed to keep the rogue nation under check, it is really shocking that Prime Minister Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah who should be seriously involved in overseeing related head-going tasks in Delhi, are found to be engaged busily in electioneering in election-prone states like Bihar, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu. It is also alleged by the opposition parties that that they are politicising Operation Sindoor for electoral gains. During his recent two day electioneering visit to Tamil Nadu, Amit Shah thundered in Madurai that they would remove the DMK government in TN and the TMC government in West Bengal from power, as they have done to the Aam Aadmi Party in Delhi.

Does it mean that engaging themselves in electioneering to capture power in different states, particularly, the non- BJP ruled states instead of devoting their time in matters relating to the safety and security of the citizens is the top most priority of the PM and HM?

Tharcious S. Fernando, Chennai