

A Portend

NARRA Prabhakar Reddy, Convenor of the Warangal district unit of APCLC was shot dead at his residence on the morning of December 7. We have no hesitation in declaring that the killers were policemen. Contrary to the impression sought to be purveyed by the police, there is no connection between this murder and the prior killing of former minister Hayagrivachary. The police of Warangal have ample reason to hate APCLC, and in particular Prabhakar Reddy. They took advantage of the killing of the former minister, killed Prabhakar Reddy, and are trying their best to make it appear that this murder was a sequel to the first.

The Warangal district unit of APCLC, which had become inactive after the police killed the district unit president Dr Ramanadham in 1985, was revived last August and has been working very actively. The police have come to see it as an obstacle to the rule of the jungle that they have let loose in the district. The district unit of APCLC has been exposing the daily police assault on villages, and the frequent 'encounters' that have been taking place ever since D T Naik took over as SP of the district. The police apparently decided that unless they kill one more civil liberties leader in Warangal, they cannot get rid of this thorn in their flesh. This is the reason behind the deliberate murder of Prabhakar Reddy.

Prabhakar Reddy did his best to obstruct the lawless acts of the police not only as a civil liberties activist, but also in his capacity as a lawyer, as secretary of the Warangal Bar Association, as 'sarpanch' of his native village Veldanda, and as a member of Narmetta Mandal Praja Parishad. He was especially effective in obstructing the arbitrary use of TADA in the district. The police have been using TADA as a means of obstructing the right to bail and keeping the accused in jail for months together. The Warangal police have filed TADA cases against nearly 1,250 poor peasants and labourers in the last three years. Prabhakar Reddy foiled their efforts effectively by arguing bail petitions tirelessly day in and day out and getting all the arrested persons released on bail very quickly. He would not even charge any fees from them. As all the accused were poor people and all the cases were falsely foisted, he would even bear the costs himself. There is perhaps no other lawyer in the country who has fought TADA so effectively inside court halls. It is no secret that this achievement of his enraged the police. About two months ago the Narmetta police implicated Prabhakar Reddy in a false case of land grab. When the local people asked the DSP Jangaon why this false case had been foisted on him, that police officer's

reply was: "We take so much trouble to book people in TADA cases and arrest them and this man gets them released free of charge in as little time as it takes us to type the remand papers. Do you expect us to keep quiet?!" During interrogation of suspects in lock-up, the DSP Warangal (Rural) has also frequently said that the police have with them a list of lawyers and civil liberties activists whom they would soon 'take care of and that Prabhakar Reddy's name was at the top of the list.

The Warangal police are also angry that APCLC has foiled their efforts to render persons 'missing' from lock-ups. APCLC agitated about the 'disappearance' of Bhadrachari of Akkampet at the hands of the Atmakur police and got the case referred to the justice T L N Reddy Commission. Prabhakar Reddy personally took pains to bring witnesses to the Commission and get their statements recorded. Recently the Madikonda police arrested two youth of Dharmasagar on November 11 and secretly spirited them away from the lock-up on the night of November 16 with the intention of making them 'disappear'. APCLC made a timely intervention and saved their lives by bringing the matter to the notice of the press and the subdivisional magistrate (RDO).

It is almost exactly a year ago that the police firing at Narmetta took place. Subsequent to the firing the police implemented severe repressive measures in the villages of Narmetta Mandal-353 villagers were implicated in three TADA cases. Prabhakar Reddy mobilised the other sarpanches of the mandal and worked very effectively to face this repression.

There are many such reasons for the hatred the Warangal police have for APCLC, and in particular for Prabhakar Reddy. And yet the district unit of APCLC has been unhesitatingly helping the district administration in solving many problems. It has helped the Agricultural Marketing Committee, the Chamber of Commerce, the Lorry Owners Association and the A P State Road Transport Corporation in tackling problems.

In recent times there have been regular meetings of the officials of the states of AP, Maharashtra, MP, Orissa and Bihar on the 'extremist problem'. The police are being trained in the use of the most modern weapons. A large number of armed personnel belonging to the CRPF, BSF, and ITBP have been deployed in the north Telangana districts and the agency areas of coastal AP. The home minister has been declaring that more forces will soon be brought to the state. The most modern weapons and the lawless authority to indulge in arbitrary violence are being given to the local police as well as the Special Task Force (STF) and the Special

Striking Force (SSF).

The home minister declares that all this is meant for countering the armed squads of the naxalites, but the experience of the last 20 years tells us eloquently what it is actually meant for. 81 persons have been killed in 'encounters' in the last one year since the Janardhan Reddy government came to power. Hardly half a dozen of the victims are members of armed squads. The rest are ordinary people, sympathisers of the naxalite movement, their legal activists, or unarmed rural militants. In the last six years of implementation of TADA nearly 10,000 persons have been accused of TADA offences in this state in the name of being naxalites. Hardly a hundred of them are members of armed squads the rest are landless poor who have occupied landlords' land, sympathisers of naxalite politics, those who have attended their meetings, those who have provided them with food or shelter, and so on. The police have been justifying the arms and the illegal powers they have been given by the government by invoking the need to apprehend armed naxalites, but have been using the arms and the licence against the landless poor, the peasants, the workers and the tribals who are the social and economic beneficiaries of the naxalite movement. This hypocritical tactic is being deliberately pursued by the government. We apprehend that the meaning of the recent threats of further repression and 'crackdown' is that this violence on the poor and the oppressed is going to be doubled. We feel that the statements being issued by the SP of Adilabad in the wake of the recent Tulasipet 'encounter' are symptomatic of what is to come. He has declared that he has instructed his police to open fire on naxalites even if they are found assembled with tribals to discuss the drought situation.

We appeal to all those who cherish democratic values to condemn the murder of Prabhakar Reddy. We demand that the SP Warangal should be kept under suspension and a judicial enquiry should be ordered into the murder of Prabhakar Reddy. We demand that the state government should send back the CRPF, BSF and ITBP forces. While ensuring the maintenance of law and order by lawful means, it should concentrate on the solution of problems of landlessness, drought, rural unemployment, etc.

K BALAGOPAL, G HARAGOPAL
Hyderabad

On EPW

I HAVE no quarrel with your decision to close the correspondence on the editorial policy of the EPW (in fact, I suggested it).