

# Police in India arrest hundreds in bid to suppress mounting worker unrest

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The ongoing industrial uprising of tens of thousands of workers in the manufacturing belt that surrounds Delhi, India's capital and largest urban area, is being met with mounting state repression. Acting at the behest of the BJP—the Hindu supremacist party that holds power nationally, in Delhi, and in the neighbouring states of Uttar Pradesh and Haryana—police have arrested hundreds of workers protesting poverty wages and brutal working conditions, as well as scores of activists who have supported them.

Over 400 workers have been arrested in the National Capital Region (NCR), since the worker rebellion began on April 10. Police are now casting a wider net to capture and arrest young labour and political activists who have shown solidarity with the worker protests by publicizing their plight and resistance via social media and by giving speeches at various strike locations. The police have falsely claimed that these activists are the principal cause of the worker unrest, labelling them instigators. In a transparent smear, the authorities have also suggested some of them may be in cahoots with India's arch-rival Pakistan.

The police started systematically targeting the activists after the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh (UP), the Hindu fascist Yogi Adityanath, called the workers' protests an "organized conspiracy" to "disrupt peace and progress at a time when the state is moving steadily towards development and stability."

On April 18, Aditya Anand, a young labour activist was arrested at a railway station in the city of Tiruchirappalli in the southern state of Tamil Nadu by teams of UP police who had travelled about 2,500 km (1,500 miles) to capture him. They had placed a reward of Rs. 100,000 for his arrest. Despite holding a bachelor's degree in engineering, Aditya is unemployed.

The UP police are fanning out across the country to arrest political activists simply for being present at the

workers' demonstrations. So far, they have reportedly arrested at least 63 people across the country, not including the hundreds of workers who have been thrown in jail.

The police have described Aditya Anand as the "mastermind" behind the violence that occurred on Monday, April 13, in the Noida township, about 25 km from New Delhi, the site of India's parliament buildings. What the police and the Indian corporate media have termed "violence" took place after the police mounted a frontal assault on the workers, mercilessly beating them with batons and dragging detained workers through the streets. After this assault, the workers defended themselves by throwing stones and firecrackers at the police and by overturning police vehicles. Some other vehicles were set on fire by unknown persons.

Anand has been charged with various criminal offences, including inciting violence and damaging public property. The police have also served him with a non-bailable arrest warrant endorsed by a local court. Prior to Anand's arrest two persons police have labelled his accomplices—Manisha Chauhan and Rupresh Rai—were also arrested. The day after Anand's arrest, police arrested two more individuals: Himanshu Thakur in New Delhi and Satyam Verma in the UP city of Lucknow. What is common to all of them is that they are activists in a labour advocacy group named *Mazdoor Bigul* (Workers' Bugle). Their only "sin" has been to document and publicize the misery of these oppressed workers through social media and to appear at their demonstrations.

After Anand's arrest, Noida Police Commissioner Laxmi Singh sensationally told the press that "the violence that occurred in Noida was a mala fide, internationally organised activity." The Police Commissioner provided no evidence to support this claim. She simply repeated an allegation first propagated by

Chief Minister Adityanath that there may be a “Pak connection,” referring to Pakistan, behind the workers’ uprising.

Continuing her remarks, Police Commissioner Singh said: “The names of Manisha Chauhan, Rupesh Rai, and Aditya Anand have surfaced in connection with inciting the violence. Rupesh has been continuously travelling across the country since 2018, and Aditya since 2020; wherever any agitation takes place, they are present there. Rupesh Roy identifies himself as an auto-rickshaw driver, while Aditya is unemployed.” The Noida Police Commissioner further accused the three of delivering “inflammatory speeches, thereby inciting the workers.”

In contrast to these sensationalist and highly prejudicial claims, Aditya’s aghast brother, Akash Anand, told the *Indian Express*: “He was simply demanding a fair wage for labourers, is that so wrong?” He continued: “He always had a humanistic approach to everyone. We even have video evidence of Aditya pleading with workers to protest in a peaceful manner, but no one is ready to listen to us.”

Aditya Anand has now reportedly “confessed to his role in the crime.” This suggests that the police have used beatings and/or torture to extract a confession from him. India’s police are notorious for abusing detainees and using forced confessions to railroad poor people and government opponents to lengthy prison terms.

Lawyers for some of those arrested have called the detentions completely illegal, arguing that the police have violated the most basic procedures of law. Defence lawyer Kabir Gupta, who represents Aditya Anand, told the *Times of India*: “The arrests are illegal because they were carried out without following due procedure under law. Unless the grounds of arrest are disclosed and our client is served with an arrest memo, the arrests cannot be called legal.”

The plight of the hundreds of arrested workers is, if anything, even more dire. The court is demanding their families post a draconian bail of Rs. 20,000 for their release. Devi, the wife of imprisoned worker Anand Kumar Ram who has been falsely booked for murder, rioting and assault, made an arduous journey of over 1,000 km (600 miles) by night train from the eastern state of Bihar. She told the press that her husband was called by Human Resources at the factory where he works and then taken to a garden area where the police were waiting for him. She asked despondently: “How can we raise Rs. 20,000 (\$215) when my husband makes only Rs. 11,000 per month (\$118).”

The Indian ruling class has a long history of criminalising workers’ struggles. One of the most notorious cases was the frame-up and victimisation of the entire leadership of the Maruti Suzuki Workers Union (MSW), a newly formed independent union that led a series of militant job actions in 2011-12. Following a company-provoked altercation and mysterious July 2012 fire at Maruti Suzuki’s Manesar, Haryana, plant, thirteen MSWU leaders were framed up on murder charges. After five years in prison and a bogus trial in which the judge deliberately mangled the law, the thirteen were sentenced to life in prison. Although the 11 surviving MSWU leaders are currently out on bail pending the court’s ruling on their appeal, they remain under threat of re-imprisonment and continue to suffer from their terrible ordeal.

The draconian measures being utilized by the authorities to suppress worker opposition flow from their determination to reassure domestic and foreign capital that India will guarantee them ever expanding profits under conditions of growing global economic turbulence, further compounded by Trump’s tariffs and now the criminal US-Israeli war on Iran. While the attack on the Noida workers has been led by the BJP, opposition-led state governments have similarly unleashed the police on protesting workers and routinely invoke essential services laws to break strikes. Many are also now implementing the “Labour Codes” introduced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his BJP government to gut even minimal statutory protections for the already highly exploited Indian working class.

The *World Socialist Web Site* condemns the arrests, imprisonment and ongoing prosecution of the Noida workers and labour activists. These actions are aimed at suppressing worker resistance and silencing left-wing opposition, above all that which seeks to support working class struggles. Workers, youth and socialist-minded professionals in India and around the world must strongly denounce and publicize this outrage and demand the immediate release of these class war prisoners.



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