



PEOPLE'S UNION FOR CIVIL LIBERTIES

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The PUCL demands the closure and halting of investigation of the NIA FIR, RC-01/2023/NIA/LKW, based on which raids in 8 locations of 5 districts of UP were undertaken today.

All the devices and books of Seema Azad, National secretary of the PUCL and similarly of others seized by the NIA be returned immediately.

PUCL demands from the MHA to stop criminalising activism aimed at realising the directive principles of state policy as anti-national.

Press Note

5th September 2023

The PUCL is outraged that the house of its National Secretary and UP State President, Seema Azad, advocate, author and editor of Dastak, a monthly non-commercial magazine, was raided today (05th September 2023). The PUCL also condemns both the raid, the detention and the twelve-hour intensive interrogation by the NIA of both Seema Azad and her husband Vishwa Vijay, also an advocate. We would like to put on record that Seema Azad is a human rights activist of deep integrity, who has led many PUCL Fact Finding teams against violations of human rights in several parts of UP State. She also initiated the process, under the aegis of the UP PUCL, of making a Human rights Manifesto for the UP-state elections, eighteen months ago. She is also in the editorial committee of the PUCL National Bulletin magazine.

The PUCL believes that this operation of the NIA is a serious attempt to stifle the voices of an active human rights and democracy defender, which is unacceptable and the PUCL strongly objects to this tyrannical act of the NIA agency. It demands that the NIA withdraw its investigation against Seema Azad and not criminalise any action undertaken by her in the course of her human rights work. According to news sources, all devices of Seema Azad, her books, poems, magazines, and other documents have been seized by the NIA officers.

From news reports we have learnt that today's raids by the NIA were carried out under the FIR: RC-01/2023/NIA/LKW, which is not on the website of the NIA. It has also been learnt that this FIR was lodged in June 2023. The raids were undertaken in eight locations in the districts of Allahabad, Varanasi, Azamgarh, Devaria and Chandauli of UP. Some media personnel have tried to insinuate that these raids were happening as the CPI Maoist party is "recruiting innocent urban youth as urban naxals" and other news portals also said that this is a part of the larger crackdown being undertaken on the alleged left extremists by the NIA in the country.

The way in which the NIA and the MHA are selectively leaking unsubstantiated information about those apprehended today appears that they have deliberately launched a smear campaign against those detained by dubbing them to be 'extremists, anti-national, anti-state' thereby 'manufacturing' public support for their

illegal actions. We strongly condemn such unconstitutional and anti-human rights actions of the NIA and demand that the witchhunt of human rights activists be stopped immediately.

Others raided and interrogated by the NIA include Advocate Soni Azad also an active member of the PUCL UP, her husband Ritesh Rai, their shared house was raided in Allahabad, Akanksha, President of the Bhagatsingh Student Morcha (BSM), whose office was raided in Varanasi. The NIA raided the Deoria house of Activist Rajesh Azad of the Khiriyabagh- Azamgarh farmers movement and the Sanyukta Kisan Morcha, Manish Azad a resident of Allahabad was also interrogated for several hours along with his house being raided. The PUCL unequivocally condemns these raids as well.

The seizure memo of the BSM President Akanksha, a copy which is with the PUCL, states that apart from the electronic devices of 2 laptops and the phone of Akanksha they also seized, books and magazines like "Dastak", BSM magazine "Mashaal", student magazine "Alternate" published from Delhi, pamphlets of Mazdoor Kisan Morcha, among others as incriminating evidence, including receipt books. To the NIA and their superintending authority, ministry of home affairs, it seems that books and opinions which are dissenting from a mainstream corporate consensus are indications of a criminal offence. This attitude and mindset does grave damage to the free exercise of the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of speech, expression and association which is the essence of a democracy.

PUCL is concerned that under the cover of 'Naxalism and Maoism', those working to ensure that the Directive Principles of State Policy become a living reality for the marginalized are being criminalized. This is a clear attempt to intimidate Indian citizens who want to raise democratic demands and seeking accountability from public officials and the political executive.

The PUCL reiterates its demand of stopping this witch hunt, immediate withdrawal of the FIR and a halt to the investigation.

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