

SDPI ESCAPES GOVT. ACTION, SAYS IT IS AN INDEPENDENT AND SECULAR ORGANISATION

Relevant for: Indian Polity | Topic: Elections, Election Commission and the Electoral Reforms in India Incl. Political Parties

Up in arms:SDPI activists taking part in a protest march at Palakkad in Kerala, in this file photo.K.K. MUSTAFAHMUSTAFAH KK

The Union Home Ministry on Wednesday banned the Popular Front of India (PFI) and its associates for five years, but the Social Democratic Party of India (SDPI), which was known as the PFI's political arm, has escaped the ban. An SDPI functionary said it was an independent organisation and not connected to the PFI.

A senior government official said since the SDPI was a recognised political party, any action would have to be initiated by the Election Commission of India (EC). The Home Ministry did not respond to calls from *The Hindu* .

The SDPI was formed on June 21, 2009 in Delhi. It was registered with the ECI on April 13, 2010. In contrast, the PFI and its associate organisations are registered under the Societies of Registration Act, 1860.

Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar and Election Commissioner Anup Chandra Pandey did not respond to requests for comment.

As part of its ongoing drive against parties that had not contested elections for six years, the EC had de-listed or declared as inactive 537 parties since May.

However, the EC does not have the power to deregister parties under the Representation of the People Act, 1951 — a power it has sought many times by writing to the Law Ministry.

A senior EC official said action would have been taken against the SDPI had it been named as an affiliate of PFI, but it wasn't named as on Wednesday, making it unlikely to face any action at the moment.

Condemns PFI ban

Though the SDPI has distanced itself from the PFI, it issued a statement on Wednesday condemning the ban. The party said in a statement that the “decision of the Union BJP government banning PFI and its associate organisations is a direct blow on democracy and the rights of people enshrined in Indian Constitution”.

SDPI's national general secretary Elyas Thumbe told *The Hindu* that the statement was issued as the Ministry's action was undemocratic and the PFI was an organisation that worked to uplift and empower minorities.

He said the SDPI was a “secular organisation as it has members from all communities” and so far the party had not received any query from the ECI or any probe agency.

He said the SDPI had elected members in municipal corporations and gram panchayats in Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka and West

Bengal.

Asked about the government's charge that the SDPI activists were involved in criminal activities, Mr. Thumbe said, "Terror accused Pragya Singh Thakur is an elected member of Lok Sabha. There are thousands of members in a political party and the party is not responsible for the criminal activities of its members. Around 43% members in Lok Sabha have criminal record, why Congress and BJP are not blamed?"

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