



ALL INDIA CATHOLIC UNION

Founded in 1919, Registered under Societies Registration Act 1850
Representing the Catholic Laity of India through 120 Diocesan Units Nation-wide

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AICU Condemns Suppression of Youth Protests, Police Excesses, and Assault on Democratic Norms

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The All India Catholic Union (AICU) views with grave alarm the escalating crackdown on peaceful youth protests against the conduct of Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar. What began as a legitimate democratic expression by young Indians—supported by opposition parties, civil society, lawyers and journalists—has been met with prohibitory orders, mass detentions, and police action that appears designed to intimidate rather than protect.

Under the watch of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah, the national capital has been turned into a fortress, seemingly a sign of response by a state that fears its own citizens.

AICU is not a political party and speaks from the tradition of Catholic social teaching, which affirms the dignity of every human person, the primacy of the common good, and the right of citizens to peaceful assembly and free expression. Those principles are constitutional, and we feel are being violated.

Reports from Delhi and across the National Capital Region indicate that over 200 protesters were detained in a single day, with drones used to monitor movement. Leaders of the Cockroach Janta Party, including Abhijeet Dipke and Dhruv Rathee, were detained at airports and from their homes. More than 1,000 volunteers and activists were reportedly picked up and held in temporary detention centres. The decision to deny permission, impose prohibitory orders, and pre-emptively arrest organisers is a direct assault on the right to protest.

The police excesses are deeply disturbing. Women protesters were allegedly beaten, dragged and mistreated by male officers. The Students' Federation of India reported that women conducting a Tiranga Yatra were detained illegally after 6 p.m. And there are serious allegations that women advocates and protesters were subjected to physical mistreatment.

Journalists were not spared. At least 20 reporters were detained while covering the protests, including journalists from The Indian Express, Hindustan Times, Scroll, Newsland, and Malayalam channels such as Reporter TV and Asianet News. Peek TV journalists Vedanta Agarwal and Sara Khan were reportedly dragged and detained despite showing press cards. Female journalists were harassed and allegedly groped by right-wing mobs, in the presence of police officers who failed to intervene. When the press is treated as an enemy, democracy loses its eyes and ears.

Members of Parliament, lawyers and opposition leaders were also targeted. Former Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, CPI(M) General Secretary M A Baby and Rajya Sabha MP John

Brittas were detained; Brittas said they were moved to an unknown location without being informed. The Congress alleged that 254 MPs were roughed up and illegally detained during an earlier march. Lawyers, including senior and women advocates, were reportedly detained near the Supreme Court and physically mistreated. Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi was briefly detained during an opposition march and later stopped by barricades some 600 metres from the Supreme Court during the “March for Democracy.” Such actions against elected representatives and legal professionals mock the rule of law.

The Congress and other opposition parties have approached the Supreme Court and complained to the Chief Justice of India. Their petition against alleged electoral irregularities and unilateral functioning of the CEC cited an Indian Express report that the two other Election Commissioners objected to the CEC’s decisions on 14 occasions in 10 months.

Whatever the procedural merits, the signal is troubling: citizens and their representatives are being left with fewer peaceful remedies.

The denotification of Jantar Mantar—India’s designated protest site for 33 years—is a symbolic and substantive blow. By cancelling the one space where peaceful dissent was historically permitted, the government is effectively suspending the right to assemble.

The opposition’s marches from Parliament to the Election Commission and the Supreme Court were legitimate democratic responses.

But for the people, the focus must remain on the excessive force used against women, journalists, MPs, lawyers and young people. The government’s attempt to frame protesters as anti-national cannot hide the core issue: allegations of electoral manipulation and the shrinking of democratic space.

The message to the outside world is stark. The national and international media have reported these events with alarm. International observers, human rights groups and press freedom organisations now describe India as a “muzzled democracy.” When journalists are detained, women are beaten, MPs are arrested, lawyers are manhandled, and the Chief Justice is petitioned because other institutions fail, India’s global image as the “Mother of Democracy” is tarnished. No amount of diplomacy or economic messaging can erase those images.

AICU calls for:

1. Immediate release of all detained protesters, journalists, lawyers, MPs and youth activists;
2. An independent judicial inquiry into police excesses, especially against women, journalists and lawyers;
3. Restoration of Jantar Mantar and the right to peaceful assembly;
4. Protection of press freedom and safety of women in public protest;
5. Transparent, accountable and impartial functioning of the Election Commission.
6. An end to vilification of dissenters;
7. Dialogue between government, opposition and civil society to restore constitutional trust.

AICU stands with the youth, journalists, lawyers, MPs and all citizens who seek justice peacefully. India’s democracy must not become a fortress. It must remain a home for every voice.

We urge all Catholics and people of goodwill to pray and work for truth, justice and constitutional governance.

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