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Pro-Maoist villagers torch range forest office in West Bengal

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Palasia (West Bengal): Hundreds of villagers owing allegiance to People's Committee Against Police Atrocities (PCAPA), a pro-Maoist organisation, stormed the premises of the Range Forest office near Palasia in west Midnapore district of West Bengal and set it on fire on Monday.

The irate villagers said that they torched the office in retaliation to the police highhandedness and as a protest against the arrest of their local PCAPA functionaries.

"On the evening of sixth December 2009, the police swooped in here and dragged people who were working in the fields. They rounded up locals named Joydeb Bera and Raju Adak. And when ladies of the village went to question such atrocities, they charged canes...to protest against such a cruel attitude of the authorities, we have gathered here under the banner of People's Committee against Police Atrocities, we are staging a sit in strike. Zindabad (hail) our crusade against police highhandedness and we will protest till Joydeb Bera and Adak are released," said Sanatan Hansda, a PCAPA leader.

West Bengal is among the most Maoist-affected states in India. The Maoist violence -- estimated to have caused 600 to 700 deaths annually and the displacement 100,000 civilians -- has spread to 182 of India's 602 districts and has been declared as the country's single biggest internal security threat.

The Maoists have stepped up violence across eastern and central India. They have attacked schools and police stations, and used landmines and Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) to disrupt infrastructure development projects.

The main objective of the Maoists is to prevent the development of infrastructure in remote areas, which so far has remained their exclusive domain. Thousands have been killed by Maoists in the recent past. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has described the Maoist threat one of the gravest homegrown threats to India's internal security.

The Maoists claim they are fighting for the rights of poor farmers and landless labourers, but they are fast losing credibility as they continue attacking schools, hospitals and infrastructure projects. - ANI

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