



HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS' ALERT - INDIA

NATIONAL SECRETARIAT

No.32, Besant Road, Chokkikulam, Madurai - 625 002, Tamil Nadu, India.
P: +91-452-2531874 & 2539520 Fax: +91-452- 2531874 Mobile: 99943-68540
E.mail: hrda.india@gmail.com Web: www.hrdaindia.org

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September 25, 2019

To

Mr. Khaleel Ahmad

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- Bihar: Journalist and Human Rights Defender Mr. Pradeep Mandal shot by liquor mafia in Bihar – Regarding

Dear Sir,

Greetings from Human Rights Defenders Alert - India!

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

We are writing to express our deep concern over attempt to kill journalist and human rights defender Mr. Pradeep Mandal in Madhubani, Bihar for reporting about issued of illegal liquor trade in the district.

Status of the Human Rights Defender

Mr. Pradeep Mandal is a journalist and has long experience in active journalism and currently he is associated with the national Hindi daily 'Dainik Jagran' as its Pandaul block stringer in Madhubani district of Bihar. He has been reporting for 'Dainik Jagran' for the last 5 years. In the past he has been a reporter for Hindi Daily 'Chauthi Duniya'. He also worked for a Hindi national weekly "Bihari Khabar" for 7 years.

Source of Information on the Incident:

- The Coordinator of HRDA for the East of India
- Communications with local journalists in Bihar
- Media Reports

The Perpetrators:

Mr. Sushil Sah
Mr. Ashok Kamat
Mr. Bhuwan Yadav

Date and Place of Incident:

28 July, 2019

Sarsopahi bazar in Pandal police station, Madhubani district, Bihar.

Details of the Incident:

On 28 July, 2019 around 9.15 pm, Pradeep Mandal was coming to Hati village from Pandal and when he reached Sarsopahi bazar two men on a motorcycle shot at him with a pistol. The bike borne perpetrators fled from the spot after firing two bullets in the journalist's stomach and he also received severe injuries in targeted shooting. He was rescued by passers-by and was rushed to Sarsopahi primary health center from where medical doctors referred him to Darbhanga Medical College and Hospital for treatment keeping in view his serious condition as he was continuously bleeding. He remained in the hospital for 13 days and for almost for 10 days he was treated in Intensive Care Unit (ICU). Doctors in the hospital removed a bullet from his body after a surgery but the cartridge could not be removed after the operation.

While being taken to the hospital, Mr. Pradeep Mandal named his attackers as two men who were released on bail after being charged with trafficking in alcohol. According to sources, the assailants were involved in illegal trade of liquor and had vengeance with Pradeep Mandal because he has been reporting against the ongoing illegal liquor trade by local liquor mafia, as Bihar is a liquor-free State. The Bihar government had imposed a complete ban on the manufacture, sale and consumption of alcohol in the state in April 2016. Mr. Pradeep's colleagues informed the sources that they are convinced that the shooting was a direct consequence of the story that Pradeep Mandal recently wrote about the two traffickers, for whom the Madhubani district police later issued an arrest warrant. The police later identified the bike borne criminals as Mr. Sushil Sah and Mr. Ashok Kamat for shooting and later Mr. Bhuwan Yadav was also identified by the police who helped the assailants in providing the motorbike to attack Mr. Pradeep Mandal. A case under sections 307 and 34 of Indian Penal Code and section 27 of Arms Act has been filed in Pandal police

station in Madhubani district of Bihar. Two of the accused Mr. Sushil Sah and Mr. Ashok Kamat have been arrested by the police and the other accused Mr. Bhuwan Yadav is reported to be absconding.

The attack on the life of journalist and human rights defender Mr. Pradeep Mandal is another reminder of the challenging conditions in which many journalists in the vernacular media work. The escalating attacks on whistleblower journalists across India is a matter of concern regarding the freedom of press and the safety of journalists in the country. Journalists, have a fundamental right to freedom of speech and expression guaranteed by Art. 19(1) (a) which includes their right to publish as journalists, a faithful report. The freedom of speech and expression also includes the freedom of press. It is pointed out that there is an urgent need to address violence against journalists and human rights defenders and to put an end to the wave of violence against human rights defenders and journalists as they play a critical role in exposing corruption and demanding government accountability. Unless the State addresses the impunity for crimes against human rights defenders and journalists, those looking to silence the critics will continue to feel emboldened to do so.

Appeal:

We, therefore urge you to immediately take necessary steps to ensure that this Hon'ble Commission to urgently:

- Order an immediate, thorough, transparent, effective and impartial investigation into the above mentioned incident of armed attack on the life of journalist and human rights defender Mr. Pradeep Mandal in Sarsopahi bazar in Pandaul police station, Madhubani district, Bihar in an attempt to suppress his right to freedom of speech and expression;
- Ensures complete medical check-up of the human rights defender Mr. Pradeep Mandal totally at state cost in the best medical facility available in the state to ensure that the defender is not suffering from any internal medical ailments after this armed attack;
- Recommend strict and immediate legal action on the perpetrators for carrying out life threatening attack on the journalist and human rights defender Mr.

Pradeep Mandal and give this assurance to the NHRC of India in writing immediately and urgently;

- Guarantee in all circumstances the physical and psychological integrity and security of the journalist and human rights defender Mr. Pradeep Mandal as well as of all journalists in India, who merely exercise their right to freedom of opinion and expression and ensure the freedom of press, right to freedom of expression in the area;
- Put an end to all acts of harassment against all journalists, writers and human rights defenders in general in the state of Bihar to ensure that in all circumstances they are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including police and judicial harassment;

Looking forward to your immediate action in this regard,
Yours sincerely,



(Henri Tiphagne)
Honorary National Working Secretary