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REVOLUTIONARY DEMOCRATIC FRONT (RDF)

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Press Statement

Condemn the fake encounter of four alleged Maoist cadres in Assam by the Indian Army, CRPF and the Police!

Demand an impartial enquiry into the incident and punishment for the personnel guilty of perpetrating this cold-blooded murder!

RDF strongly condemns the cold-blooded murder of four alleged Maoist activists in Sadiya of Tinsukia district, Assam. The Assam government has claimed that a joint team of Assam Police, CRPF and Indian Army has killed four armed cadres of the Upper Assam Leading Committee of CPI (Maoist) in a 'fierce gun-battle' at around 10.30 a.m. on 9 May at Borgora-Deopani Nepali Gaon under the Saidya police station.

The family members of the deceased and the residents of the area have rubbished this claim by the government and the circumstances in which the four youths – Siddhartha Buragohain (Telikola village, Sadiya), Medang Gogoi alias Rajib Gogoi (Topsinga village), Hiren Chetia alias Rajat (Tokajan village) and Kamala Buragohain (No.2 Tokajan village) – all between 25 to 30 years, were killed. As per the news reports in the local media which referred to the testimonies of the villagers, this was nothing but a cold-blooded murder which was later staged as an 'encounter'. According to the residents of the village published by the media, a commando unit of Sadiya Police arrived early in the morning and forced the villagers to move away from the house of one Bal Bahadur Limbu where they suspected that Maoist cadres were taking shelter. Thereafter the house was encircled from all directions. Two of the cadres who were on sentry duty outside the house ran to safety by firing at one of the police teams, while another police team entered the house from the rear. The police found the four youth taking food and asked them to raise their hands. There was no resistance from the unarmed youth. Subsequently all four were shot by the police from point-blank range and killed in cold blood. Later the police resorted to heavy firing on the house to manufacture evidence of a 'heavy gun fight' as a result of which the house was severely damaged.

The Assamese newspaper *Asomiya Pratidin* reports that this fake encounter has generated discontent among the people of Saidya region. They have criticised the role of the armed forces by saying that they could have arrested the four youth as per the law of the land instead of murdering them in a staged extra-judicial killing. The fake 'encounter' of the four alleged Maoists is the latest in the series of thousands of such extra-judicial killings by the Indian Army, CRPF and the Assam Police in the name of 'counter-insurgency' operations against United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) and other proscribed organisations in the last two decades of Indian Army deployment in Assam. Only four months back on 26 December

2011, three youths – Siva Moran, Dhiraj Duara and Janak Moran of Makum, Tinsukia district – were picked up and killed in a fake encounter in the Assam-Arunachal Pradesh border by the Army and the police, and were termed as ‘hardcore ULFA’ cadres who were killed in ‘retaliatory fire’! Even though the family members of the deceased have filed FIRs against the Indian Army and large demonstrations have taken place, no enquiry has been ordered into the incident by the state government, which is desperate to shielding the culprits rather than bringing the truth to the open.

The horrors of state repression during Operation Bajrang and Operation Rhino conducted by the Indian Army in the 1990s against ULFA are still fresh in the memory of the people of Assam, and so are the hundreds of so-called ‘secret killings’ orchestrated by LK Advani, Prafulla Kumar Mahanta and co. during the AGP government in the same decade. The latest fake encounter in Sadiya once again displays the reality of Indian occupation of Assam, its colonial militaristic approach towards the people of Assam and crushing of their genuine struggles including the struggle for national liberation. Here any political dissent and peoples’ rebellion is dealt with the coercive might of the Indian state, and in doing so the latest method adopted by the state’s armed forces to brand activists and peoples’ movements as having affiliation or links with the Maoist movement.

The state has already branded peoples’ organisations like – Assam Students’ and Youth Organisation (ASYO), Asom Chah Jonogosthi Surakhya Samiti (Assam Tea Community Protection Committee), Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti (KMSS) etc. as Maoist fronts, and are persecuting them. More than 60 activists and individuals have been arrested in Assam over the last one year from its different parts by falsely implicating them for being Maoists. Thus, in this way, the ‘hallowed’ promises of the Indian constitution – be it the right to life, liberty or justice – are conveniently trampled under the jackboots of the army in the name of protecting ‘national security’ and ‘integrity’. The expansion of the Maoist movement into Assam is a response to the continued exploitation and oppression of the people by the Indian ruling classes in collusion with the regional ruling elite of Assam, whether they belong to the Congress, BJP or AGP.

Only a strong mobilisation of public opinion and peoples’ protest in Assam and outside can prevent these cold-blooded murders from recurring. Given the highly suspicious circumstances of the Sadiya ‘encounter’ and the testimonies of the local residents challenging the police version, RDF demands that the Assam government institute an immediate independent enquiry and file FIRs against the concerned army/police personnel involved in the killings. RDF also calls upon all the progressive and democratic organisations and individuals to protest against this fake encounter, and strengthen the fight for bringing the culprits to justice.

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