

# A SERIOUS LAPSE: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON PM SECURITY BREACH

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The lapse in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's security arrangements, which left his convoy stranded on a flyover for around 20 minutes, near Ferozpur in Punjab on Wednesday is indeed a serious one as stated by the Union Home Ministry. But by quickly blaming the Punjab government and the State police, the Central functionaries triggered a blame game that has forestalled the possibility of a fair and credible inquiry into the incident. Two parallel inquiries have been announced, one by the Centre and another by the State, both of which are on hold until Monday when the Supreme Court of India will hear a plea on the issue. Discussions on national security are always surcharged in India but at least this one involving the personal security of the Prime Minister should have been more tempered. Union Ministers and Bharatiya Janata Party functionaries turned this into yet another loyalty test, and resorted to hyperbole. India takes the security of its Prime Minister very seriously. After all, a sitting Prime Minister, a former Prime Minister, and the leader revered as the father of the nation are among the list of the country's assassinated leaders. The Special Protection Group (SPG), with an outlay of around 600 crore in 2020 and around 3,000 personnel has just one job — protect one person, the Prime Minister.

The critical question that is to be probed is who made the decision that the Prime Minister could, and should, travel by road for more than 100 km, from Bathinda to Ferozpur and what inputs went into making that decision. Assuming that someone concluded that it was advisable for the Prime Minister to be on the road for nearly two hours, the process that preceded it must be probed. It was also decided that the Prime Minister should not be using a helicopter as was originally planned. The route was identified in advance as a contingency plan, but the decision to use it was made at the last moment — a version that both the State and Central governments agree on. Various scenarios involving miscommunication, misinformation and misjudgment are possible. Protesters who blocked the route were reportedly unaware of the Prime Minister's travel. As the Union Home Minister said, accountability must be fixed, and loopholes must be plugged. Considering the mutual distrust the State and the Centre have now public, a Supreme Court-monitored probe could be a good way to get to the bottom of the matter in a credible manner. This episode must also lead to a more efficient protocol for the Prime Minister's travel, and a repurposing of the SPG, if required. Meanwhile, loose talk, diatribe and electioneering on the issue must be shunned at all cost.

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