Ending VIP Culture

Why in news?

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The Union Cabinet has decided to disallow the use of the red beacon on vehicles on India's roads.

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What happened?

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- Starting May 1, only vehicles on emergency services, such as ambulances, fire trucks and police cars, will be permitted the use of a beacon from now, a blue-coloured one.
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- For this, **the Central Motor Vehicles Rules of 1989** are to be amended, so that the Central and State governments lose the power to nominate categories of persons for the red-beacon distinction.
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Why the beacon culture is bad?

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- Widespread use of red lights on government vehicles in the country is reflective of the mentality of those who served the British government in India and treated the natives as slaves.
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- The supreme court in Abhay Singh v. Union of India case **termed red beacons a "menace".**
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- It said, red lights **symbolise power and a stark differentiation** between those who are allowed to use it and those who are not.
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- A large number of those using vehicles with red lights **have no respect for**

the laws of the country and they treat the ordinary citizens with contempt.
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- SC also cited that the use of red lights on the vehicles of public representatives and civil servants has no parallel in the world democracies.
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What more needs to be done?

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- As a symbol of an assault on India’s over-reaching VIP culture, this is a good beginning.
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- But to meaningfully begin to dismantle India’s VIP culture, doing away with status symbols such as red beacons is not enough.
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- From pat-downs avoided at the security gate at an airport to a freer passage at the toll gate on a highway, there are numerous ways in which **the culture of entitlement** is asserted.
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- We must ban the habitual traffic diversions and road blocks when VIPs are on the move.
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- Every urban commuter is familiar with the interminable wait for some minister or the other to pass by or the security personnel who push traffic to the kerb to make way for a VIP.
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- For a country that aspires to a seat at the global high table, India would do well to **emulate the relatively simple style of leaders** in western democracies.
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- Though the privileges are justifiably considered compensation for public servitude, a little less overt display of privilege would allay those negative perceptions.
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Source: The Hindu & The Indian Express

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