

35 policemen missing after Maoist attack in Andhra Pradesh

At least 10 policemen were injured and 35 are missing after Maoist guerrillas ambushed a police team Sunday in Andhra Pradesh.

The guerillas opened fire on the police while they were crossing a reservoir in a motorboat in Orissa's Malkangiri district, bordering north coastal district of Visakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh.

The motorboat was carrying 64 policemen, more than half of them from the anti-Maoist elite force Greyhound, returning to Sileru in Andhra Pradesh after an anti-Maoist operations in Orissa.

Unofficial reports said five policemen, including a sub-inspector, were killed in the attack.

Director General of Andhra Pradesh Police S.S.P. Yadav, however, did not confirm this.

The police chief told newsmen in coastal city of Visakhapatnam that 10 policemen were injured and 35 were missing after the attack.

Yadav, who rushed to the city, called on three critically injured policemen who are admitted to a hospital.

The Maoists reportedly used rocket launchers and fired from automatic AK-47 rifles. The motorboat capsized during the heavy firing and many policemen jumped into the water.

The remaining policemen either swam ashore or were rescued.

Chief Minister Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy, who held a meeting in Hyderabad, and reviewed the situation, asked police authorities to press two helicopters into service to trace the missing policemen.

The surprise attack on the police squad was carried out by State Militia Commission, which was recently constituted by the Communist Party of India-Maoist to intensify attacks on the Andhra Pradesh-Orissa border.

It is the biggest attack by guerillas in the recent years and it has come after Maoists suffered several setbacks in Andhra Pradesh.

Maoists lost over 300 armed cadres, including several top leaders, during the last three years. Police had recently claimed that the Maoist movement was on wane in the state with operations against the rebels having achieved many successes.

According to a list released by the police early this month, the armed Maoist cadres came down to 474 from 1,137 last year.

The Maoist violence in the southern state has claimed over 6,000 lives since 1969.

(© IANS / India eNews)