

Centre bans PFI, affiliates for 5 years, says major threat to internal security

With this, the PFI has been added to the list of 42 banned terrorist organisations under Section 35 of the UAPA.

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Security personnel speak with Popular Front of India (PFI) workers protesting against the raid of NIA at the PFI office, in Chennai (PTI photo)

Days after law enforcement agencies launched a **nationwide crackdown against the Popular Front of India**, the Centre Wednesday **banned the PFI** and its affiliates for five years.

Invoking the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act to effect the ban, the Ministry of Home Affairs said the PFI and its affiliates are linked to terror groups like the ISIS, propagate “anti-national sentiments... radicalise a particular section of society with the intention to create disaffection” and constitute a “major threat to internal security of the country”.

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Saying it was “necessary to curb the nefarious activities” of the organisation, the MHA declared the PFI an “unlawful association” along with “its associates or affiliates or fronts including Rehab India Foundation (RIF), Campus Front of India (CFI), All India Imams Council (AIIC), National Confederation of Human Rights Organisation (NCHRO), National Women’s Front, Junior Front, Empower India Foundation and Rehab Foundation, Kerala”.

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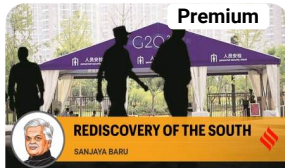
The ban left out the SDPI, the political arm of the PFI.

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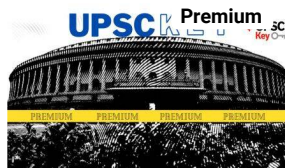
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PFI members being produced to in court in New Delhi on Thursday. (PTI Photo)

Within hours of the ban, the **PFI** announced it had disbanded.

PFI Kerala general secretary A Abdul Sattar said, “As law-abiding citizens of the country, we accept the decision of the Home Ministry.”

“It (PFI) also informs all its former members and the general public that the **Popular Front of India** has been disbanded. All members of the Popular Front of India are requested to cease their activities,” he said.

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The CFI, the student wing of the PFI, called the ban “undemocratic” and said the charges against it were “baseless and fabricated” and it would challenge the ban in court.



PFI Kerala general secretary A Abdul Sattar said, “As law-abiding citizens of the country, we accept the decision of the Home Ministry.”

In a statement, the CFI asked students not to conduct any programme or activity in the name of the organisation.

EXPLAINED

What can follow

The declaration of the PFI and its affiliates as “unlawful associations” allows law enforcement agencies to freeze bank accounts, seize assets of these

organisations – in short, choke their funding and activities.

The MHA said that some of the PFI's founding members are leaders of the SIMI and the PFI also has linkages with Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), both of which are proscribed organisations.

“There had been a number of instances of international linkages of PFI with Global Terrorist Groups like Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The PFI and its associates or affiliates or fronts have been working covertly to increase radicalisation of one community by promoting a sense of insecurity in the country, which is substantiated by the fact that the some PFI cadres have joined international terrorist organisations,” it stated.

The MHA said, “Rehab India Foundation collects funds through PFI members and some of the members of the PFI are also members of CFI, EIF, Rehab Foundation, Kerala, and the activities of Junior Front, All India Imams Council, National Confederation of Human Rights Organisation (NCHRO) and National Women's Front are monitored/coordinated by the PFI leaders.”

“The associates or affiliates or fronts have a ‘hub and spoke’ relationship with the PFI acting as the hub and utilising the mass outreach and fundraising capacity of its associates or affiliates or fronts for strengthening its capability for unlawful activities and these associates or affiliates or fronts function as ‘roots and capillaries’ through which the PFI is fed and strengthened,” it stated.

“The PFI and its associates or affiliates or fronts operate openly as socio-economic, educational and political organisations but they have been pursuing a secret agenda to radicalise a particular section of the society, working towards undermining the concept of democracy, and show sheer disrespect towards the constitutional authority and constitutional set-up of the country,” the MHA said.

The declaration of the PFI and its affiliates as “unlawful associations” grants law enforcement agencies the right to arrest members of the organisations, freeze accounts and confiscate assets.

Section 10 of the UAPA criminalises membership of a banned organisation. It says that being a member of a banned organisation would be punishable with an imprisonment of two years and may extend to life imprisonment or even death in certain circumstances.

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Section 10 says that any person who “is and continues to be a member of such association; or takes part in meetings of such association; or contributes to, or receives or solicits any contribution for the purpose of, such association; or in any way assists the operations of such association, shall be punishable with imprisonment for a term which may extend to two years, and shall also be liable to fine”.

It also applies to any person who aids the objectives of the banned organisation.

Section 7 of the UAPA gives the government the power to “prohibit use of funds” by an “unlawful association”.

It says that after an organisation is banned and the Centre is satisfied after an enquiry that “any person has custody of any moneys, securities or credits which are being used or are intended to be used for the purpose of the unlawful association, the Central Government may, by order in writing, prohibit such person from paying, delivering, transferring or otherwise dealing in any manner whatsoever with such moneys, securities or credits or with any other moneys, securities or credits which may come into his custody after the making of the order”.

It also gives powers to law enforcement agencies to search premises of such organisations and to examine their books of account.

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Section 8 of the UAPA gives powers to the Centre to “notify any place which in its opinion is used for the purpose of such unlawful association”. The “place” here includes a house or a building, or a part thereof, or even a tent or a vessel. — ***With Kiran Parashar in Bengaluru***

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