

PRESS RELEASE

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NFFPFW condemns murder of a Rava Youth in Buxa Tiger Reserve, West Bengal

In a recent 'firing' incident in Buxa Tiger Reserve in North Bengal, the forest personnel on duty in the Poro Beat (under Damanpur Range, Buxa Tiger Reserve) on 13th February evening deliberately murdered Suraj Rava, a 22-year old youth, in so-called 'self-defense'.

So far as could be ascertained, there was no 'encounter' whatsoever. The Staff challenged the boy, and started firing, which was totally unwarranted and unprovoked. Suraj was first shot and then beaten. He died in the hospital later that night.

Such killings have become commonplace in the Buxa area, and many such incidents of deliberate murder, false arrests, harassment and torture came to light during a Public Hearing conducted jointly by National Forum of Forest People and Forest Workers (NFFPFW), Delhi Forum, Nespon and Disha on 2005 April. The Judges' Panel for the Public Hearing was chaired by Justice Samresh Bandopadhyaya, the then chairperson of State Legal Services Authority. In the Poro village alone, at least two murders could be definitely recorded. Following the hearing, the decomposed body of Hradong Rava was dug up from the spot where villagers buried him after some forest staff had first shot at and then strangled the simple youth, belonging to a community living inside forests from time immemorial. That was in 2005. In 2001, Hradong Rava's brother, 14-year old Sanatan Rava, was beaten to death by the then Range Officer. The case was 'hushed' up. Since the hearing, there has been a number of killings in Poro and elsewhere in the Buxa area. In 2008-2009 alone, at least three people died because of firing by forest personnel, and in another incident the forest staff fired on a group of women near the Poro village, grievously injuring three of them.

We strongly condemn the brutal killing of Suraj in Buxa Tiger Reserve, and demand that all forest staff involved with the incident be immediately suspended and arrested, and legal proceedings against them should start without delay. We further demand that the State Government should immediately take administrative measures to sensitize Government personnel about the Forest Rights Act and take steps to implement it. We also demand that the Government, according to the spirit and letters of the law, restore the forests of Buxa and West Bengal to their rightful tribal and other traditional forest dwellers owners, and ensure that the Rava and other tribal communities are no longer subject to such brutalities.

Unless and till the time the above demands are not met, our organization calls for an indefinite and total boycott of the forest department. The indigenous people of the area can protect their own forests, according to the provisions of the Section 5 of the FRA, and they do not need forest department's support.

The forest dwellers of North Bengal demand immediate justice.

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On Behalf of NFFPFW