

Statement (India) : On Wrestlers' Agitation

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The politics of the BJP and the entire Sangh Parivar has always been deeply mired in rape culture. And as protests go down, as rape of target groups is normalized, it expands.

The sad and tragic days are here where even the sportspersons getting glory for India are not spared of sexual assault. The harassment in the case of wrestlers was done by none other than the president of Wrestling Federation of India, Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, who is also an MP from BJP.

A national wrestling camp was being organized in Lucknow in January'2023 from where the news emerged that female wrestlers were getting assaulted and felt unsafe by the President of WFI. Thus began the struggle for getting justice for the survivors in January'2023, when top wrestlers of the country Bajrang Punia, Vinesh Phogat, and Sakshi Malik started protesting against the WFI president Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh. As many as 8 separate incidents of assault have been registered against him. Since this year Olympic qualifiers are supposed to happen, the Sports minister, Anurag Thakur and Indian Olympic Association (IOA) chief, PT Usha assured the protestors that prompt action will be taken. For that the sports minister formulated 4 member oversight committee to deliver a report in 4 weeks. Of course, no investigation happened and no report came out.

Tired of the inaction, wrestlers took to streets on 23 April' 2023. They are currently protesting at Jantar Mantar, Delhi. Supported by the renowned wrestlers, members of WFI and IOA, the protest is on against Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh. One wrestler alleged the WFI chief tried to grope her and touch her inappropriately when she was called to the office on two separate days. While he touched her thighs and shoulder on the first day, on her next visit two days later, Brij Bhushan touched her breast and stomach, saying he wanted to check her breathing pattern. Another wrestler alleged, Brij Bhushan lifted her training jersey without her consent and proceeded to touch her breast and stomach on the pretext of checking her breathing pattern.

Brij Bhushain is a self-confessed murderer, who has also slapped a wrestler on stage and who was involved in demolition of Babri Masjid.

Tragically, no complaint was registered against the President of WFI till the time Supreme Court intervened. On the orders of the Supreme Court two FIRs against Brij Bhushan Singh and 1 FIR against Assistant Secretary of WFI, Vinod Tomar. The first FIR again Brij Bhushan pertains to the allegations by a minor, registered under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act. The second one is on the detailed investigations made by adult complainants and includes relevant sections of IPC relating to outraging of modesty. According to Delhi Police, they have formulated an SIT under female DCP.

The connivance of Delhi Police, the national government and Brij Bhushan is appalling, as nothing has yielded any results and all proceedings are postponed to 27th May'2023. No statement from the government, no sign of support from the prime minister or home minister for the wrestlers is at best outrageous.

To add to the woes of the protestors, the area of Jantar Mantar has been water logged, so that protestors are not able to sit, let alone sleep. There are reports of female protestors being groped by male police personnel and there is a van stationed at the site to record all activities of the protestors capturing videos, which is in direct violation of their privacy.

The situation threatens to undo the country's recent gains in promoting professional sports opportunities for women - such as the lucrative WPL cricket tournament and a newly announced professional football league — revealing an ugly underbelly where athletes have no voice and no access to a complaint mechanism.

We stand in solidarity with the survivors and the protestors. We demand stringent punishment again Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh. We also demand dismantling of system of having political heads of sport organizations.

Punish the perpetrators !

Respect Women !

Overthrow this authoritarian, misogynistic government !

Rise in Rage against Fascism and Rape Culture

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