

Ensuring safety of 10 mn Indians in Gulf 'utmost priority': MEA

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India on Tuesday said it raised its "voice clearly in favour of an early end to the conflict" in West Asia, which has evoked "great anxiety" since almost 10 million Indian citizens live and work in the Gulf region. It said their security was of "utmost priority" for the government.

The statement issued by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) on Tuesday evening said that India's trade and energy supplies traverse that geography, and any major disruption has serious consequences for the Indian economy. "Government will continue to closely monitor the evolving situation and take relevant decisions in the national interest," it said.

The statement came in the wake of demands from Opposition parties, including Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi, the Left parties, and some religious groups, that India should condemn the killing of Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in a joint US-Israel military strike. The

MEA's statement, however, did not mention the killing of Iran's Supreme Leader.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday said Prime Minister Narendra Modi must speak up and answer as to whether he supports the assassination of a head of state as a way to define the world order. He said the unilateral attacks on Iran, as well as Iran's attacks on other West Asian nations, must be condemned. "Silence now diminishes India's standing in the world," the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha said on X.

Rahul Gandhi said escalating hostilities between the US, Israel and Iran are pushing a fragile region toward wider conflict. Millions, including nearly 10 million Indians, face uncertainty, he said. "While security concerns are real, attacks that violate sovereignty will only worsen the crisis. The unilateral attacks on Iran, as well as Iran's attacks on other Middle Eastern nations, must be condemned. Viol-

ence begets violence - dialogue and restraint remain the only path to peace," Rahul Gandhi said, and also posted Sonia Gandhi's views on the subject published in a leading daily on Tuesday morning.

"India must be morally clear. We should have the courage to speak plainly in defence of international law and human lives. Our foreign policy is rooted in sovereignty and the peaceful resolution of disputes—and it must remain consistent," he said. He said Modi must speak up. Does he support the assassination of a head of state as a way to define the world order, he asked.

Earlier, Congress Parliamentary Party chairperson Sonia Gandhi said the Modi government's silence on the targeted assassination of Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei is not neutral but an abdication, and raises serious doubts about the direction and credibility of India's foreign policy. She also demanded that when Parlia-

ment reconvenes for the second part of the Budget session, the government's "disturbing silence" over the breakdown of international order must be debated openly and without evasion.

Left parties on Tuesday held a protest at Delhi's Jantar Mantar against the US-Israel attack on Iran and the killing of Khamenei, the supreme leader of the Islamic Republic, accusing the Union government of maintaining silence on the issue.

The MEA's statement said that the "safety and well-being" of 10 million Indian nationals working and living in the region is of "utmost priority". "We cannot be impervious to any development that negatively affects them," it said.

Referring to Indian nationals who lost their lives in attacks on merchant shipping, the MEA said: "As a country whose nationals are prominent in the global workforce, India is also firmly opposed to attacks on merchant shipping." Already, some Indian nationals have lost their lives or are missing as a result of such attacks in the past few days, it said.

Sources in the government argued that their top-

most concern is to ensure the safety of the 9-10 million Indian nationals and People of Indian Origin (PIOs), most of whom live and work in the Gulf countries which have faced attacks from Iran. They also pointed out that most countries of the 57-member Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC) have refrained from issuing a statement on the killing of Iran's Supreme Leader.

Of the 9 million non-resident Indians (NRIs) living in the region, most live in Saudi Arabia (2.46 million), the UAE (3.54 million), Bahrain (323,908), Kuwait (993,284), Oman (684,771), Qatar (835,175), and Jordan (16,897). None of these have issued any statement on Khamenei's death. Iran has 10,320, Iraq 17,100, and Israel has 20,000 NRIs.

"Any major disruption has serious consequences for the Indian economy," it said. As a proximate neighbour with critical stakes in the security and stability of the region, the developments in West Asia "evoke great anxiety," it said.

With inputs from PTI