

## **PM's opening remarks to the All Party Meeting on J&K**

September 15, 2010

I welcome you all to this meeting of leaders of political parties. Before I invite the participants to offer their valuable suggestions on various vexed issues relating to Jammu and Kashmir, let us offer our prayers for all those who have lost their lives in the recent violence in the State. Let us also wish early recovery to those who have suffered injury. I propose that we rise and observe a minute's silence as a mark of our respect to the departed souls.

Friends, we meet in sadness. Sadness over the loss of lives, sadness over the injuries suffered by the people, the police and the security personnel. Sadness over the huge disruption in the daily lives of the common man and the financial losses suffered by hardworking ordinary people like tour operators, apple farmers, daily wage earners and houseboat owners. I am sure all of us share a deep sense of distress over the unfortunate sequence of events, during and after Eid, particularly in the context of a reported act by a misguided person thousands of miles away.

I have said this earlier and I say it again – the only path for lasting peace and prosperity in Jammu and Kashmir is that of dialogue and discussion. It is indeed tragic that some of our people have forsaken this path during the recent days. I was shocked and distressed to see young men and women- even children- joining the protests on the streets. While some of these protests may have been impulsive or spontaneous, it cannot be denied that some incidents were orchestrated by certain groups. What we have seen over the past three months must persuade us to reflect and deliberate on the way forward.

We have to talk to each other. And those who have grievances against the Government have to talk to the administration. But it is also true that meaningful dialogue can happen only in an atmosphere free from violence and confrontation. Discussions can take place only if we have calm and public order. The Central and State Governments have already appealed to the people of Jammu and Kashmir, especially the youth, to eschew violence. I reiterate that appeal. We are ready for dialogue with anybody or any group that does not espouse or practice violence. We have also told the State Government to restore peace and public order in order to create conditions congenial to a dialogue process. The Central Government will provide all possible assistance in this task.

Over the past few months and weeks, several leaders, from across the political spectrum, have spoken or written to me, on issues concerning Jammu and Kashmir, giving many useful suggestions. We also had an all-party delegation from Jammu and Kashmir that shared its views with me and my senior cabinet colleagues. As a part of this ongoing process of consultation that our Government has been following, we thought it would be in the fitness of things to also seek guidance from various political parties represented in Parliament on the complex issues that we face in Jammu and Kashmir today.

I look forward to benefitting from your wisdom, knowledge and experience as we begin the proceedings.