



*Jehlum Post News Network/New Delhi/ Feb 17, 2015/Breaking his silence on the recent church attacks, Prime Minister Narendra Modi today said his government will not allow any religious group to incite hatred and will strongly act against any religious violence. The Prime Minister, who has been accused by opposition and Christian groups of turning a blind eye to a string of recent attacks on five churches and a Christian school in Delhi, said his government "gives equal respect to all religions." "My government will ensure that there is complete freedom of faith*

*and that everyone has the undeniable right to retain or adopt the religion of his or her choice without coercion or undue influence. "My government will not allow any religious group, belonging to the majority or the minority, to incite hatred against others, overtly or covertly. Mine will be a government that gives equal respect to all religions," he said at a function here. He was addressing the national celebration function of the elevation to Sainthood of Kuriakose Elias Chavara and Mother Euphrasia at Vigyan Bhawan. In a stern warning to fringe elements, he said, "We cannot accept violence against any religion on any pretext and I strongly condemn such violence. My government will act strongly in this regard." Noting that the world is increasingly witnessing division and hostility on religious lines and the issue has become a matter of global concern, the Prime Minister said the ancient Indian plea of mutual respect for all faiths is now beginning to manifest in global discourse.*

*Observing that the world is at crossroads, he said if not crossed properly it "can throw us back to the dark days of bigotry, fanaticism and bloodshed". He further said that this harmonious convergence among religions could not be achieved even when the world entered the third millennium. Invoking Buddha and Mahatma Gandhi, Modi said that equal respect for all religions must be in the DNA of every Indian. Seeking harmony, the Prime Minister appealed to all religious groups to act with restraint, mutual respect and tolerance in the true spirit of the ancient nation which is manifest in the Constitution and in line with the Hague Declaration. Modi's remarks have come after US President Barack Obama said the "acts of intolerance" experienced by religious faiths of all types in India in the past few years would have shocked Mahatma Gandhi. The Prime Minister said the world is increasingly witnessing division and*

*hostility on religious lines.*

*"This has become a matter of global concern. In this context the ancient Indian plea of mutual respect for all faiths is now beginning to manifest in global discourse," he said. Modi said the long-felt need and urge for mutually respectful relations led to the interfaith conference on 'Faith in Human Rights' at the Hague in December, 2008. "In their historic declaration, they defined what constitutes freedom of faith and how it is to be safeguarded...Speaking for India, and for my government, I declare that my government stands by every word of the above declaration. My government will ensure that there is complete freedom of faith and that everyone has the undeniable right to retain or adopt the religion of his or her choice without coercion or undue influence," he told the gathering.*

*Referring to his development mantra of 'sabka saath, sabka vikas', Modi said in simple terms it means food on every table, every child in school, a job for everybody and a house with toilet and electricity for every family. "This will make India proud. We can achieve this through unity. Unity strengthens us. Division weakens us. I sincerely request all Indians, and all of you present here to support me in this huge task," Modi said. Speaking on the occasion, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley referred to the recent incidents of attacks on churches in Delhi. He said these are "unacceptable aberrations."*

*He said the guilty will be brought to book and there is "no space" in India for such people. He said while the state detached itself from religion, it allowed religion to be professed, followed and to be propagated. Rajya Sabha Deputy Chairman P J Kurien said the incidents of attacks are aberrations and will be dealt with seriously by the government. He recalled that Hindu rulers in Kerala had helped Christianity prosper in the state by offering them land for churches. Archbishops Andrew Thazah and Anil Couto while addressing the gathering expressed concern on attacks on churches and hoped the government will take appropriate steps. Thazah said missionary schools have not focused on conversions but education. He said BJP veteran L K Advani and HRD Minister Smriti Irani are products of such institutions. Agency*