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Damning reports submitted to the Supreme Court by two panels of judges have confirmed that armed forces personnel were involved in rapes and killing of innocent people in Manipur "under the cover" of the controversial Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA).

The reports, one of them submitted by the Manipur government to the apex court two weeks ago, have triggered fresh demands from rights activists for a probe by a special investigation team into "nearly 1,700 extra-judicial killings in the past 35 years" and withdrawal of the AFSPA from the northeastern state.

"Crimes against women, more particularly relating to sexual harassment committed by armed forces, are now increasing in some states like ours. They (armed forces) think themselves placed at the elevated status of impunity by the legislation and think wrongly they are given licence to do whatever they like," said the latest report on incidents during 2004-08 that was compiled by a group of serving and retired judges of district courts in Manipur.

The cases

A probe by M. Manoj Kumar Singh, District Judge of Imphal East, confirmed the rape of a 15-year-old schoolgirl by two army personnel on October 4, 2004. She committed suicide the same day. Upendra Singh, a retired district judge, reported the death of Amina, a young mother who was shot by CRPF personnel while putting her baby to sleep at home. The report said Amina died when a CRPF team, chasing a criminal, entered Naorem village, surrounded her home and fired indiscriminately.

In another report, Judge Manoj Kumar Singh investigated the shooting of Yumnam Robita Devi, 52, on April 9, 2002 as she waited for a bus at Pangei Bazar. A passing convoy of CRPF

personnel was ambushed by insurgents. "In retaliation", the report said, "the personnel turned to the civilians and fired indiscriminately. Ms Devi, who ducked on the floor of the market, was spotted and shot dead."

In April 2013, a commission headed by former Supreme Court judge Santosh Hegde inquired into six killings by armed forces and police and found the allegations to be true.

It had concluded that seven victims in the six cases, including a 12-year-old boy, did not have criminal antecedents and were not involved in any insurgency-related matter. The report pointed out that "four out of these six cases shockingly followed an identical pattern".

<http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/judicial-panel-slams-army-for-human-rights-violation-in-manipur/1/394207.html>