

Gorkha leader killed, houses burnt in West Bengal hills

Houses were ransacked and set ablaze, roads blockaded and shops shut down Thursday in Kurseong town of West Bengal by Gorkha Janamukti Morcha (GJM) activists after one of its members was killed in an intra-party clash, the police said.

GJM unit convenor of Pankhabari town Subodh Pradhan, 45, along with his six friends, went to attend a cultural programme at Simulbari area in Kurseong Wednesday night. They decided to put up at a nearby guest house as it was late night.

'But the caretaker didn't let them in as they were drunk. An altercation started and in the heat of the moment Pradhan and his friends beat up the caretaker. He called the locals, who incidentally were GJM activists too, for help,' sub-divisional police officer (SDPO) Rakesh Singh told reporters Thursday.

'A scuffle started between the two groups - Pradhan and his six friends, and about 20 locals. One of the locals stabbed Pradhan with a 'kukri' (chopper) and he died on the spot. Six of his friends were hospitalised with serious injuries,' Singh said.

Following Wednesday night's incident, Pradhan's supporters ransacked the guest house and set it on fire.

'Pradhan's supporters ransacked Rohini Guest House and five other houses, and set them ablaze Thursday. They blockaded all roads at Kurseong and shut down all shops. We have deployed commando-combat force comprising specially trained police personnel in the area.'

'There is no political colour in the murder. It's just an incident,' Singh said.

Meanwhile, GJM spokesperson Benoy Tamang Thursday evening said there are possibilities that it was not an intra-party incident but a well-planned murder.

'Pradhan was with GJM for years. But the activists who murdered him joined us only two-three months back. It is possible that there is foul play in Pradhan's murder... it may be the handiwork of our rival Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF),' Tamang said.

'We have already started an internal enquiry on this issue,' Tamang said.

The GJM, led by its president Bimal Gurung, has been spearheading a movement in the hills for a separate state and also opposing the Sixth Schedule status for Darjeeling.

The central government in 2005 announced the Sixth Schedule status to the GNLF-led Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC), thereby ensuring greater autonomy to the governing body.

But Gurung's breakaway group, which is opposed to the GNLF, is demanding full statehood.

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