

statement:

PUCL Call for the defence of civil liberties

Jharkhand Janadhikar Mahasabha, along with more than 70 organizations and several individuals from across the country, has endorsed a call by the 'People's Union for Civil Liberties' (PUCL) to protest from 28 August to 5 September against the growing attacks on civil liberties.

The first day of the call, 28 August 201, marks two years of the arrest of five human rights activists and raid on nine others in the Bhima Koregaon Conspiracy Case. On 1 January 2018, thousands of Dalits had gathered in Maharashtra's Bhima-Koregaon to celebrate 200 years of the victory of Dalit soldiers over the Peshwa's army. An event, Elgar Parishad, to celebrate this and against the rise of communalism and Hindutva in the country was organised a day earlier. In this period, several communal Hindutva organisations instigated a riot and violence.

The actual perpetrators of violence in Bhima Koregaon – leaders of Hindutva organisations – remain at large. And by now, a total of twelve lawyers, professors, academics, writers, activists have been falsely accused for the violence and for "supporting Maoists" to organise Elgar Parishad and been imprisoned in this case. They are: Anand Teltumbde, Arun Ferreira, Gautam Navlakha, Hany Babu, Mahesh Raut, Surendra Gadling, Sudha Bharadwaj, Shoma Sen, Sudhir Dhawle, Sona Wilson, Varavara Rao, and Vernon Gonsalves. Apart from those who are imprisoned, several others have been harassed through interrogations and raids. One of them is Stan Swamy, who has been struggling for Adivasi rights for decades in Jharkhand. The protests culminate on 5 September, which marks the third anniversary of the assassination of Gauri Lankesh, the fearless journalist who would not be silenced any other way.

The Bhima-Koregaon conspiracy case exposes the extent to which the central government is willing to undermine constitutional values and suppress dissent. As the perpetrators of violence roam free, the jailed activists have been falsely charged with sedition and the draconian Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA). As soon as the newly formed Maharashtra government started discussing the need to withdraw the false charges against the activists, the central government transferred the case to the National Investigation Agency (NIA). The central government, in the guise of the Bhima Koregaon case, is trying to build a false narrative of a national Maoist conspiracy against the state that involves these activists. At one end, the government is trying to build a narrative without a shred of evidence and at the other, the trial of the activists is repeatedly being delayed.

Mahasabha joins the protest and has issued the attached parcha that exposes the BJP government's false narrative in the Bhima-Koregaon case. The central government, contrary to the constitutional values of secularism and equality, is taking the country towards religious majoritarianism and is coming down heavily on anyone who questions its communal agenda and anti-people policies.

Similarly, more than 24 anti-CAA-NRC protestors and supporters of the movement for equal citizenship, have also been falsely arrested under UAPA in Delhi and Assam. Several others have also been implicated under stringent sections of the IPC and other special laws. In Uttar Pradesh, anti CAA-NRC protestors are being illegally forced to auction their personal property to pay for the damage to public property caused during protests. Scores of intellectuals, trade unionists and other activists are continually being summoned, examined in the Delhi Riots case and the Bhima Koregaon case, and then subjected to vilification campaigns by a section of the media. It is being done to ensure that the process itself becomes a punishment, even as these cases will fail in trials.

The nationwide protests are also in support of Prashant Bhushan, a Supreme Court lawyer and a leading anti-corruption crusader, who has been convicted under the Contempt of Court Act, and of numerous journalists who are face charges for highlighting government failures. The violation of civil liberties is perhaps most acute in Kashmir, where many have been kept under preventive detention for over a year now.

Mahasabha endorses the demands of the national call and specifically demands – 1) immediate release of activists arrested in the Bhima-Koregaon case and withdrawal of the cases, 2) immediate withdrawal of all cases against CAA-NRC protestors and other civil rights activists across the country, 3) repeal of anti-people laws such as UAPA and national security act (NSA) and IPC sections such as 124A (sedition) and 4) central government to immediately end its politics of religious majoritarianism.

During the week-long protest, Mahasabha and associated organisations will undertake the following programmes in Jharkhand:

- ⌚ *Informing people about the attacks on civil liberties by the central government and exposing its communal narrative.*
- ⌚ *Submitting a memorandum to President and chief Justice of India for the immediate release of human right activists falsely implicated in the Bhima-Koregaon case.*
- ⌚ *Protest marches at state and district headquarters with due protection for Covid19.*
- ⌚ *Social media campaign.*
- ⌚ *Joint meeting with all non-BJP political parties.*

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