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Need code of conduct for MPs & MLAs, says Vice-President

If anyone calls for some discipline, he is called autocratic: Prime Minister

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TO ENSURE that people do not lose faith in political processes and institutions, there is a need for political parties to "evolve a consensus on the code of conduct for their members, both inside the legislature and out of it", Vice-President M Venkaiah Naidu said on Sunday.

Naidu was speaking at the release of his book, *Moving On, Moving Forward: A Year In Office*, to mark the completion of one year as Vice-President and Rajya Sabha Chairperson. The event at Vigyan Bhawan saw Prime Minister Narendra Modi, former Prime Ministers Manmohan Singh and H D Deve Gowda, Lok



Singh, Modi and Naidu in New Delhi on Sunday. Renuka Puri

Sabha Speaker Sumitra Mahajan, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley and Congress leader Anand Sharma sharing the dais with Naidu.

Recalling his travels with Naidu in the past, Modi said he was always required to be on alert as Naidu is known to never carry any money, pen, or watch

on him. "Yet, (he) is always on time," said Modi, alluding to Naidu's penchant for punctuality and discipline. "Venkaiahji is a strict disciplinarian. But in our country, the situation is such that it is very easy to brand discipline as undemocratic. If anyone calls for some discipline, he is called autocratic and every such label in the dictionary," he said.

Expressing his displeasure over the functioning of Parliament, Naidu listed reforms that he felt are necessary for its effective functioning, as well as that of the state legislatures. Besides calling for a code of conduct for MPs and MLAs, he said that "if a member desires to change party, he must do so by resigning from the membership

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Vice-President

of the House. The anti-defection laws should be implemented in letter and spirit expeditiously, within three months."

Naidu added that election petitions and criminal cases against political leaders should be disposed of within a certain time frame and, if necessary, special benches of the Supreme Court and high courts should be formed for the matter. He also emphasised the need for a national policy on having an Upper House in the states.

He said it is equally important for the media, an "invaluable partner in strength-

ening democratic culture", to focus more on the constructive contribution made by members of the House rather than giving importance to their disruptive activities.

Talking of how the last Monsoon Session of Parliament was rightly called "the session for social justice" as it saw the passage of legislation to empower under-represented groups, Naidu called for political parties to consider "dispassionately and legislate measures to empower women through reservation in all spheres of public life including legislatures".

"True nationalism is not just garlanding a picture of Bharat Mata and shouting Bharat Mata ki jai, it means not discrimi-

nating against any Indian based on his caste, religion or gender," he said.

In his speech, Modi recalled how Naidu chose to be the rural development minister due to his personal engagement with rural India, despite then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee wanting to give him more important portfolios.

Talking of Naidu's contribution and extensive travel across the country during his first year in office, former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh added how the "best is yet to come", by reciting Iqbal's couplet, "*Sitaaron se aage jahaan aur bhi hain, abhi ishq ke imtihaan aur bhi hain.*"