

LETTERS

AN APPEAL

To
Sri Gopal Krishna Gandhi,
His Excellency,
The Governor of West Bengal
Raj Bhavan, Kolkata.

Subject: Life of a doctor, serving victims of Nandigram carnage, is under threat.

Sir,

This is an appeal for your immediate, direct, remedial intervention in an ominous situation, where life of Dr Pradip Das, posted in Tamluk District Hospital, appears to be under serious threat. And in the process, proper medical treatment of the survivors among the victims of Nandigram carnage, is about to be seriously jeopardized, if not already so.

These patients, traumatized both physically and mentally, as you know yourself from your own visit on the morrow of the carnage day, felt so much benefited and comforted under the treatment of this devoted and caring doctor that they went into a hunger-strike when they came to know that the doctor was being prevented from attending them. They broke their hunger strike only under the solemn assurance of the Hospital Superintendent that Dr. Das would again be allowed to attend them. The incidents were reported in the vernacular Daily, *Dainik Statesman*, on 4th April 2007.

The long and short of it is, Dr Das has been prevented from attending those patients through the totally illegal interference allegedly by the DISTRICT SARBA-DHIPATI, a non-medical person, with active (willing and unwilling) collaboration of the Hospital authorities and some other doctors attending the victims. Dr Das was threatened in uncivilized language, over phone while the latter was attending the victims on 3rd April morning. This doctor's crime was that he refused to be a party to the effort of the hospital administration, obviously at the instance of party bosses to release (i.e. to get rid of) the patients before they are medically fit to go home. Interestingly, because of the trust of the patients he enjoys, this very doctor's successful help was taken earlier by the hospital administration to gently persuade those patients to go home, who, even after recovery were reluctant to leave the safety and security of the hospital because of their shaken mental state. Obviously Dr Das was able to help them gather enough mental strength.

The current unseemly hurry by authorities to empty the hospital of the carnage victims smacks of a cover-up operation aimed at removing this standing evidence to the barbarity let loose on a section of citizens living in Nandigram. And this doctor, because of his obvious unflinching loyalty to Hippocratic oath (usually treated as a mere ritual), which every doctor has to take before earning the professional right to heal the people, has become a serious obstacle to that cover-up operation. This suspicion is further strengthened by the fact that the hospital superintendent went back on his assurance to the patients that Dr Das would be brought back. Instead, the latter has been served with a 'show cause' notice on some flimsy ground. And a canard is being spread around that he is a mad ("pagol") doctor. All these may be a preparation either to sack him or to transfer him. Further, because of the media attention drawn to the victim patients' hunger strike and its cause, newsmen very naturally interviewed Dr Pradip Das too.

While giving such interviews (shown in the programme "zero hour" in Kolkata TV) some very chilling information tumbled out of doctor's mouth, which, if true, reveals totally illegal moves by the persons in authority to deliberately cover up/destroy a part of the evidence of murder and mayhem of the 14th March, which is a serious cognizable offence under Indian Penal code. According to Dr Das, out of 13 dead bodies brought to that hospital from the killing field of Nandigram, he conducted Post Mortem examination of 5. In the interest of criminal

justice it is the standard practice to make a video graphic record of the whole process of conducting a Post Mortem examination when the cause of death is under serious dispute. But he was asked not to do the video record. It is not clear from the shown interview whether ultimately any video record of any autopsy was done or not.

Dr Das did not make any anti-government statement during the interview as shown. Rather he explained that he believed that transparency would help establish the credibility of the state government.

It is not important to make any comment on their respective stands on the issue of transparency. What is really important is that it is a reasonable apprehension that life of Dr Das is likely to be under serious threat, because the revelation he made is severely damaging to the highest echelons of administration which act at the behest of the political wing of the State govt. right from the district to the state level. And this revelation, if pursued to its logical end, may lead to arrest and prosecution of concerned administrative personnel for attempt to cover up/destroy evidence of a horrendous crime. So the possibility of silencing forever the voice, which, in all innocence, made such revelation, is far from a wild flight of imagination. Such things do happen even on occasions, which are not as grave in its implication as the present one. And from the way he is being dealt with by district and hospital authorities, combined with this revelation by him, makes it a distinct possibility that his quiet physical elimination in the hands of some 'unknown' assassin would be considered the best solution by those to whom he, beyond doubt, has become inconvenient, nay dangerous, though he seems to be hardly aware of it in his interviews to the above-mentioned TV channel.

Ashok Sekseria, Subhas Ch Ganguly, Samar Das (Kolkata), Utpal Chatterjee, Sanjay Bharati (N 24 Pgs.), Lingaraj, Samarendra Das (Orissa), Jugal Raybir (Jalpaigudi), Krishnakanta Roy Giashil, Ranjana Roy (N. Dinajpur), Chanchal Mukherjee (Varanasi)

SOA

Since it was set up 59 years ago, the School of the Americas (SOA) in the USA has trained thousands of Latin American soldiers in military tactics that include the use of physical and psychological torture. Attempts to shut it down in 2001 failed but SOA was renamed Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC). But critics said WHINSEC's new 'peace' and 'human rights' is mere cosmetics and its role today has shifted from fighting communism to enforcing free trade.

In 1997, School of the Americas (SOA) had one Guatemalan student, a number that had risen to seven in 2000 and to 13 in 2002. According to Roy Bourgeois, head of SOA Watch, WHINSEC currently has thirty Guatemalan students.

Human rights organisations have pointed out that coinciding with the increasingly louder calls for social and economic justice in the region, and protests against free trade agreements such as NAFTA, CAFTA and Plan Pueblo Panama (PPP), the number of Latin American soldiers at the WHINSEC has escalated sharply.

According to SOA Watch, the Pentagon has told Congress that WHINSEC training supports US policy towards Latin America. This training "seeks to develop stable, free market democracies throughout the region." The mission of the US Army's Southern Command (encompassing WHINSEC) includes "...protecting the supply of strategic natural resources and access to markets."

Throughout Central America, grassroots civil society organisations have put up a fierce resistance to top-down and imposed economic integration, and have criticised various aspects of the PPP, including the likely debt burden, its urban priorities, the risk of territorial displacement that it poses to rural and indigenous populations, the increased threat of US transnational hegemony, and the lack of adequate regulatory oversight.

In August 2006, a large scale anti-drugs raid carried out in the community of internally displaced people in Ixtahuacan Chiquito, in Ixcán, Quiché, was heavily criticised by civil society groups. The true reasons behind the combined military-police raid were unclear and the government failed to provide an explanation for an operation that ended in failure, since nobody was captured and no drugs were confiscated.

However, some critics have argued that the real aim of the operation was to sow terror in the Northern Transversal Strip (FTN), a strategically important area in Quiché where large-scale infrastructure projects (megaproyectos) are underway.

According to the National Front for the Struggle in Defense of Public Services and Natural Resources (FNL): "Behind the so-called anti-drug operation, is an attempt to intimidate communities which have vehemently opposed the Xalala hydroelectric project as well as mining projects in the municipalities of Ixcén and Cobán that violate International Labour Organisation Convention 169 and are part of the PPP".

An Observer

New York