

March 5, 2023

Joint Letter by Major Opposition Parties to the Prime Minister

Dear Pradhan Mantri Ji,

We hope you would agree that India is still a democratic country. The blatant misuse of central agencies against the members of the opposition appears to suggest that we have transitioned from being a democracy to an autocracy.

On the 26th of February 2023, after a long witch-hunt, Delhi's Deputy Chief Minister Shri Manish Sisodia was arrested by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) in connection with alleged irregularity without a shred of evidence against him. The allegations against Shri Sisodia are outrightly baseless and smack of a political conspiracy. His arrest has enraged people across the country. Manish Sisodia is recognised globally for transforming Delhi's school education. His arrest will be cited worldwide as an example of a political witch-hunt and further confirm what the world was only suspecting - that India's democratic values stand threatened under an authoritarian BJP regime.

Out of the total number of key politicians booked, arrested, raided or interrogated by the investigation agencies under your administration since 2014, the maximum belongs to the opposition. Interestingly, investigation agencies go slow on cases against Opposition politicians who join the BJP. For example, former Congress member and current Assam chief minister (CM) Shri Himanta Biswa Sarma was probed by the CBI and the ED in 2014 and 2015 over the Saradha chit fund scam. However, the case didn't progress after he joined the BJP. Similarly, former TMC leaders Shri Suwendu Adhikari and Shri Mukul Roy were under the ED and CBI scanner in the Narada sting operation case but the cases didn't progress after they joined the BJP ahead of the assembly polls in the state. There are many such examples, including that of Shri Narayan Rane of Maharashtra.

Since 2014, there has been a marked rise in the number of raids conducted, cases lodged against and arrest of the opposition leaders. Be it Shri Lalu Prasad Yadav (Rashtriya Janata Dal), Shri Sanjay Raut (Shiv Sena), Shri Azam Khan (Samajwadi Party), Shri Nawab Malik, Shri Anil Deshmukh (NCP), Shri Abhishek Banerjee (TMC), central agencies have often sparked suspicion that they were working as extended wings of the ruling dispensation at the Centre. In many such cases, the timings of the cases lodged or arrests made have coincided with elections making it abundantly clear that they were politically motivated. The manner in which prominent members of the opposition have been targeted lends credence to the allegation that your government is using investigating agencies to target or eliminate the opposition. The list of the agencies your government has been accused of using against the opposition isn't limited to the Enforcement Directorate.

It is clear that these agencies have their priorities misplaced. Following the publication of an international forensic financial research report, SBI and LIC have reportedly lost over Rs 78,000 crores in market capitalisation of their shares due to exposure to a certain firm. Why have the central agencies not been pressed into service to investigate the firm's financial irregularities despite the public money at stake?

Further, it appears that there's yet another front on which a war is being waged against our country's federalism. The offices of the Governors across the country are acting in violation of the constitutional provisions and frequently hindering the governance of the state. They are wilfully undermining democratically elected state governments and choosing instead to obstruct governance as per their whims and fancies. Be it the Governor of Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, West Bengal, Punjab, Telangana or the Lt Governor of Delhi – the Governors have become the face of the widening rift between the Centre and states run by the non-BJP governments and threaten the spirit of cooperative federalism, which the states continue to nurture in spite of a lack of expression by the Centre. As a result, the

people of our country have now begun to question the role of the Governors in Indian democracy.

The misuse of central agencies and constitutional offices like that of the Governor - to settle scores outside of the electoral battlefield is strongly condemnable as it does not bode well for our democracy. The manner in which these agencies have been used since 2014 has tarnished their image and raised questions about their autonomy and impartiality. The faith of the people of India in these agencies continues to erode.

In a democracy, the will of the people is supreme. The mandate given by the people should be respected even if it was in favour of a party whose ideology was contrary to yours.

Sd/-

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Mamata Banerjee (AITC)

Arvind Kejriwal (AAP)

Bhagwant Mann (AAP)

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Sd/-

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