

Protest Safety Guide — India

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What to Do Before a Protest

Know Your Rights (India-Specific)

 **Current Context (July 2026):** During the July 20 CJP "Chalo Sansad" march, Delhi Police used tear gas, baton charges, and pellet guns against thousands of peaceful protesters. Dozens were injured. A PIL has been filed in the Delhi High Court challenging continuous surveillance of Jantar Mantar protesters. The government agreed to talks on July 24 but the situation remains volatile. **If attending protests in Delhi or other high-risk areas, protective gear is essential.**

- **Article 19(1)(a) & 19(1)(b)** of the Indian Constitution guarantees the right to freedom of speech and peaceful assembly — but these are subject to "reasonable restrictions" under Article 19(2).
- **Section 163 of the BNSS (formerly CrPC Section 144)** allows police to impose prohibitory orders banning assembly of 4+ people. Violating it is a punishable offense. Always check if Section 144/163 is in effect in your protest area.
- **You have the right to remain silent.** Do not answer questions beyond your name and address without a lawyer. Anything you say CAN and WILL be used against you.
- **You have the right to legal representation** under Article 22(1). Demand to speak with a lawyer immediately if detained. Free legal aid is available through the District Legal Services Authority (DLSA).
- **Police cannot search you without reason.** Women must only be searched by female officers (Section 51 of BNSS). Know this right and assert it.
- **If arrested, you must be produced before a magistrate within 24 hours** (Article 22(2)). Note the time of arrest.

Consider Your Arrestability

Before attending any protest, honestly assess:

- Your personal legal history and any pending cases — an arrest can complicate existing matters
- Employment vulnerability — could arrest jeopardize your job, security clearance, or professional license?
- Family obligations — who depends on you? Who will care for them if you are detained?
- Visa status — non-Indian nationals face additional risks including visa revocation and deportation
- Financial readiness — do you have access to bail money? Have you arranged for someone to manage finances if detained?

Know your boundaries and stick to them. The movement needs you to be smart and prepared, not reckless. There are many ways to contribute without putting yourself at the highest risk level.

Find a Buddy

- Never go to a protest alone. Find at least one trusted person to go with.

- Discuss each other's vulnerabilities, comfort levels, and special skills (first aid, legal knowledge, language skills).
- Agree on your risk level and commit to sticking to it together.
- Share live location with your emergency contact — someone NOT at the protest.
- Agree on a meeting point if you get separated. Choose a specific landmark, not a cross-street.

Protect Your Digital Identity

- **Disable biometric unlock** — use a strong PIN or password instead. Police can legally force your fingerprint or face to unlock your phone, but cannot force you to reveal a password (this is still legally contested — use a strong alphanumeric passcode).
- **Turn off location services** on all apps except essential ones. Disable location history in Google/Apple settings.
- **Use Signal for communication** — it offers end-to-end encryption and disappearing messages. Avoid WhatsApp and Telegram for sensitive coordination during protests.
- **Remove sensitive data before attending** — delete old chats, photos, and documents that could be used against you or others. Consider using a burner phone.
- **Never post real-time photos or videos** with identifiable faces or location metadata. Take a screenshot of your photo and post that instead — this strips EXIF metadata.
- **Avoid facial recognition** — wear a mask, cap, and avoid looking directly at CCTV cameras. Tilt your head down when passing known camera locations.
- **Download offline Google Maps** of the area beforehand. Network shutdowns (Section 144 internet suspensions) are common during large protests in India.

Create a Jail Support Plan

- Write the phone number of a lawyer or legal aid group on your arm with a permanent marker.
- Find your local District Legal Services Authority (DLSA) contact — every district in India has one providing free legal aid.
- Memorize at least one emergency contact number. Write it down — don't rely on your phone.
- Designate someone outside the protest who will:
 - Know where you are and when to expect you back
 - Call legal aid if you don't return or check in by the agreed time
 - Have access to bail money if needed

Plan Escape Routes

- Study the area before you go. Know at least 2-3 exits from the protest site in different directions.
- Identify nearby safe spaces: metro stations, hospitals, 24-hour restaurants, places of worship.
- Avoid dead-end streets and narrow gullies — they can become traps if police advance.
- Note the nearest police station, hospital, and public transport stop.

What to Bring to a Protest

Essential Supplies

- **Drinking water — at least 2 liters.** Indian summers demand extra hydration. Dehydration impairs judgment.
- **Energizing snacks** — dry fruits, energy bars, chikki, ORS (oral rehydration salts) packets.
- **Cash in small notes and change** — you may need auto fare, food, or emergency supplies.
- **Photocopy of ID, not the original.** Aadhaar or voter ID photocopy. Never carry original documents unless legally required.
- **Prescription glasses, NOT contact lenses.** Chemical irritants get trapped under contacts. Remove contacts immediately if exposed.
- **Permanent marker** — write emergency contacts, legal aid numbers, and blood type on your arm.
- **Power bank** — keep your phone charged. Network shutdowns are possible, so a full charge matters.
- **Small towel or gamcha** — multi-purpose: wipe sweat, cover face from sun/irritants, use as sling if injured.
- **Easy-access backpack** — keep your hands free at all times. Avoid messenger bags that swing.
- **Ziplock bags** — protect your phone and documents from water cannons and rain.
- **Whistle** — to signal distress or alert others if you need help.

Medical Preparedness

Plan for the possibility of arrest, injury, or medical emergency:

- **Several days of prescription medication** in its original labeled container. Police may confiscate unlabeled pills.
- **Rescue medication** — inhaler, epipen, insulin. Keep accessible, not buried in your bag.
- **Menstrual pads** — no guaranteed access to change tampons if detained. Pads are generally permitted.
- **Basic first aid** — antiseptic wipes, band-aids, gauze, medical tape, small scissors (blunt-tip).
- **ORS packets** — for dehydration and also effective for flushing eyes exposed to chemical irritants.
- **Assistive devices** — cane, hearing aid batteries, glasses repair kit.

Clothing for Anonymity & Protection

- **Plain, solid-color, long-sleeve shirt and full-length pants.** Cover as much skin as possible. Avoid identifiable logos, patterns, or distinctive clothing.
- **Mask or bandana.** N95 masks serve dual purpose — identity protection and some filtration of airborne irritants.
- **Comfortable, closed-toe sports shoes.** You may need to walk, stand, or run for hours. No sandals, no heels.
- **Cap or hat + hoodie.** Cover your head and face from surveillance and direct pepper spray.
- **Sealed change of clothes** in a plastic bag inside your backpack. Change after exposure to tear gas or chemicals to avoid continued skin irritation. Helps evade surveillance after the protest too.

Protective Gear

The more geared up you appear, the more police will single you out. Protect yourself to your own comfort level.

Recent CJP protests (July 2026) saw police using pellet guns — eye protection is no longer optional if

attending high-risk actions.

- **Shatter-resistant goggles — ESSENTIAL.** Look for ANSI Z87+ or IS 5983 impact-rated goggles. Military surplus stores, industrial safety shops, and online retailers carry these. **Regular glasses, sunglasses, and swim goggles will NOT stop pellets** — they can shatter into your eyes on impact, causing worse injury.
- **Face shield or helmet with visor** — motorcycle helmets with full-face visors provide the best protection against pellets, batons, and chemical weapons. Cricket helmets with face guards are a good alternative.
- **Body protection** — thick leather jackets, multiple layers of denim, or a heavy winter coat reduce pellet penetration. A thick hardcover notebook or folded magazine placed inside your clothing over the chest provides improvised ballistic protection.
- **Knee and elbow pads** — protect joints during falls, baton strikes, or if you need to drop to the ground quickly.
- **Face covering** — a bandana soaked in water or diluted baking soda solution (3 tsp per 250ml water) helps filter tear gas particles.
- **Helmet** — cricket helmets, bike helmets, or construction helmets. Motorcycle helmets provide the highest protection plus identity concealment.
- **Heat-resistant gloves** — deployed tear gas canisters are extremely hot. Oven mitts or hairstyling gloves allow you to move them safely.

What to Do During a Protest

Core Principles

- **Follow the organizers' direction.** They have ground intelligence and communication with other groups. Trust their calls.
- **Protect your identity and others'.** Do not photograph faces. Blur or remove identifying details before sharing anything.
- **Stay with your buddy.** If separated, head to your pre-agreed meeting point. Do not wander looking for them.
- **Stay calm.** Your adrenaline will spike. Breathe deliberately. Assess the situation before acting.
- **Take part.** You're there to show up for the cause. Chant, hold a sign, be a body. Every person counts.

If Confronted by Police

- Remain calm and polite. Do not argue, resist physically, or raise your voice.
- Ask clearly: **"Am I being detained?"** and **"Under what section of law?"**
- If not detained, you have the right to leave. Walk away calmly — do not run.
- If detained, state firmly: **"I want to speak to a lawyer."** Then say nothing else. Repeat only this.
- Do not sign anything without a lawyer present.
- If searched, remember: women should only be searched by female officers (BNSS Section 51).
- Police can and will use anything you say. Silence is not an admission of guilt — it is your legal right.

 **Weapons deployed?** If police use tear gas, batons, pellet guns, or water cannons, see the [Protection Against Weapons](#) section below for detailed response and first-aid guidance.

Protect Others

- If you see someone being targeted, document it from a distance. The presence of cameras can moderate police behavior.
- If someone is injured, call for medics. Do not provide care beyond your training.
- Protect the most vulnerable — elderly, disabled, children, pregnant people, and those who face additional marginalization.
- If you see a person of a marginalized community confronting police, physically get between them and the police if it is safe for you to do so.

Locate Support on the Ground

- **Legal observers** — often wear bright-colored vests. They monitor police conduct, document arrests, and coordinate with legal aid networks.
- **Street medics** — volunteers trained in first aid. Look for the universal Red Cross symbol on their clothing, bag, or duct tape.
- **Marshals** — organizers directing crowd movement. Follow their instructions — they have comms with multiple groups.

Protection Against Weapons

Indian police have increasingly deployed tear gas, batons, water cannons, and pellet guns against protesters — including during the July 20, 2026 CJP march in Delhi. This section covers immediate response and first aid for each. **If you are seriously injured, seek professional medical help immediately. This is first-aid guidance only.**

Tear Gas (CS Gas) & Pepper Spray (OC)

Tear gas causes intense burning in the eyes, nose, throat, and skin. Pepper spray (OC) is oil-based and harder to wash off. Both are deployed via canisters that are extremely hot to touch.

- **Move upwind immediately.** Cross perpendicular to the wind direction — do not run with the wind. Get to higher ground if possible (gas settles low).
- **Do NOT rub your eyes or face.** Rubbing spreads the chemical and drives it deeper into your skin and mucous membranes.
- **Flush eyes continuously with clean water or ORS solution** for at least 10–15 minutes. Tilt your head so water runs from the inner corner of the eye outward. Use a squeeze bottle or spray bottle if available.
- **Baking soda solution** (3 teaspoons baking soda per 250ml / 1 cup of cool water) helps neutralize tear gas particles. Pour or spray gently over the face and eyes. Do NOT use salt — salt can worsen chemical burns.
- **Remove contact lenses immediately.** Contacts trap irritants against your cornea. Switch to glasses before attending.
- **Remove contaminated clothing** and seal it in a plastic bag. Cut off clothes rather than pulling them over your head to avoid spreading chemicals to your face.
- **Shower with cool water only.** Hot water opens pores and increases chemical absorption. Wash hair thoroughly — gas particles cling to hair. Use mild, non-oil-based soap.
- **Avoid oil-based products.** No moisturizer, sunscreen, coconut oil, or Vaseline before or during a protest. Oil traps chemicals against your skin.
- **Symptoms to watch:** Persistent coughing, wheezing, chest tightness, blurred vision lasting more than 30 minutes, skin blistering — seek medical attention.
- **Antacid (Maalox) + water mix** (50/50) can be used as an emergency eye flush. This is a field expedient used by street medics internationally. Only use if clean water is unavailable.

Batons (Lathi) & Blunt Force Injuries

Lathi charges remain one of the most common forms of police force used on protesters in India. Impacts can cause welts, bruising, fractures, and in severe cases, internal injury or head trauma.

- **Protect your head first.** Use your arms to shield your skull. A direct blow to the head can be fatal. Wear a helmet if possible.
- **Move away from the line of charge.** Move sideways and back — do not turn your back completely if the charge is ongoing.
- **For red welts and bruising:** Apply a cold compress or ice pack wrapped in cloth for 15–20 minutes at a time. Do not apply ice directly to skin. This reduces swelling and numbs pain.
- **For severe bruising:** Apply Arnica gel or cream (available at Indian pharmacies). Elevate the injured limb above heart level to reduce swelling. Take paracetamol for pain — avoid ibuprofen/aspirin initially as they can worsen bleeding.

- **Check for fractures:** Can you move the limb? Is there visible deformity? Severe pain that worsens with movement? If yes, immobilize the area with a makeshift splint (rolled magazine, folded cardboard, or a sturdy stick wrapped with cloth) and seek immediate medical care.
- **Head injury warning signs:** Dizziness, confusion, vomiting, unequal pupil size, clear fluid from nose or ears, loss of consciousness even briefly — these are medical emergencies. Go to a hospital immediately.
- **Internal injury signs:** Blood in urine, severe abdominal pain, difficulty breathing, swelling that continues to expand — seek emergency care.
- **Do not massage the injured area.** This can worsen deep tissue damage and increase internal bleeding.

Pellet Guns & Rubber Bullets

Pellet guns fire multiple small metal or plastic pellets at high velocity. Delhi Police deployed pellet guns against CJP protesters on July 20, 2026, injuring dozens. Pellets can penetrate skin, embed in tissue, and cause permanent eye damage or blindness. Rubber bullets can cause fractures and internal injuries.

- **Protect your eyes above all else.** Shatter-resistant goggles (ANSI Z87+ rated) are essential. Sunglasses, prescription glasses, and even swim goggles are NOT sufficient against pellets. Pellets can shatter regular glass and plastic lenses into your eyes.
- **If a pellet is embedded in the skin:** Do NOT attempt to remove it yourself. This can cause severe bleeding and infection. Apply gentle pressure around (not on) the wound with clean cloth. Seek medical attention.
- **If a pellet has struck the eye or eye area:** Do NOT apply pressure. Cover the eye gently with a clean cloth or paper cup taped loosely in place. Do not flush with water. Seek emergency ophthalmic care immediately — time is critical for saving vision.
- **For bleeding wounds:** Apply firm, direct pressure with clean cloth or gauze for at least 10 minutes without lifting. If blood soaks through, add more layers on top — do not remove the soaked cloth. Elevate the wound above the heart.
- **For chest or abdominal pellet wounds:** These require immediate hospital care. Keep the person still and warm. Do not give food or water. Call for emergency transport.
- **Infection risk:** Pellet wounds carry high infection risk. Even minor-looking pellet injuries should be cleaned and assessed by a medical professional. Tetanus booster may be needed.
- **Protective measures:** Thick clothing layers, leather jackets, or multiple layers of denim can reduce pellet penetration. Motorcycle helmets with visors provide the best head and face protection. A thick notebook or folded magazine inside clothing over the chest can provide improvised protection.

Water Cannons

- **Protect electronics** — keep your phone in a ziplock bag or waterproof pouch before the protest starts.
- **Link arms** with people around you to avoid being knocked down by the water force. Brace your body low.
- **Water may be contaminated** with irritants or marker dyes. Treat all cannon water as contaminated. Avoid swallowing.
- **Change into dry clothes** at the earliest safe opportunity. Wet clothes increase chemical absorption and can cause hypothermia.
- **After exposure:** Rinse skin with cool water, change clothes, and monitor for chemical irritation symptoms.

What to Do After a Protest

- **Notify your emergency contact** that you are safe. A simple "I'm out, safe" message is enough. Do not share details over unsecured channels.
 - **Change your clothes immediately.** Seal worn clothes in a plastic bag. Shower thoroughly with cool water (hot water opens pores and increases irritant absorption). Wash hair twice.
 - **Do a wellness check.** Examine yourself and your buddy for injuries, chemical exposure symptoms (persistent coughing, skin burns, eye pain, pellet wounds), or signs of shock.
 - **Check for pellet wounds.** Even small entry wounds can hide deep tissue damage. Check your entire body, including areas covered by clothing. Seek medical assessment for any pellet penetration.
 - **Seek medical attention** if you experience persistent respiratory issues, skin burns that worsen, eye pain, delayed symptoms of chemical exposure, or any pellet penetration.
 - **Do NOT post identifiable photos or videos** of other protesters. Ever. If you must share, blur faces, crop identifying features, and strip EXIF metadata.
 - **Debrief with your group.** What went well? What could have been better? Share learnings with organizers to improve future safety.
 - **Check on others from the protest** — especially those who may have been detained. Coordinate with legal aid networks if someone is missing.
 - **Reset your digital security** — re-enable biometric lock if you use it, check for signs of device tampering, and change passwords if you were separated from your phone even briefly.
 - **Take care of your mental health.** Protests are intense. Rest, hydrate, eat. Talk to someone you trust if you're feeling shaken. Secondary trauma is real.
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Protest Roles

Every protest needs many roles to function. You don't need to be at the front line to contribute meaningfully. Find where your skills and comfort level fit best.

Marshal / Organizer

Direct crowd movement, communicate with police and other organizer groups, make tactical decisions. Requires experience, calm under pressure, and clear communication skills.

Street Medic

Provide first aid, eye flushing, and basic medical care. If you have healthcare training (doctor, nurse, pharmacist, physiotherapist), this is one of the most critical roles at any protest.

Documenter / Media

Record events for accountability and evidence. Follow responsible practices: no identifiable faces, strip metadata, verify before sharing. The presence of cameras can moderate police behavior.

Legal Observer

Monitor police conduct, document arrests, note badge numbers and police vehicle plates. Coordinate with legal aid networks to ensure detained protesters have representation.

Supply / Wellness

Distribute water, snacks, ORS, and first aid supplies. Drive people between locations. Move supplies where they're needed. Be the backbone that keeps everyone going.

Runner / Courier

Relay messages between groups when phone networks are jammed or shut down. Carry supplies between zones. Stay alert, move fast, know the area well.

Participant

The most important role. There is strength in numbers. Hold a sign, chant, show up. Be a body for the cause. A protest with 500 people is news. A protest with 50,000 is history.

Legal Resources in India

These are verified legal aid organizations operating across India. Save these contacts before attending any protest.

District Legal Services Authority (DLSA)

Every district in India has a DLSA providing **free legal aid** to those who cannot afford representation. Find your local DLSA office before attending. They can arrange lawyers for detained protesters.

National Legal Services Authority (NALSA)

Toll-free helpline: **15100**. Provides free legal services to eligible persons across India. Coordinates with state and district legal services authorities.

State Human Rights Commission (SHRC)

Each state has an SHRC where complaints can be filed against police misconduct, human rights violations, and custodial violence. File complaints with specific details: date, time, location, officer badge numbers if known.

Supreme Court Legal Services Committee

Provides legal aid for cases before the Supreme Court of India. Contact: 011-23384383. For cases that escalate to the highest court.

National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)

Complaints about human rights violations by public servants can be filed with the NHRC. Online complaint portal available. Toll-free: 14433 (available 24x7 in multiple languages).

State Bar Council Legal Aid Committees

Every State Bar Council has legal aid committees that provide pro bono representation. Contact your state's Bar Council for details on empaneled lawyers.

Write these on your arm before a protest:

- Your lawyer or legal aid contact number
- Local DLSA office number
- NALSA helpline: **15100**
- Your blood type
- Emergency contact number

Tech Tools for Protesters

Your phone is both your most powerful tool and your biggest vulnerability at a protest. These apps and tools help you communicate securely, access information offline, and protect your digital identity when networks are jammed, monitored, or shut down entirely.

Encrypted Communication

- **Signal** — End-to-end encrypted messaging. The gold standard for protest communication. Enable disappearing messages for all protest-related chats. Available on Android, iOS, and desktop. **Download before the protest** — app stores may be throttled during crackdowns.
- **BitChat** — Peer-to-peer Bluetooth messaging. Works entirely without internet or cellular networks. Ideal when authorities shut down mobile data or jam signals. Messages are encrypted and sent directly between nearby devices via Bluetooth. [Download BitChat APK \(Mega.nz mirror\)](#). — keep this APK saved on your phone before attending.
- **Briar** — Peer-to-peer encrypted messaging that works over Bluetooth, Wi-Fi, and Tor. No central servers. Works even if the internet is completely down. Available on Android.
- **Bridgefy** — Offline mesh messaging using Bluetooth. Messages hop between nearby phones to extend range. Useful in dense crowds where cell towers are overloaded or shut down.

Local AI on Your Phone

- **PocketPal AI** — Run a local LLM directly on your phone. No internet needed. Ask legal questions, get first-aid guidance, or access protest safety information even when networks are down. Download the app and the model beforehand — everything runs on-device.
- **Llama.cpp (Android)** — Run open-source language models locally on Android devices. More technical setup required but gives you complete offline AI access.
- **MLC Chat (iOS/Android)** — Another option for running AI models locally. Supports multiple open-source models. Download models ahead of time when you have Wi-Fi.

Privacy & Digital Security

- **Disable biometric unlock before the protest.** Use a strong alphanumeric passcode. Police can legally force your fingerprint or face to unlock your phone, but cannot force a password (though this is legally contested — use a long, complex passcode).
- **Turn off location services** on all apps except essential ones. Disable location history in Google and Apple settings. Remove location metadata from your camera app.
- **Remove sensitive data** before attending — old chats, photos, documents. Consider using a burner phone or creating a separate user profile with only protest-essential apps.
- **Use a VPN** — ProtonVPN, Mullvad, or IVPN. Encrypts your traffic and masks your IP. Enable before you leave home — don't turn it on for the first time at the protest site.
- **Tor Browser** — For accessing blocked websites and news sources. Available on Android (Orbot + Tor Browser). Slower but provides the strongest anonymity.

Offline Maps & Navigation

- **Google Maps offline** — Download the protest area map before you go. Tap your profile → Offline maps → Select your own map. Network shutdowns during protests are common in India.
- **OsmAnd** — Open-source offline maps. No Google account needed. Download entire city maps in advance. Works entirely offline with GPS.
- **Maps.me** — Free offline maps with detailed walking paths. Useful when you need to navigate side streets and escape routes without data.

File Sharing & Backups

- **Save this guide offline.** Download the [Protest Safely PDF](#) to your phone and share it via Bluetooth or offline file transfer.
- **Snapdrop / PairDrop** — Browser-based local file sharing. Works between any devices on the same Wi-Fi network. No app installation needed.
- **ShareIt / Xender** — Offline file transfer apps. Work over Wi-Fi Direct. Useful for sharing APKs, PDFs, and photos without internet or cables.
- **Keep a copy of essential APKs** (Signal, BitChat, PocketPal, offline maps) saved in a folder on your phone. App stores can be throttled or serve outdated versions during crisis periods.

 **Critical prep:** Download everything you need BEFORE protest day — apps, offline maps, AI models, this PDF guide. Network shutdowns during major protests in India are real and can happen without warning. Your phone should be fully self-sufficient before you leave home.

Glossary

Direct Action

Any act where activists directly achieve a goal by leveraging their bodies, freedom, and safety — bypassing institutional channels. Includes civil disobedience like sit-ins, hunger strikes, and peaceful blockades.

Section 163 BNSS (formerly CrPC Section 144)

An executive order prohibiting assembly of four or more people in a specified area. Police can detain anyone violating it. Can be imposed for up to 6 months. Always check if it is in effect before attending a protest.

Jail Support / Legal Support

Organized assistance for arrested protesters — arranging lawyers, tracking detainee locations, posting bail, providing post-release support (food, transport, medical care, mental health support).

Legal Observer

Trained volunteers who monitor and document police conduct at protests. They wear identifiable clothing (often bright vests), note badge numbers and police actions, and coordinate with legal aid groups to ensure detainees get representation.

Street Medics

Volunteers trained in first aid who provide medical care during protests. In India, medical students, nurses, and healthcare professionals frequently volunteer. They treat chemical exposure, injuries, dehydration, and coordinate with hospitals.

Prohibitory Orders

Orders under Section 163 BNSS that restrict movement and assembly. They can be imposed for up to 6 months. Violation is a criminal offense. Always verify current orders before attending a gathering.

Custodial Violence

Physical or psychological abuse while in police custody. If experienced or witnessed, document everything possible and contact a lawyer immediately. File a complaint with the SHRC and NHRC.

Bail

For bailable offenses, you have the right to be released on bail. For non-bailable offenses, a lawyer must apply for bail before a magistrate. Having a lawyer and bail money accessible is critical.
