

3,695 citizens sign petition urging political leaders to prevent implementation of new criminal laws

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New Delhi, Jun 19 (PTI) As many as 3,695 citizens have signed a petition urging political leaders of the INDIA bloc and numerous National Democratic Alliance (NDA) partners to intervene and prevent the implementation of new criminal laws deemed by them as “anti-democratic”.

Prominent signatories of the petition include Tushar Gandhi, Tanika Sarkar, Henri Tiphagne, Major General (Retd.) Sudhir Vombatkere, Teesta Setalvad, Kavita Srivastava and Shabnam Hashmi, among others.

The petition addressed to Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu and his Bihar counterpart Nitish Kumar as well as Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) chief Jayant Chaudhary has been sent to key figures in various political parties.

These also include Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, Communist Party of India (Marxist) general secretary Sitaram Yechury, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) national convener Arvind Kejriwal and several others from across the political spectrum.

The petitioners call for a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) investigation, legal expert consultation and a thorough debate in the Parliament regarding the new criminal laws.

They emphasize the importance of defending the democratic values enshrined in the Constitution and protecting the citizens’ democratic rights.

The petition highlights grave concerns about three new laws — Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023, Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, and Bharatiya Sakshya Adhinyam, 2023 — which were expedited through the Parliament on December 20, 2023, without a debate and are set to take effect on July 1, 2024.

The petitioners argue that these laws are draconian and threaten civil liberties, including the freedom of speech, the right to assembly, the right to associate and the right to demonstrate. According to the petition, these new laws could classify legitimate, non-violent democratic actions as ‘terrorism’.

Furthermore, the petition points out that the new laws introduce a more severe version of sedition laws, termed ‘sedition-plus’.

There is also a potential for politically biased prosecution of ideological and political opponents, which could be significantly broadened under these laws.

The petition also warns that common forms of political protest such as fasting could be criminalized. The new laws encourage the use of force against assemblies of people, further strengthening police power, including criminalizing non-compliance with police directions. Additionally, the use of handcuffing could be expanded, and police custody duration during investigations maximized.

Another concern raised by the petition is that the recording of First Information Reports (FIRs) would be at the discretion of the police. The severity of imprisonment terms could be increased, and all persons, regardless of criminal accusations, could be compelled to provide their biometric data to the government.

The petition also highlighted that certain activities of particular groups could be shielded under these new laws.

The petitioners hope that political leaders will take decisive action to prevent the erosion of democracy and uphold the principles of justice and liberty.

<https://theprint.in/india/3695-citizens-sign-petition-urging-political-leaders-to-prevent-implementation-of-new-criminal-laws/2138344/>