

CCG Open letter to Union Home Minister on fomenting of communal unrest in Uttarakhand

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To

Shri Amit Shah,

Hon'ble Home Minister of India

Honourable Home Minister of India,

As you probably know, we, the members of the Constitutional Conduct Group of former civil servants, have frequently expressed our views on the systematic erosion in recent years of constitutional values in public policy, governance and politics. This erosion has been most evident in the way the authorities have dealt with situations of communal conflict. More often than not, the conduct of several governments has led to communal hostility and violence with the involvement of those elements in society that sustain themselves ideologically on the politics of majoritarian hate, exclusion and division. The rise of such elements has been particularly noticeable in Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and Rajasthan.

2. Today we write to you to express our alarm regarding recent developments in the state of Uttarakhand, a sensitive border state long known for its traditions of peace, harmony and environmental activism and which, until a few years ago, had never displayed even the faintest hint of majoritarian aggression and belligerence. In fact, given its long history of being a sanctuary for spiritual and philosophical pursuits of diverse faiths and traditions, the coexistence of different communities and their close relationship with one another was seen as normal and natural.
3. The wilful injection of communal poison into the body politic of Uttarakhand in recent years has been part of a systematic attempt to create new nurseries of hate which can

change the syncretic, pluralistic and peaceful character of the region and make it into a breeding ground for an aggressive, militarised and bigoted version of Hindutva, permanently engaged in deepening the cleavage between communities. It is an attempt to force the minorities to live in a state of permanent fear and come to accept a premise that they are subordinate to the dominant Hindu majority. The plan seems to be to make Uttarakhand a template for similar strategies to be employed elsewhere in the country, in all places that have so far resisted such majoritarian aggression.

4. A pattern is beginning to emerge in Uttarakhand which has very ominous portends:

- On September 10, 2024, a hate speech was made in the Dehradun Press Club claiming that a “dharma sansad” will be organised in December 2024. It may be recalled that a “dharma sansad” was organized in Haridwar in December 2021, in which a series of genocidal speeches demanded the mass killings and mass rape of Indian Muslims. The call for another “dharma sansad” has now been made by many of the same individuals and Hindus have been asked to arm themselves and treat members of the minority community as “enemies of humanity”.
- The announcement on September 10, 2024 was made against the background of a series of carefully organised incidents of hate inspired violence in the state. Since August 12, 2024, hate speeches and violent attacks have occurred in Chauras (near Kirti Nagar), Dehradun, Srinagar, Berinag, Uttarkashi, Karnaprayag, Nandnagar (Chamoli), Tharali (Chamoli), Tilwada, Gauchar (Chamoli), Sonprayag, Haldwani and several other locations in the state. Properties have been damaged and, reportedly, minority families have been forced to flee from their Boards have been put up banning business by Muslim and non-Hindu vendors. A small handful of individuals and organisations – including those involved in the 2021 “dharma sansad” – are responsible for the majority of these incidents. (As per our information, these are just five individuals and two organisations, viz. Bajrang Dal and Rashtriya Seva Sangathan).
- There are ongoing calls for “mahapanchayats” to be held, which are used as a means to stoke communal violence and demand the economic boycott and expulsion of Muslim residents. We are informed that those who instigated the violence in Uttarkashi on October 24, 2024 have announced that they are going to call a mahapanchayat on November 4, 2024.
- In the vast majority of incidents, past and present, those responsible for false inflammatory allegations of “love jihad”, hate speech or property destruction have not even been detained.^[1] Even where a few arrests were made, most of those have been given bail including the notorious repeat offender and the main organiser of the 2021 event – Yati Narsinghanand.
- When on bail, the accused flagrantly violate their bail conditions with the police remaining completely unconcerned. No attempts are made to cancel their bail.
- In a particularly disturbing incident on September 27, 2024, the Dehradun police detained a repeat offender for being implicated in a violent communal clash that resulted in damage to trains as well as several private vehicles. However, his supporters were then permitted to block the main intersection of the city, call for a bandh in the main bazaar, deliver hate speeches openly and hold a celebratory parade after the main offender was “freed”.
- On September 19, 2024, 53 women’s and civil society groups from 18 states wrote an open letter to the Uttarakhand Governor condemning the manner in which women’s safety was being endangered, and complained of the police being partisan. They noted that while some members of the minority community have been physically attacked and publicly blamed for crimes against women, in the case of people close to the ruling party who are the real perpetrators of such violence, the police have gone slow, tried to weaken the case against them and have even attempted to pressurise the victims to withdraw their complaints.

5. We applaud the fact that some district officials and police officers have adopted an even-handed approach, registered suo motu FIRs, and on some occasions prevented large scale violence from spreading. But these attempts have been sporadic and insufficient in the face of a larger concerted attempt to raise the communal temperature, with the authorities either being complicit, or apathetic and ineffective. We have raised this concern with the state government thrice since June 2023, but we see no change in the overall pattern.
6. Against this sombre backdrop, we have reason to fear that if this ongoing campaign is not stopped, and if the proposed “dharma sansad” is permitted, this sensitive border state may spiral into a vicious cycle of organised violence with serious implications not just for internal peace and public order but for national security.
7. We therefore request your urgent intervention to ensure that:

– communally charged events such as the proposed mahapanchayat in Uttarkashi on November 4, 2024 and the proposed “dharma sansad” in December 2024 are not permitted; action should be taken against those attempting to use such events to foment hate and incite violence.

– The Uttarakhand police should be asked why they have failed to seek cancellation of bail in cases of violation of bail conditions, by Yati Narsinghanand and others. In fact, we feel Yati Narsinghanand should be arrested under the National Security Act for his attempts to disrupt public order.

– The Uttarakhand police should be asked to take strict action against all incidents of violence and hate speech, as per the law, the directions of the Supreme Court, and constitutional propriety.

8. We reiterate that we, as a group, have no affiliation with any political party or group and that our request is motivated entirely by our concern that a State known for its traditions of peace, tranquillity and civic harmony should not degenerate into becoming yet another arena for communal conflict and public disorder to serve narrow political and sectarian ends.

SATYAMEVA JAYATE

Yours faithfully,

Constitutional Conduct Group (101 signatories, as at pages 4-7 below)

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27.	Pradeep K. Deb	IAS (Retd.)	Former Secretary, Deptt. Of Sports, GoI
28.	Nitin Desai		Former Chief Economic Adviser, Ministry of Finance, GoI
29.	M.G. Devasahayam	IAS (Retd.)	Former Secretary, Govt. of Haryana
30.	Kiran Dhingra	IAS (Retd.)	Former Secretary, Ministry of Textiles, GoI
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42.	Kamal Jaswal	IAS (Retd.)	Former Secretary, Department of Information Technology, GoI
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46.	Sudhir Kumar	IAS (Retd.)	Former Member, Central Administrative Tribunal
47.	Subodh Lal	IPoS (Resigned)	Former Deputy Director General, Ministry of Communications, GoI
48.	Sandip Madan	IAS (Resigned)	Former Secretary, Himachal Pradesh Public Service Commission
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