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Lalgarh's PCPA turns into armed outfit, loots weapons

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LALGARH: People's Committee against Police Atrocities, the Lalgarh tribal forum that has all along denied links with Maoists, announced on Monday that it has turned into an armed outfit, 'Sidhu Kanu Gana Militia'. The announcement came with the claim that PCPA members had looted 10 firearms by raiding a CPM armed rally in Goaltore.

PCPA spokesperson Asit Mahato, who replaced Chhatradhar Mahato, said the tribal forum would "no longer continue democratic processes of rallies and agitations". "We have formed the People's Militia Force," he said. "After facing continuous torture by the joint forces and the administration in Jangalmahal, PCPA has decided to pick up arms to combat the forces."

PCPA had been carrying out a 'democratic movement' since November 2008 when it was raised to protest 'arbitrary arrests' in the wake of the ambush on the chief minister's convoy.

Just after the Sankrail attack, Maoist leader Kishanji had warned that villagers were looking for firearms to take on the forces and that the weapons looted from the police station were being distributed among them.

Since Monday morning, security forces on routine patrol were surprised to face strong resistance in villages like Teshkan, Makli and Hirabandh. Villagers seemed to be firing on security forces, which puzzled officers until Mahato came out with the statement. Soon after that, the militia opened fire on the Dharampur police camp, triggering a gunfight till late in the night.

Mahato threatened that the militia would soon hit state and central offices and government agencies. He called for an indefinite strike in Jangalmahal from Tuesday. "Police have rounded up over 350 common villagers and charged them with sedition and murder. They did not even spare elderly women. They are occupying schools, depriving our children of education. They torture villagers every day," alleged Mahato.

Senior police officers didn't make much of the threat. "Mahato's announcement indicates that the reins of the Lalgarh movement are in the hands of Maoists. It will now be easy for us to pick up PCPA members who've been working for guerrillas for the past year under the guise of PCPA," said a senior officer.

"If they've turned into a militia, they can no more claim innocence as mere villagers. Our task will be easier," DGP Bhupinder Singh said. **TOI**

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