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Chhatradhar Mahato held

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Two plainclothesmen posing as journalists reached his hideout



Chhatradhar Mahato

KOLKATA: Chhatradhar Mahato, convener of the Maoist-backed Police Santrash Birodhi Janasadharaner Committee, was arrested in an operation conducted by the West Bengal police at Birkar village near Lalgarh in West Bengal's Paschim Medinipur district on Saturday.

He was arrested by policemen who posed as journalists, according to eye witness accounts. The government, however, was tight-lipped, saying it was awaiting details.

Claiming to represent the tribal people, Mr. Mahato launched on November 2 last a "people's movement" to protest against alleged police atrocities in Lalgarh which followed an IED blast targeting the convoy of West Bengal Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee at Salboni.

Aware of the regular communication between Mr. Mahato and a section of the local journalists, two plainclothesmen befriended two local reporters posing as journalists and reached Mr. Mahato's hideout.

"Big success"

District Superintendent of Police Manoj Kumar Verma told reporters at Midnapore that Mr. Mahato's arrest was a "big success" for the police. The police were trying to arrest Mr. Mahato for quite some time now. More than 15 cases were pending against him.

The arrest could spark fresh agitations by the tribal people in the Jangalmahal (forested land) with Maoists' backing.

Kishanji, Polit Bureau member of the Communist Party of India (Maoist), told *The Hindu*: “Unless Chhatradhar Mahato is released unconditionally, the entire Jangalmahal in five States [West Bengal, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Bihar] will be up in flames.” Immediately after Mr. Mahato’s arrest, a landmine went off near Kantapahari (seven km from Lalgah) and another failed to explode at Kumarbandh.

Mr. Verma said none was injured. Six persons were arrested in connection with the incidents, four of them suspected Maoists.

The arrest is a major boost to the morale of the State government and the police in their fight against the Maoists and the Maoist-backed PSBJC. Home secretary Ardhendu Sen had said in August that the joint operation launched by the security forces at Lalgah on June 18 to flush out the rebels was “partially successful.”

<http://www.hindu.com/2009/09/27/stories/2009092750270100.htm>