

Killing of PCAPA leader shows cops on offensive

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The killing of Lalmohan Tudu, the president of the People's Committee Against Police Atrocities (PCAPA), at Katapahari in Lalgarh is being not only seen as a body blow to the Maoist-linked organisation but also signals a clear shift in the strategy of the security forces after the Silda attack.

The forces fighting the Maoist rebels have switched to "offensive aggression" from the earlier softer, cautious approach, according to officials. Though the CRPF claimed Tudu's was an encounter death, state police officers told The Indian Express that the PCAPA leader and two others were tracked down through cellphone intercepts on Monday night and gunned down. The aim is to dismantle the PCAPA, which has worked in tandem with the Maoists.

From the cellphone intercepts, a CRPF unit in Lalgarh got the lead that Tudu was returning home to see his daughter, who is to appear for the Madhamik examination. Tudu was accompanied by two others — Yuvraj Murmu and Suchitra Murmu — both said to be Maoists. Only Tudu's body could be recovered.

"Suchitra Murmu, a member of Salboni squad was a close associate of Tara, the senior leader of the regional committee of CPI (Maoist)," said a police official. Yuvraj, her husband, collected information about the Silda EFR camp before the attack. "We have information that Yuvraj did the recce of the Silda camp and he was a member of the Lalgarh squad led by Vikash," added the official, referring to the Maoist group that led the attack.

Confirming the shift in strategy for the security forces, West Bengal DGP Bhupinder Singh said: "Earlier, we had issued orders regarding the collateral damage, asking our forces to try and keep it to minimum. But now our forces will open fire at them and kill them if they could not be arrested. We won't let them run away."

However, the DGP said "the death of Lalmohan Tudu was an encounter death". "We have evidence to stand by our claim. Our force will retaliate immediately if the rebels open fire," he added.

Tudu, being a leader of the PCAPA, generally was not as secretive as the underground Maoists. But he moved with caution and secrecy after the arrest of Chhatradhar Mahato, the outfit's convenor, in October 2009. In Mahato's absence, Tudu had taken up the responsibility to coordinate the PCAPA work. According to locals, Tudu was a "cool-headed, calculative and moderate leader" unlike Sidhu Soren, who is now likely to run the PCAPA.

After Chhatradhar's arrest, Soren, a hardcore Maoist cadre who had been with the PCAPA, had formed the Sidhu-Kanhu Gana Militia — an armed wing with recruits from the local villages. Soren, who is a

close associate of Kishenji, was given the responsibility to give arms training to PCAPA activists and the villagers. The trained recruits were later to be absorbed in the Maoist squads.

A CRPF official, who did not want to be named, said the PCAPA and Gana Militia played a crucial role in the Silda attack by planting landmines in key positions and putting up barricades to prevent security forces from reaching the camp. He added that the network has to be destroyed to win the battle against the rebels.

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