In India's long history of protests, UP first to make 'vandals' pay price

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The UP government's attempt to identify and take 'ankylo' partners for the damage caused to public property during the recent anti-citizenship law protests is without precedent in a country where many states have, at one time or another, endured destruction on the streets in the name of agitation. The only other instance of strong punitive action being ordered for vandalising public property is against the Dera Sacha Sauda in Punjab, albeit on court orders.

While the jury is out on whether the Yogi Adityanath government's move will stand legal scrutiny, TOI takes stock of the number of occasions over the past five years that individuals and outfits appear to have got away with destroying public property worth crores of rupees during protests.

**HARYANA:** The Jat quota stir in February 2016 was a destructive one, resulting in 30 deaths and widespread damage to public and private property. Assoucheh estimated the loss in monetary terms to be Rs 1,800-2,000 crores. Around 2,100 cases were filed and hundreds arrested. The then UP government told the Punjab and Haryana high court that the cost of the damage would be recovered from the perpetrators, but it was never done.

In August 2017, vandalisation returned to the state after a special CBI court convicted Dera Sacha Sauda chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim in multiple rape cases. Property worth Rs 126 crore was damaged in Panchkula alone. The high court ordered that properties belonging to Dera Sacha Sauda be found troll such time 'liaibility' for the losses caused during the violence was declared. The case continues.

**DELHI:** On August 25 last year, thousands of protesters demanding the Dalits be given the Hindu Army chief Chandrashekhar Azad damaged 14 cars at Govindpuri. In November, lawyers at Tis Hazari damaged 13 police vehicles and set fire to several bikes while clashes with the cops over a parking dispute. Similar violence was reported at Saket. Nobody was even arrested.

But after the arson during anti-CAA protests at Jatia Nagar and Mathura Road on December 15, Police approached the HC to appoint a claims commissioner who would assess the damage and establish liability.

**GUJARAT:** Within just three days of the Patidar quota movement in August 2015, mobs torched 600 government vehicles and 1,822 public buildings. A week after the riots, a PIL was filed in the Gujarat HC, seeking an inquiry commission to assess the damage. The PIL was withdrawn two weeks later.

**WEST BENGAL:** The railways bore the brunt of the vandalism and arson that marred the anti-citizenship law protests last month, losing an estimated Rs 80 crore worth of property in just four days. According to the state government, 64 FIRs were lodged and 991 people arrested. The Calcutta high court is hearing six PILs on fixing the responsibility for the damage.

**ODISHA:** Property worth Rs 20 crore was damaged after violence erupted in Puri on October 3, 2018, during a bandh called by an outfit called Jagannath Sena. Police subsequently made it mandatory for organisations to sign an indemnity bond while seeking permission to hold rallies.

**KARNATAKA:** Around 15 vehicles, including police vans and buses, were set ablaze in Mysuru in April 2018 by garments factory workers protesting against the Centre's decision to amend the Karnataka Preservation Provisions Act. On September 12 the same year, a Cauvery rioters ransacked public property with more than 30 buses being damaged. No attempt was made by the government to recover damages in either of these cases.

**KERALA:** In 2018, as many as 40 state-owned buses were damaged in Pathanamthitta district and several more across other districts during protests that greeted the Supreme Court's verdict on entry of women into the Sabarimala shrine. Many were arrested under the Prevention of Damage to Public Property Act, 1964, but the loss due to damage of public property was never recovered.

In October 2011, the Kerala HC had ordered that in the event of public property being damaged, an amount equivalent to the loss must be deposited by the accused as a condition for bail.

**ASSAM:** The first few days of the anti-citizenship law protests that broke out last month saw public property being vandalised in Guwahati and Dibrugarh. The BJP-led government plans to initiate "proper legal action against the culprits of violence" after collecting more evidence.

**RAJASTHAN:** There have been multiple instances of vandalism and arson, including during the agitation against the film Padmaavat in November 2017 and the Gujjar community's quota stir in February 2019. In none of these instances did the state even calculate the extent of damage to public property.

In Bijnor on Wednesday, a UP's Bijnor district on Wednesday put up recovery notices on the houses of 11 people who are alleged to have damaged public properties during the December 20 protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act. In all, the district police have identified 40 people for damaging properties worth Rs 19.5 lakh during the clashes in Bijnor. On Wednesday, the recovery notices were pasted on 11 houses. In the notices, the additional district magistrate asked the accused to explain by January 18 why they damaged the properties.

Two youths were killed and scores of protesters and policemen injured during the clashes. Cops said that one of the deceased, Suleman, died in police firing while the other was killed by the bullets fired by protesters. Three other persons sustained bullet injuries. Police had registered 31 cases and arrested 166 protesters.