

PUCL Editorial: The Collapse of ECI's Integrity and the assault on universal adult franchise

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SL. NO. 526

THE COLLAPSE OF ECI'S INTEGRITY AND THE ASSAULT ON UNIVERSAL ADULT FRANCHISE

An investigation published on 23rd September by The Indian Express has confirmed what opposition parties and civil society groups have alleged for over a year: the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls, the largest and most consequential overhaul of India's voter lists in independent history, is not a technical exercise meant to update the electoral roll but rather a political exercise meant to benefit the party in power.

The consequential changes proposed by the ECI were rushed through without even conforming to the process of decision making within the ECI itself. Two of the Commission's three members, Election Commissioners Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Vivek Joshi, formally objected at least 14 times over 10 months to decisions and orders on the SIR that they said were issued without their knowledge. These included matters as fundamental as new voter registration, the deletion and restoration of names, the process for hearing appeals, and the custody of the electoral database itself.

Thus the body constitutionally entrusted with the integrity of Indian elections has, by the account of two of its own three members, been functioning without their consent on the single largest exercise it has ever undertaken. The institutional integrity of the Commission, stands compromised as the Commission in effect functioned as per the wishes of Gyanesh Kumar. The Chief Election Commissioner, who was appointed under the sole authority of the Prime Minister and the Home Minister has in effect acted at their behest.

The ECI has pushed through the deletion of 13 crore names which is around the population of Mexico or a little more than the entire population of Maharashtra! This exercise in mass disenfranchisement of crores of Indians should be the basis for a direct political demand: Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar must be impeached for this grave and criminal dereliction of his constitutional responsibility. The SIR which has proved itself to be an entirely illegitimate exercise must be scrapped.

When the Commission moved to alter Form 6, the statutory form citizens use to register as new voters, Joshi warned that the SIR was being conducted only as a "one time measure and exception" under Section 21(3) of the Representation of the People Act, and that the prescribed forms could not be changed without formally amending the

Registration of Electors Rules, 1960. He recommended the change instead be routed through the union government. The Commission went ahead with the change regardless.

Joshi separately raised concerns about the "gradual centralisation" of the electoral-roll database and sought an audit of who was authorised to alter voter records. Both Commissioners took their concerns over control of the Commission's IT infrastructure directly to the Cabinet Secretary, bypassing the Chief Election Commissioner. All these concerns were ignored.

The law is unambiguous about why this matters. Under Section 18 of the Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners Act, 2023, decisions of the Commission are meant to be taken unanimously as far as possible and if not by majority. This structure of decision making within the Commission exists precisely to prevent one officer from overriding the other two in the functioning of the Election Commission.

The ECI's response to these allegations is to brazen it out by publicly rejecting the allegations and maintaining that its SIR decisions were unanimous. If two of three Commissioners are on record saying they were bypassed repeatedly on decisions regarding the single largest disenfranchisement exercise in India, the Commission's own claim to unanimity can only be an untruth. One question however still hangs over this episode: why did Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Vivek Joshi stay silent for so long? Their objections were recorded over ten months, while the damage kept mounting and civil society and opposition parties raised concern after concern. Their dissent, now public, cannot be papered over. We hope they have the courage of their convictions and unequivocally stand by the concerns they raised and demand that every objection they raised be formally addressed.

The implications of this explosive expose have serious implications for the world's largest democracy. Rolled out in three phases first in Bihar in 2025, then nine states and three Union Territories, and now the current Phase 3 covering 16 more states and three UTs. The SIR has now touched nearly every part of the country except Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh. More than 13 crore names have been deleted from voter lists across the three phases so far.

Bihar's draft rolls alone excluded over 65 lakh people, a number the ECI initially argued it had no obligation to even publish, before the Supreme Court ordered it to do so. West Bengal's Phase 2 revision deleted 58.2 lakh names outright and separately flagged over 1.2 crore voters for unexplained "logical discrepancies", a category the Commission itself, in response to an RTI application, said it could not define. By Phase 3, states were applying up to eleven different, uncoordinated criteria for what accounted for a 'logical discrepancy', with no published standard operating procedure from the Commission. Delhi alone has lost nearly 48 lakh voters, 32.78% of its electorate, the steepest proportional cut recorded anywhere in the country so far.

These deletions have concentrated on migrant workers whose addresses change with employment, on women whose names shift across records through marriage, on transgender citizens whose documents are frequently out of step with what the database expects, and on Dalit and Adivasi households who rarely possess the documents required by SIR. In West Bengal, exclusion from the rolls has already been used as grounds to deactivate ration cards for people the state marked "dead" or "shifted", stripping food entitlements from citizens who remain very much alive, in a scheme serving close to 90 million people.

Elections in four states, Bihar, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Kerala, and the Union Territory of Puducherry have already been held on these very suspect rolls, which puts both their integrity and the results in question. In fact, petitioners argued that in at least 31 constituencies of West Bengal the margin of victory was smaller than the number of disputed deletions. In one, the losing candidate fell short by 862 votes while 5,550 appeals by deleted voters remained under challenge.

Unfortunately this entire process of disenfranchisement has unfolded under the aegis of the Supreme Court. In *ADR v ECI*, the Court has upheld the validity of the SIR In Bihar, inspite of the evidence of disenfranchisement. Just as the Supreme Court betrayed the promise of the Constitution in *ADM Jabalpur (1976)* by stripping individuals of judicial recourse when detained during the emergency, the Supreme Court in *ADR v ECI (2026)* lays waste to one of the key goals of the Constitution so eloquently described by Babasaheb Ambedkar, 'In politics we will be recognizing the principle of one man, one vote and one vote, one value.' While *ADM Jabalpur* was limited to the context of the emergency, the decision in *ADR v ECI* sets the seal of the Supreme Court on the betrayal of the promise of political equality, for all time.

The Court's failure is even more stark when compared to its historical role in safeguarding Indian democracy. It was in '*Anoop Baranwal v Union of India*' (2023) that the Court had laid down an important safeguard to preserve the independence of the ECI. The appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner and the Election Commissioners, shall be on the advice of a Committee consisting of the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition of the Lok Sabha and the Chief Justice of India. However the Modi government passed a law nullifying the judgement of the Supreme Court and removing the Chief Justice from the Selection Committee and replacing him with a Union Cabinet Minister. It was after the passing of this law that the three election commissioners were appointed.

Gyanesh Kumar is a direct beneficiary of this process of appointment and has since then run the ECI as a political appointee of the ruling party. He has bypassed the statutory requirement for unanimity or majority decision-making among the three Commissioners. This has resulted in arbitrary decision making the consequence of which is the disenfranchisement of 13 crore Indians.

The Court now has an opportunity to begin to make institutional amends. The Supreme Court delivered a split verdict on 23rd September, in a case challenging the mode of appointment of the Election Commissioners. In this judgment a split verdict was delivered with Justice Bagchi holding that , "It is far-fetched to expect that a minister who is part of Cabinet of Ministers would adopt a stand disagreeing with leader or government. Inclusion of cabinet ministers fails to provide an independent counterweight that a neutral selector would." One hopes that the opinion of Justice Bagchi will become the opinion of the Court when the matter is heard by a larger Bench.

While the Court has to play its role in ensuring that the process of appointment is fair, as of now impeachment proceedings must be initiated against Gyanesh Kumar and Parliament should demand a full, transparent accounting through a joint parliamentary committee, if necessary, of every decision the two dissenting Commissioners say was taken without their consent.

The reason this exercise in voter theft has come out is because the Indian Express has played its role as a watchdog institution, and the much vaunted fourth pillar of democracy. This is a welcome development at a time when mainstream media have chosen proximity to power over independence from it. One hopes that this does not remain a straw in the wind and more and more media outlets feel empowered to perform their constitutional role as watchdogs of democracy.

The right to vote was meant to be the one place where every citizen, regardless of caste, class, gender or geography, stood as an equal. An exercise that has deleted over 13 crore names, concentrated its damage on those least able to fight back, and is a direct assault on the norm of equality. The PUCL demands that:

1. Initiate removal proceedings against CEC Gyanesh Kumar
2. Suspend all further SIR phases and restore the pre-SIR rolls as the operative rolls, wherever SIR has been conducted.
3. Make public every objection recorded by Election Commissioners Sandhu and Joshi, and every order and decision on the SIR, along with minutes, with the record of who took part in each decision.

4. Constitute a Joint Parliamentary Committee to account for every SIR decision taken without the consent of the dissenting Commissioners, with power to summon records.
5. Restore the Form 6, and withdraw amendments and all other procedural changes made without amending the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960
6. Restore all names deleted in the SIR. Any deletion from electoral rolls must abide by the Section 21A of the RER, with the burden of proof on the authority. This must also render all government orders or circulars connecting deletions to ration entitlements and welfare schemes irrelevant.
7. Order an independent audit of every alteration made to the database during the SIR, showing who authorised and who executed each change.
8. Supreme Court to take suo motu cognisance of the Indian Express report and the concerns it raises. The Court should re-examine the SIR's validity and the independence and integrity with which the ECI has functioned in light of this new material.
9. The Court must also acknowledge the impact of the SIR on the recent state elections and direct that they must be declared void.
10. All efforts to witch-hunt, intimidate and harass people on allegations of being non citizens based on SIR deletions, as it is happening in West Bengal must be stopped.

PUCL calls for all opposition parties and people's movements to raise their voice and work towards defending the integrity of India's electoral democracy.

PUCL Bulletin Editorial Board

PUCL CONDEMNS ATTEMPT TO TAR TM KRISHNA AS A NAXALITE

PUCL NATIONAL

22nd September, 2026

The PUCL takes strong objection to the remark by the Solicitor General, Tushar Mehta made today in the Supreme Court during the hearing of the SLP filed by T.M. Krishna challenging the amendment to the Prevention of Insults to the National Honour Act giving 'National Song' the same protection as the 'National Anthem', as well as the Centre's circulars mandating the singing of the six stanzas of Vande Mataram, which include devotional hymns to deities, at official functions.

The Solicitor General in response to Senior Advocate Dr. S. Muralidhar's argument that the amendment was hastily passed without sufficient thought responded by stating that, "Law-making is as per the Constitution. Law-making cannot be as per the Naxalites idea."

Dr. Muralidhar took objection to the statement and requested that it be withdrawn, upon which the Solicitor General refused to withdraw the expression. The Bench seemed to push back against this approach by the Solicitor General as Justice Bagchi is reported to have said, "Even if you label someone as Naxalite, he does not lose the Constitutional rights".

As the 2nd highest law officer of the Union Government, the Solicitor General of India is expected to maintain decorum in the court and advance arguments on constitutional principles of law and not by calling names and labelling persons as one or the other. Such arguments are most unbecoming of an officer of the court and it lowers the standard of arguments and the dignity of the highest court of this country.

The PUCL notes that it has become staple argument of the Union Government to characterise any opinion contrary to its stand – irrespective whether it is a dissenting opinion, critical remark or opposing stand – as 'Naxalite', thereby seeking to delegitimise both the opinion as well as the person putting forward the opinion.

T. M Krishna, who the Solicitor General seeks to delegitimise, is an eminent exponent of Carnatic music

who has recently authored a well-received book on India's national symbols titled, 'We the people of India'. The book itself archives the often unknown history underlying the national flag, the national song, the national anthem as well as the national emblem.

T. M. Krishna is also a renowned public intellectual whose writings have been collected in a book titled the 'The spirit of inquiry: Notes of dissent'. In a foreword, Pratap Bhanu Mehta, characterises T.M Krishna as 'one of the most incandescent and luminous artistic voices of our generation', whose essays 'stand against the three biggest political evils of our time: authoritarianism, communalism and inequality'. To characterise someone who is so deeply invested in the 'idea of India' as a Naxalite is nothing other than an attempt to browbeat and silence constitutional speech.

The PUCL is of the opinion that the Solicitor General must not seek to shut down all opinions which seek to criticize the Union Government. To do so by the strategy of name calling does not behove his high constitutional office and is actually against core constitutional principles of free speech, dissent and democracy. What this incident lays bare is not TM Krishna's allegiance or commitment to the Indian Constitution, for it is because of his faith in it that he has approached the Supreme Court of India. What is being tested is the commitment of the Solicitor General of India and the Supreme Court itself, to the Constitution

We stand with Dr. S. Muralidhar and TM Krishna and so must all democratically minded citizens.

Kavita Srivastava , President PUCL

V. Suresh, General, Secretary PUCL

LETTER TO GUJARAT CM REGARDING BRUTAL ATTACK ON THOSE READING BOOKS BY MALALA AND ANNE FRANK

PUCL NATIONAL & PUCL GUJARAT

22nd September, 2026

To,

Shri Bhupendra Patel,
Chief Minister of Gujarat,
3rd floor, Swarnim Sankul – 1,
New Sachivalay, Sector 10,
Gandhinagar, Gujarat

Date: 22nd September, 2026

Subject: Unconscionable violations of the liberty of thought, conscience and expression in the brutal attack on those reading books by Malala and Anne Frank

People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), is a civil liberties and human rights body formed in 1976 by Sh. Jayaprakash Narayan, Acharya Kripalani, Krishna Kant and others. Justice V.M. Tarkunde, Justice Rajindar Sachar, Rajni Kothari, K.G. Kannabiran and others were associated with PUCL as its President. The organization has branches across India and has been raising awareness about human rights, civil liberties and also fighting for their protection. PUCL has conducted many fact-finding enquiries and has compiled several reports on human rights violations in India.

We would like to bring to your attention an egregious violation of the basic freedom of thought, conscience and expression, on a group reading peacefully in a park in Ahmedabad by right wing vigilante elements. This marks a new low in how the state has abdicated its responsibility to protect these freedoms in the state of Gujarat. We believe that while the attack may have occurred in one city, its

implications are far wider in terms of what it means for the future of the constitutional freedoms we hold dear and what it means for the future of democracy in India.

On the evening of 27 August 2026, an armed mob of 45 to 50 men attacked a peaceful, silent reading assembly of approximately 50 students, citizens, and youth at AUDA Garden in Vastrapur, Ahmedabad. The group were gathered to read books by Malala, Anne Frank as well as by Gandhi, Bhagat Singh and Ambedkar. The vigilante elements who attacked from the Bajrang Dal were seen asking about Malala's opinion on Kashmir and implying that such an anti-national person should not be read.

This was not a minor scuffle; it was sustained, blunt-force violence to vulnerable parts of the body that could easily have resulted in death.

- Jai Kumar Thakkar was dragged out of the garden and beaten with sticks, a baseball bat, fists, and kicks to the head, stomach, back, legs, and left elbow.
- Sneha Bhavsar was struck with the same weapons on the head, left hand, both legs, elbow, and back.
- Shashi Kumar was beaten repeatedly with a stick on the forehead, eyes, jaw, and back while being forced into a police vehicle
- A police officer's hand was also struck during this assault.
- Savan Zalariya was slapped hard enough to break his glasses, then beaten with sticks and a bat on the head, waist, and left ankle. Repeated blows with blunt weapons to the head carry an inherent risk of grievous, permanently disabling, or fatal injury.
- Women in the group were actively targeted. Swati Goswami's arm was forcibly grabbed, and her hair was violently pulled in a manner the complaint describes as a violation of her modesty and dignity.
- Maitreyi Chhaya was repeatedly slapped on the back by several mob members.
- Aadhy Chhatrola, who was recording the attack on her phone, was surrounded and threatened.

The details of the incident as well as the analysis of the failure of the police to treat this with seriousness as mandated by law is fully documented in the statement issued by the PUCL- Gujarat. (See Annexure A for the statement issued by the PUCL- Gujarat)

The attack followed a dispute at Anand Niketan School in Shilaj, Ahmedabad which centered around a protest by parents and members of the Bajrang Dal and Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) against two books that were recommended to be part of the students' reading list: *I Am Malala* and *The Diary of a Young Girl* (*The Diary of Anne Frank*). Following notices from District Administrative Officer Rohit Chaudhary, the school not only dropped the two books from its mandatory reading list but also terminated the services of its consultant, Munazza Shums.

The origin point of the dispute is really the choice of these two books by Anand Niketan School based on the recommendation of its consultant Munazza Shums. We at PUCL believe that the choice of these two books as recommended reading for young people was constitutionally appropriate and are deeply troubled at the intimidatory atmosphere in Gujarat when books are withdrawn based not on reason but as a result of hooliganism. This kind of atmosphere of intolerance for books reminds one of a totalitarian regime's fear of books.

Especially when it comes to the two books in question, the PUCL would like to congratulate the consultant Munazza Shums and the school for an excellent choice of books and express our disquiet at the volte face by the Anand Niketan School resulting in the termination of the contract of someone who was truly constitutional minded and clearly had the interests of children at heart in the thoughtful choice of books.

The use of books, which are not part of the syllabus, also takes forward the farsighted ideas of visionary Gujarati educationist, Gijubhai Badheka as outlined in his book, *Divaswapna*. Gijubhai Badheka's philosophy of education, which has been so influential in Gujarat, stressed the importance of going beyond the textbook and encouraging learning through the extensive use of library books.

Further, both books are age appropriate and do not fall foul of any NCERT guidelines. In fact both books have been recommended by NCERT as suitable texts in high school. A Chapter from Anne Frank's diary has been included in the class 10 NCERT English textbook and Malala's Nobel acceptance speech has been included as a part of the beehive / supplementary material, to teach them about human rights, global peace and values in education. Both texts are really exemplary in how they help students to cultivate a 'constitutional morality' based on the core values of equality and fraternity.

'I am Malala', is a book about a childhood in which the biggest concerns of Malala are not about 'being hassled by a boy' but rather about the struggle against armed men who will not hesitate to blow up your school and even kill you if you continue to assert your right to go to school as a girl student. The protagonist, Malala documents her struggle against the Pakistani Taliban to ensure that girls can continue to study. The book is a profile in courage, as Malala in spite of threats by the Taliban and in spite of being shot in the head and grievously injured, does not turn her back on her dream and continues to be a fierce advocate for girl's education. The author is a Nobel Prize winner and her book is being read widely around the world.

The Diary of Anne Frank is the moving document of Jewish life under Nazi rule during the II World War told through the words of a young Jewish girl. Anne Frank is a young girl whose family is driven by Nazi persecution to hide in a building and they remain hidden for a little over two years. Anne writes a diary of everyday life in the 'Annexe' which traverses her feelings of being Jewish, reflections on her relationships to her family as well as what it means to fall in love. However just a little over two years since when the family went into hiding, they are discovered by the police and sent to concentration camps where Anne Frank, her sister Margot and her mother perish. Anne's diary is a poignant account of a girl who is able to contextualise her difficulties and say that, 'I feel wicked sleeping in a warm bed', when 'close friends have been delivered into the hands of the crudest brutes that walk the earth'. This diary is one of the iconic memoirs of childhood, lived under incredibly difficult circumstances. Anne's diary has been translated into more than 70 languages and is now read all over the world.

Both these books are really about the struggles of girl children which though so different from the context in India have a resonance. They are very important from the point of view of the pedagogy of education as they stimulate critical reflection and thinking. Both books broaden the idea of the world we live in and help students to reflect upon growing up under incredibly difficult circumstances. Malala has to face death threats, blowing up of schools and finally an assassination attempt. As she ruefully notes, 'I really wished, being hassled by a boy was my biggest problem'. For Anne Frank, the challenge is how, 'in spite of everything' she can 'continue to believe that people are still good at heart'.

Thus both books are at heart about taking forward the values of the Constitution as well as the mandate of the right to education in Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural rights which is to 'promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations and all racial, ethnic or religious groups, and further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.' When around the globe fundamentalists seek to narrow and constrict our imagination, and when the Taliban has prohibited girls from going to school in neighbouring Afghanistan these books are even more precious.

The fact that these two books are really about the struggles by girls should resonate deeply with a government which has made *Beti Padhao, Beti Bachao* its motto. We are deeply concerned as to whether the VHP and Bajrang Dal by their strictures on what can be read are taking us down a road which is not very different from the road taken by the Nazi party and the Taliban. Is it deeply concerning that while the Taliban bombs girls schools, the Bajrang Dal attacks those who read literature it decides is anti-national ! It is ominous that if the Nazi's put restrictions on the social life of the Jews, the Bajrang Dal would do something similar to the life of Muslims.

The PUCL has been deeply concerned about protecting the sanctity of the freedom of speech and

expression. Right from our condemnation of the banning of Salman Rushdie's Satanic verses to the support we extended to Tamil writer Perumal Murugan when he was threatened as his book, 'Madhorubagan was allegedly defamatory to a caste group, we have stood with the principle of the freedom of speech and expression. More recently in August of 2025, we condemned the blanket order by the Jammu and Kashmir government banning 25 books as a form of 'drastic censorship' which showed a 'cavalier disregard for the freedom of speech and expression.'

This is because the PUCL is convinced that the fundamental right of speech and expression under Art. 19(1) (a) is one of the key underpinnings of democracy and rule of law. As has been held by the Hon'ble Supreme Court and different High Courts, the right of free speech and expression is a crucial right, in such a diverse and complex country such as ours with numerous language, religious, caste, regional and other identity diversities; any attempt, by the State (government) or non-state players, to deny free speech and expression ultimately weakens democracy. This action of violently preventing the reading of books and thereby seeking to control thought is also fundamentally antithetical to the values of the Constitution. The Bajrang Dal and the VHP by their violent attack on the peaceful exercise of these core Preambular commitments continue to undermine the values of the Constitution. They have in fact committed a constitutional crime. The violations of the criminal law are not just violations of provisions meant to protect law and order, but fundamentally the violations are about the violations of the core promise of the Constitution to all its citizens.

The constitutional rights to thought in Article 21, the right to conscience in Article 25 and the right to freedom of expression in Article 19(1)(a) stand imperilled by these violent actions and the complicity of the state Government.

The Chief Minister is duty bound to take account of this and act in accordance with his constitutional oath to 'bear true faith and allegiance to the Constitution of India'. The Chief Minister must therefore act in compliance with his oath and ensure that the machinery of the state functions in accordance with the Constitution.

Accordingly, we ask the Vastrapur police and the Ahmedabad Police Commissionerate to:

- Amend the FIR to reflect the complaint's full account, including the communal sloganeering, the demand to forcibly verify religion, and the national anthem episode.
- Treat Hiren Rabari and Jimit Rabari as main culprits.
- Apply the correct legal charges, specifically examining the evidence on record against Sections 118, 117, 121, 74, and 78 of the BNS, rather than confining the case to Sections 115(2) and 351(2).
- Immediately secure CCTV footage from AUDA Garden, the Kasa Vyoma building, and the nearby Amul parlour before the data is overwritten.
- Send the surrendered weapons for forensic and fingerprint examination without delay, as requested by the complainants.
- Provide police protection to Aadhya Chhatrola and the other complainants, given the specific and credible threats made against them.
- Complete the investigation within a fixed, publicly stated timeframe, given the size of the mob and the risk of repeat incidents at future gatherings.
- We also urge the Gujarat State Human Rights Commission and the Director General of Police, Gujarat, to call for a status report on this FIR, given the glaring gap between what was reported by victims and what was officially registered.

The Anand Niketan School management must apologise to consultant Munazza Shums for terminating her contract for doing her job.

Finally it is upto the Chief Minister to act to protect the constitutional values of dignity as well as liberty of thought, conscience and expression.

Yours faithfully,

Kavita Srivastava (President – PUCL)
V. Suresh (General Secretary – PUCL)
Anand Yagnik (President – PUCL Gujarat)
Mujahid Nafees (General Secretary – PUCL Gujarat)

PUCL'S NOTE ON THE INTERIM ARAVALLI DEFINITION REPORT SUBMITTED BY THE HPC TO THE SUPREME COURT

PUCL NATIONAL & PUCL RAJASTHAN

6th September, 2026

On 9th August, 2026, PUCL made a presentation before the High Powered Committee. [Click here to read the representation submitted then.](#)

After taking five months to form the committee for defining the Aravallis and giving it three months to give a report, on 31st August, 2026, [the SC received an interim compliance report from the High Powered Committee \(HPC\).](#) The PUCL response to this report as follows:

1. Interim report – work in progress – no final or even indicative results shared.

Despite 10 meetings, and 6 days of fieldwork and public hearings, the compliance report is a work in progress. It is silent on the key issues that it was tasked by the court to address – whether the 100 m elevation approach proposed by the MoEFCC secretary chaired Committee covered more hills and area than the three degree slope approach developed by the Forest Survey of India.

The report starts promisingly, stating that the, *“feasibility of the methodology for assessing the implications of terrain/elevation-based delineation for the coverage of Aravalli hills, forest cover and aquifers **has been demonstrated in three sample districts** – Alwar, Ajmer and Udaipur”*

Despite undertaking the analysis in three districts, the committee has not shared the outcome in terms of number of hills or areas. Even the broad direction of the analysis whether 100 m or 3 degree approach covers more hills and Aravalli area is not shared.

Instead, the committee has taken a cautious approach, that the *“quantitative outputs with potentially significant regulatory and socio-economic implications should be reported only after the underlying methodology, datasets and analytical parameters have been sufficiently tested and the results have undergone appropriate technical validation and cross-comparison.”*

The committee has stated that they will fine tune and vet their results before placing them before the court. The report states that, *“The committee's present work is directed towards establishing a scientifically robust, transparent and reproducible basis for such outputs rather than placing before the Hon'ble Court numerical estimates that may subsequently require revisions following further methodological examination.”*

2. Existing approaches applicable in Delhi and the NCR not reflected

The interim report does not reflect any recognition of the existing approaches to delineate the aravallis in Delhi, Haryana and the NCR districts of Rajasthan.

1. Delhi has developed a process of identifying the extended Aravallis – based on their geomorphological extent, fine-tuned through several judgements of the Delhi High Court and Supreme Court since 2011. The SC has also directed to delineate the entire aravallis in Delhi based on this approach.

2. Similarly the MoEFCCs Aravalli notification of 1992 used the landuse/land form categories of the revenue record to delineate the Aravallis in Gurgaon and Nuh districts of Haryana and Alwar district of the NCR.
3. These approaches must be considered and grandfathered into the process of defining and delineating the aravallis – the allure of developing a de novo/ /new approach should not sweep away existing approaches that have evolved over time.

3. Field visits and public hearings.

PUCL notes that unlike the earlier MoEF Secretary led committee, the current committee has undertaken some fieldwork and public hearings, however exploratory. However 5-6 days of visits to just two states is inadequate and does a grave injustice to the issue. Given the experience with the public hearings in Alwar, Ajmer, Udaipur and Gurgaon some concerns are being shared so that the future hearings can be more fruitful:

1. Hearings of one to two hours – are insufficient for citizens to convey the depth of their issues, these should be at least half to one day long.
2. The field visits and hearings should be done in phases and devote at least three to four weeks – and try to cover most of the Aravalli districts.
3. The Forest department should be the nodal department. In Rajasthan, the mining dept. was made the nodal dept. and this resulted in domination by mining industry stakeholders at the cost of the mining-impacted communities and ordinary citizens. In Ajmer, the public hearing was virtually converted into a show of strength by the mining lobby. Impartial moderation of proceedings is essential.
4. PUCL representatives were physically threatened by the mining interests and had to be protected by police personnel in Ajmer.
5. In Gurgaon, some citizens were not allowed to record the proceedings. Civil society was shepherded out of the room when the mining interest stakeholders started addressing the HPC, leaving them unaware of the claims made by the mining lobby – and whether they were accurate or not.
6. No hearings were undertaken in Delhi or Gujarat – these must be covered in the future.
7. The committee should review the concerns under adjudication related to the Aravallis to understand the issues involved, by asking state governments to provide a list and judgement of ongoing and settled court cases related to mining, real-estate, ownership etc in the aravallis, to analyse the same. They may then visit a sub-set of the identified sites, to understand the key concerns that communities have raised about the mining and real estate impacts. Merely visiting a few sites vetted by the mining department will not provide a realistic appreciation of the hazards of mining etc.

4. Word soup of adjectives and nouns

On a lighter note, PUCL could not help but note that the committee has provided a veritable word soup of adjectives and nouns to describe its approach. The framework they are proposing is:

1. emerging,
2. multidisciplinary,
3. tiered,
4. nested,
5. hierarchical and
6. ecosystem-based.

“Accordingly, the Committee is considering an emerging multidisciplinary tiered nested hierarchical ecosystem-based framework encompassing, inter alia, geological and geomorphological foundations, terrain and landforms, watersheds and hydrological systems, forests and biodiversity, ecological connectivity and ecosystem services to downstream areas, communities and human settlements among various other parameters to address the mandates assigned to the Committee.”

We hope that the committee gives clear recommendations that delineate the Aravallis comprehensively,

that help keep real estate and mining out of the Aravallis, highlight mining impacts so that they can be put under more effective regulatory control, stop mining for exports, and keep it away from good forest cover and from habitation.

We demand disclosure of the assessment made by the HPC on the methodology for definition of Aravallis, and its conclusions on the 100 metre approach which raised such outrage amongst the people. PUCL hopes the committee will stop tokenism and in the next three months of extension given will:

- Hear the ordinary people express their suffering due to mining and real estate
- Visit areas and see for themselves the devastating impact of mining
- And makes a clear call for closure of mining and real estate activities in its final recommendations
- In the context of the recent disaster in Nepal, recognize the much higher human cost of rampant mining

It requests that the Supreme Court must save the Aravallis, the ecosystem and the people and not sacrifice it at the altar of mining, real estate and profits.

Kavita Srivastava, President, PUCL

V. Suresh, General Secretary, PUCL

Bhanwar Meghwanshi, Secretary, PUCL Rajasthan

Anant Bhatnagar, President, PUCL Rajasthan

PUCL URGES THE CJI TO INTERVENE TO SAFEGUARD JUDICIAL INTEGRITY

PUCL RAJASTHAN

2nd September, 2026

The People's Union for Civil Liberties, Rajasthan, views with the gravest concern the allegations levelled against Justice Sanjeev Prakash Sharma, Acting Chief Justice of the Rajasthan High Court, by Justice Sandeep Mehta of the Supreme Court of India. In three letters dated 2, 10 and 17 August 2026 addressed to the Chief Justice of India, Justice Mehta has, according to reports in the national press, alleged maladministration, favouritism and the selective listing of cases contrary to settled procedure, and has stated that judges of the Rajasthan High Court have complained to him of being threatened with retributive action. He has sought the appointment of a Chief Justice from outside the State with immediate effect.

PUCL Rajasthan urges the Chief Justice of India to intervene without delay to protect the integrity of the institution. That a sitting judge of the Supreme Court has found it necessary to place a complaint of this nature on record, in writing, against the head of a High Court is an extraordinary event.

Allegations of the manipulation of listing and of the intimidation of judges strike at the working of the entire justice delivery system.

PUCL Rajasthan is conscious that these remain allegations which are yet to be tested, and that the Chief Justice of India has stated that they cannot be treated as findings and that Justice Sharma must be given an opportunity to respond. Our demand is therefore not for a verdict, but for a transparent, time-bound and institutionally credible process — and for that process to be seen to be at work.

PUCL Rajasthan is equally concerned that a State as large as Rajasthan has been left without a regular Chief Justice for over eleven months. Since the retirement of Chief Justice K. R. Shriram on 27 September 2025, the High Court has functioned under an Acting Chief Justice appointed under Article 223 of the Constitution. A vacancy of this duration raises questions about the working of the Collegium itself. It is also relevant that the Rajasthan High Court is Justice Sharma's parent High Court and that he is a resident of the State — an arrangement that sits uneasily with the long-settled convention that a High Court should be headed by a Chief Justice drawn from outside it.

PUCL Rajasthan demands that a regular Chief Justice be appointed to the Rajasthan High Court forthwith.

Concerns about Justice Sharma's administrative functioning are not new. Members of the Bar have objected to his decisions on earlier occasions, and a lawyers' body is reported to have sought his transfer months before the present letters were written.

Among the matters now in the public domain is the listing, before Justice Sharma's own Bench at the Jaipur seat, of a batch of appeals concerning valuable land in Udaipur — although, as Justice Mehta has pointed out, those matters fell within the jurisdiction of the principal seat at Jodhpur, on the strength of an earlier judgment delivered by Justice Sharma himself. That a judge due to demit office on 26 September 2026 should take a particular interest in such matters is a circumstance that calls for scrutiny.

PUCL Rajasthan demands that the administrative decisions and listing practices of this tenure be independently examined and that appropriate action follow.

We note that the Rajasthan High Court Lawyers Association has resolved upon a strike and that Justice Sharma has, for the present, opted out of judicial sittings. Such a step, however, is no substitute for a decision by the competent authority.

PUCL Rajasthan appeals to the Chief Justice of India, as the guardian of the judicial system, to dispel every doubt that this episode has raised, so that the faith and confidence of the people in the administration of justice is preserved. We urge the Collegium to hear all concerned fairly and to take the necessary action swiftly.

PUCL Rajasthan places on record its appreciation of the courage shown by Justice Sandeep Mehta in raising his voice in defence of the institution while still holding office, and urges that he be afforded the fullest institutional protection.

Issued by:

Kavita Srivastava — National President, PUCL

Dr. Anant Bhatnagar — State President, PUCL Rajasthan

Rajesh Choudhary — General Secretary, PUCL Rajasthan

PUCL CONDEMNS DEATH SENTENCE TO 10 CONVICTS IN JHIRAM VALLEY CASE

PUCL CHHATTISGARH

16th September, 2026

PUCL calls it Unjust, Disproportionate and a Setback to Peace in Bastar!

PUCL Chhattisgarh expresses deep concern and anguish over the death sentence awarded today by the Special NIA Court, Jagdalpur, to 10 convicts in the 2013 Jhiram Valley attack case. While PUCL has consistently taken a principled position against political violence in all its forms and unequivocally condemns the heinous killings of 29 Congress Party workers and leaders in the 2013 attack, we believe the death penalty is opposed to the Constitutional principles of Rule of Law and is not the answer to this or any crime. The imposition of capital punishment in this case also raises grave concerns of unequal access to justice, individual culpability, and the disproportionate impact of the harshest punishments upon the poorest and most marginalised sections of society.

Capital Punishment is barbaric and ineffective in deterring crime:

India remains amongst a minority of countries worldwide that still has death penalty in its law books and

practices it – as of 2025, 113 countries across the world have abolished capital punishment. It is a cruel and barbaric form of punishment and does not deter crime. It violates the right to life and dignity, and decades of research show no credible evidence that it prevents crime more effectively than life imprisonment.

The burden of capital punishment also falls disproportionately upon the economically and socially marginalized. Project 39A's landmark Death Penalty India Report found that 74.1% of the prisoners sentenced to death covered by its study were economically vulnerable. The relationship between poverty, and exposure to the harshest punishments cannot be ignored in any serious discussion of capital punishment in India.

The harshest punishment falls on those at the margins, while the alleged architects were never brought to trial: For PUCL, today's judgment represents a grave miscarriage of justice. The ten persons sentenced to death have consistently maintained their innocence, and their families have maintained that they were falsely implicated in the Jhiram Valley case. They are Adivasi villagers from poor and disadvantaged backgrounds who have already spent approximately thirteen years in incarceration. Today's judgment, which condemns them to death, compounds what we believe is a grave miscarriage of justice. Significantly, even the prosecution does not allege that these ten persons conceived, planned or directed the Jhiram Valley attack. The prosecution case itself attributes the planning and direction of the attack to senior Maoist leaders, none of whom were ever brought to trial in the present proceedings. The persons who now face execution are therefore not those whom the prosecution itself identifies as the principal architects of the attack.

Even apart from their consistent claim of innocence, the realities of life in conflict-affected Bastar could not have been ignored while deciding whether these ten persons should live or die. It is well documented, from the Salwa Judum years onward, that residents of such areas are routinely caught between armed actors on multiple sides, and that coercion and pressure are real, recurring features of life there, not an after-the-fact defence. This context ought to have weighed heavily against the imposition of the death penalty. Further, thirteen years of incarceration before sentence is an extraordinary deprivation of liberty, with consequences not only for the prisoners but for their families and communities. The human cost of such prolonged incarceration is not theoretical. One of the undertrials in the Jhiram Valley case died during the pendency of the proceedings after spending several years in custody.

A Setback for Peace and Reconciliation in Bastar: These death sentences must also be viewed against the present circumstances in Bastar. The State Government has repeatedly spoken of peace, dialogue, surrender and rehabilitation as part of its approach to ending the decades-long conflict. In that context, the State demanding the death penalty in this case, and the Court subsequently imposing it, sends a profoundly contradictory message.

For decades, the prisons of Bastar have held large numbers of Adivasi men and women arrested in alleged Maoist cases. Families and civil liberties groups have repeatedly raised cases of false implication, prolonged incarceration and eventual acquittal after years spent in prison. These are not peripheral issues to the conflict in Bastar. They are among its most enduring injustices. This contradiction has become particularly stark at a moment when the State claims that the armed conflict is ending. While surrender and rehabilitation are being offered to persons leaving the Maoist movement, there has been no comparable, comprehensive process to review the cases of Adivasis who have spent years in prison in alleged Maoist cases, including those who maintain that they were never associated with the Maoist movement at all. Instead of urgently addressing this legacy of incarceration and wrongful implication, the continuing emphasis on securing convictions and seeking increasingly severe punishments risks perpetuating the very injustices that any genuine process of peace and reconciliation must confront.

Justice cannot become synonymous with vengeance. A genuine transition towards peace requires the State to confront the legacy of false arrests, prolonged undertrial incarceration and wrongful

prosecutions, and to create a credible and transparent process for reviewing the cases of those who continue to languish in prison.

PUCL Chhattisgarh demands:

- Commutation of the death sentence and judicial review with full attention to individual culpability and mitigating circumstances.
- That the state addresses the conditions of conflict, coercion and deprivation that have drawn or compelled into the orbit of armed organizations.
- A recommitment to restorative, dialogue-based approaches to peace in Bastar over punitive measures that fall disproportionately on the poor.

Justice for the victims of Jhiram Valley cannot be secured by creating further injustice for the marginalised people of Bastar

Issued by

Junas Tirki, President, PUCL Chhattisgarh

Kaladas Dehariya, PUCL Chhattisgarh

TAKE ACTION REGARDING THE PUBLIC PARADING OF ACCUSED BY GUJARAT POLICE OFFICERS

PUCL GUJARAT

Anand Yagnik on behalf of his client , Mujahid Nafees, who is the General Secretary of the PUCL-Gujarat, issued a legal notice for initiating suitable action against the Illegal and Unconstitutional Custodial Violence, Torture and Public Parading of accused by Nilambaug Police Station PI D.P. Undadkat and Other Police officers involved in such inhumane actions to the DGP, Chief Secretary and other police authorities in Gujarat.

As per the legal notice, Faisal who was under investigation for a alleged crime was on September 5th in full view of the public tied the accused with ropes and brutally and ruthlessly struck him more than a 100 times with sticks, with more than 40 blows falling in the first 4 minutes of this act of barbaric and unconstitutional violence by the Bhavnagar Police. The accused was bent over a pillar and beaten until he fell, he was also laid down on a bench and attacked, A stick was placed between his legs and he was then further beaten and then made to crawl on his knees while being tied up with ropes and dragged. He was beaten until his clothes tore and he fell to the floor and yet the merciless assault continued, and he was held up with ropes to be beaten further.

This is 'illegal and unconstitutional' as 'the Police personnel are flouting the law, as it exists in the Penal Codes, flagrantly violating all protections given to the accused deriving from the Constitution of India is a cause for shame and immediate action.'

The notice made the point that, officers working under the authority of the state have completely lost sight of the law and were in 'contempt of the judgment of the Hon'ble apex court passed in **D.K.Basu Vs. State of West Bengal.**'

It was noted that, 'No section in any police manual or Indian penal code that allows police to indiscriminately assault citizens. Further these actions are also in brazen violations of D. K. Basu Vs. State of West Bengal and other subsequent decisions of the Hon'ble Apex Court touching Article 21 of the Constitution of India with regard to the maltreatment and protection of the dignity of the Accused. These also fell against Order passed by the Hon'ble High Court of Gujarat in Public Interest litigation being WP(PIL) No. 153 of 2018 calling for intervention, or the sensitization of Police personnel of every rank. And, further the Director General of Police on 12.05.2026, issued a circular/office order to all the high-ranking officers of all the districts to initiate strict disciplinary action against the erring officers in

cases of reported human rights violations. However, the implementation of all of these rightful and applicable guidelines and Orders has been soundly ignored.'

It was further noted that 'police excesses manifest themselves in two broad forms. First is when police play an active role in violence, which in the present case, the perpetrators have done. And the second is when the police in not an active participant but stands as a mute spectator and acts a facilitator of the violence, which in the present case is done' by the officers of the state.

It was prayed that the state authorities must, 'initiate any and all appropriate and suitable action, departmental, disciplinary, punitive and criminal, against the erring police officials forthwith who have openly violated all rights of the victims by way of public parading and custodial atrocities and also acting in contempt of the judgment of the apex court in the case of D.K. Basu v. State of West Bengal, failing which, my client shall be constrained to initiate any and all suitable legal action as may be advised, in accordance with law, against the erring police officials of having flogged and beaten the alleged accused in violation of all norms in public view, and against your good selves for being mute spectators to the flagrant violation of all rights of the alleged accused who belong to the minority and are as equal citizens of India, of which your good self may take note of.'

PUCL URGES ELECTION COMMISSION TO TAKE URGENT, CONCRETE MEASURES AGAINST HATE SPEECH

PUCL DELHI

18th September, 2026

The People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), Delhi, has written to Chief Election Commissioner Mr. Gyanesh Kumar, calling on the Election Commission of India to take immediate steps to prevent, monitor and respond to hate speech targeting minority communities, Dalits and other vulnerable groups during the upcoming Legislative Assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Goa and Manipur.

PUCL's representation warns that hate speech may become more frequent and widespread in the run-up to the elections, undermining the conditions required for free and fair polling and heightening the risk of intimidation, communal tension and violence.

In its representation, PUCL has called upon the Election Commission to use its constitutional and statutory authority to ensure that obligations under the general law and the Model Code of Conduct are strictly enforced. The organisation has urged the Commission to put in place immediate preventive, monitoring and enforcement measures so that hate speech is identified early, acted upon promptly and prevented from escalating into intimidation or violence.

PUCL has specifically demanded that the Election Commission establish a dedicated department, cell or nodal agency to monitor hate speech throughout the election period. Such a mechanism should track speeches made at public meetings, rallies and campaign events, as well as statements circulated through electronic media, print media, social media platforms and other forms of communication.

The proposed monitoring body should also receive complaints, refer them without delay to appropriate officers of the Election Commission, and where necessary place them before the police or courts for prompt legal action. PUCL has further urged that the body coordinate with relevant government departments and authorities to prevent hate speech, ensure strict action in cases of violation and prevent repetition of such conduct.

PUCL has also asked the Commission to make this mechanism widely known to the public and to publicise complaint channels through print, television, radio and social media. It has sought the establishment of a well-publicised helpline at least 90 days before polling so that citizens can report incidents of hate speech and submit complaints in a timely manner.

The representation further calls for an early and sustained public awareness campaign informing voters, candidates and political parties about what constitutes hate speech and making clear that such conduct is a criminal offence under applicable law, including the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023. PUCL has also urged the Commission to issue prompt and well-publicised warnings to candidates and political parties that indulge in hate speech.

In addition, PUCL has requested the Election Commission to issue directions to police authorities and other competent authorities to take immediate legal action whenever hate speech is reported or otherwise comes to their knowledge. It has emphasised that failure or inaction by responsible officials in dealing with reported hate speech should attract appropriate administrative and legal consequences, and that officials who wilfully ignore or fail to comply with the Commission's directions must be dealt with strictly in accordance with law.

PUCL has stated that these measures are necessary to preserve the integrity of the electoral process, maintain communal harmony and ensure that elections are conducted in an atmosphere free from fear, intimidation and violence. The organisation has also offered to assist the Election Commission in

spreading awareness about the prohibition on hate speech and the Commission's directions, and has sought an appointment with the Chief Election Commissioner to discuss the issue.

T S Ahuja, General Secretary
Vertika Mani, Secretary (Media)
PUCL Delhi

MARKING POLITICAL PRISONER DAY

PUCL KARNATAKA

13th September, 2026

The PUCL-K marked political prisoner day on September 13, 2026 by organizing a reading of the literary works of political prisoners. September 13 is the day that Jatin Das died, when on the 61st day of his hunger strike. If we think of Indian history, three moments when the political prisoner formed a significant part of the narrative of state oppression was the colonial period, the period of the emergency and the contemporary period of the undeclared emergency. The session included readings from a range of texts drawing attention to the significance of the political prisoner.

In the colonial period the iconic prisoner was of course Bhagat Singh whose 'Jail Note Book', was a tribute to a voracious reader who read widely in politics, history and literature. The other significant figure is Jawaharlal Nehru who wrote three volumes while in jail for nine years. Thus the 'Discovery of India', 'An autobiography' as well as 'Glimpses of world history', were written in the nine years Nehru spent in jail.

To reproduce below some of the extracts which were read from Nehru's writings.

The higher valleys and mountains of Kashmir fascinated me so much that I resolved to come back again soon... Instead of going up mountains or crossing the seas I have to satisfy my wanderlust by coming to prison. But still I plan for that is a joy which no one can deny me even in prison, and besides what else can one do in prison? And I dream of the day when I shall wander about the Himalayas and cross them to reach that lake and mountain of my desire. But meanwhile the sands of life run on and youth passes into middle age and that will give place to something worse, and sometimes I think that I may grow too old to reach Kailas and Mansarovar. But the journey is always worth the making even though the end may not be in sight...

In the barracks in which I was kept there must have been about fifty persons. We were all crowded together, our beds being almost three or four feet from each other. Fortunately almost everybody in that

barrack was known to me, and there were many friends. But the utter lack of privacy, all day and night, became more and more difficult to endure. Always the same crowd looking on, the same petty annoyances and irritations, and no escape from them to a quiet nook. We bathed in public and washed our clothes in public and ran round and round the barrack for exercise, and talked and argued till we had largely exhausted each others capacity for intelligent conversation. It was the dull side of family life, magnified a hundred fold with few of its graces and compensations, and all this among people of all kinds and tastes...

In the second half of 1928 and in 1929 there was frequent talk of my arrest...the warnings produced a feeling of uncertainty in me and I felt I was always on the verge of it. I did not mind this particularly as I knew that, whatever the future held for me, it could not be a settled life of routine. The sooner I got used to uncertainty and sudden changes and visits to prison the better. And I think that on the whole I succeeded in getting used to the idea and whenever arrest came I took it more casually than I might otherwise have done. So rumours of arrest were not without compensation; they gave a certain excitement and bite to my daily existence. Every day of freedom was something precious, a day gained...

My main occupation however was reading and writing. I could not have all the books I wanted, as there were restrictions and a censorship and the censors were not always very competent for the job...the only books the British officials heartily recommended were religious books or novels. It is wonderful how dear to the heart of the British government is the subject of religion and how impartially it encourages all brands of it

So I occupied myself with my books, going from one type of reading to another, but usually sticking to 'heavy' books. Novels made one feel mentally slack and I did not read many of them. Sometimes I would weary of too much reading and then I would take to writing. My historical series of letters to my daughter kept me occupied right through my two year term and they helped me very greatly to keep mentally fit. To some extent I lived through the past I was writing about and almost forgot about my goal surroundings.

(From An Autobiography)

The greatest gift for an individual or a nation, so we had been told in our ancient books was Abhay(fearlessness), not merely bodily courage but the absence of fear from the mind...But the dominant impulse in India under British rule was that of fear- pervasive, oppressing, strangling fear; fear of the army, the police, the widespread secret service; fear of the official class; fear of laws meant to suppress and of prison; fear of the landlord's agent; fear of the moneylender; fear of unemployment and starvation, which were always on the threshold. It was against this all pervading fear that Gandhi's quiet and determined voice was raised: be not afraid. Was it as simple as that? Not quite. And yet fear builds in phantoms, which are more fearsome than reality itself, and reality, when calmly analysed and its consequences willingly accepted, loses much of its terror.

So suddenly , as it were the black pall of fear was lifted from the peoples shoulders, not wholly of course , but to an amazing degree. As fear is a close companion to falsehood, so truth follows fearlessness...

(From a Discovery of India)

The above extracts communicated quite powerfully what it meant to be a political activist in the time of the British Raj. You lived under the threat of imprisonment and imprisonment was an experience you were bound to have. The experience of the colonial prison mirrors quite closely the experience of imprisonment during the contemporary period.

The other book from which extracts were read was 'Umar Khalid and his world'. While Nehru spent nine years in jail, Umar has spent six years. While Nehru's imprisonment was post conviction, Umar is in jail without even the trial process being completed. Below is the extract from Umar's letter on getting to know

that his bail had been rejected by the Supreme Court.

The first few days after a judgment comes are always difficult to cope with. In fact, the day I was denied bail by the Supreme Court, I was transported back to 2022 when my bail was rejected the first time in the trial court. The suddenness of the news hit me in the gut in the same way. But after spending more than five years here, after my bail has been rejected five times by three different courts, I've almost gotten used to bouncing back from the feeling of helplessness. The weather does add to the gloom... But after 3pm, when the time to return to the lock up approaches again- that is when the mind space starts to go downhill. My mind starts spiraling into a bottomless darkness and I begin to wonder whether I will ever be able to step out as a free man...

Once a prisoner who had been watering a tree in our barrack for a few weeks got bail. The next day, after he left, three others took up the mantle to keep the tree watered in the hope that they too would be released. You see hope remains a stubborn thing even in captivity I am planning to get back to my reading, even though the recovery from the bail application derailed me a bit. There's a list of books I already have in mind, which I must get cracking on. The wait for freedom seems longer than ever at this

time. So I must do what I can to keep myself going, especially in an environment where doubt has been made to turn into certainty in public perception, regarding the allegations against me. The operative word in mainstream media's discourse for me is no more "anti-national"; its "terrorist".

There is pain in this seemingly endless wait, indeed but there is also a beauty to this pain. I am content where I am, in spite of what I'm being subjected to, because there is a beauty in knowing that this is not about me alone. My incarceration is not merely to target me as an individual; it is to teach my fellow comrades a lesson that anyone who dares to ask uncomfortable questions .. will be forcibly silenced... Ours is a battle for a vision- of a time in our society when some will not be more equal than others. This conviction is what makes this pain bearable...

The other books which were displayed were 'Colours of the cage' by Arun Ferreira, 'The cell and the soul', by Anand Teltumbde, 'From phansi yard' by Sudha Bharadwaj, Varavara Rao: A life in poetry, by Meena Kandaswamy and 'Unsilenced', by Seema Azad. There were also extracts from Kannada poems which were read out.

The meeting concluded with a reading from Turkish poet, Nazim Hikmet, titled, 'On living' of which an extract is presented below:

II

Let's say you're seriously ill, need surgery—
which is to say we might not get
from the white table.

Even though it's impossible not to feel sad
about going a little too soon,
we'll still laugh at the jokes being told,
we'll look out the window to see it's raining,
or still wait anxiously
for the latest newscast...

Let's say we're at the front—
for something worth fighting for, say.
There, in the first offensive, on that very day,
we might fall on our face, dead.
We'll know this with a curious anger,
but we'll still worry ourselves to death
about the outcome of the war, which could last years.

Let's say we're in prison
and close to fifty,
and we have eighteen more years, say,
before the iron doors will open.
We'll still live with the outside,
with its people and animals, struggle and
wind—
I mean with the outside beyond the walls.
I mean, however and wherever we are,
we must live as if we will never die.

III

This earth will grow cold,
a star among stars
and one of the smallest,
a gilded mote on blue velvet—

I mean this, our great earth.
This earth will grow cold one day,
not like a block of ice
or a dead cloud even
but like an empty walnut it will roll along
in pitch-black space...
You must grieve for this right now
—you have to feel this sorrow now—
for the world must be loved this much
if you're going to say "I lived"...

PUCL WORKSHOP ON CUSTODIAL VIOLENCE, ANTI-TORTURE LAW, UN STANDARDS & STRATEGIES FOR CAMPAIGN

PUCL NATIONAL IN COLLABORATION WITH SAMBHAAVNA

India faces a crisis of custodial violence of alarming proportions. Data tabled in Parliament on 24th March 2026 reveals that 806 police custody deaths were recorded between 2021 and 2026 – an average of three deaths every week. Yet the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) recommended disciplinary action in only one case over the entire six-year period.

The figures of custodial deaths – which includes deaths in police custody and also judicial custody – when undertrial prisoners are held in state or central prisons – is alarming, totalling 11,650 deaths. This averages to 37 deaths a week!! While arguably deaths in prisons may not be due to police torture, they do reflect the poor state of prisons in India. Abysmal water and sanitation facilities, severe overcrowding, brutal prison staff, corruption, inadequate prison hospitals and worse makes life in prisons hell. Despite the staggering scale of custodial deaths, there is almost no accountability.

This impunity is not incidental. It reflects a deep, systemic failure across the chain of institutions entrusted with safeguarding citizens' rights: the police, the magistracy, government hospitals, prison authorities and human rights commissions. The Global Torture Index 2025 classifies India as a 'high-risk' country for torture, noting that beatings, forced confessions, electric shocks, sexual violence and custodial deaths are 'widespread and systemic', particularly targeting Dalits, Adivasis, Muslims, LGBTQIA+ individuals and migrant workers.

About the workshop

The People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL), in collaboration with Sambhaavnaa, proposes a five-day residential workshop to re-launch a sustained, national-level Anti-Torture Campaign. This workshop is a response to both the structural crisis of custodial violence in India and the urgent need to equip civil society with the knowledge, tools and strategies to challenge it.

Objectives of the Workshop

1. Equip participants with a rigorous understanding of the constitutional and criminal law framework governing arrest, detention and protection from custodial torture.
2. Develop critical awareness of the gaps in India's existing legal framework and the transformative potential of international instruments such as the UNCAT and its Optional Protocol.
3. Analyse the systemic and institutional failures – of the judiciary, prison authorities, medical institutions and human rights commissions – that perpetuate custodial violence.
4. Build capacity among lawyers, activists, journalists and doctors to intervene effectively at every stage: arrest, remand, judicial custody, medical examination and trial.
5. Share and learn from success stories, landmark judgments and campaign models from across India and the world. Strategise and plan for the launch of a coordinated, national-level Anti-Torture

Campaign, including demands for ratification of UNCAT and enactment of a dedicated anti-torture law.

6. Create a network of committed and informed advocates who can serve as trainers, legal advisers and campaign anchors in their respective states and regions.

Resource People: Mihir Desai, Kavita Srivastava, V Suresh, Arvind Narrain, Henri Tiphagne, Prashant Bhushan and Dr. K. Mathiharan

Read more on our website for the online edition of the Bulletin:

THE QUESTION OF INCLUSION: CITIZENSHIP, CENSUS AND STATISTICS

English translation of a lecture by Prof. G. N. Devy in Jaipur on 28 June 2026: On the occasion of PUCL's Foundation Day, a lecture by the renowned linguist and social thinker Prof. G. N. Devy, titled "The Question of Inclusion: Citizenship, Census and Statistics," was held on 28 June 2026 at the Praudh Shikshan Samiti auditorium in Jaipur. The distinguished writer Prof. Apoorvanand also addressed the gathering. The lecture drew large participation from activists from about ten districts of Rajasthan, as well as intellectuals, writers, social activists and youth.

PROF. JAGRIT GADIT: A CONSTITUTIONAL VOICE AMID THE NOISE OF HINDUTVA

Translated from a Hindi article written by Bhanwar Meghwanshi

Bhanwar Meghwanshi writes about Prof. Jagrit Gadit, head of Electrical Engineering at Maharaja Sayajirao University in Vadodara, who has questioned prayers and rituals at official university events, refused to take part, and asked the Vice-Chancellor to frame a clear policy on religious events on campus. He argues that the issue is not personal faith but whether a publicly funded institution can become the patron of one religion's rituals, a question to be tested against the Constitution. He notes that Kesavananda Bharati (1973) established the basic structure doctrine and named secularism among its basic features, and that S. R. Bommai (1994) affirmed this, though neither case directly bars prayers in universities. Article 28 prohibits religious instruction in wholly state-funded institutions and protects individuals from being compelled to join religious worship, but it does not automatically make every religious event unconstitutional; the answer depends on whether an event is official, participation is voluntary, and anyone is pressured. He adds that "tradition" and majority sentiment cannot override constitutional limits, and that a university should respect lack of faith as much as faith. In Gujarat's Hindutva-dominated climate, he concludes, Gadit's dissent is an act of constitutional conscience.

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