

**Editorial: Without Justice
there is No Peace: The Prime
Minister's Visit to Manipur
Failed to Apply a Healing Balm**

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**WITHOUT JUSTICE THERE IS NO PEACE: THE
PRIME MINISTER'S VISIT TO MANIPUR FAILED
TO APPLY A HEALING BALM**

The visit of the Prime Minister, Narendra Modi to Manipur on 13th September, 2025, addressing addressing public meetings in Kangla Fort, Imphal and in Peace Grounds, Churachandpur, failed to apply a healing balm to the bitter ongoing conflict in Manipur. This was a visit which was short in time (three hours), short in ideas and short in empathy for the suffering of the people of Manipur. It was also far too delayed, coming over 28 months after the conflict erupted on 3rd May, 2023. This only reinforced the perception that the north east is marginal to the Government of India and that the suffering of the people of Manipur was of little moment.

The violence has resulted in over 260 deaths, 60,000 displaced, sexual assaults and the destruction of homes, shops and places of worship. As a grim reminder that the conflict is far from healing, Manipur today is completely segregated between the Kukis and the Meiteis. Kukis cannot enter the Imphal valley and Meiteis cannot enter the hill regions.

Even till today, thousands live in relief camps, with the relief and rehabilitation measures for the violence-struck communities in Manipur, being grossly

inadequate and unevenly distributed. Many relief camps suffer from poor sanitation and hygiene, inadequate healthcare, absence of mental health support and lack of livelihood and education restoration. The situation in the relief camps speak to a hopelessness which needs immediate redressal, which alas, the Prime Minister did not even acknowledge.

The constitutional responsibility for the scale of atrocities experienced by the people of Manipur (both Meitei and Kuki) vests with the State Government and the Union Government. As per the Report of the Independent People's Tribunal on the Ongoing Ethnic Violence in Manipur, which was released on 20th August, 2025, the violence was not spontaneous, but planned, ethnically targeted and facilitated by state failures. The Report documents through the testimonies of victims and survivors, a deep-rooted belief, that the state either allowed the violence to happen or actively participated in it. Many deponents have attributed the flare-up of violence to the political and administrative decisions of former Chief Minister Biren Singh. The state government downplayed the violence, made no significant arrests of radical,

armed groups like that of the Arambai Tenggol and Meitei Leepun.

If the Central Government had taken seriously its constitutional responsibility to ensure that governance in the state of Manipur was carried out 'in accordance with the provision of the Constitution', then the state government would have been asked to resign for failure to ensure the most basic of constitutional responsibilities of any government, namely the protection of the right to life of the people of Manipur. The Union of India only awoke to its constitutional responsibility in February of 2025 (a year and nine months after the violence broke out) when Biren Singh was finally asked to resign and the state was put under President's Rule.

The massive constitutional failure is visible in the fact of complete ethnic segregation which makes a mockery of the constitutional guarantee of non-discrimination as well as the right to freedom of movement. The Report of the Independent Tribunal makes clear that administration is segregated on ethnic lines with Kuki employees of Manipur being posted only in the hill regions and Meitei employees only in the valley.

The abject institutional failure is highlighted by the brutality of violence which continued without check. People were butchered, tortured, dismembered, disrobed and sexually assaulted in public, and then through social media displayed before the whole world. The Report documents widespread sexual violence during the conflict which occurred

both in the Valley areas as also in the Hills. Many incidents of sexual violence were unreported due to fear, trauma and lack of institutional support. Even when women sought protection from the police and security forces, they were not only refused help, but there were instances when the police handed them to violent mobs. Due to the complete loss of trust in the state machinery, women survivors instead of reaching out to police stations, sought protection from their own communities. This displays the extent of state failure. There has been no accountability for this shocking failure of the state to ensure that women's right to be free from sexual violence is guaranteed.

There is a complete breakdown of legal, judicial and constitutional mechanisms in Manipur. It is shocking that the delivery of justice has completely failed with Kuki lawyers unable to appear in the High Court in Imphal. The key symptoms of the collapse include the failure of the courts to issue urgent directives to protect life and property, delayed or absent investigation into serious crimes, FIRs being selectively filed, and active participation of law enforcement officers in the violence. The Report of the Independent Tribunal documents the extent of police complicity and failure of security forces to maintain neutrality and to enforce the rule of law.

This history of hurt and loss, continuing violation and the failure of the mechanisms of justice was not referenced by the Prime Minister in his tightly choreographed three hour visit to Manipur. The Prime Minister instead chose to focus on

extolling Manipur as India's crown jewel which will bring prosperity to the entire North East. He announced developmental projects worth 7300 plus crores and appealed to all to restore peace in Manipur. However this focus on the great and grand could not suppress the deep emotion of sorrow and pain, which broke through the surface, when a young girl broke down in front of the Prime Minister.

The question to be asked is what is expected when a high constitutional functionary such as the Prime Minister of India, visits a region which has suffered mass violence because of the unconscionable failure of his own administration, both at the level of the Union and the State?

A lesson could be taken from the United Nations which has dealt with situations of mass violence and has established a mechanism called the '**Special Rapporteur on Truth, Justice, Reparation, Memory and Guarantees of non-recurrence**' to deal with such situations. If one takes seriously the necessity of 'truth', 'justice', 'reparation', 'memory' and a 'guarantee of non-recurrence', then the imperative of political leadership is to begin by acknowledging the truth of what has happened.

In the Prime Minister's responses, there was no acknowledgment of the suffering of the people of Manipur and the responsibility borne by his administration for the same. There was no acknowledgment that the people of Manipur have suffered an injustice and there was no reference to the imperative of justice for the wrongs suffered by the people of

Manipur.

Neither was there any reference to the need for reparations for the wrongs suffered by the people of Manipur. Instead of the justice that 'reparations' implies there was the announcement of the rebuilding of houses and developmental packages. There was no acknowledgement of the perpetration of sexual violence and no reference to bringing the perpetrators to trial. The question of ensuring that sexual violence in the context of mass crimes does not happen again either in Manipur or anywhere else in India, thus never arose. The ethnic and geographic segregation in Manipur and the need to address it was never raised.

The people of Manipur are owed an apology. An apology is based on an acknowledgment of wrong doing and a promise to right the situation. Instead the Prime Minister seemed to assume that hurt as serious as murder, rape and destruction of homes can be remedied by a developmental package and an anodyne call for peace without even whispering the word called 'justice'.

The Prime Minister could take a lesson from his predecessor Dr. Manmohan Singh who, as the then Prime Minister, apologised in Parliament on 11th August, 2005 for the horrific pogrom against the Sikhs in 1984. Although then PM Manmohan Singh's apology was a case of too little too late, (coming 21 years after the horrific anti-Sikh pogrom of 1984), what he said is nevertheless significant: *'What took place in 1984 is the negation of the concept of nationhood enshrined in our Constitution.'*

Similarly what took place in Manipur is a negation of the promise of rule of law and the responsibility of the state to protect the lives of all persons regardless of ethnicity or religion. If Manipur burned for almost two years it is because Biren Singh singularly failed to fulfil his constitutional responsibility to protect the lives of the people of Manipur regardless of ethnicity. The Union of India was complicit in the failures of the Manipur government.

What is required is to follow up an apology with concrete measures towards justice, reparations and non-recurrence. The report of the Independent People's Tribunal on the Ongoing Ethnic Violence in Manipur, details a way forward based on the principles of truth, justice, accountability, dialogue and reconciliation. The Report captured the despair and pain felt by both Meitei and Kuki communities, and their demand for justice and accountability. The report draws upon the testimonies of 195 survivors, experts and other stakeholders which contain the experiences of strife and violence, their analysis of the causes of the conflict and the vital imperative of justice as a precursor to peace.

Critical steps have to be taken to pin accountability for what happened in Manipur. There must be investigation by a Supreme Court appointed SIT into the role of the armed forces, police and other security forces in the conflict and monitor the thousands of cases of arson, murder and assault, that continue to be in a limbo at the FIR stage. There must also be an investigation into the

inflammatory and inciteful hate speeches given by political leaders and state functionaries, that occurred prior to and during the conflict.

The situation of people, living in limbo in the camps needs to be urgently addressed. With respect to this, the Tribunal recommended that a committee be formed to oversee all matters pertaining to relief, rehabilitation and restoration, including the creation of an action-plan to mobilise resources for the resettlement of the thousands of inmates in relief camps. At this crucial time, Manipur needs a region-sensitive health budgeting framework to address the hill-valley infrastructure and staffing gap. The state needs financial packages from the Central government for rebuilding and strengthening governance, recognising that the conflict has severely impacted Manipur's primarily agrarian economy and reduced its fiscal capacity.

The question of peace requires a political imagination which brings people together. Even in a deeply polarized situation, there were instances documented by the Independent People's Tribunal of how members from both the Meitei and Kuki community have 'stood against raging mobs from their own community to either talk them out of their bloodlust or minimize the damage done to property and life'. The Report goes on to lament that 'Such small yet important acts of solidarity keep on recurring throughout the last two years, yet we rarely take notice or give them the recognition they deserve'. The Prime Minister should have highlighted the role of those who embodied the

constitutional value of fraternity even amidst the violence, thereby opening out a critical space for peace dialogues between the communities.

The visit of the Prime Minister failed to acknowledge any of these needs of the strife-torn state, and instead of addressing the justice deficit, worked on the morally flawed assumption that 'development' was the panacea to Manipur's ills. The Prime Minister did not make even a

symbolic gesture towards justice and peace by bringing Kuki and Meitei leaders together or visit any of the relief camps or promise that the segregation based on ethnic lines will end. The PM did not even meet MLAs of his own party representing different ethnicities of Manipur! Instead, he choose to talk about road infrastructure and tech parks, thereby invisibilising the country's most recent and gravest humanitarian crisis and the suffering and pain of the

people of Manipur. Manipur's healing requires more than a development package. What is required is a restorative justice framework for addressing grievances and promoting healing, that is hinged on acknowledging harm, reparations, and reintegration over mere punishment. Lasting peace in Manipur requires structural changes, community dialogue, legal accountability and sustained moral leadership.

A 'CULTURE OF CONVENIENCE': A CRITICAL LOOK AT THE DELHI RIOTS CONSPIRACY CASE AND JUDICIAL ABDICATION IN DENIAL OF BAIL

PUCL NATIONAL

On September 7, 2025, the People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) hosted a critical online discussion following the Delhi High Court's rejection of bail for ten activists accused in the Delhi riots conspiracy case. A panel of lawyers and activists analyzed the judgment, articulating the systemic issues plaguing the 'decolonial' Indian criminal justice system they see as increasingly abdicating its role as a protector of fundamental rights. The panelists' painted a grim picture of a judiciary where process has become punishment, dissent is systematically criminalized, the disturbing trend of judicial deference to the executive, and where demands for accountability are shut down through the tools of the state, especially the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA).

Nadeem Khan, National Secretary of the Association for Protection of Civil Rights, opened the discussion by detailing the prolonged five-year-long incarceration of the accused. He stated that the "UAPA had been weaponized in order to ensure

that those who were arrested could not secure bail." Expressing a deep-seated disappointment, Nadeem noted that while one had come to expect little relief from the lower judiciary, the real shock was seeing the higher judiciary follow suit. "We are seeing that even the higher judiciary is passing similar orders,"... This, he argued, highlights the severe problems we are "facing today with the criminal justice system, with how the judiciary is looking at the right to bail and with how the judiciary is treating political prisoners."

Advocate Shahrukh Alam analyzed the prosecution's case through what she called the "register of cynicism and despair." She argued that "any state's commitment to rule of law can be gleaned by the way its prosecutors frame their cases" and "how much social and political prejudice against the accused", they draw from. Shahrukh Alam drew a chilling parallel to the colonial-era trial of Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar, quoting the British prosecutor:

"Gentlemen... if we had no other evidence of a plot... the very nature of the outbreak itself must convince us of the existence of a plot. Does that sound familiar?"

She dismantled the prosecution's theory that the accused had a "diabolical" plan to provoke violence through peaceful protest. "That's a very badly planned conspiracy," she noted, explaining that under criminal law, "grave and sudden provocation... is a defence," not a crime to be prosecuted for. Alam argued that the state's case is designed to send a clear message: "Muslim mobilization is inherently dangerous to the unity and integrity of India." It is a political and legal shift, she concluded, "to criminalize political mobilization of Muslims as Muslims."

Advocate Gautam Bhatia delved into the legal reasoning, or lack thereof, in the bail orders. He emphasized that in a country where criminal trials can drag on for over a decade, bail is often the only hope for liberty. He described the court's approach

as an "extreme version of the eyes wide shut approach," where "not only is the court not giving the evidence any kind of serious scrutiny, but actually it is filling in the gap where there are gaps in the prosecution's case." He criticized the "eyes wide shut" approach adopted by the courts in UAPA cases, where they conduct a mere "surface level light touch" examination of the evidence. In the Delhi riots case, he argued, the court has gone a step further, actively "filling in the gaps" in the prosecution's case to justify the denial of bail.

Bhatia provided stark examples of judicial misapplication of mind. He pointed to the court's suspicion of a "flurry of phone calls" between activists when the riots broke out, noting, "The most logical thing you would do would be to call each other. In fact, silence would be the more suspicious outcome." He highlighted the order concerning Shifa-ur-Rehman, (who was the president of Jamia Millia Islamia Alumni Association) where bail was denied because "the possibility of misuse of the position cannot be ruled out." Bhatia was unequivocal in asserting that it was possible to engage with some legal reasoning, but how does one engage with no reasoning at all?"

Bhatia concluded that the court's decision depends upon the vague and uncorroborated testimony of anonymous witnesses, to effectively deny bail and end up keeping people in jail for more than five years. In Bhatia's analysis, with respect to the allegation of conspiracy, the court itself fills in the gaps of the prosecution with completely unsubstantiated assertions.

On the court's analysis of a speech by Umar Khalid, Bhatia described it as putting "language in a torture rack and torturing it until it gives you the answer you want." The court faulted Umar Khalid for not specifying a "bloodless revolution" when he offered "revolutionary greetings." "Because you didn't say bloodless revolution," Bhatia paraphrased the court's logic, "therefore the inference is you meant a bloody revolution." He compared the proceedings to the "infamous Moscow trials" under Stalin, where mere association with a perceived conspiracy was enough for conviction.

Advocate Harshit Anand argued that "in the government's eye, this case is to serve as an exemplary case for creating a larger chilling effect in the Indian society." He asserted that the judiciary has fostered a "culture of convenience," characterized by "a complete disregard for existing precedent," a refusal to engage with the merits of allegations, and interpreting judgments "against their very clear intent."

Anand noted the Supreme Court's own repeated judgments that long incarceration is a ground for bail, even in UAPA cases. Yet, the High Court sidestepped these precedents. He decried the "lack of real engagement with allegations," where being the "heads of WhatsApp groups" or "printing of pamphlets" is presented as evidence of a terror conspiracy with "no proximate connection" to the actual violence. He concluded that "the validity of your speech is now tested on whether or not the executive wants you to make those

speeches." He also drew a parallel with the historical use of seemingly neutral laws to target specific communities, as was the case with the incarceration of Black people in the United States in the 19th and 20th centuries. Anand urged the courts to not turn a blind eye to the political realities that inform such cases.

The discussion concluded with a call to action. Advocate Mihir Desai stressed the need to not only continue the legal fight in the Supreme Court but also to mount a campaign to keep the case in the public eye. "It's not enough to say that these people should be released on bail," he argued, "it's also important to talk about repeal of UAPA." Kavita Srivastava of PUCL echoed this, proposing a "national campaign for judicial accountability" to "restore bail is the rule and jail the exception." Mihir advocated for a multi-pronged strategy, including writing to the Chief Justice, circulating critiques of the judgment, and organizing public demonstrations. Crucially, Mihir called for a broader campaign for the repeal of the UAPA itself, arguing that it is a draconian law that has no place in a democratic society. The consensus was clear: without sustained public pressure and a direct challenge to the draconian framework of the UAPA, the degradation of justice will continue unabated.

The discussion organized by the PUCL served as a stark reminder of the challenges confronting the Indian criminal justice system. The Delhi riots conspiracy case is not merely about the denial of bail to a few individuals; it is about the erosion of fundamental rights, the criminalization of

dissent, and the systemic degradation of justice. It is a testament to the urgent need for judicial accountability and a robust defence of civil liberties. In the words of the panelists, the fight for the release of these

political prisoners and the repeal of draconian laws like the UAPA is a test of the collective conscience of Indian citizens and a trial of India's democratic commitment to the principles of justice and equality.

(The video of the entire online conference is available at <https://www.youtube.com/live/SIDf42j8Kis>)

RESOLUTION ON COMMUNAL HARMONY: CAMPAIGN AGAINST HATE SPEECHES AND HATE CRIMES

CONFERENCE ORGANISED BY PUCL DELHI ON 20th & 21st SEPTEMBER 2025

In recent years, India has witnessed a significant rise in hate speech and hate crimes, particularly against religious minorities such as Muslims and Christians. This troubling trend has been marked by an increasing number of violent and discriminatory incidents, often incited by inflammatory rhetoric from political and religious leaders.

India is a nation renowned for its diversity, comprising numerous religious, linguistic and ethnic groups. Historically, Indian culture has been largely tolerant of different faiths and communities. Ancient India was the birthplace of philosophies such as Buddhism and Jainism, and the Charvaka, Sankhya, and Poorva Mimansa schools of Indian thought, some of which questioned or rejected the concept of God. Religious intolerance was not characteristic of ancient Indian society.

Hindus served in the Mughal armies, and Muslims fought alongside Maharana Pratap, Guru Gobind Singh and Shivaji. Sufi saints such as Baba Sheikh Farid and Bhakti poets like Kabir and Guru Nanak were revered across communities. Figures including Rahim, Ameer Khuro, Surdas, and, in the modern era, Jotiba Phule were widely well-

regarded. The foundation stone of Harimandir Sahib (Golden Temple) was laid by a Muslim Sufi Saint. This reflects a longstanding tradition of interfaith respect.

India's freedom fighters fulfilled their pledge by establishing a sovereign, democratic, and republican state with the adoption of the Constitution on 26/01/1950. The Preamble of the Constitution affirms the resolve of the people of India to promote fraternity and assure the dignity of every individual. Fostering brotherhood and fraternity among citizens was a foundational resolution when the Constitution was drafted.

Given these noble foundations, the current rise in hate speeches and hate crimes targeting specific communities is deeply concerning. There have been numerous appalling incidents of lynching targeting Muslim and Dalit individuals. Muslim women have been subjected to derogatory online trolling. Some individuals claiming religious authority have openly called for violence against Muslims. Such hate-filled rhetoric and its resultant actions disrupt harmony and brotherhood, fostering insecurity and distrust among communities.

Religious processions are increasingly being used to incite communal violence. There is a growing hysteria around interfaith marriages, often labelled as 'Love Jihad'. Under the pretext of alleged 'large scale conversions', violent attacks are launched against churches, mosques, prayer meetings, and the homes of Christians and Muslims. Both central and state governments have not only failed to take effective measures to counter these dangerous trends, but in some cases promoted them by showing that the culprits of these crimes can act with impunity. A number of State Governments in order to increase or consolidate their constituency with political motives have passed Anti Conversion laws directly contravening the Constitution of India.

Another disturbing trend which is noticed is in calls for economic boycott on religious lines, especially of the Muslims. Economically boycotting around 14% of the population will result in plunging not only the community into economic distress but will be harmful to the entire Indian economy as you cannot have a great economy by isolating such a vast section of society.

In these circumstances, it is

imperative that all who cherish constitutional values unite to protect and promote India's tradition of tolerance and communal harmony. Clause (e) of Article 51A in Chapter IVA of the Constitution on Fundamental Duties mandates every citizen to foster harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood among all Indians, transcending religious, linguistic, regional, and sectional differences, and to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women.

Therefore, at this conference of the PUCL, Delhi, it is resolved that, in collaboration with other organizations and individuals sharing similar objectives, we shall launch a campaign and undertake all legitimate actions to curb the menace of hate

speeches and hate crimes and promote the spirit of brotherhood and harmony amongst all sections of society. This is essential to ensure that the secular and democratic foundations of the Indian State are further strengthened and secured.

We call upon the Central and State Governments:

1. To stop pandering to communal elements and follow the principle of equality of applicability of rule of law.
2. To deal strictly with the groups and individuals indulging in lynching and cow vigilante groups and treat them at par with terrorist organizations.
3. To ensure the right to practice freedom of religion and to ensure that no religious community feels

its members to be deemed as second class citizens.

4. To deal strictly with groups giving calls of economic boycott of religious communities and ensure the economic progress of all groups and communities regardless of religion.

5. To pass and strictly enforce an equal opportunities law.

(Arun Majhi, President; TS Ahuja, General Secretary)

(A report of the 2 day conference will be published in the next issue.)

JOINT STATEMENT OF ORGANISATIONS CONDEMNING THE ANTI CONVERSION LAW PASSED BY THE RAJASTHAN STATE ASSEMBLY

PUCL RAJASTHAN

(Released at the Press Conference at Vinoba Gyan Mandir, Jaipur on 25th Sept. 2025)

Our statement is in four parts. Part 1 consists of the logic of our condemnation and rejection, Part II consists of a brief outline of our strategy of lobbying against the Governor signing it, Part III consists of incidents of violence and Part IV consists of the analysis of the bill.

We the undersigned organisations jointly condemn and reject the passage of the "Rajasthan Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion Bill, 2025" in the State Vidhan Sabha on the 9th of September 2025. Rajasthan is now the 13th state to pass this law after the following states, which are as

follows.

- Odisha: (1967)
- Madhya Pradesh: (initial 1968 now a new law 2021)
- Arunachal Pradesh: (1978)
- Chhattisgarh: (2000 and 2006)
- Tamil Nadu (2002 repealed in 2006)
- Gujarat: (2003, with amendments in 2021)
- Himachal Pradesh: (2006, with amendments in 2019)
- Jharkhand: (2017)
- Uttarakhand: (2018)
- Uttar Pradesh: (2020 with amendments in 2024)
- Haryana: (2022)
- Karnataka: (2022)
- Rajasthan (2025)

These religious conversion laws are being implemented in 11 states presently, with Rajasthan awaiting the Governor's assent

and Tamil Nadu having repealed the law in 2006.

It is our belief that the Rajasthan bill is a draconian law and is nothing but a tool (as in the earlier two attempts in 2006 and 2008), of the BJP to spread the Sangh ideology of majoritarian hatred towards minorities and create an atmosphere of fear within the minority communities living in the State. The Rajasthan law is much wider and more stringent and invasive than any of the other legislations of the 11 states, including the Orissa Freedom of Religion Act, 1967 and The Madhya Pradesh Dharam Swatantray Adhiniyam, 1968 legislations which was upheld by the Supreme Court in the Rev. Stainislaus v. State of M.P., (1977) 1 SCC 677. Or even the UP law of 2020 which

amended the punishment sections in 2024. Its provisions fail the test of Constitutionality at every step, whether it be related to definitions, or mechanism for conversion or the proportionality of punishments.

Since the last two weeks, when the bill was (re)placed in the State Assembly on 3rd of September and its passage on the 9th of September, more than 9 incidents of attacks have happened against the Christian Community, showing how unlawful the State is becoming. Incidents took place in Alwar on the 3rd of September 2025 the day the bill was tabled in the State legislature, and other incidents include, 2 in Hanumangarh, 2 in Dungarpur, police harassment with 2 in Kotputli Behor district and 2 in Jaipur, shamefully both in the CMs constituency, which should have been the safest space for all communities. (See table) The license that the passage of this bill in the State legislature has given the right-wing RSS affiliated groups to attack Minorities, including attempts by the Rajasthan Police to criminalise the worship and practicing rights under Article 25, shows how this law will be used in the future to subordinate minorities and deprive all other faiths, other than being Hindu of full expression of their constitutional rights particularly of Article 14, 19, 21 and 25 (a more detailed analysis of the Bill has been given in part IV of the statement.)

Part II: Collective Strategy to Stop the Bill

Our collective strategy to stop this illegal bill will be as follows:

We all have decided to meet the Governor and explain to him to not sign this unconstitutional bill and instead send it to the President of India under Article 200. In 2006 and 2008, we had been successful in our endeavour with the respective Governor's to not sign the bill and send it to the President.

We would also conduct a series of dialogues with all communities including all minorities that they should debate this bill publicly and show how bad it is in law and violative of constitutional rights. We are sure that this bill will result in a two-class system of governance.

We will also hold public rallies and public meetings in all districts and the state capital and campaign on social media against this law against this bill, will carry out signature and postcard campaigns to the Governor, and also move the Supreme court once it comes into force, where all the State laws that have been challenged by diverse petitioners are being heard.

Part III: Attacks and FIRs and police intimidation against the Christian Community.

From 3rd September onwards, when the law was replaced and tabled again in the Vishan Sabha, 10 incidents have come to our notice. As if the message of the Government to all the Senior police officials, the SPs and Thanas were informed that they can now intimidate any Christian and that the Bajrang Dal/ VHP and others should be given a free hand and no FIR needs to lodged for their acts of Vandalism or hooliganism. Their

applications entertained and enquiry needs to be instituted and arrests of Christian Pastors should be made.

In the six Districts of Alwar, Kotputli - Behror, Dungarpur, Sri Ganganagar and Jaipur a total of 10 incidents were reported. In nine the police has intervened mostly from the side of the Bajrang dal and VHP people. In two places arrests of pastors has also been made. The FIRs against these right wing forces only happened in one case, in Jaipur. The table attached shows the complete details of the incidents. The most disconcerting fact has been the repeated attacks on Christians in Pratap Nagar, Jaipur, which is a part of the CMs constituency where the Thana and the Bajrang Dalis have a free hand to do whatever they want. No arrests, no restraining orders, NO medical examinations of the Injured. Shows a completely compromised police in these districts as far as these incidents go.

We demand immediate action in these matters against the Right wing hooligans, Fair and Just investigation in all FIRs lodged and action against the police who are in complete complicity in these matters.

Part IV: A brief analysis of the law of 2025

The draconian definition of allurement in section 2 states that: Even ordinary conversation about and between faiths will now fall within the catchment of prohibition and can be termed allurement leading to a minimum 7 to 14 years punishment along with fines to the tune of Rs 5

lakhs.

Through section 5 of the law, shockingly the RSS concept of Love Jihad has also found place leading to punishment to upto 20 years of imprisonment along with fines upto twenty five lakhs.

We would also like to state that, interestingly the law like in many States, including in Rajasthan too, will not apply to the Sangh Parivar Policy of Gharwapsi, Section 3 (4) meaning that "....if any person re-converts to original religion i.e. ancestral religion, the same shall not be deemed to be a conversion under this Act", no permission will be required if a person wishes to convert to the "original" religion., whereas all other conversions require three months permission with the Collector. No definition of original/ancestral religion has been stated an attempt to show Hindu religion as the default religion of this region, showing complete supremacy of it over all religions, including Buddhism, Jainism, Sikh, Islam, Christianity in contravention to Article 14, 19, 21 and 25 of the Indian Constitution.

The outlawing of even the Mass conversion (conversion of more than two or more persons together) as stated in section 5 of the bill, forget what Dr Bhim Rao Ambedkar did with converting approximately 365,000 to 500,000 followers to Buddhism with on October 14, 1956, at Deeksha Bhoomi in Nagpur, the idea of the mass conversion was a symbolic act of rejecting the caste system in particular the acts of social discrimination, untouchability and all types of social inequality. Or that of the Meenakshipuram, TN of 1980

when large numbers of Dalits converted in 1980 to Islam, Or that of Dalits of Kumher, Rajasthan who after massive caste riot in 1992, chose to convert to Sikhism to get out of the cycle of untouchability, social discrimination and violence. All these would not just be permissible but would offend public order according to their definition and result in sentencing upto life imprisonment, fine to the tune of 25 lakhs (section 5) and forfeiture (section 12) and bulldozer action (13) against the properties of the individual and of the institute for so called illegal and mass conversion.

The Rajasthan Religious Conversion Bill, 2025 would not stand the scrutiny of the law due to its severe mandatory sentences of punishment align with offences being cognizable and non-bailable. Punishments from 7 years to life imprisonment, penalties to the tune of thirty lakhs for heinous crimes and to be handed over to survivors, and last but not the least, if organisations are involved in violating the law, then cancellation of registration Including bull dozer action can be undertaken. The punishments actually supercede the concept of reasonableness and proportionality and would not pass a court of law.

The law also seriously violates the right to privacy as pronounced by the SC in the Puttusamy judgement of 2018 as the process of conversion, not only requires a sixty day prior to the date of conversion an application to any public authority including the Collector but also a declaration which will be displayed on noticeboards,

inviting objections, violating an individual's freedom of conscience and choice of choosing her religion as a personal, private right. Similarly just about anyone can report a possible violation and an enquiry will be initiated by the police, showing how this right can be misused to settle scores and also genuinely snatch the right to choose my religion.

Apart from the above the anti-conversion Bill of 2025 impacts both the issues of Legislative Competency as it falls under entries of the Union under List -I and III and does not fall within the State list, that is sufficient to give the Union legislative competence. It also impacts on the interpretation of the word propagate on the fundamental right to religion, which includes the right to convert, which this law is treating as illegal.

Because this law is draconian in its provisions, unconstitutional its sections, brazenly violating Articles 14, 19, 21 and 25, they will not stand scrutiny under the due process of law and should be referred to the President under Article 200 of the constitution of India.

Sawai Singh, John Mathew and Muzammil
On behalf of
PUCL (People's Union for Civil Liberties) and several other concerned organizations.

(The table detailing the attacks against the Christian community in six districts has been published in the online edition of the PUCL Bulletin, on the PUCL website.)

THE ATTACK ON THE 8-HOUR DAY: PUCL DEMANDS MAHARASHTRA REVOKE PROPOSED REGRESSIVE LABOUR LAW CHANGES

PUCL MAHARASHTRA

People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), Maharashtra is deeply concerned about the Cabinet decision taken by the Government of Maharashtra to "reform" labour laws. The proposed amendments are highly regressive and a clear attack on labour rights. If legislated and implemented, this decision will be disastrous for working people in the state – shrinking the organised workforce and rolling back labour protections to the exploitative norms of the colonial era.

On 3rd September 2025 the Maharashtra Cabinet approved a series of labour law amendments to increase the length of the working day, working hours without rest intervals, working hours per week, and limit of the overtime period. These amendments are based on recommendations of a central task force on labour reforms in order to "attract investment, expand industries, and create more employment opportunities." The Maharashtra decision aligns with states such as Karnataka, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh, and Tripura – which have already enacted similar "reforms."

It must not be forgotten that the State is the biggest employer both in industries and establishments and is therefore required to ensure that workers are not exploited and their fundamental rights to a decent, safe and healthy work environment are protected. Yet it fails to do precisely that.

The State Government has made

many lofty claims in support of these "reforms," that are presumably in the interests of both labour as well as capital. The amendments will facilitate "protection of labour rights" while "improving the ease of doing business." They will help "attract investment" as well as "increase employment opportunities in the state." But it is obvious that extending working hours, and removing smaller establishments from the purview of the law is meant to reduce or remove protections for workers, not to expand them. Today, even in the industrial sector in India, contractual workers are already working 12-hour shifts (without overtime). In effect, the amendments aim to legalise what is already happening in fact – depriving workers of the legal safeguards against super-exploitation. They seem to be a way of coercing a shrinking permanent workforce into this inhuman work regime. Besides, far from increasing employment, as is claimed, this step will reduce the organised work force to two thirds of its size by replacing 8-hour shifts with 12-hour ones. It is no surprise that the Karnataka State IT/ITeS Employees Union (KITU) labelled similar amendments proposed in Karnataka as "inhuman attempt to impose modern-day slavery" upon them.

The proposed amendments will be carried out in the Factories Act of 1948 and the Maharashtra Shops and Establishments (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 2017. In the Factories Act, the

amendments proposed are:

- (a) Under Section 65, the workday shall be extended from the present 9 hours up to 12 hours;
- (b) Under Section 55, the rest period which was half an hour after the first five hours shall be made half an hour after six hours;
- (c) Under Section 56, the maximum number of working hours (spread over) in a day from 10.5 hours to 12 hours;
- (d) Under Section 65, the maximum number of hours of overtime in a quarter shall be increased from the present 115 to 144 hours (the original limit had been laid down as 75 hours).

Under the Shops and Establishments Act the government intends to

- (a) increase working hours from 9 to 10 hours;
- (b) exclude establishments having less than 20 workers (the current number of 85 lakh establishments covered by this Act will be reduced to about 56,000).

While the State Labour Secretary has claimed that overtime work will be paid at double the rate of basic wages and allowances for every such increase in working hours, and that such overtime shall be subject to worker's consent, these assurances have to be tested upon the actual language of the proposed amendments, particularly the fine

print. While the decisions have yet to take the shape of a bill/ordinance for amending the Factories Act in the state, it is very likely that the amending bill/ordinance shall be on the lines of similar amendments made in Rajasthan and Gujarat.

In the Gujarat Ordinance No. 2 of 2025, issued on 1st July 2025, for instance, at Section 6, it is stated that Section 59(1) of the Factories Act shall be substituted by:

“Where a worker works in any factory:-

(i) for more than nine hours in any day or for more than forty-eight hours in any week, working for six days in any week;

(ii) for more than ten hours in any day or for more than forty eight hours in any week, working for five days in any week;

(iii) for more than eleven and a half hours in any day working for four days in any week, or works on paid holidays; he shall in respect of overtime work be entitled to wages at the rate of twice his ordinary rate of wages.”

In effect this means that overtime will not be calculated on a daily basis, but on a weekly basis, and a worker may work for eleven and a half hours each day for four days in a week without being eligible for overtime. This amounts to squeezing out the maximum from workers, and if they do not consent to overtime, subjecting them to artificial breaks in service jeopardising their permanent status.

The Rajasthan Bill contains another dangerous clause,

namely

6(v) “A worker may be required to work for overtime subject to the consent of such worker for such work except worker required to work for safety activities.”

Thus, a maintenance worker may be forced to work overtime all the year round. Given the current situation in the country of a large informal sector, underemployment, low wages, and unpaid work – workers will give “consent” out of fear or desperation, not choice. The provision of “consent” will be little more than legal subterfuge to conceal a new form of servitude. It is a serious concern that while average working hours in wealthy countries have reduced by roughly half over the last 150 years – moving from over 50 hours per week to around 25-35 hours per week in recent times – India is reverting to colonial era standards by increasing working hours. In France, for instance, the standard full-time work week is 35 hours, with a daily cap of 10 hours; hours beyond the 35 hour threshold are considered overtime.

The working class all over the world has fought a long battle to establish its right to an 8-hour working day so that workers may also have 8 hours of rest and 8 hours of personal time in which to achieve their full potential as citizens and as human beings. It must be recalled that the International Workers Day originates from the demand for an eight hour working day. Labour Day commemorates the sacrifice of union organisers – who were framed after the Haymarket protest on false charges of causing a riot – during

a strike and demonstrations of Chicago workers in 1886. It has origins in the American Federation of Labour’s call: “eight hours shall constitute a legal day’s labour from and after May 1st, 1886”. After the International Labour Organisation (ILO) was founded in 1919, the first instrument ratified by it was the one regulating working hours. The second article limited working hours to 8 hours per day and 48 hours per week. India was one of the first signatories of the ILO’s “Hours of Work Convention” in 1921. India has itself witnessed valiant struggles of textile workers in the year 1911 to reduce working hours which finally under the pen of Dr B.R. Ambedkar were enshrined in the Factories Act, 1948 in the form of the 8-hour work day. The government’s decision in effect seeks to extinguish in one stroke the rights that working people have won with great sacrifice and struggle over more than a century.

It is widely acknowledged that long hours of work does not increase worker productivity, on the contrary, they drastically increase incidents of workplace accidents. Such long hours of work can only lead to sweat labour and hazardous work conditions. It will adversely impact health of workers by increasing exhaustion and stress, and increase their exposure to occupation-linked diseases and medical conditions. It is equally well known that workers in establishments with 12-hour shifts are rarely able to unionise. Longer working hours are discriminatory towards women workers because women bear a significant burden of care work in their homes. If the government

was serious about increasing productivity, employment opportunities and welfare of workers, they would introduce progressive amendments to reduce working hours without any reduction in wages.

The PUCL Maharashtra therefore demands that the full texts of the proposed amendments be made available in the public domain in both in Marathi and English, and in all offices of the Labour Department so that trade unions and organisations can scrutinise the fine print of these so-called

“reforms.” We demand that this decision to amend the Factories Act and the Shop and Establishments Act along the lines of other state governments be immediately revoked. Any proposed labour reforms in the state must only be considered after a series of consultations with trade unions and workers’ organisations, after which they ought to be opened to the broader public for suggestions and objections.

The PUCL in alliance with trade unions and informal sector

workers organisations will campaign against the extension of work hours. It will also lobby with the Standing Committee in the Legislative Assembly and with opposition party MLAs to not accept these changes, and if required challenge these amendments in the courts.

(Shiraz Bulsara Prabhu,
President
Sandhya Gokhale, General
Secretary)

CIVIL SOCIETY AND INDIGENOUS GROUPS DEMAND REVOCATION OF THE APPOINTMENT OF PERSONS WITH CONFLICT OF INTEREST TO ODISHA WILDLIFE BOARD

JOINT STATEMENT

To

1. President of India
2. Chairperson, National Board for Wildlife, Govt. of India
3. Minister, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Govt. of India
4. Chief Minister, Govt. of Odisha
5. Minister, Forest, Environment and Climate Change Department, Govt. of Odisha
6. PCCF & HoFF, Forest, Environment and Climate Change Department, Govt. of Odisha

Subject: Objection to the appointment of persons with conflict of interest to the Odisha State Board for Wildlife, amounting to gross dilution of the mandate and integrity of the Board

We, the undersigned Adivasi/Indigenous community organisations, concerned

citizens, former civil servants, conservationists, academics, lawyers, journalists, students, poets and activists, write to express our urgent objection to the recent appointment of a person with a serious conflict of interest to Odisha's State Board for Wildlife, which amounts to the dilution of the Board's mandate and its integrity.

It has come to our knowledge that Mr Aditya Chandra Panda, who operates private safari tourism businesses within forest and wildlife habitats and has known affiliations to World Wildlife Fund (WWF), which has a proven record of complicity in human rights abuses against forest-dwelling communities, has been appointed as a member of the Board in February 2025. We raise our strong objection as the appointment of Mr Aditya Panda is arbitrary, undeniably inappropriate, and violates the principles of impartiality,

transparency, and ecological justice that should guide such appointments.

The Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, envisages the State Wildlife Board as a statutory advisory body that must serve the public interest in protecting wildlife and natural ecosystems, provided that it shall not interfere with or affect the rights of local people, particularly Scheduled Tribe communities. Appointing a person to the Board whose commercial ventures depend directly on exploiting socio-ecologically sensitive areas is an evident and serious conflict of interest. It risks compromising the integrity of the Board's decisions and may skew policy directions in favour of business goals rather than upholding ecological protection and community rights.

It has also come to our knowledge that the said person has been repeatedly misusing his

position and social privileges to leverage his quid pro quo nexus with certain forest officials and gain undue access to wildlife habitats, particularly in eastern and central Indian states, in violation of established rules and conservation norms. Such actions not only undermine the rule of law but also compromise the ecological security of India's most sensitive and biodiversity-rich landscapes, which are also the ancestral territories of millions of indigenous people. The private use of protected areas under the guise of safari tourism or personal interest is a blatant misuse of position and erodes public trust in the Odisha Forest Department. Mr Panda has been using his past position as Honorary Wildlife Warden of Angul and his current membership in the State Board for Wildlife and Joint Task Force to promote his credentials and leverage his commercial networks. For instance, Mr Panda uses his roles in government and statutory bodies as references to promote tourism companies like Natural Habitat Adventures, USA and India Safari & Tours Ltd, New Delhi.

Our gravest concern is about the way Mr Panda has been using his influential status and his privileges to manufacture misleading public opinion on the issue of village evictions from inside protected areas. Apart from vilifying the indigenous communities at large, Mr Panda has been involved in campaigns against the customary rights of forest dwellers over ancestral lands and forest territories, which starkly contradict the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 - a

landmark legislation enacted to rectify the historical injustices committed against forest-dwelling and indigenous communities. This reflects Mr Panda's racist, casteist, and colonial mindset that is incompatible with the inclusive and democratic spirit of conservation envisioned under Indian law and global human rights frameworks. Furthermore, Mr Panda has also been actively propagating misinformation that vilifies indigenous and forest-dwelling communities, portraying them as obstacles to conservation within Protected Areas. Such malicious narratives undermine the constitutional and legal recognition of customary rights, knowledge systems, and the historical stewardship roles of forest-dwelling indigenous communities in protecting India's forests and wildlife.

Furthermore, India has been a signatory to the Convention on Biological Diversity, wherein, Article 8, which pertains to in situ conservation, imposes an obligation on contracting parties to preserve and maintain the practices of indigenous communities and Article 10(c) provides that contracting parties shall, as far as possible, and as appropriate, protect and encourage customary use of biological resources in accordance with traditional cultural practices. In this context, Mr Panda's ethical positions and political agenda reflect an exclusionary approach to conservation that is out of step with contemporary ecological justice frameworks and democratic values, and hence antithetical to the overall mandate of the Board.

In addition, it is imperative to

highlight the broader failures of the Board, which are being compounded by such appointments of persons with conflicts of interest. At a time when Odisha's forests and wildlife habitats are being systematically destroyed by mining projects, industrial expansion, tourism, and linear infrastructure, the Board has utterly failed to exercise its statutory powers to prevent ecological damage. Instead of acting as a safeguard, the Board is complicit in facilitating these extractive priorities. In socio-ecologically sensitive areas like Sijimali, Niyamgiri, Maliparbat, Baphlamali, Balda, Kutrumali, Majingmali and surrounding regions in Southern Odisha, the mindless diversion of forest land for bauxite mining has been pursued in flagrant violation of laws and Free Prior Informed Consent from the local indigenous communities. The Board has deliberately maintained silence, demonstrating its nexus with ecologically disastrous mining projects. At the behest of bauxite mining lobbies, the Board unhesitatingly endorsed the proposal to alter the boundary of Karlapat Wildlife Sanctuary.

We use this letter to raise certain pertinent issues around the way tourism is operating inside Protected Areas. We ask: whose interests the Open Jeep Safari Tourism ventures inside the core areas of Similipal Tiger Reserve trying to serve? While thousands of indigenous families have been forcefully evicted and put into destitution under the guise of creating "inviolate areas" for tiger conservation, how come tourist SUVs have now been facilitated to roam inside the so-called

"inviolable areas" of Similipal Tiger Reserve? It is unambiguously clear that, in violation of all legal provisions, the State Wildlife Board misused its authority and engineered such a discriminatory and extractive conservation model inside Similipal and other Protected Areas.

Further, we are shocked to know the ongoing attempts to dilute Eco Sensitive Zone (ESZ) notifications to bypass the "no commercial construction" clause of the Environmental Protection Act 1986 and enable commercial tourism infrastructure within ESZs. These glaring cases reflect the Board's double standards - rather than protecting the forests, wildlife habitats and indigenous territories, it has been covertly enabling corporates and vested interest groups to advance their commercial agenda. Odisha has been witnessing a spate of elephant and human casualties due to mining-induced deforestation and habitat fragmentation across many districts. The Board has done nothing substantive to address this alarming crisis and has instead been complicit throughout, reflecting a failure to uphold its mandate.

Against this backdrop of inaction and complicity, the appointment of persons with direct commercial and ideological conflicts of interest further dilutes the credibility of the State Wildlife Board. It demonstrates a dangerous shift in priorities from ecological justice and indigenous rights to nepotism, corruption and the appeasement of private profiteering.

Indeed, the Preamble, Article 48A, and Article 51A(g) of the

Constitution mandate the State and its citizens to protect the environment and safeguard the forest ecosystems. However, conservation governance must be participatory, inclusive, and uphold social justice - not driven by elite capture or private profiteering. As clarified by the Supreme Court in several judgments (e.g., Centre for Public Interest Litigation vs. Union of India, (2012) 3 SCC 1), any appointment to statutory bodies must be based on transparent criteria and free from arbitrariness or favouritism, particularly when public interest and natural resources are involved.

It must be noted that the doctrine of natural justice, a fundamental tenet of administrative law, requires that those in decision-making roles must be free from bias or vested interest. Appointing a person whose business benefits from decisions regarding access, tourism regulation, or conservation priorities constitutes a direct conflict of interest, violating the universal doctrine of *nemo iudex in causa sua* no one should be a judge in their own cause.

We strongly believe that such an arbitrary appointment:

- Breaches the public trust in Odisha's Forest Department.
- Undermines the statutory mandate and moral authority of the State Board for Wildlife.
- Violates the principles of natural justice by allowing a conflicted party to influence decisions that benefit their business.
- Sends a dangerous signal that commercial interests can

- supersede ecological integrity and social justice.
- Alienates and marginalises the very communities that have historically protected forests and wildlife.

In light of the above, we demand:

1. Immediate revocation of the appointment of Mr Aditya Chandra Panda and reconstitution of the State Board for Wildlife with members having genuine credibility.
2. The Minister of Forest, Environment and Climate Change, Govt. of Odisha, must publicly commit to preventing future appointments of individuals with conflicts of interest to statutory wildlife bodies.
3. The inclusion of representatives from forest-dwelling communities, independent ecologists, legal experts, and civil society members in the Wildlife Board with due diligence, in line with the objectives of participatory and just conservation.
4. Full transparency in the nomination and appointment process, including public disclosure of selection criteria and stakeholder consultations.
5. Suo motu public disclosure of the functioning of the State Board for Wildlife, including proposals tabled, minutes of meetings, correspondence and decisions.

We urge you to take this matter with the seriousness it deserves. Odisha's rich biodiversity and forest-dwelling communities deserve protection not from wildlife, but from such unjust governance and commercial

encroachment, particularly commercial tourism, mining and other extractive industries. We trust that you will uphold the mandate of the State Wildlife Board and act in accordance with the constitutional and ecological values enshrined in law.

Sincerely,

Signed by numerous concerned organizations and activists.

OBITUARY: JAGDEEP S. CHHOKAR (1944-2025)

The PUCL condoles the passing away of Jagdeep S. Chhokar, who was a professor of Management and Organisational Behaviour at the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, from 1985 till November 2006, when he retired.

Prof. Chhokar was one of the founding members of Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR). He and the ADR were behind

some of the major electoral reforms in the last two decades, including disclosure of property and criminal antecedents of candidates. ADR is the principal petitioner against the SIR and the attempt to end universal adult franchise in India. Prof Chhokar worked closely with PUCL especially in the area of electoral reforms and his wisdom will be deeply missed.

He will be missed by all those committed to democracy as democracy itself comes under increasing threat. As a true tribute to him, we must redouble our efforts to ensure that the disenfranchisement of hundreds of thousands through the SIR be stopped and the danger to our democracy is averted.

PUCL CONDEMNS THE EFFORTS AT SILENCING CIVIL SOCIETY VOICES ENDEAVOURING TO BRING ATTENTION TO THE UNCONSTITUTIONAL EVICTIONS AND DETENTIONS IN ASSAM

PUCL NATIONAL

All prosecution against Syeda Hameed for her constitutionally protected speech be withdrawn.

Section 152 of the BNS which is the sedition law in a new avatar be repealed.

The PUCL condemns the concerted attempts to silence civil society voices that are attempting to cast light on the Assam government's unconstitutional evictions and detentions targeting Bengali-speaking Muslims.

On 24th August, 2025, Syeda Hameed, a member of the 'People's Tribunal on Assam: Evictions, Detentions and the

Right to Belong', participated in a meeting in Guwahati which was hosted by several civil society groups which was chaired by Ajit Bhuyan. Following the meeting, while addressing the press, out of humanitarian concern, she made remarks on the common humanity of Bangladeshis who too deserve the right to life. In the course of her remarks invoking a common humanity shared between all persons she also said that "If some Bangladeshis also live in Assam, then what is the problem?." These seemingly innocuous remarks, envisaging a utopian vision of human existence outside the rigid boundaries of the nation state, were taken out of context and

she was wrongly accused of stirring communal trouble in Assam. There were complaints filed against her in all sixteen districts in Assam, the complaints being initiated by the Assam Jatiya Parishad (AJP).

This invocation of the criminal law to clamp down on viewpoints which the state finds troublesome shows scant respect for the freedom of speech and expression. Surely, in a constitutional democracy (which our leaders like to claim is the world's largest democracy), Ms. Hameed has a right to express her viewpoints, without being subjected to the harassment of criminal law!

However, the attack on Syeda Hameed was not a one off incident but rather a part of a concerted effort to clamp down on any expression of dissent vis-a-vis the policy of unconstitutional evictions and detentions carried out by the Assam government. This was made clear through the vigilante attack on the 'People's Tribunal on Assam: Evictions, Detentions and the Right to Belong' which was held in Delhi on the 26th of August, 2025. This discussion was hosted by the Association for Protection of Civil Rights (APCR) and Karwan-e-Mohabbat, who had jointly convened the public tribunal. The tribunal looked at how Assam was going through a surge in state-led evictions and targeted harassment against Bengali-speaking Muslim families.

The event was disrupted by a mob with aggressive and communal sloganeering, including the dehumanizing and inflammatory "Desh ke gaddaron ko, goli maro salon ko", as well as other aggressive slogans. The attack happened in full media glare and the attackers were led by Vishnu Gupta of the Hindu Sena and Chaudhary Parvez Alam Baliyan. These men have a track record of trying to disturb communal harmony. Vishnu Gupta has attacked well known lawyer Prashant Bhushan, and has also moved a civil petition against the Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti Dargah under the Places of Worship Act, challenging its status as a dargah and asserting that it was a Shivalaya. Parwez Baliyan is a BJP member who is seen in photos with Himanta Biswa Sarma, tweeted by the Chief Minister himself.

The aim of the disruption was to deny even the right to place the suffering imposed upon those evicted and detained outside the due process of law before the wider public. The importance of civil society efforts such as the Tribunal on Assam become even more significant when seen against the backdrop of the systematic efforts of the Assam government to stifle independent media voices. However it is to be noted that despite the disruption, the participants and audience continued with the hearing, demonstrating a constitutional commitment to protecting the freedom of speech and expression, in the face of lawless vigilante action.

These attacks are part of a wider clampdown on independent media voices by the Assam government. The FIR filed by the Assam Police against Siddharth Varadarajan and Karan Thapar of The Wire for reportage on Operation Sindoor and another one against journalist Abhisar Sharma of Assam, for criticising the state's policies both under Section 152 of the BNS, shows the attempt to cow down the media through threat of criminal prosecution. The arrests have had a chilling effect on the freedom of the press, with not many willing to risk an FIR for putting out news or views which is critical of the Assam government or the Union Government.

The Assam Police is acting outside the framework of the constitutional mandate to respect the right to speech and expression as embodied in Article 19(1)(a) and making a mockery of the idea of India as a Constitutional democracy where

people have a right to criticise the government.

In this context, the work of civil society is even more important! We demand that:

- All prosecution against Syeda Hameed for her constitutionally protected speech be withdrawn
- An FIR be registered against all those who disrupted the proceedings of the Tribunal which included Vishnu Gupta of the Hindu Sena and Chaudhary Parvez Alam Baliyan.
- Assam Police must act in a constitutionally compliant manner and altogether cease from invoking Article 152 of the BNS to target speech which is critical of the state.
- The state must ensure that the right to speech and assembly as guaranteed by the Constitution is protected by the Assam government
- Section 152 of the BNS which is the sedition law in a new avatar must be repealed by the Union Government

(Kavita Srivastava, President, PUCL-National, Dr. V Suresh, General Secretary, PUCL-National)

Arun Majhi, President, PUCL-Delhi, T.S. Ahuja, General Secretary, PUCL-Delhi)

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS AT THE 17TH NATIONAL CONVENTION OF THE PUCL, RANCHI

KAVITA SRIVASTAVA

A warm welcome to all the delegates of the 17th National Convention!

What has changed since May 2023, since the last 16th national convention held in Bengaluru? I think the last two years has seen our bonding grow. Together we have shared a lot of joy, hope, grief and pain and struggled together to ensure some sort of justice, which is getting increasingly difficult. Despite doors of democracy almost closing around us, we have tried to peacefully address the issues of human rights violations which have increased manifold.

The issues look the same, almost repetitive. You could say, why go on and on about it, when it is the same. But if you actually look at what is happening, it is not the same. Yes, the scale has increased, it is much more. But what has changed from earlier is that not only has the form of that violence changed, but it is now also seemingly on autopilot, becoming more and more permanent with no solution in sight.

Let us see some of the issues:

- Detentions in Kashmir continue.
- Use of bulldozer justice continues, despite SC orders.
- Singling out Muslims in the name of being Bangladeshis continues. But the form post-Pehlgam was not only that several thousands of Muslims were detained but also deported to Bangladesh in thousands.

- Missing voters of yesteryears is now going to move to deregistering of voters through SIR and the making of stateless people. We can see the active participation of the State in this.
- Blocking of social media accounts continues. The only thing is that it has increased manifold.
- Killings of Adivasis in the name of Maoism continues. But the agenda is now to finish Maoism, whatever be the damages and lives lost.
- Hate Speech against Muslims has increased manifold, so much that it has become normalised and goes unchecked, with hardly any state action.
- Active SC intervention in converting Masjid properties to temples.
- Deforestation and denotifying forest for mining and commercial purposes continues.
- Manipur still burns and though I will not address the issue here, I would like to request colleagues to follow the important work of the Independent People's Tribunal on Manipur.

Let us take a quick glance at some of the above.

Detentions in Kashmir

Following the Pahalgalam terror attack on April 22, 2025, which claimed the lives of 26 civilians, security forces launched a widespread and aggressive crackdown across the Kashmir

Valley. This has disproportionately impacted Muslim civilians, particularly youth, in what appears to be a blanket securitised response.

Scale of Detentions:

- Around 1,500 Muslim youth have reportedly been questioned or detained across districts like Anantnag, Pulwama, Kulgam, Shopian, and Srinagar.
- In Anantnag district alone, 175 individuals were detained in coordinated cordon-and-search operations involving police, CRPF, Army, and intelligence agencies.
- In Srinagar, the homes of 65 suspects, including so-called overground workers and family members of alleged militants, were searched.

Targeting and Profiling:

- The crackdown appears to be indiscriminately targeting Muslim families, often based on vague allegations of "sympathising with militants."
- Many of those detained or questioned are relatives of men who went missing years ago, some with documented police reports.
- Entire neighbourhoods and villages in South Kashmir—a Muslim-majority region—have been subjected to raids, intimidation, and surveillance.
- Locals have alleged harassment, intimidation, and coercion, with people being picked up without formal

- charges.
- No official statements have clarified the legal basis of these detentions or whether those held have been granted access to legal counsel or their families.

Families speak of a climate of fear and helplessness, where collective punishment is becoming normalized. The mass detentions raise concerns of violations of Articles 14, 19, and 21 of the Indian Constitution, which guarantee equality before the law, freedom of expression, and personal liberty.

Bulldozer Justice Continues: Contradiction with Supreme Court Orders

In the aftermath of the Pahalgam terror attack that killed 26 civilians on April 22, security forces in Jammu and Kashmir have launched a sweeping crackdown across the Valley. This has included the demolition of at least eight houses belonging to suspected militants, using controlled blasts in districts like Pulwama, which caused damage to abutting civilian property. Shopian, Kulgam, Kupwara, and Anantnag saw widespread detentions and indiscriminate searching of houses of so-called suspected militant supporters. More than a hundred homes were in a state of siege.

These demolitions starkly contradict the Supreme Court's repeated directions, particularly the 1st September 2024 judgement that unauthorized demolitions—especially as a punitive response to alleged criminal activity—are unconstitutional unless conducted strictly under due legal

process and with adequate notice. In multiple rulings, including those in the Bulldozer Justice cases, the Supreme Court has cautioned state authorities that demolitions cannot be used as "extra-legal punishment."

Let us understand that India's counterterrorism now includes the method of razing homes without due process. The government's actions risk eroding public trust, escalating alienation, and potentially undermining long-term peace efforts in the Valley.

Crackdown on Refugees and Bengali Muslims

The first bogey of the crackdown in mainland India, post-Pahalgam, were the Rohingya refugees; 40 were thrown into the sea on 9th of June, 2025. India will never forget the lawless way in which Rohingya refugees, all with UNHCR cards, were thrown into the sea, close to the region of Tanintharyi on the East coast of Myanmar, after taking them blindfolded from Port Blair in an Indian Naval ship. All these Rohingyas, Christian and Muslims from Delhi, were first detained in police stations and then flown into Port Blair in an Indian Air Force plane, breaking International law treaties and the Constitution of India. Luckily they survived to tell their story, saved by fishermen about a kilometre from where they were thrown into the sea in life jackets.

What was disconcerting was the refusal of the GOI to explain why it had done this lawless act; worse still, the SC refused to believe the narrative and threatened to throw out the petition when lawyers stood in

the SC arguing that their clients had been thrown into the sea just before the hearing. A fear now prevails over the most persecuted of all refugees in the world, the Rohingyas, about 40,000 of them in India (UNHCR Statistics), whether their fate will be the same.

In the wake of the Pahalgam terror attack, a sweeping crackdown labelled large numbers of Bengali Muslims as illegal Bangladeshi migrants—leading to mass detentions and deportations across Gujarat, Delhi, Rajasthan, Assam and other states, without due legal process. Estimates indicate between 1,800 and 2,000 individuals, mostly Muslims, were deported between May and July 2025.

Here is a summary of the operations:

- **Gujarat:** 1,024 individuals were detained in a coordinated operation in Ahmedabad (890) and Surat (134). These were part of an estimated 6,500+ detentions statewide.
- **Delhi NCR:** Approximately 520 people were deported following the Pahalgam incident. Over the six months ending in July, about 700–770 individuals were deported.
- **Assam:** 81 individuals were arrested on "anti-national" charges, though deportation figures are not known.
- **Odisha:** 447 Bengali-speaking migrants were detained. 403 were released after verification, while 44 remain in jail or have been deported.
- **Rajasthan:** More than 1,000 were detained from 17

- districts and held in six detention centres. A total of 300 were deported in two batches of 150 and 148.
- Nationwide: Around 2,000 people were deported between May 7 and July 3, many of whom were Indian citizens.

Many deportees reported abduction, blindfolding, destruction of ID documents, forced pushbacks, denial of legal representation, and summary removals with no due process.

The Discourse on 'Ghushpethi' (Infiltrators) and Electoral Rolls

The discourse on infiltrators continues through the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls. On June 24th 2025, the Election Commission of India (EC) issued an Order citing its constitutional mandate to ensure only Indian citizens are registered in the electoral roll. The Order declares the beginning of the Special Intensive Revision in the entire country, starting with Bihar.

The said Guidelines introduce new procedures, which are contrary to the gazetted Rules for Registration of Electors, and set new thresholds for proof of citizenship before being enrolled as voters. It shifts the central process from enumeration of electors to a test of citizenship. So till now we talked of missing names; post-2014 this was a strategy, then came adding voters. Now the strategy is to deregister in the name of citizenship, implementing CAA through the back door. This policy of removing Indian people from voters lists, contrary to the principle of Universal Adult

Franchise, will be yet another process of subordinating a section of the people, who will be devoid of any rights.

Increased Blocking of Digital Media Since the Pahalgam Attack

The volume and rapid deployment of these measures mark a new phase of digital control.

- **X (Twitter):** Received block orders for 8,000 accounts within India, representing a significant spike versus earlier years.
- **Instagram:** Geoblocking of Pakistani celebrities and Muslim news pages was implemented, an unprecedented breadth compared to earlier cases.
- **YouTube:** Bans on 16 Pakistani channels and other high-visibility accounts marked a coordinated and large-scale post-attack suppression.
- **Legal Detentions:** The use of UAPA charges and arrests for social media posts showed a heightened use of stringent laws in minor social posts.

Killings of Adivasis in the name of Maoism

What started in January 2024 of killing Adivasis in the name of being Maoists is continuing brazenly. By May end 2025, the GOI announced operation Karegutta, stating that this marks the end of Naxal violence. In the name of looking for the most dangerous Maoist Hidma, they brought in between 5,000 to 20,000 troops and greyhounds and trapped around 150 to 500 Adivasis, including some

Maoists, in the Kargutta Hillside. The Karegutta operation was launched even as Maoists issued six letters over four months with offers to talk peace. But both the Chhattisgarh and Union governments have demanded that Maoists lay down arms, and have refused to ease operations. In the last 18 months, over 415 alleged Maoists, mostly young Adivasis, and 39 security personnel have been killed.

Hate Crimes in the First Year of the Third Modi Term

A total of 947 hate crime incidents took place in the first year of Modi's third regime. The largest number took place in UP (217), followed by Maharashtra and MP (100), Uttarakhand (84), Rajasthan (60), and Karnataka (30). Of these, 345 were hate speeches and 602 were hate crimes. Out of the 602 hate crimes, 173 involved physical violence targeted at minorities. In 25 of these, the victim died. All victims were Muslims. Out of the 345 hate speeches made in the year, 178 were made by individuals associated with the BJP.

Conclusion and the Way Forward

From the above it is clear that the intensity of the state attack on the people of India, its residents and culture is on the increase. The state's power and control over the citizens is increasing manifold. The breakdown of Institutional mechanisms had happened a long time ago, with the complete surrender of the bureaucracy; now it is not just surrender but an active participation of the state. The judiciary is mostly not the

platform for justice, including the Supreme Court.

The PUCL has to metamorphosise as the context changes. Our aim and objects, as per the PUCL Constitution written in 1980, must continue to be to "bring together all those who are committed to the defence and promotion of civil liberties in India... and will uphold and promote by peaceful means civil liberties and democratic way of life throughout India." We have to discuss how to move forward on this.

Eliciting Volunteerism in the Youth

The under-thirty generation is different. It has a short attention span and is unable to grapple with growing unemployment and a sense of despair. How does the PUCL address this generation? The discontentment in the youth, without any path ahead, needs to be looked at creatively and the PUCL needs to rethink its strategy with the under-30s. Muslim, Dalit, Adivasi, Christian and youth of various ethnicities and identities are wanting to rise up and protect their rights when violated as a community. They all want the Constitution to be implemented to the hilt.

Strengthening our Social Media Outreach

The PUCL members have to become social media literate and savvy with the cyber world. We cannot live in denial. Most youth are surviving in the virtual world. We need to understand that and create a lot of new content on

social media. As attention span is short, we have to continuously create new content. We have to counter that narrative of hate and divisiveness on social media, on a war footing.

Lastly, we need to do small workshops across India where we sit across a cross-section of people to understand how they are taking on these challenges. We need to build alliances to develop new methods in taking on these challenges, where democracy is under extreme attack. We need to build a fraternity of all those striving to preserve a constitutional vision of India despite all of our differences.

I end with the famous poem of a revolutionary poet we just lost a month ago.

Instead of Depression by Andrea Gibson (1975 – 2025)

Instead of Depression,
try calling it hibernation.
Imagine the darkness is a cave
in which you will be nurtured
by doing absolutely nothing.
Hibernating animals don't even dream.
It's okay if you can't imagine
Spring.
Sleep through the alarm
of the world.
Name your hopelessness
a quiet hollow, a place you go
to heal, a den you dug,
Sweetheart, instead
of a grave.

People's Union for Civil Liberties

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