

PUCL

PEOPLE'S UNION FOR CIVIL LIBERTIES

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PUCL Statement:

***Condemn Police Raids on Journalists and Media Houses:
Stop Criminalising Journalists and Intimidating the Media!***

The PUCL strongly condemns the raid on houses and offices of journalists, commentators and activists connected with Newslick and other media professionals. It is shocking that the police is investigating a case under draconian terror sections 13,16, 17, 18 and 22C of the UAPA and sec. 153 (A) (hate speech) and 120 (B) (conspiracy) of IPC against media professionals. The raids have happened in more than 30 locations in Delhi, Mumbai and Hyderabad today.

Amongst the houses and offices which were raided by the Delhi Police were the Editor of Newslick, Prabir Purkayastha, the former Managing Editor of NDTV, Aunindyo Chakravorty, senior journalist and researcher, Paranjay Guha Thakurta, and senior journalists including Urmilesh, Abhisar Sharma, Bhasha Singh, Subodh Verma, Anuradha Raman, Aditi Nigam, Pranjal, Sumedha Pal and Mukund Jha and some others. Besides, the police searched and seized the devices of satirist and stand-up comedian Sanjay Rajoura, historian Sohail Hashmi, author Gita Hariharan, Raghunandan of Delhi Science Forum and Kiran Chandra of Free Software Movement of India. The Delhi police also raided the office and residence of Teesta Setalvad and Javed Anand of Sabrang India in Mumbai. Not stopping at this, the police also raided the house of Sitaram Yechury, General Secretary of the CPI (M) party and confiscated a device of a guest staying with him!

The attack on the Newslick portal and all the independent journalists and organisations they support, is part of a larger witch hunt that has been ongoing against Newslick, a registered company and media portal, since February 2021. The news portal has stood out for its impeccable news reporting which the present dispensation has found it difficult to swallow. Despite cases against Newslick and Prabir Purkayastha by the ED, IT and CBI, the editor and journalists have not stepped back and have continued fulfilling their professional responsibilities fearlessly.

This raid comes at a time when all the cases against Newslick and Prabir Purkayastha, have been listed next week before the Delhi High Court, which has passed an order that no coercive action should be taken against him. In order to influence public opinion and the court, these raids have been carried out.

It is also shocking that these raids on the media house and these journalists of integrity is being carried out under the draconian provisions of the UAPA relating to unlawful activity, questioning the sovereignty and integrity of India and the even more dangerous provisions

relating to terrorism. It bears repetition that those who are raided are journalists and media professionals , who are involved in the business of publishing material which, the state may strongly disagree with. However to label what is an exercise of a constitutional right under Article 19(1)(a) as a terror related offence or an unlawful activity which challenges the sovereignty and integrity of India is to distort and stretch the meaning of terrorism to criminalize all forms of dissent. This is nothing other than an egregious abuse of state power utilized to build a fairy tale narrative that Chinese money was being used by the raided journalists and media professionals for purposes of terrorism!

What is alarming is the manner in which Delhi police seized all data in the journalists' electronic devices, in several instances, without even providing a hash value, thereby compromising the integrity of their data and violating their privacy and the identity of their sources. This is an egregious assault on the right to privacy, the right to dignity as well as the freedom of journalists to practice their profession fearlessly.

It is necessary to point out that the journalists were detained and have been interrogated for hours by the police, in a manner clearly seeking to harass and intimidate them. The larger purpose also is to vilify and create an anti-national narrative against these independent journalists in the public mind and as reprisal for their fair and brave reporting.

India stands at 161 out of 180 nations in the world press freedom index. Such raids and harassment of journalists under terror laws makes even more precarious the practice of journalism in India and renders even more chimerical the Government's claim that India is the 'mother of democracies' and is the world's largest democracy.

The PUCL appeals to all sections of society to come out and condemn this act of the Delhi police and MHA, be they journalists, lawyers, activists, academics, artists, homemakers and others. The echoes of the Emergency of 1975-77 are there in today's unconstitutional raids and all of us have to stand in solidarity against those being subjected to the high handedness of a tyrannical and lawless state which in its arrogance is forgetting that it too is subject to the Constitution.

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V. Suresh, General Secretary, PUCL

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