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NATION


Bharat Bandh: Dalits, Adivasis protest against SC's sub-classification verdict

The nationwide agitation has widespread participation from various groups, with major disruptions reported from Bihar, Odisha and Rajasthan

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Procession in Jharkhand, part of the Dalit and Adviasi Bangla Bandh demonstrations of 21 August

 NH Political Bureau
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A wave of protests swept across India on Wednesday, 21 August, leading to a nationwide Bharat Bandh, as 21 organisations, supported by the INDIA bloc parties and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) chief Mayawati, took to the streets.

They object to the Supreme Court of India's recent ruling that permits the sub-classification of Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) based on varying levels of backwardness. The ruling has sparked fears among Dalit and Adivasi communities about the potential dilution of their constitutional rights.

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The Bandh witnessed widespread participation from various groups and organisations across different states, with major disruptions reported in Bihar, Odisha and Rajasthan, among others.

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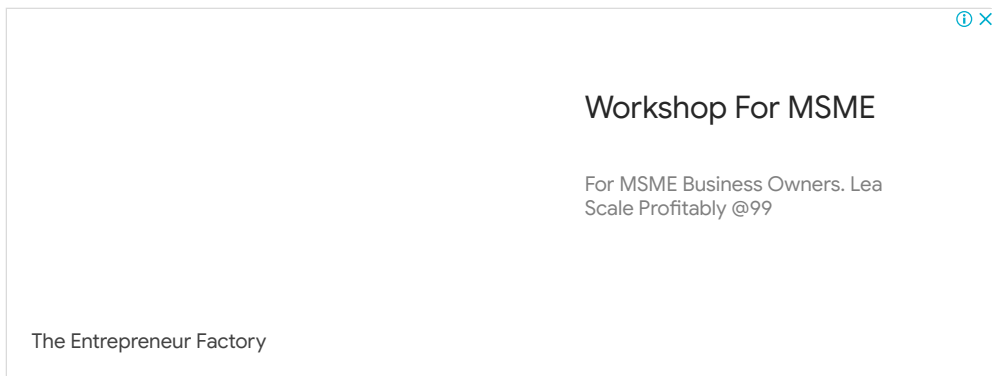
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In Bihar, where the ruling BJP–JDU alliance is already under pressure following the verdict, the situation escalated, with police resorting to a lathi charge on protesters.

Visuals shared by news agency ANI showed members of the Reservation Bachao Sangharsh Samiti blocking National Highway 83 in Jehanabad and demonstrating in Patna. The protests quickly spread to other parts of the state, bringing normal life to a halt. An SDM who ordered the lathi charge himself ended up being hit by the police in Patna.



In Odisha, visuals from OTV highlighted the disruption of rail services at Bhubaneswar railway station, where protesters blocked tracks, affecting long-distance trains.



In Uttar Pradesh, the Bandh was observed in various cities, including Agra, where Dalit activists led by the district unit of the BSP raised the BSP flag atop government buildings, signalling their defiance of the Supreme Court ruling. Azad Samaj Party chief Chandrasekhar Azad also took to the streets in support of the Bandh.

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BSP chief Mayawati had already pledged her support for the movement. Today, BSP activists have joined the protest in large numbers, various media reports suggest.

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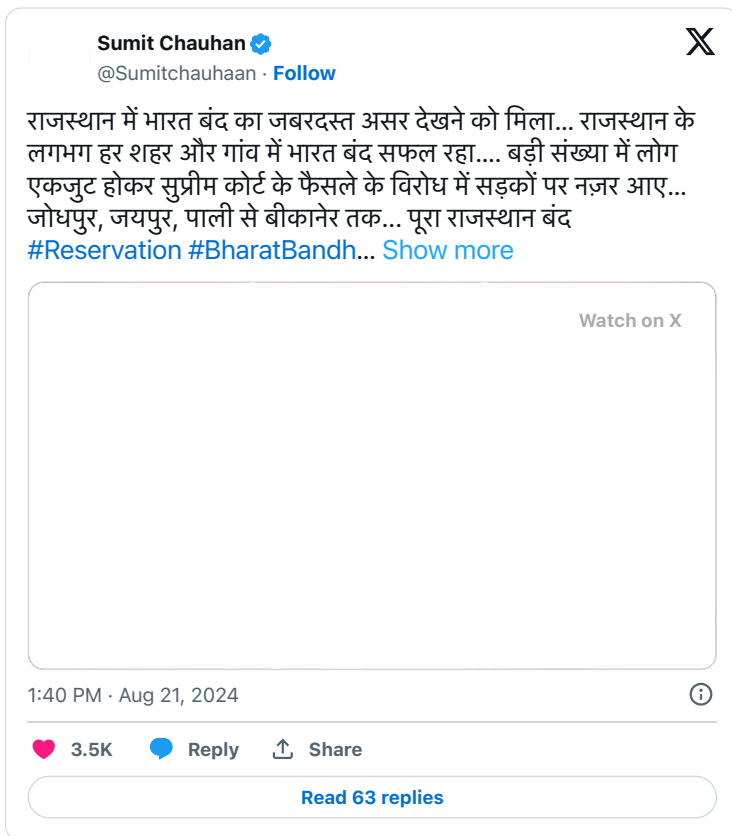
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Similarly, in Jaipur, large numbers of the SC/ST communities came out to demonstrate against what the judicial decision.



The Supreme Court's ruling, which aims to facilitate targeted protections for the most disadvantaged groups within the SC/ST categories through fixing sub-quotas, has been met with mixed reactions.

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While the judgement is seen, by some, as a step towards equitable distribution of reservation benefits, it has also raised concerns among Dalit and Adivasi leaders.

The National Confederation of Dalit and Adivasi Organisations (NACDAOR) has voiced strong opposition, arguing that the ruling threatens to fragment the unity among the SC/ST communities.

The organisation has demanded that the Modi government should enact a new law safeguarding the reservation rights of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) by including them in the Ninth Schedule of the Constitution, thereby making it immune to judicial scrutiny.

It is noteworthy that the Bharat Bandh led by SC/ST groups received significant support from opposition leaders.

Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav, in a post on X, backed the protests and called them a 'positive effort' to protect reservation rights. 'This movement will instil new consciousness among the exploited and deprived and will serve as a shield against any tampering with reservation,' Yadav wrote, emphasising that peaceful protest is a democratic right.

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Yadav also echoed the warnings of Dr B.R. Ambedkar, the principal architect of the Indian Constitution, stating that the public must rise to defend their rights when those in power attempt to undermine the Constitution.

Akhilesh Yadav

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^ minister Jayant Singh Chaudhary, however, downplayed the unrest, saying, "The Supreme Court has made its comments, and the law minister has already clarified the government's stance in Parliament. The Cabinet has also expressed its opinion, so there's nothing left to discuss."

However, political observers believe that despite the heavy police presence and government assurances, the protests have underscored the deep-seated anxieties

within the marginalised communities about the potential erosion of their hard-won rights.

As the nation grapples with the implications of the Supreme Court's ruling, today's Bharat Bandh also serves as a potent reminder of the enduring significance of reservation policies in India. The widespread participation and support for the Bandh reflect the strong sentiments within the SC/ST communities and their determination to protect their constitutional rights.

With the ruling BJP on the back foot and opposition parties rallying around the cause, the coming weeks are likely to see further political maneuvering and possibly more protests, as the debate over sub-classification and reservation intensifies.

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