

Antony can apologise, but tribal people won't forgive Muthanga violence: CK Janu



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Janadhipathya Rashtriya Party (JRP) chairperson C K Janu. File photo: Manorama

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Kalpetta: Even as former Chief Minister AK Antony tried to clear the air over the police brutality during the Muthanga agitation, CK Janu, who spearheaded the Adivasi protest, said that tribal people will not forgive him or other

leaders who stood by the cops when they used excessive force to crush the campaign.

She also lambasted the CPM, which has launched a campaign against the brutal police action against the tribal people, saying that the ruling party was shedding crocodile tears. While Antony had the power to control the police, it was the CPM and the other political parties who had set the stage for the tragedy, she said.

She was reacting to Antony's statement about the police brutality towards landless tribal people of Wayanad during his tenure.

Defending his role in the 2003 Muthanga eviction, Antony said he was the Chief Minister who allotted the most land to Adivasis. "We could not allow them to remain inside the Muthanga Wildlife Sanctuary. A CBI report has also been submitted. Has any government since then allowed adivasis to stay there? It has been 21 years since I left the CM's chair," he said.

The Muthanga incident followed a protest by the Adivasi Gothra Maha Sabha (AGMS), demanding land promised by the state in 2001.

AGMS launched the agitation on January 4, 2003. Led by Janu and political activist M Geethanandan, they demanded land for landless tribals in the Muthanga Range of the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary.

When the UDF ministry headed by Antony failed to resolve the issue amicably, the agitators declared the encroached zone as a self-rule area under the Fifth and Sixth schedules of the Constitution, setting up checkposts.

Soon, clashes with local people, forest staff and alleged political party goons escalated. On February 19, 2003, police and forest officials moved in to evict the protesters, leading to violence in which a policeman and a tribal man, Jogi, were killed. In the ensuing mass hunt for the protesters, countless tribal people were arrested and allegedly tortured.

Speaking to Onmanorama, Janu said all political parties had complicated the issue. She claimed that the CPM had played a leading role in escalating the otherwise peaceful agitation into a bloody confrontation.

CPM, she said, is now shedding crocodile tears about police atrocities. "If they are sincere in their demand, let them file cases against the officers responsible for the atrocities and reinstate the Tribal Land Mission to speed up the land distribution to the landless tribals," she demanded.

She noted that 16 tribal activists, accused in the land-grabbing agitation, had since died following the extreme torture they suffered while in custody. "Many others live as 'martyrs' of the agitation," she said.

Accusing the CPM of conspiring with anti-social elements to crush the agitation through hired goons, she demanded that the party should apologise and secure land for all landless tribals.

Janu and Geethanandan, who had surrendered to the police in front of the public, were brutally tortured in the police van two days after the bloodshed in Muthanga.

Janu said that several tribal families that had encroached the vested forest land as part of the CPM agitation under its tribal arm 'Adivasi Kshema Samithy' (AKS), remain encroachers, even after 22 years.

'We won't forgive'

Recollecting the days of suppression, torture, and trauma, Janu said she will not forgive Antony for his inefficiency that led to the violent eviction and bloodshed.

"We know that it was against Antony's will that the final phase was designed and executed by a coterie, but he cannot escape from the responsibility," she said. Janu acknowledged that Antony was the first leader to recognise their demand for land, bringing them to the negotiating table. He even approached the Centre for 25,000 hectares of land and secured 19,000 hectares. "But the CPM sabotaged the process while taking the credit for Antony's efforts," she alleged.

"Let CPM first complete the land distribution process before accusing Antony," she said. "It was the CPM, not the UDF, which filed two more cases against the tribal people," she said.

For Janu, the fury, grief, and scars of Muthanga remain as raw as ever in her body and mind.



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