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ಇಲಾಖೆ / ವಿಷಯ : DEPARTMENT / SUBJECT: Constitution day -boycotts  
in Parliament

ಪತ್ರಿಕೆಯ ಹೆಸರು : NAME OF THE NEWS PAPER: Indian Express ದಿನಾಂಕ : DATE: 27.11.2019

## Oppn boycotts Constitution Day joint session of Parliament, holds protest

27/11/2019

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ New Delhi

PROTESTING on the Maharashtra issue, the Congress and other opposition parties on Tuesday boycotted the special joint session of Parliament on Constitution Day that was attended by President Ram Nath Kovind, Vice-President M Venkaiah Naidu, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla and lawmakers from both Houses.

Addressing the gathering at the Central Hall, Modi said India has strengthened and empowered its democracy in the last 70 years. "We cannot safeguard our rights without fulfilling our responsibilities. It should be our effort to empha-

sise on duties in our interactions with people," the PM said.

"As proud citizens of India, let us think about how our actions will make our nation even stronger. We the people of India are our Constitution's strength, its inspiration and its goal."

Staying away from the joint sitting, the opposition led by Congress president Sonia Gandhi protested at the Ambedkar statue in Parliament, where leaders from 17 opposition parties read the Constitution in various languages. While the Shiv Sena joined the protest, the BSP broke the opposition ranks and attended the event.

There was some faux pas as BJP MP Khagen Murmu joined the protest while TMC's

Nusrat Jahan attended the sitting. Murmu thought MPs had gathered at the Ambedkar statue to pay tributes to the father of the Constitution, but left after he realised it was joint opposition protest. Jahan, however, was unaware that her party has decided to boycott the event and attended it.

Sonia led the protesters in taking a pledge to uphold the Constitution. She read out the Preamble and resolved to stand by the fundamental values of the Constitution. Former PM Manmohan Singh and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi were also present, apart from DMK's T R Baalu, Shiv Sena's Arvind Sawant and TMC's Saugata Roy, among other leaders.