

14 November 2014

The Army on Thursday sentenced five of its personnel, including two officers, to life imprisonment for staging the killing of three Kashmiri civilians in the Macchil area of Kupwara district in 2010 and branding them as foreign militants for rewards and remunerations.

Those sentenced by the Army's summary general court martial are the then Commanding Officer of 4 Rajput regiment, Col. Dinesh Pathania, Captain Upendra Singh, havildar Davender, lance naik Lakhmi and lance naik Arun Kumar.

Chief Minister Omar Abdullah welcomed the decision, calling it a "watershed moment."

On April 30, 2010, Shahzad Ahmad Khan, Mohammad Shafi Lone and Riyaz Ahmad Lone, all residents of Nadihal in Sopore, were lured to work as porters for the Army on the promise of high wages.

They were later killed in a staged encounter and passed off as foreign militants.

Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah said the sentencing of five Army men in the Macchil fake encounter case, in which three Kashmiri civilians were killed and branded as foreign militants, should serve as a warning to those security personnel who may want to target innocent persons.

"No one in Kashmir ever believed that justice would be done in such cases. Faith in institutions had disappeared. I hope that we never ever see such Macchil fake encounter type of incidents again & let this serve as a warning to those tempted to try," Mr. Abdullah tweeted.

An Army court concluded its inquiry into the Macchil case in September and its sentence has now been sent to the Northern Army Commander for formal approval. If approved, all the five personnel will be imprisoned. The process may take a couple of months.

Reacting to the sentence, the mother of one of the victims called the convicted Army men murderers. "My son went once [to work for the Army] and was paid Rs. 500 for a day's work. That amount was three times the money he usually earned. So when he was asked to come again, he willingly went but it was all a plan to murder him. It was not that they killed my son in anger or by mistake, they murdered him," Naseema Bano, the mother of Riyaz Ahmad Lone told The Hindu.

Human rights organisations such as the Amnesty International welcomed the decision and said it indicated commitment to justice for human rights violations in Kashmir. Local rights organisations, which have been working on cases of staged killings, said the judgment should not be used to whitewash other cases.

"We hope this case will not be used as a whip to silence the critics of AFSPA and whitewash hundreds of human rights violations like Kunan-Poshpora mass rape, Pathribal killings and Badar Payeen killings in which the Army is still in a denial mode," said Parvez Imroz, a human rights lawyer who heads the Coalition of Civil Society in Kashmir.

The Macchil fake encounter triggered the 2010 mass protests in Kashmir in which a large number of civilians took to the streets, demanding the right to self-determination. More than 120 young, unarmed protesters were killed in police firing during the protests.

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/machil-fake-encounter-seven-soldiers-sentenced-to-life-for-killing-three-kashmiri-civilians/article6594347.ece>