It was in the wee hours of this date way back in 1975 that the Congress regime headed by Indira Gandhi clamped down on the emergency, curtailed all Constitutional and democratic rights of the citizens, gagged the press, and put thousands of people behind bars across the country in order to ensure that no one raised any voice of protest. Indira Gandhi, whose election to the Lok Sabha had been struck down by the Allahabad High court a few days earlier, had tried to justify the drastic measure in terms of national interest primarily based on three grounds. One, she considered India's security and democracy to be under threat due to the nationwide democratic movement launched by Jayaprakash Narayan to protest growing unemployment, rampant inflation, and food scarcity. Two, she thought that only through such a measure could her government ensure speedy economic development and the uplift of the poor. And three, there was an apprehension that foreign powers were on the lookout to destabilize India. While all democratic people and organizations opposed the Emergency, the Communist Party of India (CPI) stood behind the Congress in this massive clampdown. During the Emergency, Indira Gandhi bestowed upon herself the power to rule by decree. She took all decisions with a coterie of close party leaders, while her younger son Sanjay Gandhi emerged as an extra-Constitutional power centre. The then Congress president, DK Barooah, went to such an extent of sycophancy that he raised a slogan saying, "India is Indira, Indira is India." But, even as thousands of opposition leaders and democratic persons were jailed and the entire nation was converted into a prison, and her sycophants assured Indira Gandhi at the end of one and a half years that 'stability' had returned and no one could stop the Congress from remaining in power, the people of the country voted it out in the general election held in early 1977. That was the first defeat, and a crushing one, that the Congress suffered at the hands of India's people since Independence. Looking back on the eve of the 48th anniversary of the declaration of Emergency one can say that a government, a political party, or a Prime Minister can go to any extent without bothering to care for democracy and the people when power goes into their heads. Tackling voices of dissent with an iron fist, curtailing the freedom of the media, and suppressing the democratic

voice of the people can actually destroy the very spirit and beauty of the world’s most vibrant democracy, which India is. Nobody wants such dark days to come back again, and this is one moment when every citizen should take a pledge to protect democracy by all means.