

Swatantra Party Parliamentary Office

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For favour of publication

The following is the letter written by Prof. N.G. Ranga, M.P. Leader of Swatantra Party in Parliament to the Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, regarding recent developments in West Bengal.

"Ever since the United Front Government dominated by the Marxist Communists took office about a month ago in West Bengal, they have been doing everything possible to take the law into their own hands, to disrespect and defy the Constitution of India, to obstruct protection to Central property and Central Government employees and to force a confrontation with the Centre so as to endanger the unity and integrity of India.

2. First of all I refer to the report which has appeared in the papers today that the West Bengal Ministers "would lead a Bandh" or strike in West Bengal. I attach a cutting from the Times of India relating to this news. It is said that the United Front Government advised the Railways, Indian Airlines and Posts & Telegraphs Department on April 9 not to run their normal services in West Bengal during to-day's twenty-four hour Bengal Bandh as a result of which Indian Airlines cancelled all flights to and from Calcutta and Railways emanating from Calcutta have also been suspended. This news item goes on to say that the United Front Ministers are giving lead in the Bandh and that none of the thirty ministers will attend the Secretariat on the 10th. This is the first time in the history of this country and perhaps in the history of any country in the world that a total strike is organised and propagated by the Government itself. Strikes and bandhs are generally organised by dissatisfied and discontented anti-government elements in the community against the inaction, harassment or wrong policies of the Government. But to the best of my knowledge, I have never come across a case in which Government itself is organising and promoting a strike or a Bandh. Defiance of the Constitution could go no further. It is the primary duty and function of a Government to maintain and protect normal services against interference by rowdy or unruly elements. But when a Government itself formally appeals for the observance of a strike, where is the incentive to the public to continue to be law-abiding citizens of the country? This is a highly explosive situation of which serious notice must be taken by the Centre if it means to function as a Government.

3. This is not an isolated incident. From the very first day of their assuming office, the United Front leaders are indulging in unconstitutional and unlawful acts. First of all, they tried to force the Governor to read a speech implicating both the Governor and the Centre. But this attempt did not succeed because of the firmness of the then Governor, Shri Dharma Vira. During the few days that Shri Dharma Vira stayed on as Governor of the State, no co-operation was shown by the Government and particularly by the Ministers. They did everything possible to humiliate him and to make his life uncomfortable. Forgetting that he is the representative of the President, they did not have the elementary courtesy of seeing him off at the station when he finally left the State.

4. As examples of the Government of West Bengal taking the law into their own hands, I would give only two instances - the arrest of General Vadera and another senior officer of Durgapur Steel after labour trouble at the Durgapur Steel Works, which is a central government public enterprise. The recent arrest of three senior officers of the Cossipore Ordnance Factory after handcuffing them, as a consequence of certain incidents into the merits of which I do not propose to go as they should be subject matter of a central, full-fledged, independent, judicial investigation is another incident. You are already aware of the fact that in the early days of the assumption of office of the West Bengal Government, they threw out feelers for sending a "fraternal" delegation to East Pakistan, presumably with a view to joining up hands in the interest of China with which country our relations are most strained ever since its unprovoked and brutal aggression on our borders in 1962. In between, there was a question of the posting of Central Reserve Police at Durgapur and other places for the protection of installations and factories belonging to the Government of India and the dispute has not yet been settled in spite of the right of the Centre to take whatever steps may be necessary for the protection of its property located and its personnel working in any State.

5. It seems to us that the United Front has over-stepped all reasonable limits and the time has come for the Central Government to govern or to get out. If the present Government is unable to enforce respect for the Constitution in any part of the country or on the part of any party, it has no business to continue in office. Our Party stands for enforcing law and order, ensuring respect for the Constitution and the safeguarding of the Central Government property, employees and interests anywhere in the country and particularly in West Bengal where they are seriously threatened by lawless and perverse acts on the part of the present government of West Bengal. It is not for us to suggest what should be done, though we have a clear idea as to what should be done to meet the situation and we would spell them out at the right time and at the right opportunity. All that we want to say at this stage is that a desperate situation has arisen in the country requiring courageous action and Government at the Centre must give the highest priority to tackling this situation and take all steps for the maintenance of the Constitution and for the preservation of law and order in the country.

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Not for publication:

(A.P. Jain)
Executive Secretary