

State sponsored mass killing at Rampurhat - all victims are Muslims - systematic political violence with impunity going on

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To
The Chairman
National Human Rights Commission
Manav Adhikar Bhawan
Block-C, GPO Complex, INA
New Delhi-110023

29 March 2022

Respected Sir,

I am writing to you with great concern and extreme shock, to inform an incident of mass killing that took place in Bogtui village under Rampurhat police station area in Birbhum district of West Bengal on 21.03.2022. As per report, at least 10 persons, including women and children were mercilessly beaten up, their houses ransacked and later torched to death by a group of culprits influenced with political intentions.

Our central fact-finding team visited the place of occurrence on 23.02.22 and conducted a thorough fact-finding of the whole incident. The following were revealed from our fact-finding:

It has been revealed that since long, the area was frequented with illegal trade like illegal sand excavation and coal smuggling, which generated a huge amount of money, being controlled and monitored by local kingpins. The sum of money generated from these illegal trades amounted between 70 to 75 lakhs per day. There have been several instances of clash between different groups of the area to get control of these trades and the money generated from those. In such an instance, rivalry issued over the share of the extracted amount between one Angur Sheikh and one Bhadu Sheikh, both Congress party workers then. After 2011, when the Trinamool Congress (TMC) came into power, Bhadu joined TMC and drove Angur away to gain control over the whole cartel. However, Bhadu still couldn't achieve monopoly in the cartel as few local syndicate members from Bonhat village demanded share from the trade. Bhadu had no other option but to share a small percentage to those syndicate groups since 2011. However, these syndicate groups didn't agree to the share and initiated a clash with Bhadu. Since the last 1 and half years, one Rajel Sheikh, a member of Bhadu's opponent cartel and one Bapi Mondal, a member of Bhadu's cartel got killed in the clash. On 5th January, 2021, Babar Sheikh, Bhadu's brother also got killed in a shootout, allegedly by the men from Angur Sheikh's group. Hence, the area frequented with violence in clash between different syndicate groups.

38-year-old Bhadu became the deputy Pradhan of Bogtui gram panchayat in course of time and due to the long-standing rivalry, used to move along with bodyguards. On 21.03.22 at around 6:00 PM, as Bhadu Sheikh and his bodyguards were sitting in a local tea-stall, about 6/7 persons came in motorcycles and hurled crude bombs at Bhadu. He was taken to the Rampurhat Medical College Hospital, where he succumbed to his injuries. Soon after the incident, Mrs. Sebi Bibi, wife of Bhadu Sheikh openly called for revenge and dictated an attack on one Fatik Sheikh and one Sona Sheikh, who were allegedly involved in the murder of Bhadu Sheikh.

Soon around 50/60 followers of Bhadu came to the Bogtui village riding motorcycles at around 9:00 pm, with the purpose of avenging Bhadu's death. Meanwhile, almost all the male members of the village have left their houses. The riders then unleashed a brutal attack upon the villagers remaining in the village; their prime target being Sona and Fatik, accused of killing Bhadu. It has been revealed that the attackers have dragged the women and children out from their houses and brutally tortured them. They have also charged crude bombs at their houses. Finally, the women and children, after being beaten up, were forcefully dragged inside their houses. The perpetrators then locked the doors of these houses from outside and set fire to those houses. About 10 houses in the village were set on fire, including the houses of Sona and Fatik. It has been reported that Fatik's wife, Meena Bibi and minor son was among the deceased in the incident. According to the eye witnesses, the whole incident happened in the presence of police posted in the area. After the assassination of Bhadu Sheikh, at least 5 police vehicles and several police personnel were posted inside the village, when the riders entered the village and initiated the massacre. The witnesses narrated that when the attackers entered Bogtui village, the police didn't take any initiative to stop them. On the next morning the fire brigade initiated a rescue operation and recovered the dead bodies. However, the actual number of deaths are still not clear from either the version of the fire brigade or the police.

We have managed to reveal the names of the 10 victims, who were killed in the incident. There may be more deaths still unrevealed. The names of the 10 deceased are as follows:

Jahanara Bibi (42)
Marjina Khatun (20)
Kazi Sajidur Rahman (28)
Raushanara Bibi (42)
Umehani Khatun (7)
Rupali Bibi (42)
Nur Nahar Bibi (75)
Meena Bibi (42)
Akash Sheikh (10)
Surja Sheikh (7)

Following the brutal massacre, the Rampurhat police station initiated a case vide Rampurhat P.S. Case no. 169/2022 dated 22.03.2022, under sections 147/148/149/325/326/307/302/435/436/427 of the Indian Penal Code. The Rampurhat police and SIT have also arrested 23 accused persons in the incident. On 24.03.22, the TMC block President of Rampurhat Block, Anarul Hossain, was arrested in connection to the massacre. The inquest was conducted by ADM (Development) of Birbhum district, Mr. Supriyo Das at the Rampurhat Medical College Hospital. The Post Mortem Examinations were also conducted in a hurry without even informing the relative of the deceased. Some of the dead bodies were buried without even informing the actual relatives of the deceased; rather the identification was allegedly done by persons set-up by the police. A Special Investigative team (SIT) headed by ADG CID Gyanwant Singh was also formed to probe into the matter. Members of all leading political parties including Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee visited the spot and enquired on the incident. However, all the villagers except few have abandoned the village leaving behind only ruins.

Inspector-in-Charge of Rampurhat police station, Mr. Tridip Pramanick has been suspended and SDPO Rampurhat, Mr. Shayan Ahmed has been temporarily closed following the incident. Chief Minister, Mamata Banerjee declared compensation packages for the deceased and handed over cheques to the victims during her visit to Bogtui.

Upon hearing a writ petition, division bench of Calcutta High Court, presided by Chief Justice, asked Central Bureau of Investigation to probe recent violence at Rampurhat.

Yesterday, 28 March, one Nazima Bibi succumbed while was treated in hospital following the incident.

The incident of mass killing at Rampurhat was raised in the West Bengal Legislative Assembly with unruly scenes at the session, exchange of blows resulting busting the nose, fracture of ribs of the MLAs.

However, several questions are still unanswered from the incident:

1. As all the bodies of mass killings were taken by police administration and buried upon forcefully at midnight, hence why local police and administration shall not be booked for causing disappearance of evidences?
2. Despite police being posted at the place of occurrence after the murder of Bhadu Sheikh, why were they inactive? Or allowed people to be burnt alive?
3. The perpetrators have continued the massacre for 4 to 5 hours. Why police, civil administration or fire brigade didn't intervene during this time?
4. What is the actual number of deaths and why is there a discrepancy in this number as reported?
5. Why was no punitive action taken against the respective police personnel whereas their intentional inaction was evident?
6. Who are the actual perpetrators and the brain behind the massacre? Why are they being shielded with ruling political influence?
7. Why were the family members of the deceased not informed before the inquest over the bodies and the autopsy?
8. Why were the dead bodies not handed over the respective family members and not even informed before they were buried by police?
9. Why and what for the police administration was mute for years when series of killings were going on routinely?
10. The F I R registered at Rampurhat PS being No. 168/22 in the case murder of Vadu Sk, section 120B has been charged along with other sections of IPC; whereas in the case of mass killing Rampurhat PS being No. 169/22 the Rampurhat police missed to charge section 120B of IPC. Why?
11. Proper examination of dead bodies has not been done. Both Government of India and Government of West Bengal have shown their least interest to the international laws. The Minnesota Protocol on the investigation of unlawful death cases till now ignored. May we be allowed to ask the NHRC should look into the matter and pass such direction to governments?
12. Victims are not beggars. They want justice. In the instant case, state government is trying to shut up the mouths of victims by providing some money from public exchequer. Is this system be granted by our criminal justice system?

Under the circumstances we demand the following:

- The perpetrators of both the incidents, the murder of Bhadu Sheikh and the massacre following the murder, should be severely punished after neutral investigation.
- Safety and security of the villagers of Bogtui village should be ensured immediately
- All the victims are from marginalized religious minority community (Muslims).
- Measures should be taken to bring back the villagers, who have fled after the incident and re-establish peace in the village
- In West Bengal, series of state sponsored mass killings happen from 1970s jail killings (1970-71), Marichjhapi (1979), Anandmargi (1982) Nandigram (2007). In no case victims received justice or reparation. This aspect should be looked into by the investigative agencies.
- Rule of law should be established instead of law of rulers
- Stop making political games in the name justice to the victims of mass killings
- To ensure presence of relatives at the time of inquest over bodies (Secs 174 & 176 Cr.P.C.)
- An independent probe should be initiated by the Commission apart from the state's interference
- The respective police personnel responsible for their negligence in duty and saving lives should be identified, booked and tried in court of laws
- Effective investigation must be taken based on the guidelines of the Istanbul protocol and Minnesota protocol.

Video Link: <https://youtu.be/NA6JaeL1LuU>



