

## Revolutionary songs, slogans mark Maoist leader Azad's last rites



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Hyderabad, July 4 – The last rites of top Maoist leader Cherukuri Rajkumar alias Azad were performed here Sunday amid revolutionary songs, slogans and red salutes by sympathisers, former extremists and civil liberties activists.

Azad's brother Anil Kumar aided by revolutionary writer Varavara Rao and others lit the funeral pyre around 2 p.m. as the slogans of 'Lal salam, lal salam' (red salute) and 'Comrade Azad amar rahe' rent the air.

For over two hours, the mourners from various groups held a meeting at Panjagutta cremation ground, paying tributes to Azad and accusing the central and state governments of killing him in a stage-managed gunfight.

Speakers, including revolutionary writers, poets, singers, intellectuals and rights activists, described Azad as a 'hero' and vowed to continue the fight to fulfil his dreams.

The body of Azad, who was killed by the police in an alleged exchange of fire in the forests of Adilabad district Friday, was brought to his brother's house in Madhapur Sunday morning from a hospital where it was kept Saturday night.

Dozens of Azad's relatives, friends and supporters paid homage to him before the body was taken to the cremation ground. Intellectuals, artists and leaders of leftist groups also paid homage to Azad, who was No.2 leader and spokesman of outlawed Communist Party of India (Maoist).

His mother Cherukuri Karuna, brothers Cherukuri Suresh, Cherukuri Anil Kumar and other relatives were in tears so also Maoist sympathisers and Varavara Rao, revolutionary writer Kalyan Rao and revolutionary balladeer Gaddar.

Several others, including women, joined in paying their last respects at the cremation ground. The artistes, including Gaddar, sung revolutionary songs, hailing him as ‘people’s true leader who sacrificed his life for the cause of poor and downtrodden’.

Amar, a former leader of the CPI (ML) Janashakti, leaders of other CPI-ML groups, leader of Madiga community Manda Krishna Madiga and Progressive Organisation of Women leader Sandhya were among those who paid their last respects.

Gaddar, Varavara Rao and Kalyan Rao, who acted as mediators in the peace talks between Maoists and the Andhra Pradesh government in 2005, and others addressed the gathering.

Varavara Rao alleged that Andhra police arrested Azad along with a journalist in Nagpur, brought them to Adilabad district and tortured them before opening fire on him from point blank range.

‘Azad was carrying a message from Swami Agnivesh for peace and was working on the proposal for peace talks. By killing the same man in fake encounter, the government has proved that it is not interested in peace,’ he said.

Recalling his close association with Azad, the writer said he gave up a promising career to fight for the cause of poor. ‘He was the voice of the suppressed people, a great intellectual who had good command over both English and Telugu,’ he said.

Gaddar said by killing Azad in fake encounter, the government can’t suppress the people’s movement. ‘This is an unconstitutional government because it kills people in the name of constitution and democracy. I am warning the murderers that if they continue such killings they will face a massive people’s movement,’ he said.

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