



## NHRC notice to Telangana chief secretary, police head

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

Taking cognisance of a complaint from the residents of Lagacharla village of Vikarabad district in Telangana, alleging police harassment, physical abuse, and false criminal charges, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has issued notices to the Chief Secretary and Director General of Police of the Southern State, calling for a detailed report in the matter within two weeks. In a statement issued here, the commission has observed that the contents of the complaint, if true, raise a serious issue of violation of human rights, which is indeed a matter of concern. The report is expected to include the status of the FIRs, persons in judicial custody and the villagers who, out of fear, are allegedly hiding in the forest areas without basic amenities. Citing media reports, the NHRC said that these actions allegedly occurred after the villagers protested the state's land acquisition for a proposed "Pharma Village" without following proper procedures. Most of the victims of the alleged atrocities claim to be from the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Communities. The complaint has been submitted by at least 12 victims who visited the Commission praying for its intervention to save them from starvation in the matter.

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## UTP death in custody NHRC asks CS to pay Rs 5L to victim's kin

**PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR**

**T**he National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has recommended the Odisha Chief Secretary to provide a Rs 5-lakh compensation to the family members of an under trial prisoner (UTP) Gobinda Sahu, who died in the Kantabanji Sub-Jail in Balangir district.

The NHRC passed the order taking cognisance of a petition filed by advocate and rights activist Radhakanta Tripathy.

Tripathy had earlier alleged that the death of Sahu in custody is violation of human rights laws. He sought for an independent and impartial investigation of the incident and heavy compensation to the bereaved family members, with legal action against the jail officials if they are found guilty.

Tripathy further stated that the cause of death of the UTP is given as asphyxia due to hanging. Though the inquiry Magistrate did not find negligence in the death of deceased, it is apparent that the deceased had committed suicide while in judicial custody.

The legal position with respect to the custodial death due to suicide or assault by other co-inmates or due to medical negligence is quite clear and well settled. The Supreme Court and High Courts in number of judgments have upheld the vicarious liability of the State to pay compensation to the next of the kin of the deceased in such cases, the petitioner stated.

The NHRC asked the Chief Secretary to submit the compliance report along with the proof of payment to the commission within eight weeks.



## NHRC visits Lagcherla

**The Hindu Bureau**  
HYDERABAD

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has started its inquiry on the police arrests of villagers of Lagcherla in Vikarabad district following the attack on the Vikarabad Collector, who had gone to the village for a pu-

blic hearing for acquisition lands for a pharma project.

The team consisting of Law department Deputy Registrar Mukesh and two inspectors conducted the field investigation at Rotibanda Tanda in Dudyala Mandal of Vikarabad.

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## NHRC delegation visits Lagcherla

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The NHRC team visited the village based on a complaint received that the police attacked and illegally arrested the local tribals who had opposed the land acquisition.

The team consisting of Law department Deputy Registrar Mukesh and two inspectors conducted the field investigation at Rotibanda Tanda in Dudyala

Mandal of Vikarabad. The team enquired from villagers on the behaviour of the police officials and also asked them whether women police accompanied them.

The women claimed that police broke into their homes at midnight and misbehaved them while taking the men into custody.

They also complained that electricity was cut off during the police presence. The officials tried to extract information whether any medical help was provided. Earlier, the NHRC directed the Chief Secretary and the DGP to submit a report within two weeks on the incident along with the details of persons taken into custody and the status of FIRs.





Roti Banda thanda in Vikarabad district wears a forlorn look in the aftermath of the November 12 attack on Collector Prateek Jain and Kodangal Area Development Authority Special Officer K. Venkat Reddy, by locals. NAGAR GOWD

# Pharma dreams face farmers' wrath

Land acquisition for a Pharma Village project in the constituency of Telangana's Chief Minister has sparked violent protests from farmers and tribals, culminating in the attack on Vikarabad District Collector and other government officials in Lagherla village. With over a dozen tribals arrested in connection with the incident, local residents, fearing police action, are fleeing their homes. **P. Laxma Reddy and N. Ravi Kumar** analyse the unfolding drama

**T**he approach to Lagherla village, nearly 130 km from Hyderabad, is under lockdown-like security. Multiple police checkpoints have been set up along the Tunkumeta-Kosgi road, where vehicles are stopped, and identification is meticulously scrutinised before allowing further access. The intensified measures follow the November 12 attack on Vikarabad District Collector Prateek Jain, Kodangal Area Development Authority (KADA) Special Officer K. Venkat Reddy, and other government officials by locals during a contentious public hearing.

The hearing, held to discuss land acquisition for a proposed 'Pharma Village' project by the Telangana government, turned chaotic when residents, mainly from Roti Banda thanda and Pulicheru thanda – now part of Roti Banda thanda gram panchayat – allegedly attacked the officials. The incident, the first of its kind on this scale in Telangana, has sparked outrage among government officials and ministers alike.

Lagherla, a sleepy village 17 km from Tunkumeta in Kodangal Assembly constituency represented by Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy, now resembles a war zone. Police personnel and barricades dominate the landscape, and tensions, though under control,

linger. This village is home to around 3,000 people of various communities.

Official sources say the acquisition plan involves 1,388 acres of land, including 547 acres of assigned land, 90 acres of government land, and 721 acres of private holdings. Around 800 farmers, mainly from poor and tribal communities, stand to lose their land and are seeking compensation of ₹30 lakh per acre, citing loss of livelihood and generational land. The area is considered one of the more backward regions of the State, plagued by arid climatic conditions.

Government officials, for their part, reportedly proposed a Rehabilitation and Resettlement (R&R) package that includes financial aid of ₹10 lakh per acre, a house under the Indira housing scheme, and a 125-square-yard plot for every acre of land surrendered. However, farmers argue that the compensation undervalues their land and does not account for the socio-economic impact of displacement. But officials maintain the project is crucial for industrial development and employment generation, with promises of further negotiations to address farmers' grievances. These talks, however, ended in chaos, with farmers attacking officials during a public hearing.

## Escalation of simmering tension

For over eight months, landowners from Lagherla, Roti Banda thanda, and Pulicheru thanda had been opposing the project. Their resistance peaked during the planned boycott of the November 12 public hearing, marked by a 'Vanta-Vaaru' protest – a symbolic form of agitation reminiscent of the Telangana statehood movement.

"When the Collector arrived without police protection, protesters began chasing and attacking him with sticks. People of our village were not involved; it was mainly those from nearby thandas and outsiders," an elderly resident says.

Patolla Ravinder Reddy, member of the Mandal Parishad Territorial Constituency, attributes the turmoil to dissatisfaction with the compensation package. "Landowners were offered ₹10 lakh per acre and 125 square yards of house site per acre, but the market value is ₹25 lakh even in the village, while roadside land is valued at ₹30-₹60 lakh per acre. Many would be willing to part with their land if the government offered ₹15 lakh per acre," he said, accusing officials and local Congress leaders, including the Chief Minister's brother, A. Thirupathi Reddy, of 'mishandling' the situation.

Protests escalated into violence when a mob attacked officials near a tent, 2 km from Lagherla village. Police said KADA Special Officer Venkat Reddy, Additional Collector Linga Naik, and Vikarabad DSP Srinivas Reddy were severely injured.

Subsequently, authorities arrested several suspects, including former Bharat Kashta Samithi (BRS) MLA from Kodangal Patnam Narendar Reddy and local BRS leader Bogamoni Suresh Raj, both accused of inciting violence for political gain, allegedly at the behest of BRS working president and Sircilla MLA K.T. Rama Rao. Roads and Buildings Minister Komatireddy Venkat Reddy claimed individuals from neighbouring villages had been brought in to stir unrest.

So far, 24 persons, including members of the Lambada tribe, have been arrested, and police are identifying more suspects. Cases have been registered under various sections, including attempted murder and obstruction of official duties, IGP Multi Zone-IV V. Sayanarayana revealed that 19 of the 50 suspects identified do not own land in the village.

Meanwhile, Additional DGP (Law & Order) Mahesh M. Bhagwat has launched an inquiry

into the incident. The government transferred Pargi DSP Karunasagar to the DGP office due to his alleged failure to prevent the incident. A senior police officer notes that the DSP could have stopped the officials from leaving their tents, and his absence during the attack was cited as a major lapse.

Farmers and villagers have expressed frustration over alleged provocation, inadequate compensation, and police excesses. Rathod Laxmi, 67, a farmer from Roti Banda thanda, says, "Compensation of ₹10 lakh per acre is insufficient when even half an acre cannot be purchased for that amount."

The unrest has drawn the attention of rights activists, Opposition leaders, the State SC/ST Commission and the National ST Commission, who have called for action against alleged police brutality. On November 18, National ST Commission member Jaroti Hussain Naik visited the area to hear the villagers' grievances. The villagers claimed they were unaware of the Collector's presence during the protest and alleged police misconduct, including harassment and indecent behaviour during midnight searches.

## Political colour

The agitation against land acquisition intensified on October 25, when Congress Mandal president A. Shekhar was locked in the gram panchayat office by villagers. He was accused of threatening residents of Roti Banda thanda to part with their lands in exchange for 'paltry' compensation. Shekhar is said to be a key supporter of the CM.

The mention of Rama Rao in the remand report of ex-MLA Narendar Reddy has intensified political tensions. The report alleges that the latter, under Rama Rao's direction, masterminded the attack on November 12, describing it as 'criminal conspiracy'. Police claim Narendar Reddy confessed to receiving assurances of protection from a prominent party leader. However, both the BRS and legal experts have dismissed the claims as politically motivated.

Further, concerns have been raised over the inadequate police presence at Lagherla, despite rising tensions over land acquisition for the proposed pharma village. Congress leaders, including CM Revanth Reddy, have openly blamed the BRS for the incident, and accused them of being "anti-development" for obstructing the project. In contrast, BRS leaders, including Rama Rao, led delegations to New Delhi to meet with the ST Commission and other statutory bodies. Meanwhile, tribal farmers, accused of attacking the Collector, met with Telangana State Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes chairman Bakki Venkataiah, accompanied by MLC Satyavathi Rathod. They alleged police brutality during their arrests.

Venkataiah assured the farmers of justice while Rathod called for registering cases against police officials under the SC and ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, accusing the government of unfairly targeting tribals.

Telangana BJP president and Union Minister G. Kishan Reddy has demanded action against the culprits, while ensuring protection of farmers. Mallajigiri MP Ean Rajendar has raised the issue with the National Human Rights Commission, alleging third-degree torture of farmers in police custody.

Land acquisition for projects remains a sensitive issue, regardless of the pro-

ject's purpose or promises of a relatively higher compensation and job opportunities for families relinquishing their land. Hyderabad Pharma City is not the first project in Telangana to face opposition in recent years, but what sets it apart is the government's focus on developing an at-scale, integrated, and one-of-its-kind facility.

## Land acquisition vs industrial growth

The project's features helped fuel interest among prospective investors and also contributed to stoking opposition, especially given the pharma industry's reputation as a polluter and a few research studies holding it responsible for anti-microbial resistant bacteria in water bodies near Hyderabad. Thus, it came as no surprise when Rama Rao, as then Industries Minister ahead of the first public hearing for the project in October 2017, stressed that "utmost care" will be taken to safeguard environment and handle pollution "very efficiently".

"We are setting ourselves up for scrutiny," he had declared, outlining the project's scope – spread over 19,333 acres, with ₹64,000-crore investment and direct job creation for 1.7 lakh people. However, the road to implementation has been fraught with challenges, including legal disputes over land acquisition, the COVID-19 pandemic, and inadequate financial support from the Centre, all of which delayed its rollout ahead of 2023 State Assembly elections.

The Congress party, which had opposed the ambitious project, wasted no time scrapping it after coming to power. However, with thousands of acres already acquired by the previous BRS government, fully abandoning the project proved challenging for the new administration. As a result, the Revanth Reddy-led government scrapped the Pharma City but unveiled plans to establish a clutch of smaller pharma clusters across the State. It was decided to call these Pharma Villages, as 'city' implied scale. "These [pharma villages] will be smaller in size and decentralised in different parts of the State and in all directions," Special Chief Secretary for Industries and IT, Jayesh Ranjan says.

The objective behind this shift is to avoid concentrating the pharma industry in one area, which could exacerbate pollution. Ranjan, however, clarifies that this does not mean there will be no pharma industry in the former Hyderabad Pharma City area. "Since land has been acquired, we have decided that in the erstwhile Pharma City also, a minimum of two but more also, if situation warrants, pharma villages will be established. As of now we plan to start two pharma villages of 2,000 acres each in the Pharma City. If there is more demand, we will do one more or two... one difference between the earlier proposed pharma city and the villages is only green category pharma [units will be permitted]," he explained. The villages will also feature logistics facilities, R&D labs, training centres, and manufacturing units.

Industries Minister in the Congress government, D. Sridhar Babu underscored the standpoint when responding to media queries about the pharma village projects. He recently chaired a review meeting where several drugmakers, including Aurobindo Pharma, MSN Group, and Dr. Reddy's Laboratories, expressed interest in setting up green pharma units on 50-acre plots within these villages.

The first two pharma villages being planned will focus on formulations, bio-similars, research, and vaccines, and not manufacturing of active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs), says Ranjan.

However, given the demand for APIs and the Indian government's push to enhance domestic production of raw materials, future pharma villages may include API manufacturing units. "Unlike in green pharma [manufacturing] meant huge contamination of groundwater, the technology has now advanced quite a bit [to allow for cleaner processes]," Ranjan explains.

He also emphasises that the Zero Liquid Discharge (ZLD) norm would be mandatory, with the government establishing state-of-the-art common effluent treatment plants (CETPs) to ensure proper effluent management. Interestingly, the Hyderabad Pharma City also had ZLD and CETP among pollution control measures.

Each company within these pharma villages will be required to set up its own ZLD facility. "There will be no liquid discharge and whatever effluents are coming will be treated through a government created facility. So, we are not leaving anything to chance," Ranjan adds.

This approach is in contrast with previous practices, where companies in existing pharma parks in and around Hyderabad, such as those in Pashamylaram and Patancheru, were left to develop their own effluent treatment plants, leading to inconsistent management and contamination. The government had earlier expressed intent to relocate all pharma units within the Outer Ring Road to the proposed Hyderabad Pharma City.

Ranjan says while district collectors have been advised to identify locations for the remaining 78 pharma villages, "we don't have any guarantee on the timeline. But in the case of the erstwhile Pharma City, the moment we allot land to the seven companies (MSN, Aurobindo among others), they will start construction."

As tensions over the Lagherla incident turned into a turf war between the ruling Congress and opposition parties BRS and BJP, the Chief Minister announced land acquisition is must for development. "My government is taking care of those who have lost their land and are suffering. We have decided to triple the compensation value," he has said.





# Lagacherla row: NHRC team in TG

STATE BUREAU

Vikarabad

A three-member delegation from the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) arrived in the district and interacted with the residents of Rotibanda thanda on Saturday. The delegation is also expected to visit Lagacherla and speak to the villagers.

The NHRC had taken cognisance of a complaint alleging harassment, torture and false implication of the villagers of Lagacherla after they protested against land acquisition for a pharma village project by the State government without following proper procedures.

Accordingly, the NHRC members are interacting with tribal farmers, women and others.

It may be recalled that National Commission for Scheduled Tribes member Jatothu Hussain Nayak had already visited Rotibanda thanda and Lagacherla last week. Apart from interacting with residents, he also spoke to the persons jailed in Sangareddy.

The NHRC had also issued notices to Chief Secretary A Santhi Kumari and Director General of Police (DGP), and sought a detailed report on the alleged atrocities on the farmers and women within two weeks.