

Modi in US: PM Modi signs 'flag', sparking controversy; Government denies

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New York: A controversy erupted today when Prime Minister Narendra Modi autographed an Indian "flag" to be gifted to US President Barack Obama by celebrity chef Vikas Khanna, evoking sharp reactions after which the government insisted that it was not the national tricolor.

Social media was abuzz with the issue of Modi signing on the tricolour which Khanna said he will hand over to Obama. Khanna had prepared the menu for the Prime Minister's dinner with Fortune 500 CEOs last night.

The chef also displayed the signed piece of cloth to the media.

Government spokesman Frank Noronha denied that the Prime Minister had signed the national flag and said it had not been confiscated as reported.

Noronha, Director General (Media and Communication), Press Information Bureau, said in New Delhi that the piece of cloth was a work of handicraft prepared by physically-challenged daughter of the chef and the Prime Minister had autographed it on compassionate basis after Khanna and his family made a request.

"The piece of cloth does not have white colour nor the wheel....It has been prepared by Khanna's daughter with her toe and the Prime Minister was compassionate," he said.

He termed as "absolutely false" that it had been confiscated.

The Indian Flag Code, 2002, states that putting any kind of inscription upon the Indian national flag is construed as disrespect to the flag. It also states that lettering of any kind shall not be put on the tricolor.

The reactions in the virtual world came thick and fast as the controversy continued to rage.

Asked whether the Prime Minister's action of signing on a national flag was an offence under IPC, Congress Party's chief spokesman Randeep Surjewala said in New Delhi, "we are not petty like BJP. We respect the office of the Prime Minister".

At the same time, he said that the Prime Minister must look within and take corrective action as respect for the national flag is the responsibility of 125 crore people, more so for the Prime Minister.

"However high you may be, the National flag is above you, you should understand this," Surjewala said.

Congress leader Manish Tewari tweeted, "Has PM read Para 2.1 sub para 6& Para 3.28 of Flag Code 2002 that states lettering on National Flag is misuse.3 yrs jail under PINH Act 2003."

BJP accused Congress of "raking up a controversy where none exists" and making "irrelevant and unwarranted" comments on Modi.

Prime Minister told the chef that he had done him proud by preparing an elaborate menu for his guests over 50 top American CEOs who met him at the Waldorf Astoria hotel here.

- PTI