Strapped by a wire: landmine?

Midnapore, March 5: Spending the night tied to a eucalyptus tree, yards from the blood-soaked body of a comrade, was bad enough for CPM activist Bhim Soren.

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He had to spend a few more hours trussed up in the morning, though, because the police were too scared to free him. It had struck them that the wire twined around Soren might be connected to a landmine at the other end.

When it comes to Naxalites, Bengal's police are better safe than brave.

After the Maoists had killed Kartik Singha and left Soren immobilised by the side of the body, the man in his late thirties had spent a traumatic night counting the minutes for the police to arrive from nearby Lalgarh.

When they did, at 9 am, the first thing they spotted was the loose end of the wire, rolled into a bundle, nestling in the narrow gap between Soren's waist and the tree trunk. The next thing they did was frighten the man some more by suggesting he might be tied to a landmine.

They stood watching from a distance - all two dozen of them, each carrying a semi-automatic weapon - for six hours, waiting for the bomb disposal squad to arrive from Jhargram. It was 3 in the afternoon when the experts declared there was no explosive.

The policemen defended themselves citing how the Barikul officer-in-charge, Prabal Sengupta, was killed last July when a bag booby-trapped by Maoists blew up in his face.

"We have taken lessons from that. Sengupta should have waited for bomb experts," an officer at Lalgarh said.

This fear of Naxalites hangs like a pall over every police station in the Maoist hubs - at Ranibandh or Sarenga in Bankura, Belpahari, Banspahari or Binpur in West Midnapore or Bandwan in Purulia.

"Go to any of these police stations, you will find the main entrance closed through the day," a senior district police officer said. "With sunset, the policemen lock themselves inside the rooms."

MP leader killed

Suspected Maoists stabbed a CPM local committee member of Barikul to death and injured a partyman tonight. Gatilal Tudu and Mangal Mandi, who is fighting for life in hospital, were returning home after a party meeting when accosted at Satnala village.

The Bankura police chief refused to confirm that the attackers were Maoists. A large police team has gone there.

Von: 6.3.2006 by Naresh Jana, The Telegraph, India

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