



Arrest of Activist in India Sparks Outrage and Fuels Concerns Regarding the Modi Government's Continued Attempts to Suppress Dissent

One of India's leading climate activists was arrested by the government over her alleged role in inciting violence during the recent protests in the country. Disha Ravi, a 22-year-old climate change advocate, was charged with sedition for sharing a toolkit outlining methods of support for ongoing farmers' protests in India. The toolkit is a publicly available online document that provides a list of ways supporters of the protests can help. Ravi is alleged to be one of the original authors and disseminators of the document, a charge which she denies. The Indian government has also intentionally misconstrued the document as a way for miscreants to create trouble, which led to the steep charge of sedition being leveled against her. Ravi's detention has raised more concerns regarding human rights in India, where the Modi government already faces strong criticism over their treatment of ethnic and religious minorities.

At the heart of Disha Ravi's arrest is the ongoing protest movement in India. Millions of farmers are protesting several new agriculture laws recently passed by the Modi government. The laws aim to deregulate farming in India, and make the sector more market-driven. The government argues that the deregulation will boost economic growth and increase production. However, farmers are concerned over the lack of protection given to small-scale farmers, fearing that large corporations will dominate the sector without government regulation. Previously, the government set a minimum price for which buyers could purchase products from farmers. Under the new laws, this minimum price point will be abolished. As a result, farmers are concerned over corporations driving down market prices and running small scale farmers out of business. India's Supreme Court recently suspended the implementation of the laws due to the uproar against them, and nine rounds of negotiations between farmers' unions and the government have ended at an impasse.

The toolkit that Disha Ravi was arrested over has gained international notoriety after several high-profile people posted on social media in support of it. Most notably, Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg tweeted a link to the toolkit which originally brought its existence to the attention of police in India's capital. India's right-wing nationalist government has conflated international support of the protests with outsiders seeking to destabilize the country by interfering with its internal affairs. Several activists including Ravi have been arrested and charged with sedition over sharing the document. Indian police have also alleged that the toolkit contains links to websites supporting a Sikh independence movement, which would undermine the lawfully affected government, according to a statement from a Delhi police official. Ravi is charged with being an original author of the toolkit, a charge which she denies. She told a court in Delhi that she edited two lines of the document, but was not the original creator.

International observers have expressed concern over Ravi's arrest as it relates to a larger trend in India of the Modi government stifling dissent. Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party have intentionally misconstrued any criticism of his government as anti-India sentiment led by antagonistic outside actors. Modi has also drawn condemnation from many human rights groups and the international community for his government's recent legislation that disenfranchises religious minorities. Critics argue that democracy in India is slowly being eroded by Prime Minister Modi and his policies. The stifling of dissent as it relates to Disha Ravi is only the latest example of this.