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## **Name Change from India to “Bharat”**

*By Prem SINGH GILL*

### **SYNOPSIS**

*The renaming of India to “Bharat” represents a strategically calculated political move by the ruling government in response to the emergence of the opposition’s “INDIA” coalition ahead of the 2024 Indian general election. This decision has ignited passionate internal debates ranging from support for the preservation of India's identity to practical concerns and the potential diversion from more pressing issues. There are also implications for international diplomacy.*

### **COMMENTARY**

Indian President Droupadi Murmu recently identified herself as the “President of Bharat” during an event held in conjunction with the G20 summit, sparking intense speculation and scholarly discourse on India’s national identity.

In a world marked by shifting geopolitical dynamics and evolving national identities, India finds itself at a crossroads contemplating a significant transformation – changing its name from India to “Bharat”. The potential renaming of India to “Bharat” is the ruling government’s strategic response to the emergence of the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance, or “INDIA” coalition, in the lead-up to the Spring 2024 Indian general election. Comprising 26 opposition parties thus far, the adoption of the name “INDIA” as a collective identity by Narendra Modi’s political opponents was a clear attempt to monopolise the nation’s brand and identity and shape the political discourse surrounding the concept of the nation “India” to their advantage.

In response, the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is strategically countering this narrative by proposing the country change its name from “India” to its Sanskrit name, “Bharat”. This move aims to reclaim the narrative surrounding India’s cultural and historical identity by emphasising traditional values and cultural heritage. More significantly, such a name change positions the ruling party as being committed to

preserving and protecting the essence of India's culture and identity. The ruling party's strategic alignment reflects a broader political strategy of invoking patriotism and thereby capitalising on nationalist sentiments to rally support in India's diverse and complex political landscape.

Nevertheless, this proposed name change has sparked intense debates both internationally and domestically, touching upon issues ranging from identity and cultural discourse to constitutional matters and implications for international diplomacy. As this issue delves deeply into the multifaceted aspects of potential transformation, this commentary will consider the historical, constitutional, and diplomatic aspects surrounding this potential transformation.

## **Historical Roots**

The significance of renaming India to "Bharat" can be traced to the country's historical roots. Derived from the Sanskrit epic, the *Mahabharata*, the Sanskrit term "Bharat" has been used to refer to the Indian subcontinent and is a name deeply intertwined in India's ancient past, civilisation, and culture.

Proponents of the name change argue that, conversely, the name "India" is a colonial legacy imposed by the British during their rule over the Indian subcontinent. They thus view "Bharat" as a return to India's pre-colonial identity, rooted in its rich heritage and civilisation. This historical perspective resonates with many Indians who take pride in their ancient traditions.

## **Constitutional Implications**

Changing the name of a country is a complex process, especially in a democratic nation like India. India's constitution, adopted in 1950, officially recognises the country as "India" and "Bharat" in Article 1. In addition, this article of the Indian constitution begins with the words, "India, that is Bharat, shall be a Union of States". Any alteration to this nomenclature would require a constitutional amendment, which is no small feat. Hence, while the ruling party seems to be actively seeking an alternative name, it is noteworthy that India already possesses a dual nomenclature, a provision enshrined within the constitutional framework.

Furthermore, the Constitution of India represents a delicate balance between various linguistic, cultural, and regional identities. Renaming the country would necessitate extensive debates in Parliament and among various states, each with its unique linguistic and cultural heritage. Critics argue that such a move could potentially stoke tensions among different linguistic groups and disrupt the unity enshrined in the Indian constitution.

Despite these potential obstacles, proponents of the name change argue that "Bharat" represents a more inclusive identity that transcends linguistic and regional boundaries. They believe renaming the country "Bharat" can foster a sense of national unity that goes beyond diversity. Nevertheless, achieving this unity would require careful consideration of linguistic and cultural sensitivities.

## **International Diplomacy**

The international implications of renaming a country cannot be ignored. "India" is a well-established name in international diplomacy, recognised by countries worldwide. By renaming India to "Bharat" would require a comprehensive diplomatic effort to inform and gain recognition from the international community. It involves complex negotiations, rebranding efforts, and the preservation of India's global standing and diplomatic relationships.

One concern is how this change might affect existing treaties, agreements, and international organisations where India is a member. Renegotiating these agreements under a new name could be a time-consuming and complex process. The potential confusion surrounding the name change could thus lead to various diplomatic challenges.

## **The Dialogue Continues**

The proposed name change underscores the complex interplay of identity, politics, and governance. Some argue that this rebranding aligns the nation more closely with its cultural and historical roots, symbolically preserving India's identity and heritage. However, opponents express concerns about the practicality of such a change, fearing that it might divert attention from more immediate and pressing issues such as economic development, poverty alleviation, and social justice (especially for minorities). Some even suspect that the name change could be an attempt to placate specific political or cultural factions.

While critics argue that this name change might divert attention from pressing issues, the government appears to view it as an opportunity to reshape the political narrative, framing the debate around cultural identity and heritage. Ultimately, the decision to rename India to "Bharat" is a calculated move for a competitive advantage in the ongoing political landscape, intended to consolidate support by appealing to cultural and nationalist sentiments in response to evolving political dynamics.

## **Conclusion**

To rename India's name to "Bharat" raises significant questions about identity, constitutionality, and diplomacy. While there is a rich historical and cultural basis for the name change, it also presents substantial practical challenges. Renaming a country is not merely a matter of semantics; it touches upon issues of national identity and unity. India must navigate these debates with sensitivity, keeping in mind the diverse linguistic and cultural fabric of the nation.

Additionally, India must engage in a meticulous diplomatic effort to ensure a smooth transition on the international stage. Ultimately, regardless of whether India decides to become "Bharat" or remain as "India", the process should reflect the will and consensus of its people while preserving its democratic principles and respect for its multicultural heritage.

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