

PUCL condemns CBI case on People's Watch

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'Stop use of FCRA to repress dissent'



The People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) on Monday condemned the registration of a case and searches by the CBI against the Centre for Promotion of Social Concerns (CPSC) and its initiative, People's Watch, for alleged violation of the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act.

Two days after the case was registered, the agency searched the premises of the CPSC-People's Watch in Madurai on January 8.

Seeking immediate withdrawal of the case, the PUCL urged the Central government to stop the use of the Act as a “weapon to repress dissenting voices in the civil society and create hurdles in the valuable work of NGOs in the field of human rights”.

Terming it a witch hunt, the PUCL said the case pertained to show cause notices issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) in 2012 and 2013, which were challenged before the Delhi High Court in 2014. “The High Court passed orders in the proceeding permitting CPSC to operate the FCRA bank account. Since no further action was taken by the MHA, the matter was eventually disposed of as infructuous,” it said.

The MHA refused to renew the CPSC's FCRA licence in October 2016, after which it moved the Delhi High Court where the matter is pending. No reference to any allegation of criminal act during the court proceedings had been made till date, said

the PUCL. “It thus becomes explicitly clear that the CBI’s action of launching criminal prosecution in 2022 for actions going back almost a decade is just an act of persecution by the CBI and the MHA,” it said.

The PUCL said the CPSC-People’s Watch continued to raise issues of human rights concerns and rights violations at the grassroots even after the FCRA licence revocation. “They have monitored and documented from inception in 1995, human rights violations both in Tamil Nadu as also in other States, relating to caste atrocities, communal violence, custodial torture and attacks on human rights defenders across India,” it said.

“What is striking is the failure of the National Human Rights Commission to effectively intervene in the matter in spite of taking up the matter *suo motu*,” said the PUCL, alleging that the FCRA-linked actions were part of a growing trend under the present regime, of targeting civil society organisations.

The PUCL said: “The CBI had previously launched similar false and frivolous cases against acclaimed human rights organisations like Sabrang and Lawyers Collective. Organisations such as Greenpeace and Amnesty International India were forced to stop their work in India following suspension and freezing of their FCRA accounts.”

Stating that the FCRA had witnessed major amendments in 2020 making it increasingly difficult for the NGOs to receive or utilise foreign funding, the PUCL said the law, as it stood today, gave unaccountable and disproportionate powers to the executive.

On January 1, the licences of thousands of organisations stood lapsed/ceased/rejected. Noting that the licence of the Missionaries of Charity had also not been renewed, the PUCL said: “...it was because of the international condemnation of such brazenly unfair action that the FCRA licence of the Missionaries of Charity was reinstated on January 7 along with 78 others.”

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/pucl-condemns-cbi-case-and-searches-on-cpsc-peoples-watch/article38225220.ece>