

CPI(Maoist) Spokesperson Azad killed by government forces in Andhra Pradesh

(With great sadness, we report the following news. This account from the bourgeois newspaper The Hindu contains the government account, but indicates that some key aspects of the account are contested. We will post further, and more complete, information as it becomes available. –Ed.)



THE END: The body of Maoist leader Cherukuri Rajkumar lies where he was killed in Adilabad district on Friday

The Hindu newspaper

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The Andhra Pradesh police on Friday said it had shot dead top naxalite Cherukuri Rajkumar alias Azad, along with an unidentified cohort, in an exchange of fire in Adilabad district, close to the State's border with Maharashtra.

The death of Azad, a member and spokesman of the Central Committee of the CPI (Maoist) and a member of the Polit Bureau, has dealt a big blow to the Maoist movement in India. He was an ideologue who had specialised in field-craft as well.

Even as some sources questioned the encounter theory, the police said the gunfight lasted more than three hours. An AK-47 assault rifle, a pistol and two kitbags were found at the scene.

The alleged encounter took place on a 500-metre-high hillock 3 km from the nearest motorable road. With the monsoon having set in, the forest had become lush green, and the tribals had started farming operations. Some of them were tilling the land, but none would speak to The Hindu about the encounter.

Azad, around 58 years old, hailed from Krishna district of Andhra Pradesh. He went underground in 1979. He was arrested in 1975 and 1978 and jumped bail. He carried a reward of Rs. 12 lakh on his head.

He had apparently been tasked with reviving the Maoist movement in Andhra Pradesh. He was a member of the Urban Sub-Committee (USCO) and was in charge of the South Western Regional Bureau (SWRB) of Maoists, which coordinates the movement in Kerala, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Gujarat.

Police sources familiar with the Maoists' pattern of activity said Friday's encounter deaths could lead to reprisal attacks in Maoist strongholds in Chhattisgarh, Orissa, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal. They, however, said the death of Azad had broken the aura of invincibility that the Maoists were seeking to create by means of their recent brutal strikes against the security forces.

Adilabad Superintendent of Police P. Promod Kumar told journalists that the police had launched combing operations following intelligence inputs that a team of Maoists had moved into the forests from Maharashtra. One of the police teams encountered a group of 25 to 30 rebels in the hilly terrain near Sarkepally, a village 15 km from the border with Maharashtra.

“Our team... cautioned them to surrender, but it came under fire, forcing it to retaliate,” the officer said.

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/article496686.ece>