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Politicians, activists express anguish over Stan Swamy's death, slam Centre for apathy towards the activist

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Published: July 05, 2021 08:51 PM IST

Stan Swamy, 84, an accused in the Elgar Parishad-Maoist links case, died at a Mumbai hospital on Monday afternoon. He was waiting for interim bail on medical grounds in the case.

Topic | India

New Delhi: Activists on Monday expressed anguish over the death of Jesuit priest and tribal rights activist Stan Swamy and demanded that the government fix accountability for this "custodial murder".

Swamy, 84, an accused in the Elgar Parishad-Maoist links case, died at a Mumbai hospital on Monday afternoon. He was waiting for interim bail on medical grounds in the case.

The Elgar Parishad case is related to alleged inflammatory speeches made by some activists at a conclave held in Pune on December 31, 2017, which, the police claim, triggered violence the next day near the Koregaon-Bhima war memorial located on the outskirts of the western Maharashtra city.

The police have claimed the conclave was organised by people with alleged Maoist links.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi expressed condolences on Monday over

the death of Father Stan Swamy and said he deserved justice and humaneness.

"Heartfelt condolences on the passing of Father Stan Swamy. He deserved justice and humaneness," he wrote on Twitter.

PDP president Mehbooba Mufti on Monday expressed shock over the death of the 84-year-old tribal, saying a "ruthless and callous government deprived him of dignity and has blood on its hands.

Deeply disturbed by the passing away of 84 year old tribal activist Stan Swamy. A ruthless & callous government that deprived him of dignity even while he was alive has blood on its hands. Absolutely shocked & appalled. May his soul rest in peace," Mehbooba wrote on Twitter.

Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren in a tweet alleged that the Central Government should be held accountable for the absolute apathy towards Stan Swamy saying he was shocked to learn of the priests demise.

"Shocked to learn about the demise of Father Stan Swamy. He dedicated his life working for tribal rights. I had strongly opposed his arrest & incarceration. The Union government should be answerable for absolute apathy and non provision of timely medical services, leading to his death," Soren said in a tweet.

Stan Swamy had worked for about three decades among tribals in Jharkhand.

Ranchi Catholic Archdiocese expressing grief over Swamy's death said the "caged parrot" now sings in Heaven.

"We are deeply grieved to learn of the death of Father Stan Swamy, a champion of tribal rights, a fighter for justice and a symbol of courage. The fact that this sick man suffering with Parkinson disease was arrested at the age of 84, refused bail for over 7 months, not even allowed a sipper and finally contracted COVID in jail itself is a sad reflection on those who got the innocent man arrested and the courts that refused to give him bail," said the Archdiocese.

Cutting across party lines, leaders in Kerala on Monday condoled the death of human rights activist Stan Swamy, an accused in the Elgar Parishad-Maoist links case, with Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan sayingsuch "travesty of justice should have no place in our democracy."

Apart from Vijayan, Minister K Rajan, Assembly Speaker M B Rajesh, former Chief Minister Oommen Chandy and former leader of the Opposition Ramesh Chennithala were among those who condoled the demise of Swamy.

"Deeply saddened by the passing of Fr.Stan Swamy.

Unjustifiable that a man who fought all through his life for our society's most downtrodden had to die in custody.

Such travesty of justice should have no place in our democracy. Heartfelt condolences!," Vijayan tweeted.

Chandy said Swamy would remain a "painful memory" in the conscience

of India, the largest democracy in the world.

"Stan Swamy was the victim of state terrorism and today is a black day for Indian democracy. He was someone who had fought for the rights of tribals till his last breath," Chennithala said in a statement.

Chennithala also alleged that the government failed to provide treatment for Swamy.

Kerala Catholic Bishops' Coouncil (KCBC) condoled the demise of Swamy and said he used to work for the welfare of the tribal community in Jharkhand.

"We express our deepest condolences over the demise of Stan Swamy. He was someone who fought relentlessly for the rights of the tribal community and the marginalised sections of society," Rajesh said in a statement.

Kavita Krishnan, a member of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) politburo, tweeted, "It is not Father Stan we mourn for... We condole the death of the judicial process, Constitution in India today".

"It's over. Modi and Shah have accomplished the custodial killing of the gentle Jesuit social worker Fr Stan Swamy, who spent his life serving the oppressed. I hope the judges who denied him bail never get to sleep at night: they have blood on their hands," she said in another tweet.

Social activist Harsh Mander called Swamy's death a tragedy for the nation.

"Devoted to selfless defence of Adivasi rights. Gentle, brave, even from prison he grieved not for himself but injustice to poor prisoners. A cruel state jailed him to silence his voice, the judiciary did nothing to secure his freedom. A tragedy for the nation," he said.

Anti-graft crusader and RTI activist Anjali Bhardwaj termed Swamy's death an "institutional murder".

"With UAPA, the process is the punishment. The death of 84-year-old Father Stan Swamy should be recognised for what it is - institutional murder. RIP Father Stan," she tweeted.

Rights activist Shabnam Hashmi spoke in the same vein.

"#StanSwamy passes away. Fr. Stan Swamy passes away as undertrial in state custody under fake charges under UAPA, NIA, sedition. This is not death, this is custodial murder. Government has to be held accountable," she tweeted.

Karwan-e-Mohabbat, a people's campaign devoted to equality, freedom and justice said, "Father Stan Swamy has died. He is now free. The state that inflicted cruelties on this brave, noble soul has murder on its hands".

The National Platform for the Rights of the Disabled (NPRD) also expressed profound grief and anguish over Swamy's death.

"A Jesuit priest and activist who worked tirelessly for the marginalised, the 'adivasis', in remote areas of Jharkhand, Stan was jailed on trumped-up charges. Eighty-four-year-old Stan Swamy had, apart from other

ailments, been afflicted with Parkinson's, a disabling condition," the NPRD said in a statement.

"The ruthless and brutal manner in which he was treated is evident," it said.

The NPRD alleged that Swamy was denied treatment and medication. It said a campaign had to be launched to ensure that he was provided with something as basic as a sipper, which was so essential for him for the intake of liquids, it added.

Tribal Army, a rights group, said the only crime Swamy committed was that he stood with the oppressed tribal people of the country.

(With PTI inputs)

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