

From Director's Desk

Bulldozer Raj, let loose:

Silencing Dissent & Challenging Rule of Law

Molesting the rights of children during inhuman evictions at Chennai

More than 100 families near the Buckingham Canal including Govidasamy Nagar, in Raja Annamalai Puram of Chennai were evicted from their dwellings and their houses bulldozed beginning on 29th April 2022.

The eviction happened when children were preparing for their annual exams in schools. The eviction violated the United Nations Basic Principles and Guidelines on Development-based Evictions and Displacement, which stipulate that evictions must not violate rights of children and must not be carried out before or during school examinations. Moreover, the inadequate availability of schools in resettlement sites like Perumbakkam affected the children and violated the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act.

Eighty eight percent of the evictions done by Tamilnadu Government between 2015 and 2020 happened during the academic year. In the absence of any social impact assessments prior to eviction, the government did not have adequate information on the children residing in the locality.

The government could opt for eviction of people residing in government land only when *in situ* rehabilitation was not possible. Even in case of evictions, alternative housing should be provided within 5 km and not in far away places; in this case the alternate accommodation given by the officials was 30-50 kilometre away from this area.

The settlement (Govindasamy Nagar) is listed in the list of "unobjectionable slums" as per the Pre-Feasibility Study for Identification of Environmental Infrastructure Requirement in Slums in Chennai Metropolitan Area, Final Report - Chennai Corporation Area, September 2005, prepared by Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board (now renamed as Tamil Nadu Urban Habitat Development Board – TNUHDB) and Tamil Nadu Urban Infrastructure Financial Services; yet, eviction has been done because of pressure from a corporate real estate builder. The government needs a clear policy framework for regularisation of settlements in unobjectionable governmental land.

Social activist MedhaPatkar, on Monday 24th May 2022, met the residents of Govindasamy Nagar in RA Puram,

who were forcefully evicted from their homes near the Buckingham canal; she said that bulldozers are being used as a weapon to oppress ordinary people.

The destruction of the residence of Javed Mohammed, Welfare Party of India: against the Rule of Law

The flattening of houses related to protesters in Uttar Pradesh is nothing but revenge and collective punishment targeted at Muslims. The complete demolition of the residence of Javed Mohammed, Welfare Party of India activist and father of activist Afreen Fatima in Prayagraj, shortly after he was identified by the police as an alleged conspirator behind the violence during a protest, adequately demonstrates this. The legality attached to the claim that the action by the Prayagraj Development Authority was to clear an illegal building has been weakened by the fact that the notice of demolition was addressed to Mr. Mohammed, and not to his wife, who owns the property. Bulldozers in UP under the Yogi regime were used to silence the minority religious group who protest or oppose against their Hindutva agenda.

In an yet another vulgar display of silencing dissent, activist Teesta Setalvad and former IPS officer RB Sreekumar were arrested by Gujarat Police for following up a case against Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his alleged role in the Gujarat's communal violence of 2002. The Gujarat police has arrested Mr. Sreekumar from Gandhinagar and Ms. Setalvad from Mumbai within a day of the Supreme Court dismissing a petition against a lower court's refusal to file a case against Mr. Modi for his alleged role in the violence.

Democracy, Justice, equality, fraternity are no more the concerns of the rule of Law. The only law is to bulldoze anything and arrest anyone who stood for constitutional values.

Those who have power, money, police, judiciary, arms and support Hindutva religion, Sanathana dharma were treated as human beings and those who toil for justice, equity and democracy are put behind bars or destroyed with bulldozers in public. It is time to reclaim the values of freedom, brotherhood and equality. Let's join hands to save 'Truth that liberates'.

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