

[One of the great many articles, spread far and wide, which falsely claimed that the massacre of 16 people in the Khagaria District of Bihar was the work of “Maoists”, and specifically the CPI(Maoist). As far as we know the AFP news agency did not correct this false claim later, or if it did, it was not picked up and published in the many publications and websites that published this first report.]

Maoist rebels kill 16 villagers in eastern India

By Imran Khan (AFP) – 2 days ago
[Written & distributed on Oct. 2, 2009]

PATNA, India — Suspected Maoist rebels killed 16 villagers in eastern India, tying them up and then shooting them over an apparent land dispute, police and local residents said Friday.

Deputy Superintendent Ajay Pandey told AFP that more than 50 armed rebels raided the village in Bihar state on Thursday night and singled out the members of three families.

"They woke them up, tied their hands and legs and gunned them down," Pandey said, adding that five children were among the 16 killed.

The deadly attack was the result of a land dispute between two groups in Amausi Village, located about 200 kilometres (125 miles) north of the state capital Patna.

"The Maoists were used by one group to kill the other to gain control over the agricultural land," he said.

India's Maoist insurgency, which started as a peasant uprising in 1967, has spread to 20 of the country's 29 states and claimed more than 600 lives so far this year.

The rebels say they are fighting for the rights of neglected people and landless farmers, but officials accuse them of using intimidation and extortion to secure the cooperation of impoverished villagers.

State police said they had so far arrested one man in connection with the case.

"We have arrested one farmer and are interrogating him to nab the others involved," Anand Shankar, the state's director general of police, told AFP.

"We will track all of the perpetrators of this heinous crime. The incident has triggered panic among residents of Bihar," he said.

Ranjit Singh, a villager who survived Thursday's attack, said there was local anger at the authorities' alleged failure to heed several warnings that such an attack was imminent.

Singh, 50, said the Maoists had ordered a group of villagers to stop planting crops on a piece of disputed land four months ago.

"We had informed the local administration about the threat, but they ignored our complaint," he told AFP by telephone.

An eye-witness to the attack, Raj Kumar, 30, said he ran out of his house after being woken by the sound of gunfire.

"I hid behind a tree and saw people being shot dead," he said.

Local villagers refused to open their doors in the morning for fear of more violence, Kumar said. Last month Prime Minister Manmohan Singh rebuked regional police chiefs for failing to stem the Maoist insurgency, which he described as the greatest threat to India's internal security. Little is known about the Maoist movement's shadowy leadership based in the dense forests of central India's Chhattisgarh state, or the number of cadres, which is variously estimated at between 10,000 and 20,000.

The rebels have grown more brazen in recent years.

In 2007, they assassinated a federal MP and engineered a mass prison break for 300 of their jailed fighters. Last year saw a series of attacks, including the sinking of a boat carrying elite commandos, while in April this year the rebels briefly held an entire train with 300 passengers hostage.

"I would like to say frankly that we have not achieved as much success as we would have liked in containing this menace," Singh told the police chiefs in September.

The Indian government recently launched a grisly newspaper campaign to discredit the Maoists, running graphic photographs of the rebels' victims.

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