

Narendra Modi autographed memento, not national flag, government clarifies after row

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New York/New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi put his autograph on what appeared to be an Indian flag evoking sharp criticism from the Congress but the government clarified that it was only a memento. The artwork has been taken for review.

The controversy erupted after super chef Vikas Khanna, who had dished up the fare for the prime minister's dinner with Fortune 500 CEOs on Thursday, approached Modi with the flag crafted by children of Smile India Foundation to be gifted to President Barack Obama. When Khanna told him that he wanted to present it to Obama, Modi autographed it.

Modi also praised Khanna, a four-time Michelin-starred chef, for the dinner held at the Waldorf Astoria hotel in New York.

The story broke after Khanna displayed the autographed flag to the media.

According to the rules governing the national flag, putting any inscription on the flag is considered disrespect.

Twitter was abuzz on Friday under the hashtag #ModiDisrespectsTricolor after the incident, which evoked a sharp reaction from the Congress.

Congress spokesperson Randeep Surjewala said in New Delhi: "We are not petty like BJP. We respect the office of the prime minister... However high you may be, the national flag is above you, you should understand this."

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."

However, Press Information Bureau director general (media and communication) Frank Noronha clarified that the "memento signed by PM Modi did not have the Ashok Chakra on it or the 'white' colour band on it".

He also tweeted: "Story about PM Modi disrespecting the tricolor is false and mischievous. PM didn't autograph the flag."

"The flag autographed by PM #narendramodi was a design made by an enthusiastic child with unique abilities. It is not the #tricolour."

"The #design has not been confiscated by any of the authorities as reported in a section of the #media."

"NarendraModi's gesture is a mark of #appreciation & aimed at encouraging the child with unique abilities," Noronha said in a series of tweets.

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

In New York, external affairs ministry spokesperson Vikas Swarup, when asked by IANS, said: "It was not a flag".

Swarup said Khanna wanted to present the artwork to President Obama and he wanted Modi's autograph on it as he

thought it would be nice gesture.

Swarup said that the child's drawing was being erroneously portrayed as the national flag.

Asked if the artwork was taken back, Swarup said that it was only taken for a review.

Khanna tweeted that it was not a flag, under his handle @TheVikasKhanna.

"Dear all, It is not the National Flag. A differently abled girl from my Foundation who I treat like my daughter had attempted an artistic hand impression on a light brown piece of cloth. It didn't have the three colours of the national flag represented. Was more like the insignia of the MakeInIndia. Unnecessary controversy is being created deliberately," he said.

Khanna had presented a cuisine that included sandalwood saffron sherbet, paneer ravioli, saffron sheermal and mango-ginger soup. Many of the dishes were from his coffee table book on festival cuisine in India.

- IANS