

TDP leader among nine killed in Andhra Pradesh

Political violence once again raised its ugly head in Andhra Pradesh claiming nine lives Saturday.

A leader of the opposition Telugu Desam Party (TDP) and his nephew were among the nine killed when unidentified people attacked them with bombs in Kurnool district.

TDP leader Kapatralla Venkatappa Naidu, his brother Shivshankar Naidu's son and 10 others were travelling in a Tata Sumo when a truck hit their vehicle in Bodannuru village, about 60 km from Kurnool town and 300 km from here.

Immediately after the collision, a group of about 12 attackers in another Tata Sumo reached the scene and hurled bombs on the TDP leader and others.

While eight people died on the spot, one person succumbed to his wounds at the hospital. Two injured were undergoing treatment at the Kurnool hospital.

Naidu's two gunmen, a bank employee, driver and the TDP leader's followers were among the dead.

Late in the evening, police booked a murder case against 18 people including Kotla Harichakrapani Reddy, nephew of Kurnool MP Kotla Vijaybhaskar Reddy. The Congress MP is the son of former chief minister late Kotla Vijaybhaskar Reddy.

Others booked include Maddileti Naidu, C. Narayan Reddy and V. Padma, all belonging to the ruling Congress party.

Police said Venkatappa Naidu and his followers were attacked when they were going to a court in connection with the hearing of a case. A truck deliberately hit the vehicle to make it easy for the attackers to finish their job. The driver and the cleaner of the truck fled from the scene.

Initial reports had said it was an accident and the bombs in Venkatappa Naidu's vehicle had exploded.

Veeraswamy, one of the injured, told reporters that Maddileti Naidu and others threw bombs on them. He denied they were carrying bombs in the vehicle.

The vehicle used by the attackers was later recovered by police from a nearby village.

The incident led to tension in the area as Naidu's supporters came out on the streets, damaging buses and other public property.

Venkatappa Naidu, a powerful leader in the region who had several criminal cases pending against him, had a long running feud with V. Padma, who enjoys the support of the Congress.

The two groups have been fighting for the last three decades for supremacy in the region, notorious for deadly factional fights.

Naidu, who escaped about a dozen attacks in the past, had served as TDP member of the Zilla

Parishad Territorial Committee (ZPTC) and was a powerful leader during TDP rule.

His rival Padma returned to Kapatralla village in 2005, about three decades after her family was forced to flee the village. Supported by some Congress leaders, she tried to gain control of her ancestral property, which was allegedly encroached by Naidu, leading to tension in the village.

After Padma's return, Naidu and his supporters were reportedly in hiding. Fearing for his life, the TDP leader had also sought police protection.

TDP president N. Chandrababu Naidu alleged it was a conspiracy of the ruling party.

Rayalseema, comprising Kurnool and three others districts, has a long history of factional violence.

Factions, fighting for domination in the villages and enjoying support of the two main political parties, often target each other. The factions are notorious for brutal attacks with bombs and sharp-edged weapons.

The TDP alleges that more than 100 of its leaders and cadres were killed by Congress leaders since the party came to power four years ago. They include former minister and TDP legislator Paritala Ravi, who was gunned down by a rival group in Anantapur three years ago.

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