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Election Commission sends notice to BJP chief Nadda for complaints against PM Modi

Campaign speeches made by those holding high positions have more serious consequences, says poll body; similar notice served on Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge over complaints related both to him and Rahul Gandhi

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File picture of Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressing a public meeting. | Photo Credit: PTI

In a first, the Election Commission of India has issued a notice for violation of the Model Code of Conduct on the **basis of complaints against Prime Minister Narendra Modi**. However, taking a circuitous route, the notice was sent on Thursday to BJP President J.P. Nadda, and not to Mr. Modi.

In fact, the notice does not mention the name of the Prime Minister at all. The complaints attached to the notice, however, are those of the Congress against Mr. Modi's "malicious election speech delivered at Banswara (Rajasthan)", along with complaints from other parties, such as the Communist Party of India (Marxist).

A similar notice was served on Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, concerning complaints related both to him and party leader Rahul Gandhi.

The poll body sought responses from both parties by 11 a.m. on April 29.

Unprecedented notice

ECI officials said this is the first time in recent history that the panel has taken cognisance of a complaint against a Prime Minister. In the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, the ECI had given a clean chit to Mr. Modi on complaints lodged by the Opposition parties. Then-Election Commissioner Ashok Lavasa had submitted a dissent note on some of the decisions taken by the ECI regarding complaints against the Prime Minister.

What is also unprecedented is the ECI issuing Thursday's notices to the respective party presidents instead of directly to the concerned individuals. Since the beginning of this poll season, the Commission has issued showcause notices to Congress leader Supriya Shrinete, BJP MP from West Bengal Dilip Ghosh, Aam Aadmi Party leader Atishi, Congress leader Randeep Singh Surjewala, and Bharat Rashtra Samithi chief K. Chandrashekar Rao. In all these cases, however, notices were directly addressed to each of the individuals against whom complaints were filed.

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'Serious consequences'

In its notice to the BJP president, the ECI asked Mr. Nadda to bring to the notice of all star campaigners of the party to "set high standards of political discourse and observe provisions of model code of conduct in letter and spirit".

The Commission said it has taken a view that while individual star campaigners will continue to remain responsible for speeches made by them, the Commission will address

party chiefs “on a case-to-case basis”. Campaign speeches made by those holding high positions have more serious consequences, the poll panel said.

‘ECI being super cautious’

The Congress, which was the chief complainant against the PM’s comments, said that the ECI sending the notice to Mr. Nadda and not to the Prime Minister was a revealing move. “They [the ECI] are super, super cautious when it comes to the Prime Minister, they are super cautious when it comes to the Home Minister,” Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh told reporters at party headquarters, adding that the Congress expects the Commission to act impartially and issue notices whenever there is need for one.

“There had been no complaint against (former PMs) P.V. Narasimha Rao, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, and Manmohan Singh. This is the second time we have complained against the PM. We had earlier complained about the Home Minister [Amit Shah], but no action was taken. Action was taken against the Assam Chief Minister,” he added.

Notice to Congress chief

The ECI attached the complaints filed by the BJP to the notice sent to Mr. Kharge. They alleged that he and Mr. Gandhi had violated the MCC during a speech in Kottayam on April 18 by making “false allegations” against the PM, claiming that Mr. Modi had advocated for ‘one nation, one language, and one religion’. The notice also said that Mr. Kharge, in comments made to a publication, had said that President Droupadi Murmu was not invited to the Ram Temple consecration ceremony because she is a member of a Scheduled Tribe.

This notice too did not name either of the individual leaders.

The Congress, however, questioned the identical language used by the EC regarding the complaints against Mr. Modi and Mr. Gandhi. “Is this what the EC means by a ‘level playing field?’” Mr. Ramesh asked in a subsequent post on X.

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