

'Baghajatin' Story

## Killing a Hospital SS

WHEN BAGHAJATIN STATE General Hospital in South Kolkata suburbs was founded people of the locality and South 24 Parganas district hoped to get good medical treatment at low cost. The nearest government hospital is M R Bangur hospital which is overcrowded with thousands of patients, the doctors are stretched to the limit. After Baghajatin hospital came up people thought they would get medical treatment without hassle. Sad but true, those hopes were belied. A movement has been going on under the aegis of Jadavpur Citizens' Initiatives Forum for last few months on this issue. It started with a people's convention in the month of May, 2010. Afterwards, through data collection, mass signature, awareness programme the campaign is carrying on.

There is a common complaint that health services of acceptable quality are not available in Baghajatin hospital. Moreover, although facility for medical tests is available, patients do not get the benefit of it. On the basis of these complaints data have been collected from the hospital. The data testify to the allegations. Through the RTI one got to know that facilities for all these tests are there in the hospital. In other words, the reason for the sad state of Baghajatin hospital lies in the indifferent attitude of those who are supposed to provide the right health services. Ironically, there is a colossal hospital building and other infrastructure in place; crores of rupees are being spent on salary, maintenance etc.

A demand was also raised that the hospital cannot be handed over to private health businessmen under any excuse. Similar thing was done in case of Jadavpur TB hospital which was handed over to the NRI KCP group (for Re 1).

On 24th December, 2010, citizens' forum organized a gathering of local people in front of the hospital gate. A deputation visited the hospital superintendent along with a charter of demands with signatures.

Some successes were achieved, courtesy the ongoing movement. Earlier although test facilities for blood, stool, urine, sputum were there, they were not put to use. Now these are being utilised. X ray, ultrasound, ECG tests were not done. Now they are operational. The generator has been repaired. On the allegation that indispensable medicines are not available in the hospital the superintendent says that the state health department is not providing all the medicines. Those which are being sent are not effective in many cases. The doctors are getting compelled to prescribe better medicines and patients are being forced to buy them from outside.

The superintendent was compelled to admit that doctors are many a time not present on duty, they are not even available in emergency departments. He blamed this on dearth of doctors and lack of cooperation by a section of the doctors. Those spearheading the movement demanded that the superintendent has to take the responsibility to fill the vacancy of doctors. If doctors do not cooperate it is he who is responsible. Patients not getting treatment because of hospital's callousness is unacceptable.

The hospital is supposed to have surgery facility. Microsurgery, laparo-scopy, eye surgery—all facilities are supposed to be available. Yet none is. The superintendent responded that in spite of having the equipments for surgery, surgical department is not operational because eye specialists, anesthetist, group D employees are not available. In spite of repeated intimation the government is not appointing the required man-power.

Food for hospital patients comes from the outside caterers, there is no monitoring of food quality.

In the basement of the hospital, clothes and bed sheets of 16 hospitals are washed. The place is so dirty and polluted that it may cause diseases rather than healing them. Moreover although these jobs are for government hospitals, they have been outsourced to the private company 'Bandbox'. Representatives of civil society protested against this step towards privatisation. Superintendent says he is simply implementing the government directives, he has no say on this matter. Conceding to demands, the superintendent has promised that a list will be publicly displayed containing list of doctors according to departments, time of duty of doctors, list of medicines, number of beds. He has also promised to keep the indoor patients department clean.

But the most worrying part is, the government is moving towards handing over the hospital to private management. Already three private parties have inspected the hospital, they were accompanied by government officials. The third party is a Bangalore-based health businessman. They have even done survey of the premise. After closing down the government hospital they would open a neuro-facial clinic. This is a project to import western technology which would un wrinkle skin, beautify bodies through use of cosmetic treatment. The owners would earn millions on the side.

If this comes about it would completely jeopardise health facility of thousands of poor people in the Baghajatin-Jadavpur area along with extensive region of South 24 Parganas. To resist the anti-people conspiracy what is needed is collective action and struggle involving many people. Jadavpur Citizens' Initiative has made promise to take forward that movement. □□□

[Recently the newly elected Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee visited the hospital. Now everyone hopes somewhat against hope that it won't be privatised]

*[source : sanhati.com]*