



HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS' ALERT - INDIA

NATIONAL SECRETARIAT

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June 14, 2017

To,

Shri Srinivasa Kammath

National Focal Point - Human Rights Defenders & Deputy Registrar
National Human Rights Commission
Manav Adhikar Bhawan,
Block-C, GPO Complex, INA,
New Delhi – 110 023
Email: hrd-nhrc@nic.in

Dear Sir,

Sub: HRD Alert - India - Urgent Appeal for Action – Tamil Nadu: Student HRDs brutally assaulted for protesting against the government's regulations on cattle sale in Chennai, Tamil Nadu – Regarding

Greetings from Human Rights Defenders Alert - India!

HRD Alert - India is a Forum of Human Rights Defenders for Human Rights Defenders. It endeavours to initiate actions on behalf of Human Rights Defenders under threat or with security concerns.

We are writing to express our grave concern regarding the brutal assault on student human rights defenders who were observing a peaceful protest in Chennai, to protest against the Central Government's order regulating cattle sale for slaughter.

Source of Information on the Incident:

- The Tamil Nadu State Coordinator for Citizens Movement for Human Rights (CHRM)
- Media reports
- The Regional Coordinator for the South India, HRDA.

The Human Rights Defenders:

The Students are from the Ambedkar Periyar Study Circle (APSC) which is an independent student body recognised by the IIT Madras. APSC has been an active body for student politics and has in the past organised many protests on social issues.

Mr. Sooraj is one of the core members of the APSC who was peacefully involved in protest to provide moral support and solidarity to them.

The Perpetrators:

- Mr. Manish Kumar Singh , student of the ocean engineering department in IIT Madras.
- Mr. Akhil Pratap Kumar of the Chemistry Department
- Five others unknown persons
- Mr. Bhaskar Ramamurthi, Dean - IIT Madras

Date of Incident:

- May 28-30, 2017

Place of Incident:

- Inside the campus of IIT-Madras in Chennai, Tamil Nadu.

Incident detail:

A notification was issued on May 23, 2017 by the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change on 'Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Regulation of Livestock Markets) Rules, 2017', banning cattle slaughter and introduced severe restrictions on the sale of cattle to prevent their killing. According to this notification, no one can bring cattle to an animal market unless he or she has furnished a written declaration that the cattle will not be sold for the purpose of slaughter. It also mandates that after sale, the animal market committee will take an "undertaking" that the animals are for agricultural purposes and not for slaughter. Effectively, it makes it impossible for the farmers to sell off their unproductive cattle and for the beef eaters to buy the same.

This issue created a nation wide debate as it affected the interests of farmers and also indirectly intruded into the food habits of common people. This was a matter of

serious discussion amongst students of IIT Madras since this notification was announced. On May 28, 2017, a group of students initiated the idea of holding a discussion on the issue. They later shared the invite of the festival in their Facebook page and also mentioned that beef will be served after the discussion.

At around 7.30 PM on May 28, 2017, 70-80 students had gathered at the Himalaya lawns inside the campus. One of the core members of the APSC addressed the gathering on the issue. It is learnt that, a group of students associated with Akhil Bharatiya Vidya Parishad (right-wing students' organization) were watching them from a distance, and were trying to identify those who were present. By around 8.45 PM the programme was over. Mr. Arjun, one of the members of the APSC, was returning to his hostel and was waylaid by one Mr. Manish Kumar Singh, a student associated with the RSS, who threatened Mr. Arjun that he would chop everybody off as pieces of beef. Later, Mr. Arjun tried to register a complaint with the IIT dean via email, but upon receipt of the email, IIT dean took no action.

On the next day, May 29, 2017, Mr. Nishant, a student who had participated in the discussion, was threatened by the same Mr. Manish and a complaint was filed by Mr. Nishant with the IIT Dean. The dean continued ignorance, allegedly deliberate, and took no action.

On May 30, 2017, Mr. R Sooraj, a research scholar in the Department of Aerospace, associated with APSC, was having lunch at the 'Himalaya Mess' in the campus. Mr. Manish, along with Mr. Akhil Pratap Kumar of the Chemistry Department, came and sat near Mr. Sooraj and asked if he had eaten beef the other day. Immediately thereafter, Mr. Manish and Mr. Akhil shouted at Mr. Sooraj saying '*how dare he comes to a Jain mess after eating beef*' and attacked him at the back of the head.

Mr. Manish, Mr. Akhil along with the other five unidentified persons associated with right wing organizations surrounded Mr. Sooraj, pushed him to the ground, Mr. Manish held Mr. Sooraj's head, pulled his hair and repeatedly punched him in his face. Mr. Sooraj's face was fractured and possibly required surgery. When other students intervened and took Mr. Sooraj to the hospital inside the campus, the mob followed and continued to threaten them. It is learnt that Mr. Sooraj might need to undergo a surgery since the injury in the eye seemed serious and he was taken to Sankara Nethralaya hospital in Nungambakkam.

It is learnt from the APSC and others, that Mr. Manish is a self-proclaimed saffron thug and never cares to hold any meaningful debates. He has a history of creating ruckus and manhandling the participants in many events. Recently when the APSC had released a poster in support of the Ravanleela held in IIT-Madras, he had torn the posters and abused the APSC members. When there was a discussion on Kashmir, a faculty who moderated the programme was abused in abusive language by Mr. Manish and had been warned by the administration for his misbehaviour in the student body meeting.

The series of attack on the members of the APSC was not totally unexpected, but the APSC states that the silence and inaction of the administration, in spite of all the complaints filed, that has emboldened Mr. Manish and other students associated with RSS and other right-wing groups.

Mr. Sooraj states that, he has filed a complaint with the police and no proper action has been initiated. He further states that it was alarming to know that Mr. Manish has a history of being violent with other students and threatening them. This attack was a well-planned move by Mr. Manish as suggested by him on Facebook and now with Mr. Manish in the same campus, he fears for his life and seeks police protection.

Appeal:

We, therefore urge you to immediately take necessary steps and:

- Order an immediate, thorough, transparent, effective and impartial investigation, through NHRC's investigation department, into the above-mentioned events of manhandling and brutal assault on the student human rights defenders.
- Take immediate action on the perpetrators in this case Mr. Manish, Mr. Akhil and others who had attacked Mr. Sooraj.
- Take immediate action on the IIT Madras Dean, for repeatedly ignoring complaints from students and taking no action, resulting in free hands to right-wing student goons on campus.
- Guarantee in all circumstances, at the cost of the State, the physical and psychological integrity of the student HRDs in IIT Madras, who are still under risk of further attacks from the perpetrators.

- Ensure provision of reparation, compensation, apology to Mr. Sooraj for the physical and psychological sufferings they underwent because of the manhandling and brutal assault and provide a re-assurance of not engaging in such acts against HRDs such as these student defenders;

Looking forward to your immediate action in this regard,

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Henri Tiphagne', with a horizontal line underneath.

(Henri Tiphagne)

National Working Secretary