

Chundur Harijans sore at Dalit leaders

HYDERABAD, August 15

FIVE Harijans from Chundur, scene of a recent massacre, appeared here before the press yesterday and charged that Dalit Mahasabha leaders were misleading Harijans and adding to their sufferings by making them refuse aid offered by the state government.

An assistance of Rs 10,000 each was given to five families on August 11, when Ms Meera Kumar, AICC observer, and Mr V. Hanumantha Rao, APCC president, visited Chundur. Mr Katti Padmarao, the secretary of Dalit Mahasabha, made the families return all the money to the joint collector the very next day. The affected families had also refused the rice sent by the government. The stand of Dalit activists and Chundur Harijans is that they would accept aid only after justice was done.

The AP home minister, Dr Mysore Reddy, has said that Dalit leaders were preventing Chundur Harijans from co-operating in the process of recording evidence, which was necessary for arresting people named as suspects. Police had made 29 arrests.

Non-cooperation by Harijans is also said to have affected the government move to attach properties of absconding suspects.

On the other hand, Dalits have been complaining that the government was not serious about apprehending suspects. Mr Katti Padmarao told some newsmen at the village that a circle inspector who was supposed to have been suspended was very much on duty on Monday, August 12.

Dalits are asking for a compensation of Rs 100,000 each for every person killed in the massacre. The chief minister, Mr N. Janardhan Reddy, had announced an assistance of Rs 100,000 for each family of those killed, an acre of land, pucca houses and jobs.

The Chunduru Harijans who spoke to the press here yesterday, said that they were misled by Mr Katti Padmarao. He had told them that the chief minister, Mr N. Janardhan Reddy, would be gheraoed for five minutes and that they could talk to the chief minister after the token protest. But, when Mr Reddy came to the refugee camp at Aithanagar in Tenali town

on August 9, he was surrounded by slogan-shouting youth for a long time and was not allowed to enter the church serving as a sanctuary to the Harijans.

Mr Pilli Prasanna Rao, Mr D. Isaac, Mr Pilli Sangeetha Rao, Mr Prakasa Rao and Mr G. Jacob told newsmen that initially they expected that Mr Padmarao would get them a larger assistance from the government.

They said they would accept assistance from the government. All that they wanted was that the social atmosphere in Chunduru should be restored so that they could live in the village and have their children educated in the village itself.

FOCUS OF CONTROVERSY:

The deputy speaker of Andhra Pradesh assembly, Mr A. Dharma Rao, has become the focus of a controversy after the Chundur massacre. He is the MLA from Vemuru constituency which covers Chundur.

Dalit activists and opposition parties have been demanding that Mr Dharma Rao should be removed from the deputy speakership. They have charged him with patronising the upper-caste groups of Chunduru.

However, Telugu Desam and other mainstream opposition parties have not been able to decide their approach to the Dharma Rao issue. There is a proposal that they should not participate in assembly proceedings if Mr Dharma Rao was to preside. The assembly is to meet on August 17 and Mr Dharma Rao has been officiating as speaker since December, 1990, after the then speaker, Mr Ramachandra Reddy, became a minister.

Mr D. Isaac, uncle of a young man killed in Chunduru, has said that Mr Dharma Rao, who had a record of service to Harijans, could not have been involved in the massacre.

Mr Dharma Rao is one of the prominent Congress leaders of Guntur district, a Congress bastion, where NTR's Telugu Desam suffered many reverses. In 1985, when Congress won only 50 out of 294 assembly seats in the state, he was the only Congress MLA to win from the Tenali sub-division which has five constituencies.