

## Press Release

### **THE PM IS LOWERING THE DIGNITY OF THE HIGH OFFICE**

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For quite some time now the nation as a whole has watched with increasing disappointment, even dismay, the virulently partisan character of Modi's stances and statements in public. Calumniating those deemed to be his opponents seems to afford him the highest degree of pleasure. This is at once puerile and sadistic. This streak came to a head in his recent visit to Kerala.

I have been participating, out of my spiritual concern and sense of duty as a citizen in a secular, democratic republic, in the spirited debates in that state in the wake of the Supreme Court verdict removing the discriminatory ban on women between ten and fifty years of age. I am in principled solidarity with the decision of the government of Kerala to implement the order of the Supreme Court, which is the only course of action open to it.

Yet, Modi, during his visit to the state launched a virulent attack on the government, belittling his duty to abide by the rule of law. He went there, ostensibly, to inaugurate a newly constructed bypass and was, in that sense, a guest of the people of Kerala. He should have shown better sensitivity to his hosts, given the godliness our culture attributes to hospitality.

Even otherwise, the Prime Minister of a country, on an official visit to a state, conducting himself as a party enthusiast and discrediting the principal opponent of his party on the mere pretext that the

government led by it chose to implement the order of the Supreme Court, is the height of administrative impropriety. Modi, as an individual is entitled to his views and party zeal; but as the Prime Minister of India, he has to rise above party politics on his official tours.

A high order of propriety goes with high offices. It is a national duty to respect it. The office of the Prime Minister is not a personal trophy, but a national emblem. Its incumbent must conduct himself, as Modi's predecessors, including Atal Bihari Vajpayee, did. Lowering the dignity of the office of the Prime Minister of India, as Modi, alas, appears to have no qualms in doing, is a disservice to the nation.

Prime Ministers come and go. India as a secular, democratic republic must endure. The essence of a republic is its republican culture, with special emphasis on personal liberty and intellectual integrity, which requires a culture of tolerance. The essence of the republican spirit was articulated by Voltaire- "I disapprove what you say, but I will defend to death your right to say it". Modi's trigger-happy denunciation of the perfectly lawful stand taken by the Kerala government, and all who disagree with him, is contrary to this basic republican norm.

It is imperative that the people of India take note of the degradation of national sentiments and standards of public conduct involved in all this, and see the serious dangers lurking in it to all that we cherish about our country. Modi is doing this out of the desperation to cling to office; but his needs, and the ambitions of his party, cannot take precedence over national interests and constitutional norms.

I urge the Prime Minister to desist from statements, actions and reactions out of tune with the high office he holds. I am sure every right-minded Indian endorses this plea.

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