



# PEOPLE'S UNION FOR CIVIL LIBERTIES

## Maharashtra State Unit

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### **PUCL MAHARASHTRA STATEMENT ON THE MULTIPLE MURDERS BY RPF CONSTABLE CHETAN SINGH OF HIS SUPERIOR OFFICER AND THREE MUSLIM PASSENGERS WHILE ON DUTY ONBOARD THE JAIPUR-MUMBAI CENTRAL EXPRESS ON JULY 31, 2023**

#### **Alarm bells must set off in the country on the hate killings by RPF constable Chetan Singh!**

PUCL Maharashtra is shocked by the ghastly hate killings by RPF constable Chetan Singh of his superior officer RPF Assistant Sub-Inspector Tika Ram Meena and three Muslim passengers Abdul Qadir bhai Mohammed Hussain Bhanpurwala, Asgar Abbas Ali and Sayed Saifullah, onboard the Jaipur-Mumbai Central Express on July 31, 2023. Increasing hate propaganda is hurtling the Indian society down such a dangerous path, where even a police officer from Railway Protection Force (RPF) is influenced enough by communal hate to carry out killings of Muslim men, identifying them by clothes and beards, inside a train.

In a chilling case that has shaken the public consciousness, RPF constable Chetan Singh, 33 years old, shot dead his superior RPF Assistant Sub-Inspector Tika Ram Meena (58), from Sawai Madhavpur, Rajasthan and three passengers - Abdul Qadir bhai Mohammed Hussain Bhanpurwala (64) from Nalasopara in Palghar, Asgar Abbas Ali (48) from Madhubani Bihar, and Sayed Saifullah (43) from Hyderabad, using his automatic weapon, while on duty, on the Jaipur-Mumbai Central Express on July 31, 2023 around 5 a.m.<sup>1,2</sup> All the three Muslim passengers had typical beards clearly identifying their religion. RPF constable Chetan Singh went to different coaches, B5, B2, PC, S-6 looking for Muslim victims and killing them. He walked from B5 (where he killed Mr. Meena and Mr. Bhanpurwala) to B2 compartment and asked Mr. Saifulla his name. As soon as he gave his name, he was taken at gunpoint by RPF consable Singh to the pantry car and shot. Thereafter he travelled to compartment S8 and S7 without hurting anyone. In S6 compartment, he shot dead Mr. Asghar Abbas Ali. RPF constable Singh, who was on escort duty, fired 12 rounds from his automatic service rifle and was finally nabbed when he was trying to flee along with his automatic service rifle.

In a video shot by a fellow passenger (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C7cCczN-IDQ>), the shooter Chetan Singh can be seen holding his gun and delivering an Islamophobic rant, inter alia saying "... Pakistan se operate hue ye, aur media yehi coverage dikha rahi hai, unko sab pata chal raha hai ye kya kar rahe hain... Agar vote dena hai, agar Hindustan mein rehna hai to mai kehta hoon Modi aur Yogi, ye do hain." (*"they operate from Pakistan, and media is showing this. They all know, what they are doing. If you want to vote, if you want to stay in India, then I am telling you only two are there, Modi and Yogi"*). The video clearly indicates his deep hate and motivation to murder the Muslim victims and the role that propaganda spread through media has had in influencing and instigating his hate sentiments and heinous actions.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/jaipur-mumbai-train-shooting-8870583/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/rpf-man-held-for-killing-4th-victim-a-hyderabad-resident-mla-says-identified-by-religion-8872120/>

While an FIR was registered under section 302 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), sections 3, 25, 27 of the Arms Act and sections 151, 152, 153 of Railway Act, it is shocking that both the FIR and remand order did not make mention of the video referred to above and his selective killing of Muslim passengers.<sup>3</sup> They also did not include the offences attracted on account of his hate speech and action. It has been reported that during the remand hearing before the Borivali Court on August 1, 2023 where the accused RPF officer Chetan Singh was produced and remanded to police custody until August 7, 2023, the prosecution while asking for remand shockingly stated that the accused was mentally unfit<sup>4</sup>. Meanwhile, the Railway had released a press statement on August 2, 2023 that no mental ailment was detected in the last periodic medical examination of the RPF constable Chetan Singh, only to mysteriously withdraw it later.<sup>5</sup> However, it was subsequently reported that having confirmed the authenticity of the video, the Government Railway Police (GRP) would be adding the offence of promoting hate and enmity, being section 153A of the IPC, when the accused is produced for the remand hearing on August 7, 2023<sup>6</sup>. In the latest reports out today, this appears to have been done and the accused has been remanded to police custody until August 11, 2023<sup>7</sup>.

The Indian Express news report states that as per Western Railway RPF records, the accused RPF constable Singh had against him complaints of “insubordination” while he was posted in Ujjain over five years ago and that his colleagues had complained of misbehaviour and indiscipline. It is also reported that at the time of the crime no inquiry was pending against him. In any case, the complaints against him in no manner support the narrative sought to be created that he is mentally unstable and if anything, shows his preexisting disposition to misbehaviour. Infact, his superiors continued to trust him with his weapon, which clearly indicates that he was expected to be acting in full thinking capacity.

The actions of the accused RPF constable Singh appear to be calculated and motivated by his hate for Muslims, as he specifically searched for and selected Muslim victims for the cold-blooded execution and not the other non-Muslim passengers, and also conveyed his motivations through his hate tirade captured on video. It was hence completely shocking to read reports that the prosecution made a statement at the remand hearing that the accused was mentally unstable without any basis rather than prosecuting this as a hate crime. This would amount to a subversion of law, as hate is a known motive in many cases of grave crimes such as murder. It is entirely mischievous to even suggest that harbouring hate is akin to mental instability. Any attempt to do this would constitute an abuse of the process of law and would set a dangerous precedent. Moreover, it would deny accountability and justice to the families of the victims of this ghastly crime, which must be ensured at all costs.

This extremely terrifying incident of multiple hate killings by a public official entrusted with the security of citizens, while on duty, raises critical questions. The most important one being the extent of the influence that the unchecked communal hate propaganda has had on the minds of the public, including police officers who are entrusted with the serious responsibility of maintaining law and order in the country. So much so that even accused RPF constable Chetan Singh got influenced by the hate propaganda against Muslims to such an extent that he handpicked and killed completely innocent persons from the Muslim community, only because of their religion. The current situation in Manipur

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<sup>3</sup> <https://thewire.in/law/police-focuses-on-rpf-constables-mental-illness-erases-mention-of-possible-hate-crime-from-fir>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/mumbai/rpf-constable-chetan-singh-accused-of-killing-four-remanded-in-police-custody-till-aug-7/article67145481.ece>

<sup>5</sup> <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/jaipur-mumbai-train-shooting-railways-withdraws-statement-mental-condition-accused-rpf-constable-8873695/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/mumbai/rpf-cop-to-face-charge-of-communal-discord-too/articleshow/102435292.cms?from=mdr>

<sup>7</sup> <https://m.economictimes.com/news/india/train-firing-accused-rpf-constables-police-custody-extended-till-aug-11/articleshow/102496471.cms>

where multiple reports are emerging of the complicity of the police, including where police officers allegedly led the women victims of sexual assault to the mobs<sup>8</sup>, is another indication of the danger faced by the Nation in terms of communal influence operating amongst the police and security forces. Incidents such as this have also been reported in cases in other parts of the country, with allegations of the police standing spectator to mob lynchings, protecting perpetrators indulging in communal violence and also harassing families of victims in cases of hate crimes. While it is not surprising that the police and security forces get influenced by the overall communal atmosphere in the country it becomes alarming because they are the ones who are bearers of arms and in charge of maintaining public order.

This crime has a dire implication for Maharashtra. Since November 2022, Maharashtra, like several other states in the country, has witnessed rallies and public demonstrations organized by extremist Hinduvta groups filled with hateful, provocative and inciteful speeches against minorities, using false propaganda and communal narratives, and calling for economic boycott and violence against Muslims. Several civil society groups including PUCL Maharashtra<sup>9</sup> have issued letters to the Director General of Police, Maharashtra and concerned Commissioners / Superintendents of Police to take preventive action against hate speech at the rallies and also prosecute the offenders. Numerous complaints have also been filed at the jurisdictional police stations for hate speech offences committed at these events. However, the perpetrators have not been arrested till date and groups/individuals repeatedly indulging in hate speech are allowed to continue holding events and spread the hatred. The Supreme Court of India has also passed orders from time to time to curb the menace of hate speech including orders dated 13<sup>th</sup> January 2023, 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2023 and 28<sup>th</sup> April 2023<sup>10</sup>, however the inciteful hate speech and communal propaganda have been allowed to continue. It is no coincidence that the increasing incidents of mob lynchings and hate crimes against Muslims, communal violence during festivals and on other communally charged subjects, is preceded and incited by an atmosphere of hate created by the uncurbed hate speech and communal propaganda.

PUCL Maharashtra is greatly aggrieved and concerned at the communal hate being spread against minorities at breakneck speed in the state of Maharashtra and in particular, this instant case of multiple hate killing. Maharashtra is a state which prides in its secular culture and unity in diversity, foregrounded throughout its history and politics. It is the land of social reformers and political leaders such as the Father of Indian Constitution - Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Mahatma Phule, Savitribai Phule, Fatima bi who strived tirelessly for our most prized constitutional values of equality and non-discrimination. It is imperative that urgent steps are taken to stop the communal hate and violence, ensure accountability against offenders, deliver justice to the victims and spread the message of communal harmony and unity to restore peace and public order in the state.

### **PUCL Maharashtra, hence, demands that:**

1. A court monitored Special Investigation Team (SIT) / independent investigating agency be appointed to investigate the case of multiple hate killings by RPF constable Chetan Singh of his superior officer RPF Assistant Sub-Inspector Tika Ram Meena and three Muslim passengers - Abdul Qadir bhai Mohammed Hussain Bhanpurwala, Asgar Abbas Ali and Sayed Saifullah, onboard the Jaipur-Mumbai Central Express on July 31, 2023. Timely reports of investigation be submitted to the court to ensure that the case is investigated fairly, thoroughly and without any external influence, also considering that the accused is a police officer.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/manipur-sexual-assault-mob-video-women-police-8849995/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/mumbai/what-action-has-been-taken-on-hate-speech-incidents-pucl-asks-maharashtra-dgp/article66826928.ece>

<sup>10</sup> <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/act-swiftly-against-hate-speech-or-face-contempt-supreme-court-tells-states/articleshow/99854337.cms?from=mdr>

2. Ensure that all evidence is collected impartially and included in the case against the accused, including the video taken by the fellow passenger of accused RPF constable Chetan Singh delivering the hate tirade and other such video and other evidence, witness testimonies etc. It must be ensured that the case is prosecuted properly and effectively, leading the best evidence against the accused.
3. The investigation must also look into what kind of hate propaganda the accused Chetan Singh was exposed to, whether he was part of any organization which promotes hatred based on religious identities and if he attended any such meetings. His social media accounts, media he followed / subscribed, need to be looked at to identify the sources of influence.
4. Sections 153A, 153B, 295A and 505 of IPC should be applied in this case.
5. The case must be tried on day-to-day basis, without any delay and be given the utmost priority.
6. Protection must be provided to the witnesses and safety of the families of the victims must be ensured.
7. Proper compensation should be paid and measures taken for livelihood support to families of victims by the Railways and government authorities.
8. Government authorities both at the Centre and in all the states act swiftly to prevent and stop the spread of hate speech and communal propaganda at all costs! Investigate and prosecute the incidences of communal hate speech made at the rallies and public events in Maharashtra and take all measures to ensure that such incidents do not occur in the future. Arrest the known perpetrators immediately. Ensure strict implementation of the Supreme Court orders dated 13<sup>th</sup> January 2023, 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2023 and 28<sup>th</sup> April 2023 in letter and spirit.
9. In light of the communal atmosphere prevailing in the State, the authorities must put in place mechanisms to ensure periodic checks on the biases, prejudices and hate among police and security forces, including the RPF. It must be ascertained if any other personnel are similarly exposed to hate propaganda and if so, immediate action must be taken to remove them from their charge to ensure such an incident does not take place again. The RPF must take steps to prevent hate crimes and to maintain the safety of the passengers.
10. There should be regular sessions held by police and security forces, including the RPF, to sensitize its officers on the values of equality, non-discrimination, secularism, unity and fraternity enshrined in the Indian Constitution, emphasizing on the plural and secular nature of Indian society and their duty as public officials to uphold Indian constitution.

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