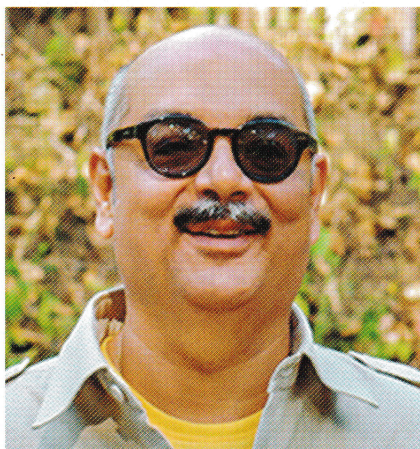


From May 01, 2017, 'lal battis' or red beacon lights on cars are banned for everybody. Yes, even the President, Prime Minister and the Chief Justice of India cannot use red lights on their cars. The government has said, "There will be no exceptions." Only emergency vehicles like fire engines, ambulances and police vehicles can have beacons. "Blue lights, used often for the car preceding VIPs, will be allowed only for emergency vehicles," said Arun Jaitley, the Finance and Defence Minister. Speaking about this ban, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said, "Every Indian is special, every Indian is a VIP." The PM has also spoken about ending the 'lal batti and VIP culture'.

I applaud PM Modi for having taken this step. But however good the PM's intentions are, will he be able to end the 'VIP culture'? I have my doubts. The PM has initiated several commendable projects like the 'Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan'. But the implementation is very poor, and in most places things are worse than before. There is still garbage everywhere. Go to any tollbooth and you'll find thousands of toll receipts littered everywhere. The tollbooth operator is duty-bound to issue this receipt, but most of our motorists immediately dump it on the road. Even those driving expensive luxury cars are guilty of this.

Coming back to the 'lal batti and VIP culture', already several ministers have shown reluctance in removing the 'lal batti'. In Karnataka one minister is reported to have said, "Since the state government has given me a vehicle fitted with a red beacon, I do not have power to alter my car!" I have also seen interviews on news channels where politicians across parties and several senior bureaucrats have responded very aggressively when asked about this ban. They are obviously angry about it and some have blatantly said this is one of the privileges that come with their job, so why should they give it up. Others have started fitting loud hooters and sirens to their vehicles. So while the red light may not flash atop their cars, the ear shattering hooters will shoo other motorists and road users out of the way.

Interestingly, no politician or government servant wants a red light or any sort of indication that he is a VIP, in a



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The government has banned the 'lal batti' or red beacon light on cars. But this is unlikely to end India's VIP culture

Naxalite or Maoist affected area. The same is true of places in India where insurgency is prevalent. They know if they behave like VIPs in such regions, they will become immediate targets of the Naxalites and insurgents. I have also heard reports that in these areas no politician or government servant even wants to reveal his identity. It's really sad that our politicians and government servants are kept in check only in such places. Ironically, when they do move around in these regions, their security cover is multiplied manifold.

Talking of bans and implementation reminds me of the Supreme Court ban on dark glasses or black-tinted film on vehicles. Yes, in May 2012, the Supreme Court ordered a complete ban on use of tinted glasses and films in vehicles throughout India. The Supreme Court also said police officers should not only issue challans but also remove the black and dark films from the offending vehicles. The Supreme Court added that the use of black films in vehicles helped criminals escape after committing heinous crimes such as sexual assault against women, robberies, kidnapping etc.

As was to be expected a group of MPs (Members of Parliament) opposed this ban and appealed that it be lifted. Fortunately the ban stayed and remains in place till date. But what is the ground reality. Visit the parking lots of the parliament or the seat of power of any state government, and you will find cars with dark black film that does not allow anyone to see who is in the vehicle or what is going on inside. It does not end there. Go to the offices of political parties or workers, and you are sure to find several vehicles with black film. Even at the police headquarters or various police stations you will see the same thing. Sadly, infringement of the ban on dark film is not limited to politicians, policemen and government servants. Look around and you will notice big SUVs, often luxury

ones, moving around with dark film. In most cases they will be followed by a more affordable SUV carrying private bodyguards and bouncers. Most often the car with the dark windows will have a special licence plate number or what is known as a 'VIP number' that is sold by RTOs for a premium. The occupants of such vehicles are usually criminals or those involved in shady and illegal businesses. All these people flout the Supreme Court's ban freely. I really wish someone starts a campaign on social media and people post photographs and expose the users and owners of these vehicles with banned black film. The drivers of these vehicles also break all other traffic rules and drive very rashly and aggressively. Very rarely are they caught, because there is a clear nexus in our country between politicians, the police and criminals. And builders, bootleggers and what have you. If one of us regular folks drove around in a car with dark windows, I can promise you we would be pulled up and fined in less than 60 minutes! Oh Darling, Yeh Hai India. [OD](#)