

PEOPLE'S ALLIANCE FOR DEMOCRACY AND SECULARISM (PADS)

An Appeal to Democratic Citizens and Organisations of India

(from People's Alliance for Democracy and Secularism)

Democracy in India is facing a grave threat. The BJP government and organisations allied with it are violating every principle of constitutional democracy. Their strategy is to keep society on a boil through a continuous barrage of fake allegations and vilification campaigns against selected targets, and create an atmosphere of suspicion, hatred, fear and widespread violence.

Their assault on the Indian constitution is at three levels:

Public discourse is constantly poisoned with communal propaganda. Ministers, MPs and MLAs of the BJP make open threats against Indian Muslims. The latest piece of poison is jingoistic nationalism and the branding of all opponents of the RSS as traitors to the nation.

The BJP/RSS is willfully degrading constitutional institutions and democratic norms. After the tragic suicide of Rohith Vemula, a scholar of Hyderabad Central University, due to institutionalised victimization, state intelligence agencies have been asked to prove that Rohit was not a dalit. The Delhi police have foisted cases of sedition on elected student representatives of JNU on what appear to be trumped up charges. Muscle-men in lawyer's robes have brazenly attacked journalists and other citizens in full public view, and assaulted the JNUSU President Kanhaiya Kumar inside court premises whilst policemen watched. Some of the attackers are known for their proximity to the Union Home Minister, who has been exposed using fake tweets to associate student activists with terrorists.

The family of Hindutva organizations is assaulting democracy via the open use of violence against convenient targets. It is doing so under state protection, which is now being extended to controlled mobs organised by the ruling dispensation. Students and teachers of one of an internationally respected central university have been physically assaulted by a mob of lawyers. Similar assaults have taken place in other cities. In Chhatisgarh, activists such as Soni Sori have been physically attacked. Members of the Jagdalpur Legal Aid team, who work on protecting Adivasis from illegal detention, have been forced to wind up.

The BJP government and media houses pliant with the RSS have declared an open war on all democratic voices in the country. Besides religious minorities, new social groups have been added to their list of targets. Students and universities are under attack; their right to mobilise against state policies, and debate issues of mass concern are under threat. Radical Dalit groups who refuse to conform to aggressive Hindutva ideology are under vicious assault. Democratic-minded intelligentsia are under threat to prove their 'patriotism'.

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All people and organisations who support democracy need to co-operate in the struggle against the diabolical plans and practices of the RSS-led Modi government. We must understand what we are faced with. Fascism has always been based upon a degree of mass support. In the 2014 elections Mr Modi managed to convince a significant number of youth and disaffected sections with his promise of prosperity. Now that the economy is faltering, the countryside ravaged with years of neglect and drought, and there are no signs of the millions of promised jobs, the RSS 'parivar' is resorting to its familiar dirty tricks, and doing so with full state support. Their plan is to isolate religious minorities, radicalised Dalits, and liberal and progressive elements of workers, youth and the middle classes.

The mobilisations against Hindutva have to be broad based. Democratic principles that emphasise citizenship rights of all Indians have to be publicised far and wide. Apart from those directly affected by the RSS campaigns of vilification and violence, it should also include broader masses who suffer from economic deprivation and social oppression.

Democratic forces need to ensure that the agenda of public discourse and action is not set by the RSS. Their authoritarian agenda for the Indian people must be exposed politically. Hindutva is driven by prejudice against Dalits and affirmative action. Its aggressive and homogenized Hindu identity is also directed against Adivasis, whom it insists on naming vanvasis (forest dwellers). It is also directed against those Dalits who want to establish a cultural identity outside the caste system.

Neo-liberal economics and politics have benefitted small section of Indians, while disempowering and pauperising masses of ordinary citizens. India's economic agenda should be determined by the problems faced by Indian masses, not by the hate-filled and divisive politics of the RSS.

Democratic forces should try to transform the current crisis in Indian democracy into an opportunity. Popular democratic consciousness is the only permanent antidote to fascist politics. This consciousness should include an appreciation of the fundamental rights of every citizen, recognition of the oppressive practices of the Indian state in J&K and the North-East, and an awareness of the injustice and oppression prevalent in our society. No citizen or community can claim rights only for themselves, and remain indifferent to, or violate the rights of others.

PADS appeals to all democratic citizens, student bodies, women's rights groups and organisations of laboring people in India to come together for a principled fight against the RSS/BJP government. Above all they must be alert to the constant threat of communal violence and do their best to counter communal propaganda, be it in the name of any religion or community whatsoever. [Released on 4 March 2016]