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India: Maoist armed group should immediately release Chhattisgarh District Administrator and Orissa Legislator

The Communist Party of India (Maoist), an armed opposition group, must immediately stop holding, as hostages, a district official in the central Indian state of Chhattisgarh and a legislator in the neighbouring state of Orissa, and ensure their well being as long as they are held, Amnesty International said.

According to eyewitnesses, on the evening of 21 April, armed Maoists abducted 32-year-old Alex Paul Menon, the head of the district administration in Sukma in the Bastar region of Chhattisgarh, after shooting dead his two security guards, on his return from a meeting of Adivasi (Indigenous) farmers in nearby Majhipara village. The Maoists have sent a message to select news channels stating that they would release the abducted official only if the authorities halted all operations against them in Chhattisgarh and released eight of their arrested colleagues - Markam Gopanna alias Satyam Reddy, Nirmal Akka alias Vijayalakshmi, Devpal Chandrashekhar Reddy, Shantipriya Reddy, Meena Choudhari, Korsa Sunny, Markam Sunny and Asit Kumar Sen.

The Maoists also threatened to try Alex Paul Menon before a “people’s court” if their demands were not met by 25 April.

The Maoists have sent similar messages to select news channels in Orissa about Jina Hikaka, a 28-year-old legislator from the neighbouring state of Orissa, who was abducted three weeks ago in Koraput district. In exchange of Hikaka, the Maoists are now demanding the release of 29 prisoners, all belonging to the Chasi Mula Adivasi Sangh, an outfit claiming to fight for Adivasi land rights in the district.

Amnesty International urges the Maoists not to kill or harm the hostages, or threaten to do so, but to guarantee their safety and to release them immediately.

Abduction and hostage-taking are prohibited by international law. It is contrary to fundamental principles of humanity, as reflected in international humanitarian law, to abduct or detain anyone and threaten to kill or harm them if the authorities do not comply with the abductors’ demands.

On 14 March, the Maoists abducted Orissa-based Italian adventure tour operator Paolo Bosusco and tourist Claudio Colangelo along with two Indian nationals in Kandhamal district. They held the two Indian nationals for three days, Colangelo for a week and Bosusco for almost a month. The hostages were later released them in exchange for six Maoists held by the Orissa government.

In March 2011, Maoists released Vineel Krishna, the head of the district administration in Malkangiri in south-western Orissa and Pabitra Majhi, a junior engineer, after holding them hostage for nearly two weeks.

In February 2011, Maoists released five members of the Chhattisgarh state armed police force after holding them hostage for nearly two weeks.

In September 2010, Maoists abducted eight members of the state police force in central Chhattisgarh state; killing three. and later releasing the others. In the same month, the Maoists released three of the four police officers they had abducted in Lakhisarai district in the eastern Bihar state; the bullet-ridden body of the fourth abducted police officer, Lucas Tete, had been found the day before.

The long-running confrontation between the Maoists and security forces in several states has seen civilians routinely targeted for killings and abductions by both the security forces and the Maoists who continue to operate in a general climate of impunity. Hundreds of Maoist suspects jailed in the central and eastern states of India are awaiting trial.

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