

Maoists Kill CPM Leader, Ransack Lalgarh Houses

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CHANDRA (West Midnapore): Armed Maoists yet again went on an offensive against CPM members in Lalgarh on Tuesday night, killing one and ransacking houses of seven others.

They abducted CPM's Amjhora branch committee member Ratan Mahato from his house at Pirakhuli in Salboni and took him to a nearby jungle. Carrying out a trial by a "peoples' court," he was accused of being a police informer and of giving shelter to CPM's musclemen.

Ratan was beaten up badly. He cried for help, but no one came to his assistance, fearing reprisal from the Maoists. Villagers later brought an injured Ratan to Midnapore Medical College and Hospital at 11 pm. He died early on Wednesday.

West Midnapore SP Manoj Verma said: "We have spoken to Ratan's wife and some of his neighbours. Based on their descriptions, we have got a list of suspects. A massive hunt is on for them."

Maoist supporters went on the rampage in other parts of Lalgarh, too, on Tuesday night. Nearly 3,000 people attacked the house of Chandra range forest beat officer Tarini Mahato and his brothers, Kalipada and Bikash, at Dharrasole in the Midnapore Sadar block. They looted Rs 50,000 and gold ornaments from the almirah and drawers set the house on fire. Armed men also ransacked the houses of former panchayat member and local CPM leader Naba Kumar Mahato, Srikanta Mahato and veteran CPI leader Sushen Mahato, looted everything and set the houses on fire.

"We have never attended any party meeting like other businessmen. My elder brother Tarini stays at forest quarters at Chandra and brother Bikash stays in a rented house at Mitra Compound in Midnapore. Naturally, we don't know why they attacked our family property," a scared Kalipada, a paddy merchant, said. "They looted Rs 50,000, gold ornaments and even rice after asking my wife Banalata to leave the house. I was hiding on the roof when they set the house on fire. I was lucky to have saved my life."

Suspected Maoists also attacked and looted houses of CPM party members Sunil Mahato, Nakul Mahato, Deben Mahato and Uttam Mahato at Jamdahra village, which is only 3 km from the Chandra police camp.

Suspected Maoists dug up roads at Belia and felled trees to stop the movement of joint forces from Midnapore. They also blocked roads from Chandra to Jamdhara and Dharrasole to obstruct the forces' movement from the Chandra police camp.