

Backdrop to Veterans Statement

Since Independence in 1947, and becoming a Republic in 1950, when the Constitution of India came into force, the members of the Armed Forces in India have been ‘a-political’, in so far as they have acknowledged civil, namely political, authority over the military.

However every officer and jawan enjoys the right to vote as free and equal citizens in our democratic Republic . And the exercise of casting one’s vote implies that she or he is also exercising a political choice. Considering that all of us, civil or military, are sworn to safeguard and uphold our Constitution - it is our duty and our responsibility as citizens of the country, to point out those actions and events which clearly are transgressions – wilful or otherwise – that undermine that Constitution and its provisions, namely of assuring:

*“Justice – social, economic, and political;
Liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship;
Equality of status and opportunity;
and to promote Fraternity – assuring the Dignity of the Individual and the Unity and Integrity of the Nation.” [from Preamble to the Constitution]*

We have come together on this occasion to share our concern at the ways in which it appears that our Constitution is being weakened. It is in this spirit that we the undersigned have issued this statement on the recent events surrounding actions taken by a Union Minister. We also support our colleagues in the Civil Services in taking the lead on this issue.

*In the words of Martin Luther King Jr, quoted by a senior veteran :
" In the end we will remember not the words of our enemies but the silence of our friends".*

We must not remain silent when injustice is perpetrated with impunity.

STATEMENT

This group of Veterans of the Armed Forces hereby puts on record its revulsion at the recent incident in Hazaribagh, Jharkhand, where Union Minister of State for Civil Aviation Jayant Sinha publicly felicitated a group of convicts that a court has found guilty of lynching a Muslim meat trader in June 2017 in Ramgarh, Jharkhand, for carrying beef in his car.

While the convicts are on bail, pending a High Court decision on their appeal, and are entitled to the due process of law, we deplore that fact that a Union minister has felicitated these convicts as though they were “revolutionaries in a freedom struggle”. Until a higher court finds them innocent, the individuals who Mr Sinha feted are guilty of murdering a minority citizen for a motive directly linked with religion.

This was clearly a cynical political move by Mr Sinha, of a pattern with numerous recent incidents involving members of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Whether it is a Union Minister draping the body of a riot accused in the national tricolour, the instigation by ruling party ministers in Jammu & Kashmir in the

Kathua rape case, or the efforts to subvert due process of law in the brutal Rajsamand murder case, all such cases point to a violent, majoritarian mindset that seeks to telegraph the message that there is an unwritten license to kill minorities, and that those involved in such crimes will be supported -- financially, legally and politically.

“In the past, the Union government has derisively dismissed protests against such communal killings by invoking the constitutional separation of powers – arguing that the *locus standi* lay with the concerned states, even though many of these states were also BJP-ruled. Now that a BJP Union minister has openly questioned a criminal case that his own party government in Jharkhand had – admirably, in our opinion – prosecuted successfully, we would like to know the Government of India’s stand at this challenge to the rule of law by a minister entrusted with its protection. “

We demand the immediate resignation/removal of Shri Jayant Sinha from the Union Council of Ministers and an apology to the people of India from the party he represents for publicly sympathizing with perpetrators of communal killings, thereby sending out a message of support for such crimes.

We also urge our colleagues in the civil services and judiciary to firmly uphold the rule of law and not be intimidated by the actions of powerful and influential groups that seek to spread the poison of disharmony and enmity in our multicultural society.

LIST OF SIGNATORIES FROM ARMED FORCES VETERANS
TO THE STATEMENT ON JAYANT SINHA - UNION MINISTER OF STATE

1. Lt Gen Vijay Oberoi
2. Lt Gen Z U Shah
3. Lt Gen C A Barreto
4. Maj Gen T K Kaul
5. Maj Gen S.G.Vombatkere
6. Maj Gen RPRC Naidu
7. Brigadier H C Ghuman
8. Brigadier Madhav Prasad,
9. Brig Jawahar Kaul
10. Brigadier Baqir Shameem
11. Brigadier Amardeep Singh
12. Brig[Dr] A Narayanan
13. Col Virendra Sahai Verma
14. Col V P Kapoor
15. Col M S Kapoor
16. Col Ajai Shukla

17. Col Pavan Nair
18. Lt Col VC Alexander
19. Lt Col VK Nair
20. Lt Col Niraj Pant
21. Lt Col Israr Asghar

22. Admiral L Ramdas
23. Vice Admiral Dick Schunker
24. Vice Admiral Prem Suthan
25. Vice Admiral I C Rao
26. Vice Admiral Adolf Britto
27. Vice Admiral DB Kapila
28. Vice Admiral Madanjit Singh
29. Rear Admiral Stanley O'Leary
30. Commodore Rajan Vir
31. Commodore Medioma Bhada
32. Commodore Jal Postwalla
33. Commodore Ranjit B Rai
34. Commodore Lokesh Batra
35. Commodore Anil Dabir
36. Capt Subba Rao Prabala,
37. Capt A K Varma
38. Surg Commander Abe Abraham
39. Commander S P Taneja
40. Commander Atul Bhardwaj
41. Commander C R Babu
42. Commander P G Bhat
43. Commander Mani Thomas
44. Lt Cdr Rakesh Bali
45. Chief Petty Officer V S Bains

46. Air Marshal Vir Narain
47. Air Marshal Kapil Kak
48. Wing Cdr R Khosla
49. Wing Cdr A C Mathur
50. Wing Cdr BJ Vaz
51. Capt Pushp Vaid,