

India or Bharat? A political name game

An invitation sent out at the G20 Summit in New Delhi has set off “a major controversy”, said **India Today (Noida)**. The invite, to an official dinner, was issued in the name of “The President of Bharat”; the capital was soon buzzing with rumours that the government plans to scrap the country’s English name and replace it with its Hindi equivalent, Bharat. Those who wish to change it, including many in PM Narendra Modi’s Hindu nationalist BJP, are “driven by a desire to shed remnants of colonial rule and embrace the nation’s indigenous heritage”.

Naresh Bansal, a BJP MP, recently called for the removal of the word India from the constitution, arguing that it symbolised “colonial slavery”. The government has called a special session of parliament later in the month. It is said that a motion to rename the nation is on the cards.

“India and Bharat have both evoked the same emotions among patriots for decades,” said **The Hindu (Chennai)**. The 1949 constitution refers to “India, that is Bharat”. The two words, it’s true, have slightly different resonances: India refers more to the modern republic; Bharat to the geographical and cultural landscape out of which it emerged. But both are “labels of pride”. It is sad that both have now been “weaponised for



Modi: shedding the remnants of colonial rule?

narrow political ends”. No doubt one factor is that the anti-BJP opposition bloc has renamed itself INDIA – the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance – ahead of next year’s general election. It seems that if the opposition are shouting “India”, Modi wants his side shouting “Bharat”. But “far from demonstrating a nation’s strength and pride, the government’s name game undermines the confidence and soft power of the nation”. India, of course, is a name recognised by billions around the world.

Even so, we should change it, said Reshmi Dasgupta on **First Post (Mumbai)**. India is an exonym: it’s what the country was called by others. It’s a Greek-Persian corruption of “Sindhu”, the Sanskrit word for the Indus River, later adopted by the British. Bharat, by contrast, is a Sanskrit word we use in our own languages. “Burma and Ceylon bravely decided to switch to their endonyms, Myanmar and Sri Lanka.” Why shouldn’t we do the same? India is a land of great linguistic and ethnic diversity, said **Mint (Bangalore)**. Not all our languages use the word Bharat. At a time of growing racial and religious intolerance, it would be far better if the name of the nation were not used as a “divisive wedge”. The current “cosy coexistence” of India and Bharat should be retained.