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India: Maoist armed group in Bihar should immediately stop holding police as hostages

The Communist Party of India (Maoist), an armed opposition group, must immediately stop holding as hostage the three remaining police officers it abducted at Lakhisarai district in Bihar five days ago, and must ensure their safety and well-being as long as they detain them, Amnesty International said. The body of a fourth police officer abducted at that time, Lucas Tete, was found on 3 September morning.

According to reports, a Maoist leaflet found near his bullet-ridden body in the forests of Lakhisarai reiterated their threat that the three remaining police officers being held hostage by the Maoists would also be killed if the Bihar government failed to release eight Maoists who have been jailed and some of them are being tried on various charges.

The taking of hostages is prohibited by international law. "It is contrary to fundamental principles of humanity, as reflected in international humanitarian law, to seize or detain anyone and threaten to kill or harm them if the government does not comply with the hostage-takers' demands", said Amnesty International, adding that "the CPI (Maoist) must stop threatening to kill or harm them these police officers and guarantee their lives and safety."

The four police officers – Lucas Tete, Mohammad Ehsaan, Rupesh Kumar Sinha and Abhay Prasad Yadav - were taken hostage on 29 August, Sunday, after Maoists attacked a police search party and killed seven other police officers in a gun battle.

The deadline set by the Maoists for their release expired on 1 September, even as the Bihar government offered to hold talks with the Maoists on the issue. On 3 September, a Maoist spokesperson claimed that the kidnappers have killed Abhay Prasad Yadav, but his body has not been found so far.

Background

The long-running confrontation between the banned Communist Party of India (Maoist), an armed opposition group, and security forces in several Indian states intensified in July 2010 after the suspected extrajudicial execution by Indian security forces of Maoist spokesperson Azad alias Cherukuri Rajkumar and a freelance journalist Hemchandra Pandey, when they were travelling to initiate peace talks, in Andhra Pradesh state. The Government of India has rejected the demand for an independent and impartial and effective investigation into the killings as required under international human rights law and by guidelines set out by India's National Human Rights Commission in 2003.

Civilians in several states have been routinely targeted by the security forces and the Maoists during the confrontation.