

CCG OPEN LETTER TO CITIZENS OF INDIA
CIVIL SOCIETY: ENEMY OF THE STATE?

28 November 2021

Dear fellow citizens,

We are a group of former civil servants of the All India and Central Services who have worked with the Central and State Governments in the course of our careers. As a group, we have no affiliation with any political party but believe in impartiality, neutrality and commitment to the Constitution of India.

A disturbing trend in the direction of the country's governance has become discernible over the past few years. The foundational values of our republic and the cherished norms of governance, which we had taken as immutable, have been under the relentless assault of an arrogant, majoritarian state. The sacrosanct principles of secularism and human rights have come to acquire a pejorative sense. Civil society activists striving to defend these principles are subjected to arrest and indefinite detention under draconian laws that blot our statute book. The establishment does its best to discredit them as anti-national and foreign agents.

Civil society, a diverse mass of formal and informal groups pursuing their own interests, occupies the vast democratic space outside of government and business. As the locus of critique, contestation and negotiation, it is an important stakeholder in governance, as well as a force multiplier and partner in the project of meeting popular aspirations. But civil society is viewed through an adversarial prism today. Any entity, which dares to highlight deviations from the norms of Constitutional conduct, or question the arbitrary exercise of executive authority, runs the risk of being projected as a foreign agent and enemy of the people. At a systemic level, the financial viability of civil society organisations is being progressively undermined by tweaking the legal framework governing foreign contributions, deployment of corporate social responsibility funds and income tax exemptions.

Our anxiety with regard to the articulation of the state-civil society interface has been heightened in recent weeks by statements emanating from high dignitaries of the state. On the occasion of the Foundation Day of the National Human Rights Commission, its Chair, Justice (retd.) Arun Mishra, asserted that India's creditable record on human rights was being tarnished at the behest of international forces. The Prime Minister, on his part, discerned a political agenda in what he felt was selective perception of human rights violation in certain incidents,

while overlooking certain others. And quite shockingly, General Bipin Rawat, Chief of Defence Staff, gave a fillip to the growing menace of vigilantism by endorsing the killing of persons believed to be terrorists by lynch mobs in Kashmir.

Taken together, these portents indicate a deliberate strategy to deny civil society the space and wherewithal for its operation. The contours of this strategy have now been revealed in the New Doval Doctrine propounded by the National Security Adviser (NSA).

Reviewing the passing out parade of IPS probationers at the National Police Academy in Hyderabad, Shri Ajit Doval proclaimed:

“The new frontiers of war, what you call the fourth- generation warfare, is the civil society. Wars have ceased to become an effective instrument for achieving political or military objectives. They are too expensive and unaffordable and, at the same time, there is uncertainty about their outcome. But it is the civil society that can be subverted, that can be suborned, that can be divided, that can be manipulated to hurt the interests of a nation. You are there to see that they stand fully protected.”

Instead of exhorting the IPS probationers to abide by the values enshrined in the Constitution to which they had sworn allegiance, the NSA stressed the primacy of the representatives of the people, and the laws framed by them.

It would be pertinent to recall here that the term “fourth-generation warfare” is normally employed in relation to a conflict where the state is fighting non-state actors, such as terror groups and insurgents. Civil society now finds itself placed in this company. Earlier, the term “Urban Naxal” was being used to denigrate individual human rights activists. Clearly, under the New Doval Doctrine, people like Father Stan Swamy would become the arch enemy of the Indian state and the prime concern and target of its security forces.

The NSA’s clarion call for an onslaught on a demonised civil society is of a piece with the narrative of hate targeting defenders of Constitutional values and human rights that is regularly purveyed by the high and mighty in the establishment.

The defining traits of the current dispensation are hubris and an utter disregard of democratic norms. These were manifest in the steamrolling of a discriminatory Citizenship

(Amendment) Act through Parliament, its linkage with the National Register of Citizens, and the ruthless suppression of the spontaneous protests that erupted in various parts of the country.

The same traits were in evidence in the enactment of a set of three farm laws without public debate, stakeholder consultations or endorsement by alliance partners, and the high-handed treatment accorded to the agitated farmers encamped at the gates of Delhi. Their heroic resistance over fourteen months elicited the choicest of epithets from the establishment. Dubbed variously as “Andolanjeevis” (professional agitators), “Left-wing extremists” and “Khalistanis”, they were accused of working at the behest of “Foreign Destructive Ideology”, in a bizarre word-play with the acronym FDI referring to Foreign Direct Investment. Electoral compulsions might have led the Prime Minister to announce the decision to repeal the hated laws, but the damage done to the nation’s polity and social fabric will be hard to repair.

Let us hope that the government will realize the pitfalls of demonising dissent and trying to suppress civil resistance by brute force. It is also hoped that the alumni of the National Police Academy, or indeed our security forces in general, will not be swayed by the NSA’s rhetoric and remember that their primary duty is to uphold Constitutional values, which override the will of the political executive. Even the laws framed by the legislatures have to be tested on the touchstone of constitutionality and accepted by the people. If this fundamental principle is not accepted, we may turn to the well-known satirical poem “The Solution”, written in a different context by the famous German playwright Bertolt Brecht, which concludes with the following words:

*Would it not in that case be simpler
for the government
To dissolve the people
And elect another?*

SATYAMEVA JAYATE

(102 signatories, at pages 4-8 below)

1.	Anita Agnihotri	IAS (Retd.)	Former Secretary, Department of Social Justice Empowerment, GoI
2.	Salahuddin Ahmad	IAS (Retd.)	Former Chief Secretary, Govt. of Rajasthan
3.	S.P. Ambrose	IAS (Retd.)	Former Additional Secretary, Ministry of Shipping & Transport, GoI
4.	Anand Arni	RAS (Retd.)	Former Special Secretary, Cabinet Secretariat, GoI
5.	Vappala Balachandran	IPS (Retd.)	Former Special Secretary, Cabinet Secretariat, GoI
6.	Gopalan Balagopal	IAS (Retd.)	Former Special Secretary, Govt. of West Bengal
7.	Chandrashekhar Balakrishnan	IAS (Retd.)	Former Secretary, Coal, GoI
8.	T.K. Banerji	IAS (Retd.)	Former Member, Union Public Service Commission
9.	Sharad Behar	IAS (Retd.)	Former Chief Secretary, Govt. of Madhya Pradesh
10.	Aurobindo Behera	IAS (Retd.)	Former Member, Board of Revenue, Govt. of Odisha
11.	Madhu Bhaduri	IFS (Retd.)	Former Ambassador to Portugal
12.	Meeran C Borwankar	IPS (Retd.)	Former DGP, Bureau of Police Research and Development, GoI
13.	Ravi Budhiraja	IAS (Retd.)	Former Chairman, Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust, GoI
14.	Sundar Burra	IAS (Retd.)	Former Secretary, Govt. of Maharashtra
15.	R. Chandramohan	IAS (Retd.)	Former Principal Secretary, Transport and Urban Development, Govt. of NCT of Delhi
16.	Rachel Chatterjee	IAS (Retd.)	Former Special Chief Secretary, Agriculture, Govt. of Andhra Pradesh
17.	Kalyani Chaudhuri	IAS (Retd.)	Former Additional Chief Secretary, Govt. of West Bengal
18.	Gurjit Singh Cheema	IAS (Retd.)	Former Financial Commissioner (Revenue), Govt. of Punjab
19.	F.T.R. Colaso	IPS (Retd.)	Former Director General of Police, Govt. of Karnataka & former Director General of Police, Govt. of Jammu & Kashmir
20.	Anna Dani	IAS (Retd.)	Former Additional Chief Secretary, Govt. of Maharashtra
21.	Surjit K. Das	IAS (Retd.)	Former Chief Secretary, Govt. of Uttarakhand
22.	Vibha Puri Das	IAS (Retd.)	Former Secretary, Ministry of Tribal Affairs, GoI

23.	P.R. Dasgupta	IAS (Retd.)	Former Chairman, Food Corporation of India, GoI
24.	Pradeep K. Deb	IAS (Retd.)	Former Secretary, Deptt. Of Sports, GoI
25.	Nitin Desai		Former Chief Economic Adviser, Ministry of Finance, GoI
26.	M.G. Devasahayam	IAS (Retd.)	Former Secretary, Govt. of Haryana
27.	Sushil Dubey	IFS (Retd.)	Former Ambassador to Sweden
28.	A.S. Dulat	IPS (Retd.)	Former OSD on Kashmir, Prime Minister's Office, GoI
29.	K.P. Fabian	IFS (Retd.)	Former Ambassador to Italy
30.	Prabhu Ghate	IAS (Retd.)	Former Addl. Director General, Department of Tourism, GoI
31.	Gourisankar Ghosh	IAS (Retd.)	Former Mission Director, National Drinking Water Mission, GoI
32.	Suresh K. Goel	IFS (Retd.)	Former Director General, Indian Council of Cultural Relations, GoI
33.	S. Gopal	IPS (Retd.)	Former Special Secretary, GoI
34.	S.K. Guha	IAS (Retd.)	Former Joint Secretary, Department of Women & Child Development, GoI
35.	H.S. Gujral	IFoS (Retd.)	Former Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, Govt. of Punjab
36.	Meena Gupta	IAS (Retd.)	Former Secretary, Ministry of Environment & Forests, GoI
37.	Ravi Vira Gupta	IAS (Retd.)	Former Deputy Governor, Reserve Bank of India
38.	Wajahat Habibullah	IAS (Retd.)	Former Secretary, GoI and former Chief Information Commissioner
39.	Deepa Hari	IRS (Resigned)	
40.	Sajjad Hassan	IAS (Retd.)	Former Commissioner (Planning), Govt. of Manipur
41.	Kamal Jaswal	IAS (Retd.)	Former Secretary, Department of Information Technology, GoI
42.	Brijesh Kumar	IAS (Retd.)	Former Secretary, Department of Information Technology, GoI
43.	Ish Kumar	IPS (Retd.)	Former DGP (Vigilance & Enforcement), Govt. of Telangana and former Special Rapporteur, National Human Rights Commission

44.	Sudhir Kumar	IAS (Retd.)	Former Member, Central Administrative Tribunal
45.	Subodh Lal	IPoS (Resigned)	Former Deputy Director General, Ministry of Communications, GoI
46.	Harsh Mander	IAS (Retd.)	Govt. of Madhya Pradesh
47.	Amitabh Mathur	IPS (Retd.)	Former Special Secretary, Cabinet Secretariat, GoI
48.	L.L. Mehrotra	IFS (Retd.)	Former Special Envoy to the Prime Minister and former Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs, GoI
49.	Aditi Mehta	IAS (Retd.)	Former Additional Chief Secretary, Govt. of Rajasthan
50.	Shivshankar Menon	IFS (Retd.)	Former Foreign Secretary and Former National Security Adviser
51.	Sonalini Mirchandani	IFS (Resigned)	GoI
52.	Malay Mishra	IFS (Retd.)	Former Ambassador to Hungary
53.	Sunil Mitra	IAS (Retd.)	Former Secretary, Ministry of Finance, GoI
54.	Noor Mohammad	IAS (Retd.)	Former Secretary, National Disaster Management Authority, GoI
55.	Avinash Mohananev	IPS (Retd.)	Former Director General of Police, Govt. of Sikkim
56.	Satya Narayan Mohanty	IAS (Retd.)	Former Secretary General, National Human Rights Commission
57.	Deb Mukharji	IFS (Retd.)	Former High Commissioner to Bangladesh and former Ambassador to Nepal
58.	Shiv Shankar Mukherjee	IFS (Retd.)	Former High Commissioner to the United Kingdom
59.	Gautam Mukhopadhaya	IFS (Retd.)	Former Ambassador to Myanmar
60.	Pranab S. Mukhopadhyay	IAS (Retd.)	Former Director, Institute of Port Management, GoI
61.	Nagalsamy	IA&AS (Retd.)	Former Principal Accountant General, Tamil Nadu & Kerala
62.	Sobha Nambisan	IAS (Retd.)	Former Principal Secretary (Planning), Govt. of Karnataka
63.	P.A. Nazareth	IFS (Retd.)	Former Ambassador to Egypt and Mexico
64.	P. Joy Oommen	IAS (Retd.)	Former Chief Secretary, Govt. of Chhattisgarh

65.	Amitabha Pande	IAS (Retd.)	Former Secretary, Inter-State Council, GoI
66.	Mira Pande	IAS (Retd.)	Former State Election Commissioner, West Bengal
67.	Maxwell Pereira	IPS (Retd.)	Former Joint Commissioner of Police, Delhi
68.	Alok Perti	IAS (Retd.)	Former Secretary, Ministry of Coal, GoI
69.	R. Poornalingam	IAS (Retd.)	Former Secretary, Ministry of Textiles, GoI
70.	Rajesh Prasad	IFS (Retd.)	Former Ambassador to the Netherlands
71.	R.M. Premkumar	IAS (Retd.)	Former Chief Secretary, Govt. of Maharashtra
72.	N.K. Raghupathy	IAS (Retd.)	Former Chairman, Staff Selection Commission, GoI
73.	V.P. Raja	IAS (Retd.)	Former Chairman, Maharashtra Electricity Regulatory Commission
74.	K. Sujatha Rao	IAS (Retd.)	Former Health Secretary, GoI
75.	M.Y. Rao	IAS (Retd.)	
76.	Prasadranjan Ray	IAS (Retd.)	Former Chairperson, West Bengal Electricity Regulatory Commission
77.	Satwant Reddy	IAS (Retd.)	Former Secretary, Chemicals and Petrochemicals, GoI
78.	Vijaya Latha Reddy	IFS (Retd.)	Former Deputy National Security Adviser, GoI
79.	Julio Ribeiro	IPS (Retd.)	Former Adviser to Governor of Punjab & former Ambassador to Romania
80.	Aruna Roy	IAS (Resigned)	
81.	Manabendra N. Roy	IAS (Retd.)	Former Additional Chief Secretary, Govt. of West Bengal
82.	A.K. Samanta	IPS (Retd.)	Former Director General of Police (Intelligence), Govt. of West Bengal
83.	Deepak Sanan	IAS (Retd.)	Former Principal Adviser (AR) to Chief Minister, Govt. of Himachal Pradesh
84.	G. Sankaran	IC&CES (Retd.)	Former President, Customs, Excise and Gold (Control) Appellate Tribunal
85.	S. Satyabhama	IAS (Retd.)	Former Chairperson, National Seeds Corporation, GoI
86.	N.C. Saxena	IAS (Retd.)	Former Secretary, Planning Commission, GoI

87.	A. Selvaraj	IRS (Retd.)	Former Chief Commissioner, Income Tax, Chennai, GoI
88.	Ardhendu Sen	IAS (Retd.)	Former Chief Secretary, Govt. of West Bengal
89.	Abhijit Sengupta	IAS (Retd.)	Former Secretary, Ministry of Culture, GoI
90.	Aftab Seth	IFS (Retd.)	Former Ambassador to Japan
91.	Ashok Kumar Sharma	IFoS (Retd.)	Former MD, State Forest Development Corporation, Govt. of Gujarat
92.	Ashok Kumar Sharma	IFS (Retd.)	Former Ambassador to Finland and Estonia
93.	Navrekha Sharma	IFS (Retd.)	Former Ambassador to Indonesia
94.	Raju Sharma	IAS (Retd.)	Former Member, Board of Revenue, Govt. of Uttar Pradesh
95.	Tara Ajai Singh	IAS (Retd.)	Former Additional Chief Secretary, Govt. of Karnataka
96.	Tirlochan Singh	IAS (Retd.)	Former Secretary, National Commission for Minorities, GoI
97.	Parveen Talha	IRS (Retd.)	Former Member, Union Public Service Commission
98.	P.S.S. Thomas	IAS (Retd.)	Former Secretary General, National Human Rights Commission
99.	Hindal Tyabji	IAS (Retd.)	Former Chief Secretary rank, Govt. of Jammu & Kashmir
100.	Ashok Vajpeyi	IAS (Retd.)	Former Chairman, Lalit Kala Akademi
101.	Ramani Venkatesan	IAS (Retd.)	Former Director General, YASHADA, Govt. of Maharashtra
102.	Rudi Warjri	IFS (Retd.)	Former Ambassador to Colombia, Ecuador and Costa Rica