

## **Press Release**

The Human Rights Forum (HRF) demands that personnel of the Greyhounds as well as the CRPF responsible for the unprovoked and unilateral firing that led to the death of two Adivasi farmers on the night of March 15 near Buradamamidi village in Pedakodapalle panchayat of Pedabayulu mandal in Visakhapatnam district be prosecuted under IPC 302 and other relevant sections of the law.

A two-member HRF fact-finding team along with functionaries of several Adivasi organisations on March 19 visited the area where these killings took place. We examined the spot where the two adivasis, Batti Bhushanam (52) and Sidaari Jamadhar (30) were shot to death and spoke in detail to two adivasis, Sidaari Rambabu and Koda Bonjubabu, who were lucky to survive the firing. We also interacted with residents of Pedakodapalle, Buradamamidi, Mettaveedhi and Jayantikota who accompanied us to the area.

We have no hesitation in stating that the official police version that 2 contingents of Greyhounds and CRPF personnel who were on combing operations were fired upon by Maoists of the Pedabayulu Area Committee following which they were compelled to retaliate thereby resulting in the death of two Maoist squad members is a brazen and shameless lie. There was no exchange of fire on that night, only unprovoked, one-sided firing by the police that led to the death of two adivasis. In fact, the firing was not preceded by any warning.

After dinner on March 15, Bhushanam and Bonjubabu (residents of Mettaveedhi, a hamlet of Pedakodapalle) and Jamadhar and Rambabu (first cousins and residents of the Pedakodapalle main village) set out for a hunt hoping to strike some game, mainly birds. This is normal and fairly regular practice in Adivasi society, particularly in the dry summer months. Bhushanam and Jamadhar were each carrying a country-made weapon and had torchlights fixed with a strap across their head while the other two were holding torches.

The four crossed the local Gede Gedda and after a sojourn beyond Jayantikota took a turn back around midnight descending the Arnambayalu hill near Buradamamidi village. All four, were dressed in civil clothes. They were walking on a track in the fields belonging to residents of Buradamamidi when

they were shot upon by the police from about a half a furlong away to their left. There was no forewarning whatsoever. Both Rambabu, who was walking in front, and Bonjubabu who was at the back ran for their lives. Ramababu managed to crawl some distance and then run by the local rivulet away from the spot where they were fired upon. He was so terrified that he hid in the hills, on top of a mango tree and only emerged at about 8 am near his village. Bonjubabu ran to his village Mettaveedhi and to the safety of his home.

Bhushanam, a farmer and pensioner with three children and Jamadhar, a farmer who was recently married, were not so lucky. Both died as a result of the firing which continued for several minutes. Within a few hours of this, the police trotted out the customary concoction of an exchange of fire with Maoists. They are trying to pass off these senseless killings that resulted from their own criminality as one of an “encounter” by invoking the plea of self-defence. What is even more alarming is that these wanton killings did not take place in some remote habitation. Buradamamidi is only about 15 km from Paderu, the divisional headquarters.

We wish to point out that this is not the first time that such killings have taken place. In the Visakhapatnam Agency itself we recall the killing of three Adivasi youth (Marri Nageswara Rao, Mamidi Gopala Rao and Musidi Bangarayya) on December 3, 2007 near Kannavaram village of Budharalla panchayat in Koyyuru mandal. On that occasion the youth were part of a group of 25-30 adivasi villagers of Nallabilli and Kannavaram who were scaring away wild animals like wild boar from laying waste to their fields. They were resting at a perennial stream when they were fired upon by Greyhounds personnel and killed on the spot. This happened at around 4.30 pm!

And on the afternoon of February 21, 2016 two Adivasi farmers Ganga Madkami (40) and Ganga Podiami (33), residents of Balakati village in Korukonda block of Malkangiri district in Odissa, who were out hunting, were fired upon and killed by Greyhounds in the Puttakota forest area, also in Koyyuru mandal. On that occasion, the police got hold of Irma Kawasi, who was injured, got him treated at Visakhapatnam where he was operated upon and then sent him home after about three weeks! In both these killings, the police put out the utter falsehood that the deceased were armed Maoist cadre - of the Galikonda Area Committee.

As is known, adivasis set out to the forest, with which they have a deep and organic relationship, for a myriad of work. People of several villages in the area told us that following the Buradamamidi killings they were hesitant to venture out, particularly at night. There is palpable fear in the agency region with adivasis fearing for their safety.

We demand that a case be registered against police personnel involved in the firing under IPC 302 and other appropriate sections of the penal law at the Pedabayulu police station. The investigation in the case must be done by an agency as independent of the police as possible. We call upon the government to suitably compensate the families of the deceased. We shall also be approaching the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes as well as the National and State Human Rights Commissions seeking justice.

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**Visakhapatnam**