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SRINAGAR: The Army on Friday admitted that the killing of two youths in Budgam district by its soldiers earlier this week was a "mistake" and a violation of the rules of engagement. The Army said it would complete its inquiry within 10 days and take action against the guilty. The defence ministry offered a compensation of Rs 10 lakh each for the families of the deceased and Rs 5 lakh each to the injured.

Budgam survivor's account challenges Army's version:- "I admit that a mistake happened. Why else would two civilian boys have been killed like this?" Northern Army commander Lt General D S Hooda told reporters at the 15th Corps headquarters in Badami Bagh cantonment. "We sincerely wish the killing of civilians hadn't happened. We share the sorrow of the families."

Hood added, "There was some information about a white car with terrorists. Obviously, the identity was mistaken in this case. We take responsibility for the death."

However, SHO of Chadoora police station Arshid Ahmed refuted the Army's claim about the information on terrorists. "I don't know from where the Army got the inputs about militants...my police station and I had no such inputs. Maybe my seniors had the information but I did not have it," he said.

GoC 15 Corps Lt Gen Subrata Saha admitted there was a violation of the rules of engagement. "We are questioning ourselves why firing took place and why rules were not followed," Saha said.

Faisal Yusuf Bhat, 14, and Mehrajuddin Dar, 21, were killed and two others injured in Chhattergam village on November 3 when soldiers of 53 Rashtriya Rifles fired on their car. The Army had claimed that the car had jumped two mobile vehicle check posts set up in Chhattergam following specific information about terrorists in a car. A fifth boy, Wasim Amin, who survived the hail of bullets, claimed a clutch of soldiers fired at the car when it didn't stop immediately.

Defence spokesman Col Brijesh Pandey said the injured youth disclosed that there were five occupants in the car. Amin had escaped from the car after the firing by crawling out of the window.

Sources said the killings were being debated in the defence services with many in the Army believing that the soldiers not only violated the standard operating procedure, but ruined the goodwill earned by the Army with its rescue and relief operations during the recent floods in the state. The killings have triggered protests in Nowgam which have continued for the past four days.

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Killing-of-2-Kashmiri-boys-a-mistake-admits-Army/article-show/45076174.cms>