

Now rangers seek Kishenji protection

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At a time when the West Bengal government is red-faced after the elusive Maoist leader Kishenji called up one of its top bureaucrats, there was more embarrassment for the government. Two of its forest officials are said to have called up Kishenji seeking protection.

A highly placed police official revealed that two of the rangers called up Kishenji on Wednesday and spoke for a few minutes. The calls were tapped as all mobile phones of Kishenji are being monitored by the state CID.

“We tap all the calls received by Kishenji and the calls made by Kishenji. The calls were tapped while two rangers in the Lalgarh-Jhargram area called him up and sought protection. They spoke for 5-6 minutes,” said the official on condition of anonymity.

“The rangers pleaded to the Maoist leader for their lives as the Maoists are on the rampage in the forest beat and range offices. It is against the policy of the government for any government official to call Kishenji for protection,” added the official.

Two rangers (names being withheld) called up Kishenji late on Wednesday night seeking protection as early on Wednesday morning the Maoists-backed Sidhu-Kanhu Gana Militia ransacked the Parihati range office in Jhargram and assaulted ranger Pratap Acharya after a group of ultras were denied extortion money they demanded from Acharya. Acharya was asked to hand over the government funds he had in the office.

Since the funds were already shifted in view of the violence and targeted attacks on forest establishments, the Maoists did not get any money and they beat up Acharya with wooden planks. Acharya was rushed to hospital and is reported to be in a critical condition.

“We have inquired into the matter. However, as of now we have not got the names of the rangers. Around 5-6 cases have been reported to me in which the Maoists, after ransacking the range offices, stole mobile phones of our rangers. There is a possibility that the Maoists are using these cell phones to mislead the police and the intelligence agencies,” said Atanu Raha, Principal Chief Conservator, Forests.

In the last couple of weeks, the Maoists and the members of the People’s Committee Against Police Atrocities (PCAPA) have torched five forest offices in Sankhahar, Binpur, Goaltore, Jhitka and Parihati.

Bhupinder Singh, DGP, said: “We are yet to get information about the calls made to Kishenji by the government officials. The matter will be looked into.”