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- **Blame not the messenger in India's diplomacy**
- **Will delaying the Census affect its implementation?**
- **ASI to organise global meet on decoding Indus Valley script**
- **Canada says Khalistani extremists continue to fund violence in India**

Blame not the messenger in India's diplomacy

Criticism of Indian diplomacy

India's diplomats faced backlash post-Operation Sindoor — not for the action, but for weak global messaging.

- **Limited support:** Sympathy came after the Pahalgam attack, but not after Operation Sindoor, as seen in 2016 and 2019. **Pakistan, meanwhile, gained vocal allies.**
- **Pakistani gains:** Despite terror links, Pakistan secured UN roles and financial aid from IMF; India struggled to rally support or label attackers.
- **U.S. ambiguity:** President Trump blurred lines between India and Pakistan, offering mediation without addressing terrorism.

Despite high-level outreach, global impact was limited — highlighting the need to reassess not just diplomacy, but the message itself.

Blame not the messenger in India's diplomacy

History and literature are replete with references to not 'shooting the messenger' for bringing bad news. In Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, the Egyptian queen assaults a messenger and threatens to have him "whipped with wire and stewed in brine, smarting in ling'ring pickle", for bringing her the news that the Roman General Mark Antony has married another. "I had do bring the news made not the match," the messenger replies, before making a hasty exit. Over the past two months, India's 'diplomatic messengers' too have faced an ire that is unprecedented — criticised not for the message they bring, but for failing to convey effectively enough, the message New Delhi has sent out after Operation Sindoor (May 7-10, 2025).

Criticism of Indian diplomacy
Public commentary that is critical of the Ministry of External Affairs and its missions has focused broadly on three counts. First, that India received condolences and statements condemning the Pahalgam terror attack from all quarters, but not the kind of unequivocal support, especially from Pakistan, of the kind seen in 2016 (post-Uri) and 2019 (post-Pulwama). In 2016, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka and the Maldives backed India's decision to stay away from the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation summit in Pakistan after the Uri attack. In 2019, global solidarity with India forced even China to back a United Nations Security Council (UNSC) terror designation for Jaish-e-Mohammad chief Masood Azhar. Earlier, in 2008, there was international consensus in India's favour after the Mumbai attacks, when Hafiz Saeed and a number of Lashkar-e-Taiba terrorists were designated by the UNSC, and Pakistan was put on the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) grey list for the first time. Instead, this time, unfavourable comparisons have been made to Pakistan for the lines of support it received from China, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Malaysia and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

Second, the perception is that Pakistan has scored some diplomatic wins, despite widespread global understanding that Pakistan uses terrorists as state proxies. In April, Pakistan, a non-permanent member of the UNSC, managed to amend the resolution on Pakistan to delete any reference to The Resistance Front (TRF), that claimed responsibility for the heinous attack.

Earlier this month, Pakistan was chosen as chair of the Taliban Sanctions Committee and vice-Chair of the Counter-Terrorism Committee at the UNSC, and secured loans from the International Monetary Fund and Asian Development Bank despite New Delhi's opposition. Next was the White House's lunch invitation to Pakistan Army chief (now Field Marshal) General Asim Munir, despite the belief in India that his "jugalur vein" speech was a virtual green signal for the Pahalgam attack. In



Suhassini Haider

July, as Security Council President for the month, Pakistan will try to schedule meetings on the India-Pakistan conflict and Kashmir, even as India accelerates efforts to designate the TRF at the UNSC, and place Pakistan on the FATF greylist. India's diplomats will be tested again.

The third aspect pertains to United States President Donald Trump, who, despite official denials from India, has chosen to muddy the narrative of how the May 10 ceasefire was achieved, hyphenating India and Pakistan in more than a dozen public statements, and offering to mediate on Kashmir. His latest iteration of the comments this week, just hours after a telephone conversation with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and just before his meeting with Gen. Munir, was possibly the most blatant. Thus far, Mr. Trump's statements, post-ceasefire, have not had a single word on the scourge of terrorism itself, showing just far apart the understanding between Delhi and Washington is at this time.

A flurry of diplomacy does not seem to have moved the needle on these criticisms. After Operation Sindoor, special delegations of Members of Parliament and former diplomats travelled to 32 countries. The most time (six days) was spent in the United States. After the G-7 meet, Mr. Modi has meetings ahead with BRICS leaders. External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar is visiting the U.S. for the Quad Foreign Ministers Meeting soon, after several visits to European capitals recently. The government had not essayed such a campaign after the 2016 or 2019 actions against Pakistan, indicating that it too feels that diplomatic efforts by the Ministry of External Affairs and missions abroad have been found wanting and need bolstering.

But much as the messenger in Shakespeare says, India's diplomats do not decide the message that India wishes to send after Operation Sindoor, and cannot be held responsible for its resonance.

It is necessary for the government to study the contents of that message, the shift in geopolitical narratives and in how India is perceived, in order to build a more realistic assessment of how far international diplomacy can ensure the outcomes New Delhi desires vis-à-vis Pakistan.

The 'new normal'

With reference to the content of the message, Mr. Modi's three-pronged "New Normal" has raised eyebrows in some capitals. The first prong — "Any act of terror is an act of war" — lowers the threshold for future conflicts, passing the trigger for Indian strikes into the hands of any terrorist, acting on orders on their own. The second — "India will not bow to nuclear blackmail" — is not necessarily new, but has been left unarticulated thus far because it gives the appearance of a heightened nuclear risk for the region. The third — India will not distinguish between state and non-state actors henceforth — sends out an escalatory message, indicating that the next terror attack could well invoke 'Armageddon',

rather than the controlled four day conflict in Operation Sindoor. While India's partners have not asked for evidence of Pakistan's links to Pahalgam, they look askance at other aspects — like why India has been unable to trace the terrorists responsible yet.

Next, it is necessary to note that global shocks in the past few years have changed how the world views India's tough messaging. Take for example, a growing number of statements by Indian Ministers about "taking back Pakistan occupied Kashmir" by force if necessary. These make many of India's interlocutors uncomfortable, given the current number of conflicts over territorial aggression underway, from West Asia, to Ukraine to the South China Sea. In the light of Israel's retaliation for the October 7, 2023 terror attacks, few wish to give any state a free hand for "retribution". New Delhi's refusal to criticise Russia for its invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and to raise its oil imports from Russia in the face of sanctions, lost it some support in the western world, especially Europe. The Modi government's silence on Israel's devastation of Gaza has also been met with disappointment in the Global South.

India, as Mr. Modi told Mr. Trump this week, views terrorism emanating from Pakistan, "not as a proxy war, but as a war itself". India's diplomats have been left explaining why their stock responses that "this is not an era of war" and that "dialogue and diplomacy" are the only way forward do not apply to India and Pakistan. Thus, it may be necessary for New Delhi to rethink how it frames its message in view of these changes, notwithstanding the global double standards inherent in the expectations from India.

Democracy in decline

Finally, there is need for introspection over how the Modi government's image itself has altered in the world since 2019, leading to diplomatic challenges on a number of fronts. These range from concerns abroad over laws such as the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, the amendment of Article 370, Internet bans and summary arrests in different parts of the country, and accusations against Indian government agents of involvement in transnational killings in the U.S. and Canada. Questions over the broader decline in democracy from concerns abroad over laws such as the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, the amendment of Article 370, Internet bans and summary arrests in different parts of the country, and accusations against Indian government agents of involvement in transnational killings in the U.S. and Canada.

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The 'new normal'

India's new policy, promoted by Prime Minister Modi, is seen as more aggressive and includes three main ideas:

- 1. Terror = War:** Any terror attack is considered an act of war, which could lead to immediate military response.
- 2. No fear of nuclear threats:** India rejects being intimidated by Pakistan's nuclear weapons.
- 3. No difference between state and non-state actors:** India will treat all attackers the same, even if the state denies involvement.

These strong stances **raise concerns internationally**, especially because they could lead to more frequent conflicts. Many countries are also uneasy because of other Indian government actions and statements, like promises to take back Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.

India's neutral stance on global conflicts like Russia-Ukraine and its silence on Israel's actions in Gaza have also hurt its image among Western and Global South nations.

In this new global environment, India's current messaging may not resonate — and needs rethinking.

Democracy in decline

India's global reputation has also been affected by internal issues. Concerns include:

- The Citizenship Amendment Act
- Removal of Jammu & Kashmir's special status (Article 370)
- Internet shutdowns and arrests
- Accusations of Indian agents involved in killings abroad

These actions **have made India's image less democratic** and harmed its moral standing in the world.

India has every right to defend itself from terrorism.

But for diplomats to present a strong case, India must also show that it remains different from Pakistan as a democratic, secular, stable, and law-abiding country.

Will delaying the Census affect its implementation?

Will delaying the Census affect its implementation?



Sanjay Kumar,
Co-Director of Lokniti, a research programme at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, New Delhi



Poonam Mittreja,
Executive Director, Population Foundation of India

PARLEY
On June 16, the Registrar General of India under the Union Ministry of Home Affairs issued a notification that India's population will be counted in 2027. Following demands by the Opposition parties, among other reasons, the government has also announced the inclusion of caste enumeration in the Census for the first time in independent India. The last Census was held in 2011. The exercise was to take place in 2023, but was delayed because of the COVID-19 pandemic. It has now been further pushed to 2027. Will delaying the Census affect its implementation? Sanjay Kumar and Poonam Mittreja discuss the question in a conversation moderated by Vijaya Singh. Edited excerpts:

Sanjay Kumar: The Census should have taken place in 2023, but that was the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since everything was stalled in 2020 and we were under a strict lockdown for a good part of that year, the Census could not take place.

Do you see any political reasons for the further delay? Do you think the government wanted to time it with the delimitation exercise, which is frozen till 2026?

SK: I don't have an explanation for this delay. The pandemic was over by mid-2022. By the end of 2022, universities had opened, schools had gone back to a normal routine, and everyone had started going back to office. The delay for nearly three years after that is frankly inexplicable. I'm not sure why the government did not take the initiative earlier. Every time delimitation takes place, the exercise uses the previous Census data. So the government could have begun conducting the Census in 2023 as well. Even if it did start conducting the exercise in 2025, it would have made no difference to the work of delimitation.

Can you tell us about the implications of a delayed Census?

Poonam Mittreja: The delay has serious consequences for governance and development. India continues to use Census data from 2011 data in 2025. The ground reality has changed dramatically since 2011. Population growth, internal migration, urbanisation, and fertility patterns have all accelerated/changed. But policy continues to run on outdated assumptions. The delay effects nearly every



A view of Ranganathan Street in T. Nagar, Chennai, S. VELAMKANNI/BJP

sector. School enrolment projections are inaccurate. Vaccine coverage targets have missed the mark. Social welfare programmes such as PDS (public distribution system) and MGNREGS (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme) cannot adjust to the actual population needs. The delay also affects disaster preparedness and infrastructure planning.

This is going to be the first digital Census in India. Are there any concerns about that?

PM: Digitisation can bring in efficiency, reduce manual error, and allow faster data processing. But a fully digital Census also risks excluding the very people who are the hardest to reach, such as those in rural households and informal settlements, those belonging to marginalised communities, and women. They may not have smartphones, stable electricity, or digital access. Take women, for instance – only 33% of rural women use the Internet. Among women in low income households, mobile phone ownership is significantly low. A digital 'first' approach without safeguards could reinforce the existing gender bias.

To succeed, this Census must retain door-to-door in person enumeration, especially in areas that are difficult to access. The enumerators must be trained to work with diverse populations in regional languages and have an inclusive approach. Technology should support, not replace, the human engagement that is essential for collecting accurate data.

The government is yet to announce any decision regarding the National Population Register (NPR), which is the first step towards the creation of a National Register of Citizens (NRC). In the 2023 Census, it was planned to be updated with the first phase of

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POONAM MITTREJA

the Census. Do you think if the two are combined – the NPR and population Census – it may impact the process because of the controversies and fears around the NPR?

SK: If you are trying to do one piece of work and then you combine it with other work, there is a possibility of both getting tampered with. Things could get delayed, jumbled, and some information could get misrepresented.

But do you see the Centre not going ahead with the NPR so that the Census is done in a hassle-free manner?

SK: I would be in favour of getting the Census done separately because we should not forget that this is being undertaken after a very long time – 16 years! This is the first time that caste enumeration is also taking place as part of the Census. So a new element is already there. Why overburden the enumerators?

How difficult or easy will it be for the government to collect data on caste? In the Socio-Economic and Caste Census of 2011, around 40 lakh caste names were thrown up. There were instances of people writing their surnames instead of their community names. It was based on self-disclosure. What methodology do you think the government should follow to make the process robust?

If we are raising questions about caste data, we can raise questions about the collection of other information as well. If people can answer questions about their assets, age, gender, and education, why should there be any difficulty in answering questions about caste?

But yes, training is important. If we are able to train our enumerators well, the respondents will be able to answer most of the questions. The enumerators need to know that Varma, for instance, is a surname, not a caste. If a respondent mentions this surname as their caste, the enumerators will have to ask a follow-up question.

PM: Asking about a person's caste is not going to be difficult. The UPA (United Progressive Alliance) government conducted a caste census nearly a decade ago, but never released the data. I think homework needs to be done well when we collect data on caste. Enumerators must understand all the caste sub-categories. Unless they themselves are well informed, they are not going to be able to deal with erroneous answers or inappropriate answers.

Why do you think Census is important for a country?

PM: The world is changing rapidly and so many things are uncertain. In such a scenario, the Census is the most important aspect to consider in not only planning and policymaking, but also in the allocation of resources. It helps us understand how climate change is impacting us, changing population dynamics, and patterns of digitisation. In India, to understand the rapid increase in urbanisation and migration patterns, we need numbers. We also know that India is an ageing society. The number of aged people is going to nearly double in the next 20 years. You can't let people age and then start planning. So given the rapidly changing environment, planning, allocation of resources, targeting the poor and targeting those who are marginalised are all objectives. In fact, the whole purpose of having a caste census is to invest in the most marginalised communities.

Do you think the government should consider reducing the 10-year period for conducting the Census so that we can have faster and more accurate data about these changes in society?

SK: Conducting the Census is a tedious, time-consuming process. It cannot happen overnight. The Census is not merely about counting the number of people. The government's policy formulation depends on the information collected during a Census. The large amount of information gathered is valuable for the government to implement various kinds of policies. We may feel that the government can do this every five years, but it is more appropriate to do it every 10 years. But we should make sure that the Census takes place on time and there is no break in between.



To listen to the full interview
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www.thehindu.com





Census Delay and Its Causes

- The Census, due in 2021, was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Further delays (till 2027) are unexplained, as normalcy resumed by late 2022.
- No valid reason ties the delay for the delimitation exercise, which uses past Census data.

Impact of the Delay

- Using outdated 2011 data affects planning and policy in key sectors:
 - ♦ School enrolment, vaccine targets, welfare schemes (PDS, MGNREGS), infrastructure, disaster planning.
- Population dynamics have changed significantly since 2011.

Caste Enumeration – First Time in Census

- New addition to the Census; requires proper planning and training.
- Enumerators must distinguish between caste and surname (e.g., “Varma” as surname, not caste).
- Prior effort (SECC 2011) saw issues like inconsistent naming and unreleased data.

Importance of the Census

- Vital for:
 - ♦ Policy formulation
 - ♦ Resource allocation
 - ♦ Tracking demographic changes (urbanisation, migration, ageing)
 - ♦ Planning for marginalised communities

ASI to organise global meet on decoding Indus Valley script

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) will host a three-day international conference from August 20 to 22 in Greater Noida to discuss deciphering the Indus Valley script.

The Indus script, comprising pictorial symbols, remains undeciphered due to the lack of bilingual texts and the brevity of inscriptions.

The inscriptions are very short, making it hard to find patterns or meanings.

The script consists of over 400 pictorial signs, leading some researchers to classify it as “logo-syllabic”.

ASI to organise global meet on decoding Indus Valley script

Sreeparna Chakrabarty
NEW DELHI

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) will host a three-day international conference from August 20 to 22 in Greater Noida to discuss deciphering the Indus Valley script.

Invitations to the international conclave on “Decipherment of the Indus script: current status and the way forward”, to be held at the Pt. Deendayal Upadhyay Institute of Archaeology, Greater Noida, have been sent out to experts working on the Harappan civilisation and culture both in India and abroad.

Sources in the ASI told *The Hindu* that the seminar would take place mainly through presentations, both offline and online. Thematic sessions shall be designed based on the current stage of research in this field. Discussions shall



Seals with the script of the Indus Valley Civilisation.

follow presentations at the end of each session.

“The proceedings of the seminar is anticipated to highlight the scope and quantum of current and future research in the field,” a senior ASI functionary said.

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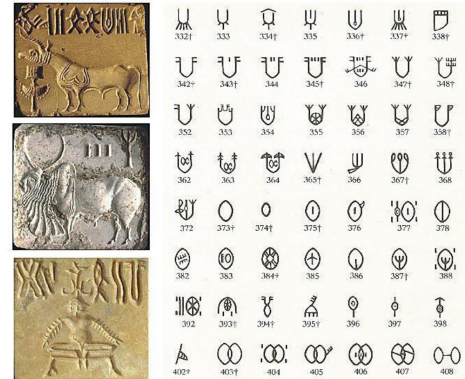


The **Indus script** is the **writing system** used by the **Indus Valley Civilization (IVC)** (c. 2500–1900 BCE).

Found on **seals, tablets, pottery, copper plates**, and other artifacts.

Importance of the Script

- Key to understanding **IVC's administration, religion, economy, and culture**.
- May hold insights into **early urban planning, trade networks, and social structure**.
- Could help trace the **linguistic roots of South Asia**.



Canada has repeated its **allegation** that the **Indian government** was involved in the killing of Hardeep Singh Nijjar.

At the same time, for the **first time**, Canada has officially acknowledged that **Khalistani extremists** based in **Canada** are involved in **planning and funding violence in India**.

Canada says Khalistani extremists continue to fund violence in India

Suhasini Haidar
NEW DELHI

Canada doubled down on allegations of a link between the Indian government and the Nijjar killing, while acknowledging for the first time, in a report released on Wednesday, that Canada-based Khalistani extremists continue to plan and fund violence in India.

The Canadian Security and Intelligence Service (CSIS), which named India, along with China, Iran, Pakistan and Russia as the “main perpetrators of foreign interference and espionage against Canada”, released the report online a day after Prime Minister Narendra Modi met with Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney at the G-7 Summit outreach in Kananaskis and agreed to restore High Commissioners and a number of dialogue



Police officers watch Sikh protesters participate in a rally as world leaders gather for the G-7 Summit in Calgary, Canada. REUTERS

mechanisms. It was tabled by the CSIS in the Canadian Parliament last week.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) declined to comment on the report, which indicates that while Canada is taking note of India's concerns over Khalistani groups more than in the past, it maintains its allegations over the Nijjar killing and other accusations of foreign interfe-

rence, including transnational repression (TNR), which New Delhi has repeatedly denied.

The report added Canada-based Khalistani extremist groups for the first time to its section on politically motivated violent extremism (PMVE), indicating that the CSIS is taking India's complaints about violence from these groups more seriously than be-

fore, which has been a source of New Delhi's long-held grievance against Ottawa.

However, it said that while “some” of Khalistani separatist supporters took part in legitimate protests and other activities, “only a small group of individuals are considered Khalistani extremists because they continue to use Canada as a base for the promotion, fundraising or planning of violence primarily in India”.

The report said Canada “must remain vigilant about continued foreign interference conducted by the Government of India”.

It said Pakistan had attempted to interfere in Canadian politics, by helping “pro-Pakistan” candidates over those seen as “pro-India” and also carried out TNR activities to suppress Pakistani dissidents and critics in the country.





Canada says Khalistani extremists continue to fund violence in India

CSIS Report:

- The report was released by **Canada's intelligence agency (CSIS)**.
- It names **India, China, Iran, Pakistan, and Russia** as key sources of **foreign interference and espionage** in Canada.
- The report came out a day after **PM Modi met Canadian PM Mark Carney** at the G-7 Summit, where both agreed to restore **diplomatic ties and dialogues**.
- CSIS noted that **only a small group** of Khalistani extremists are using Canada to promote, fundraise, or plan violence in India.
- Others may support the Khalistan movement but are involved in **peaceful protests**.

