

TOLERANCE DEFICIT: ON 'TOOLKIT CONSPIRACY' CASE

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Rights Issues - Human Rights and NHRC

The police in India, and especially forces under the present regime, have a dubious record of effecting needless arrests and filing [questionable cases as a tool of harassment](#). The Delhi Police have outdone all of them by [arresting a 22-year-old climate activist](#) in a case that makes the incredible allegation that a social media [toolkit for organisers of protests](#) against the farm laws amounted to sedition and incitement to riots. The manner in which a Delhi Police team travelled to Bengaluru and took Disha Ravi into custody, apparently without following the guidelines laid down by the Delhi High Court on inter-State arrests, marks a new low in the display of perversity and high-handedness in law enforcement. Even though Ms. Ravi was produced before a duty magistrate in Delhi within the mandatory 24-hour period, there is no indication whether the Delhi Police informed the local police and if she was properly represented by counsel. It appears that the main charge against her is that she edited a Google document shared among activists, including global climate change icon Greta Thunberg. The toolkit, the prosecution alleges, was prepared by a pro-Khalistani outfit, and based on this, it was concluded that Ms. Ravi was working with separatists to create disaffection against India. It is quite strange that none in the Delhi Police deemed this far-fetched. Such [toolkits are common for those organising protests](#) online, and they contain not much more than calls for protests, texts to be tweeted, hashtags to be used, and names of authorities and public functionaries whose handles can be tagged. The possible fact that direct protests were also discussed and planned does not mean there was any incitement to violence, a mandatory requirement to charge someone, as has been done in the case of Ms. Ravi, with sedition.

There is little doubt now that it is not organised protests, online or offline activism in support of the ongoing farmers' protests against the controversial agricultural laws, or the mobilisation of public opinion against government policy, that is adversely affecting the country's reputation and prestige. The regime is more likely to attract international embarrassment and opprobrium by the indiscriminate use of police power against activists, protesters and the media. The state is increasingly resorting to heavy-handed responses to issues that attract a convergence of activism, opposition political activity and adverse media scrutiny. In particular, the farmers' protests, and the violent turn that it took on Republic Day due to some deviant elements, have led the present regime to imagine a global conspiracy where none exists. A government truly worried about its global image would instead seek to address the deficit in tolerance and surfeit in repression that are becoming more obvious with each passing day.

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