Three people were killed and 10 injured when Maoists Wednesday triggered a landmine targeting a top police official in Ongole town of Andhra Pradesh, about 400 km from here.

District Superintendent of Police Mahesh Chandra Laddha escaped unhurt but his vehicle was damaged in the blast in Prakasam district.

The Maoists tried to blow up Laddha's vehicle when he was returning home from office.

Police said three gunmen with Laddha received minor injuries. Laddha's vehicle caught fire while two tractors and a scooter passing by also bore the brunt of the blast that was heard in a radius of six km.

Police said that after triggering the blast, the guerillas hiding nearby opened fire on Laddha's vehicle but escaped after his three gunmen returned the fire.

The Maoists had blamed Laddha for a series of killings of their cadres in "stage managed gun battles" in the district.

The attack is also being seen as a revenge for the massive combing operations launched in Nallamalla forests spread over four districts.

State Home Minister K. Jana Reddy condemned the attack. This is the first landmine blast aimed at a top police official since the eight-month long ceasefire between the state government and the rebels broke down in January.

More than 175 people, including 12 policemen, have been killed in the last three and a half months. Over 6,000 people have died in Maoist violence during the last 35 years.

Von: 27 April 2005, IANS