Vatican
News



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Member of Parliament Subramanian Swamy of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party has urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to end India's relations with the Vatican and close the apostolic nunciature in New Delhi.

Swami, a member of the Rajya Sabha, the upper house in parliament, May 23 criticized a letter Archbishop Anil Couto of Delhi wrote to the Catholics of his archdiocese urging them to pray and fast for the nation.

Swamy used Twitter to urge Modi to direct the Ministry of External Affairs to cease all diplomatic relations with the Vatican and seal the Vatican embassy in New Delhi's Chanakyapuri area as the Delhi archbishop is "a formal nominee of the Vatican."

Couto's May 8 letter spoke of a "turbulent political atmosphere" in the country that threatens the democratic principles enshrined in its Constitution and "the secular fabric of our nation."

The archbishop urged all parishes and religious institutions in his archdiocese to skip a meal and conduct hour-long Eucharistic adoration on Fridays for the spiritual

renewal of the nation that is scheduled to elect a new government before May 2019.

Several television channels and pro-Hindu leaders lambasted the archbishop for interfering in the country’s politics.

BJP president Amit Shah said May 22 that nobody should galvanize support on the basis of religion. "I personally believe that no one should say things like this. For a religious person to make such comments cannot be accepted and appreciated," he added.

However, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee backed the archbishop and his letter, saying: "We respect all communities, castes, and archbishops across the country, including that of Kolkata. I think whatever they said, they correctly said. It's a fact."

The All India Catholic Union, the largest lay organization in the country, issued a statement May 24 expressing solidarity with Couto and commending his courage, integrity and spiritual strength in calling attention to the rising tide of targeted violence against Dalits and religious minorities.

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"Archbishop [Couto] has been hounded since his letter to his clergy asking his people to pray for the people, and to keep a special fast every Friday seeking blessings for India and peace in the land. We demand of every bishop in India to issue such call for prayer for the country. We hope religious heads of all communities will also join in these prayers," said the statement signed by the Catholic union's national president Lancy D Cunha and official spokesperson John Dayal.

[Jose Kavi is the editor-in-chief of Matters India, a news portal focusing on religious and social issues in India. He is a regular contributor to NCR and Global Sisters Report.]