

Statement of Concern and Support for Students Agitating for Accountability in the Education System

By Vikalp Sangam General Assembly* on 19 July, 2026

Vikalp Sangam (Alternative Confluence) General Assembly consisting of over 90 organisations and networks across India, join our voices with all concerned citizens demanding accountability from the government for severe mishandling of several competitive examinations. We recognize that the students currently protesting peacefully at Jantar Mantar are exercising their fundamental right to protest and seek accountability from the government. We also express dismay at the fact that the government has not been forthcoming in either holding a dialogue with the students or taking responsibility for its mistakes. We unequivocally condemn the forceful manner in which fasting Sonam Wangchuk was removed from the protest site and taken to a hospital against his will.

It is now publicly and widely known that the intensely competitive NEET-UG 2026 exam, in which more than 20 lakh students had appeared in May, was cancelled due to the paper leaking, forcing students to re-take the exam. The pressure of the exam and the uncertainty about their future drove many students - at least 12 as per independent media analysis - to die by suicide. This is a collective and systemic failure for which the government needs to take moral, legal and constitutional responsibility and course correct. This was followed by another mishap related to marking in board exams conducted by the CBSE, which further added to the anxieties of students. Allegations of corruption in award of tender for the same also surfaced which require a thorough and impartial investigation.

We are also deeply concerned by the deteriorating health of educator Sonam Wangchuk and the many students who are on indefinite hunger strike in support of the demand for accountability from the government for more than two weeks now. Hunger strike is a legitimate and Gandhian method of peaceful protest in a democracy, and we are disappointed that there has been no attempt from the government to engage with the fasting protestors, heed their demands and take appropriate action, including providing them necessary medical support. We add that providing any medical support to fasting protestors doesn't include forceful feeding or attempts to detain or remove them from the protest site, as was attempted on the morning of 18 July.

In 2018, former professor of IIT Kanpur and Gandhian activist G.D. Agarwal died after fasting for 111 days demanding that the revered river Ganga be saved and revived. It is painfully ironic that Gandhian methods of peaceful protest like hunger strike, instrumental in our freedom struggle, and inspiration to many other similar struggles across the world, now fail to move a democratically elected government, which took an oath to uphold the principles of the Constitution.

Therefore, in solidarity with the protesting students, we demand that:

- the government must refrain from taking any coercive and extra-judicial actions against peaceful protestors particularly in light of the call for a peaceful march to Parliament on 20 July, and desist from any further intimidation and eviction following July 18th's actions;
- the government must immediately reach out to the protestors, including those on indefinite hunger strike, and hold an honest and earnest dialogue with them;
- the government must undertake an impartial investigation into all substantiated claims of paper leaks and corruption, and take stringent measures to hold accountability, including of the relevant bureaucrats and the Minister of Education Dharmendra Pradhan; and
- the government must initiate a consultative and transparent process for designing wide ranging and comprehensive reforms in our education system, including in the manner in which competitive exams are conducted.

** The Vikalp Sangam General Assembly (VSGA) is the coordinating mechanism for the Vikalp Sangam process (www.vikalpsangam.org), which aims to network movements, organisations and individuals working on alternatives to unsustainable, iniquitous development. Write to info@vikalpsangam.org for further details.*