

Statement issued by Shri L.K. Advani, Leader of the Opposition (Lok Sabha) at a press conference in Thiruvananthapuram

Smt. Sonia Gandhi's statement that "We are in greater danger from people inside our country than from foreign terrorists entering India" is dangerous and irresponsible. BJP demands her apology for this slanderous statement. We challenge her to a public debate on this issue.

My attention has been drawn to a highly objectionable speech by Congress president Smt. Sonia Gandhi at an election rally in support of her party's candidate in Khunti (Jharkhand) on April 11.

The Statesman newspaper has reported:

KHUNTI, April 11: Congress president and Rae Bareilly MP, Mrs Sonia Gandhi, made veiled attacks on the BJP, but stopped short of naming the party, in an election rally in Khunti, Jharkhand today....**"We are in greater danger from people inside our country than from foreign terrorists entering India.** There are those in our country who always try to divide people on lines of religion, caste and creed. Communalism is a bigger threat to India than terrorism. Parties who divide the people on narrow lines of religion by putting on masks of desh prem (patriotism) are only weakening the country from the inside," said Mrs Gandhi.

The Times of India has reported:

"Without naming any party or leader, Sonia said some of the political parties in the country have been trying to divide the nation in the name of Hindus, Muslims and Christians. "These people wear masks of patriotism but are actually engaged in weakening the nation for petty political gains," she said and **added the country is not under the threat of terrorists coming from outside but the risk is emerging from within".**

I am aghast by the Congress president's thought that **"We are in greater danger from people inside our country than from foreign terrorists entering India" or that "the country is not under the threat of terrorists coming from outside but the risk is emerging from within".**

I have seen all the previous Congress presidents in action right since the first general elections in 1952. Not one of them ever characterized that a threat to India's security coming from outside was less dangerous than the one emerging from within.

Since the advent of terrorism in India in the early 1980s, there was broad unanimity in

India's political class, shared by the BJP, Congress and many other parties, that this menace has its origin across the border and was indeed a form of "proxy war" by Pakistan. There was also broad understanding that Pakistan, through its ISI, had resorted to this proxy war against India because it had failed to achieve its objective through conventional wars in 1948, 1965 and 1971. Apart from the bomb blasts in various places in India, the two most warlike terrorist attacks by terrorists based and trained in Pakistan were the assault on Indian Parliament on 13 December 2001 and the horrific events of 26/11 last year in Mumbai.

Indeed, in the aftermath of 26/11 my party supported the UPA government when it belatedly introduced two-anti-terror legislations, after having scrapped POTA in 2004. Speaking in Parliament, I said that India's entire political class should sink internal differences and stand as one in the face of an external attack.

No nationalist Indian would ever belittle this threat of cross-border terrorism by saying that there is a greater danger emerging from "people inside our country". Obviously Soniaji is ignorant even about the tradition of her senior party leaders in this regard. Both Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Lal Bahadur Shastri lauded the contribution of the Jana Sangh and RSS to the national effort during the 1962 and 1965 wars. Panditji actually had an RSS contingent participate in the Republic Day Parade of 1963.

Although Smt. Gandhi did not take the name of the BJP, it is obvious that the Congress president was attacking the BJP, not only questioning our patriotism but also making hurling a worse charge. **She should publicly apologies for this slanderous statement.** I challenge her to join us in a debate on this issue by being specific in telling the nation that the BJP poses a bigger threat to India's security and unity than the terrorists coming from outside. Let the people of India decide.

If she is unwilling to join the debate, I urge Smt. Gandhi to desist from making such irresponsible statements. I recall here that during the campaign for the 2004 parliamentary elections, she had raised the so-called "Coffingate" matter and leveled the wild charge that the NDA government had made money in the purchase of coffins meant for the martyrs of the Indian Army. In its five years in office, the UPA government was unable to prove the allegation.

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Congress deserves punishment, not a second innings; 3rd and 4th Fronts are irrelevant; BJP-led NDA is the only alternative

In three days from now, Indian voters will participate in the first phase of polling in the elections to 15th Lok Sabha. In exactly a month from now, on May 13, the fifth and last phase of polling will be over. It is becoming clearer by the day that the main contest for

forming the next government in New Delhi is between the BJP-led NDA (which is the only cohesive pre-poll alliance at the national level) and the Congress (whose own UPA alliance has disintegrated).

The so-called Third Front and Fourth Front are irrelevant as far as forming the next government on their own under their leadership. They are opportunist platforms, having neither a common platform nor a common leader. The CPI(M) is trying to be active in both to hide its own growing irrelevance. The people of India know that a 3rd Front or 4th Front government would be disastrous.

The contrast between the NDA and its rivals is stark. At no place are constituents of our alliance fighting against each other. On the other hand, parties which are still part of the UPA government are contesting against each other. Some have openly stated that Dr. Manmohan Singh is a prime ministerial candidate of the Congress party, and not theirs. Some have shared election platforms with Third Front parties.

What emerges from the disarray in the UPA government is that the Congress has failed to keep its alliance together and that its failure is principally because its allies think that the Congress is untrustworthy. This being the case, the handicap that the Congress is facing is two-fold. Firstly, it carries the enormous burden of anti-incumbency due to the UPA government's failures and betrayals on multiple fronts (price rise, joblessness, plight of farmers, and failure to tackle terrorism). Secondly, it has lost the faith of its own allies.

The first handicap has earned the Congress popular anger across the country. The second has earned the Congress its allies' distrust. The growing mood in India is that the Congress deserves punishment, not a second innings.

Therefore, I am convinced that the defeat of the Congress is certain. The only alternative before the electorate to form a government at the Centre, committed to the principles of GOOD GOVERNANCE, DEVELOPMENT AND SECURITY, is the BJP-led NDA. I appeal to the voters, including those in Kerala, to give a clear and decisive mandate to the BJP and its allies in the NDA so that the next government in New Delhi is strong, stable and capable of effectively facing the challenges before the nation, both internal and external.

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I heartily congratulate the Indian Hockey Team for winning the Azlan Shah Cup.

**Here are the actual news reports cited above, taken from the Internet editions of
The Statesman and The Times of India**

The Statesman

11 April 2009

KHUNTI, April 11: Congress president and Rae Bareilly MP, Mrs Sonia Gandhi, made veiled attacks on the BJP, but stopped short of naming the party, in an election rally in Khunti, Jharkhand today. Mrs Gandhi was in Khunti to campaign in favour of party candidate and Simdega MLA, Mr Niel Tirkey.

“We are in greater danger from people inside our country than from foreign terrorists entering India. There are those in our country who always try to divide people on lines of religion, caste and creed. Communalism is a bigger threat to India than terrorism. Parties who divide the people on narrow lines of religion by putting on masks of desh prem (patriotism) are only weakening the country from the inside,” said Mrs Gandhi.

Khunti constituency in Jharkhand is witnessing a tough political battle between the BJP heavyweight candidate and former union minister Mr Karia Munda, and Mr Niel Trikey of the Congress. This is Mr Trikey's first Lok Sabha nomination, following the party's decision to replace the sitting candidate Ms Suhila Kerketta.

Mrs Gandhi urged the youth of Khunti to ensure 100 per cent turnout on polling day.

“Today, only you ~ the youth ~ can change the future of the country. You will be making the call tomorrow. Please vote with an open mind and for the best alternative,” she said. Showcasing the Congress party's achievements during UPA rule, Mrs Gandhi urged the voters to cast their ballots in favour of the Congress and ensure Dr Manmohan Singh's candidature as the next PM.

“The Congress-led government was, and will be, the best alternative for the country. We have come up with the NREGA and the loan waiver schemes for the farmers. More than 31 per cent of Dalits and 26 per cent of Advasis have benefited from these schemes. We think that a strong and stable government under Dr Manmohan Singh will ensure better prospects for the country in the future,” declared Mrs Gandhi.

The Congress president later addressed another election rally in Chatra, in favour of the party candidate Mr Dhiraj Prasad Sahu. Mr Sahu is pitted against heavyweights Mr Inder Singh Namdhari and Mr Dharendra Agrawal ~ both Independent candidates. Mr Nagmani of the RJD and Mr Arun Yadav of the JD-U enjoy a well rooted support base in Chatra.

The Times of India

12 Apr 2009

KHUNTI: "Violence is not a solution to any problem. The youth who have lost direction should join the mainstream and help government execute development projects even in the remotest corners," UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi said at an election rally here on Saturday in an obvious reference to Maoists even while police were engaged in an

encounter with the ultra-leftists in the forests, some 40 km away.

Five CRPF jawans were killed in the encounter that continued even after Sonia ended her speech at the Kutchery ground.

Sonia, in her short speech, called upon people to vote the Manmohan Singh government to power again so that issues like social disparity could be addressed in a better way. "Only a stable and efficient government led by Congress can provide lasting solutions to people's problems," she said.

The Congress leader enumerated the achievements of UPA government during its five years of rule. "NREGA gave jobs to over 4 crore villagers and checked migration to towns," she said and added even in these times of market meltdown, the Indian economy has remained largely unaffected because of the visionary policies of the Manmohan Singh government.

Without naming any party or leader, Sonia said some of the political parties in the country have been trying to divide the nation in the name of Hindus, Muslims and Christians. "These people wear masks of patriotism but are actually engaged in weakening the nation for petty political gains," she said and added the country is not under the threat of terrorists coming from outside but the risk is emerging from within".

Sonia called upon the youth to exercise their franchise carefully. "The onus is on the large population of first-time voters and of those below 35 years to give a stable and efficient government to the country," she said.

She hailed the local Tana Bhagats for their efforts to spread the message of Congress in the region since olden times.

Sonia was accompanied by state Congress president Pradeep Balmuchu, Congress' Khunti candidate Niyel Tirkey and K Keshav Rao, incharge of party's affairs in the state.