

Congress, Redistribution & Muslims



Huge uproar over Modi's contentious address in Banswara, ECI gives notice

In a contentious address that came right after first phase of voting for Lok Sabha elections ended, Prime Minister Narendra Modi stormed a controversy as he suggested that if the Congress comes to power, it would redistribute wealth of people to Muslims and cited former PM Manmohan Singh's remark that the minority community had the first claim on the country's resources.

As a controversy erupted, at least three political parties-- Congress, CPI and CPI-M(L)- made representations to the Election Commission of India, which on Thursday issued notice to the Bharatiya Janata Party, and sought its response, by April 29.

Addressing a rally in Rajasthan's Banswara on April 21, Modi said: "The Congress manifesto says they will calculate the gold with mothers and sisters, get information about it and then distribute that property. They will distribute it to whom - Manmohan Singh's government had said that Muslims have the first right on the country's assets.

"Earlier, when their (Congress) government was in power, they had said that Muslims have the first right on the country's assets. This means to whom will this property be distributed? It will be distributed among those who have more children. It will be distributed to the infiltrators. Should your hard-earned money go to the infiltrators? Do you approve of this?" he said.

"This urban-naxal mindset, my mothers and sisters, they will not even leave your 'Mangalsutra'. They can go to that level," he said.

Modi's reference was to former prime minister Manmohan Singh's controversial "first claim" remark made in 2006.

While the Congress manifesto delves into



the issue of economic inequalities, the party has asserted that it does not talk about "redistribution" and that it favours a "comprehensive socio-economic caste census".

Modi's remarks courted a huge uproar, as

the Opposition parties criticised their attack on the PM and the saffron party.

Congress, CPI and CPI-M(L) filed complaints with the ECI in the subsequent days, accused PM Modi of committing blatant viola-

tions of electoral laws, as well as of the Indian Penal Code.

Congress said that the speech delivered by the Prime Minister, the 'star campaigner' of BJP for the ongoing Lok Sabha Elections, was "highly objectionable, divisive and ex-facie illegal."

Amidst a growing chorus of opposition condemnation, the Election Commission initiated an examination of complaints on Wednesday, and on Thursday, it, for the first time, took note of alleged model code violations by a prime minister, asking the BJP to respond to complaints from opposition parties accusing Modi of delivering a divisive and defamatory speech in Banswara, Rajasthan.

The Election Commission's letter to BJP President J P Nadda requested a response by Monday to complaints from the Congress, CPI, and CPI (ML) regarding Modi's remarks made on April 21 in Banswara. The Commission urged Nadda to ensure that all star campaigners of the party uphold high standards of political discourse and adhere to the model code of conduct.

This action marks the first instance where the Election Commission has addressed complaints against a sitting prime minister. The Commission has utilized provisions of the Representation of the People Act by initially engaging with party presidents to regulate star campaigners.

Separate but similarly-worded letters were sent to the Congress president concerning allegations made against him and Rahul Gandhi by the BJP. While not naming individuals directly, the Commission attached representations received with details of allegations against Modi, Gandhi, and Kharge.