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Custody, Pellets and a Report Card: What the NEET Protest Ruling and SPIR 2025 Reveal About Indian Policing

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Custody, Pellets and a Report Card: What the NEET Protest Ruling and SPIR 2025 Reveal About Indian Policing

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✓ Every fact web-verified against primary sources

A Supreme Court bench led by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, with Justices Joymalya Bagchi and V. Mohana, ordered States to release all under-18 detainees, without criminal antecedents, arrested during nationwide protests over the alleged NEET-UG 2026 paper leak, days after a leaked Rapid Action Force (RAF) diary confirmed Delhi Police had authorised pellet-gun use against protesters, and as the Status of Policing in India Report (SPIR) 2025 surveyed police attitudes to force nationwide.

WHAT THE SUPREME COURT ORDERED

DIRECTION	CONTENT
Release of minors	States to release all under-18 detainees without criminal antecedents
Bar on coercive action	No further coercive action against protesting students pending further hearing
Evidence preservation	States directed to preserve digital and electronic evidence relating to the protests
Judicial observation	Allegations of police excess “prima facie warrant an independent and impartial probe”

The order arose from the protest movement following the **NEET-UG 2026** paper-leak allegations, the same underlying controversy that produced the **Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026** and the **Nandan Nilekani-led task force** on examination reform, both covered in earlier editions of this edition series. This ruling adds a distinct judicial-accountability dimension: it is not about fixing the examination system, but about how the State responded to citizens protesting its failure.

THE RAF DIARY AND WHAT IT CONTRADICTED

A **Rapid Action Force diary** entry, registered on 20 July 2026, confirmed that Delhi Police had authorised **pellet-gun use** on a Deputy Commissioner of Police’s orders during a protest march. This directly contradicted earlier public denials by Delhi Police that pellet guns had been used, a gap between official

statement and internal record that is itself now part of what the Supreme Court has asked to be independently probed.

Pellet guns, designed to disperse crowds through less-lethal projectile impact, carry a well-documented risk of serious and permanent eye injury at close range, a risk that has previously drawn judicial and human-rights scrutiny in other contexts of crowd-control policing in India.

THE STATUS OF POLICING IN INDIA REPORT 2025

PARAMETER	DETAIL
Publishers	Common Cause and Lokniti-CSDS
Theme	“Police Torture and (Un)Accountability”
Sample	8,276 police personnel , across 82 locations in 17 states
Key finding 1	Over 30 per cent of surveyed personnel justify “third-degree” methods in serious crimes
Key finding 2	Only 41 per cent say arrest procedures are “always followed”
State variation	Karnataka : about 70 per cent report non-compliance with arrest procedures; Kerala : about 94 per cent adherence
Force-immunity view	About 25 per cent express strong support for using force against suspects, and about 22 per cent believe extrajudicial killing is preferable to a legal trial for “dangerous” criminals

SPIR is a periodic survey series that has, in successive editions, tracked police attitudes toward custodial practices, use of force and institutional accountability, providing one of the few systematic, large-sample data sources on how serving police personnel themselves view these questions, rather than relying only on incident-based reporting.

THE PRECEDENT THIS SITS AGAINST: PRAKASH SINGH

The [doctrinal](#) reference point for any Indian police-accountability discussion remains **Prakash Singh v. Union of India (2006)**, in which the Supreme Court, responding to decades of stalled police reform, issued binding directives to insulate police functioning from arbitrary political interference and to build accountability mechanisms:

DIRECTIVE	PURPOSE
Fixed minimum tenure for DGPs and key operational postings	Prevent arbitrary transfers used as a political control lever
State Security Commission	Insulate policy-level policing decisions from day-to-day political direction
Police Establishment Board	Handle transfers, postings and promotions with reduced political discretion
Police Complaints Authority	Independent body for complaints against police misconduct, at State and district level
Separation of investigation from law-and-order functions	Improve investigation quality and reduce operational overload

Implementation of the Prakash Singh directives has been widely assessed as partial and uneven across States nearly two decades on, and SPIR's findings, particularly the roughly one-in-four personnel who express strong support for using force against suspects, are frequently read as evidence that institutional accountability mechanisms envisaged in 2006 have not translated into a changed operational culture.

UPSC RELEVANCE

GS Paper 2: Structure, organisation and functioning of the Executive; the judiciary; role of civil services in a democracy; issues relating to police reforms; welfare mechanisms and accountability for the protection of vulnerable sections, including juveniles.

Prelims pointers:

- Bench: **CJI Surya Kant**, with **Justices Joymalya Bagchi and V. Mohana**.
- SPIR 2025 published by **Common Cause and Lokniti-CSDS**; sample **8,276 personnel, 82 locations, 17 states**.
- Landmark case on police reform: **Prakash Singh v. Union of India (2006)**.
- Prakash Singh directives include fixed DGP tenure, State Security Commission, Police Complaints Authority, and separation of investigation from law-and-order duties.

 FACTS CORNER, KNOWLEDGE PEDIA**SUPREME COURT ORDER, JULY 2026:**

Bench: CJI Surya Kant, Justices Joymalya Bagchi and V. Mohana.

Directed release of minors without criminal antecedents; barred coercive action; ordered evidence preservation.

Arose from NEET-UG 2026 paper-leak protests.

RAF DIARY AND SPIR 2025:

RAF diary confirmed Delhi Police pellet-gun authorisation, contradicting prior denials.

SPIR 2025 theme: “Police Torture and (Un)Accountability”; publishers Common Cause and Lokniti-CSDS.

Sample: 8,276 personnel, 82 locations, 17 states.

Over 30 per cent justify third-degree methods; only 41 per cent say arrest procedures are always followed; about 25 per cent strongly support using force against suspects, and about 22 per cent favour extrajudicial killing over trial for “dangerous” criminals.

POLICE REFORM FRAMEWORK:

Prakash Singh v. Union of India (2006): fixed DGP tenure, State Security Commission, Police Establishment Board, Police Complaints Authority, separation of investigation from law-and-order functions.

Sources: Supreme Court of India, Common Cause, Lokniti-CSDS, The Hindu

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