

From radical student to armed commando: Why Basava Raju's death is a blow to Maoists

Chhattisgarh Basava Raju Encounter: The top Naxal leader, security officials say, was the link between the northern and southern commands of the banned CPI (Maoist)

Chhattisgarh Encounter News: For the two states of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, Basava Raju, who was killed in an encounter in Abujhmad on Tuesday, was synonymous with the Maoist party. The 70-year-old hailed from Srikakulam in Andhra Pradesh and was a student of the Regional Engineering College, Warangal.

"He was the students' union president of REC Warangal. He contested elections under the banner of the Radical Students Union," a top intelligence officer from Telangana said.

Basava Raju was known by his birth name, Nambala Keshava Rao, at the time. "This was when the whole of Warangal was influenced by radical outfits. He was one of their important recruits of the 1980s," the Telangana officer said.

It is believed that Basava Raju went underground in 1985. "He had been leading major operations ever since, and climbed up the ranks of the People's War Group," the official said.

The People's War Group (PWG) and the Maoist Communist Centre merged to form the CPI (Maoist) in 2004.

Basava Raju's death is a major blow to the Communist Party of India (Maoist), intelligence officials in the Telugu states said, because he was the link between the northern and southern commands of the banned outfit. After Ganapathy or Muppala Lakshman Rao quit the post of General Secretary of the banned outfit, Basava Raju stepped into his shoes.

"Ganapathy (70) was once known to unite the Naxalbari with the southern command of the party. He was known to have travelled the length and breadth of the country to bring the party under one umbrella. Basava Raju followed in his footsteps," another Telangana anti-Maoist police official said.

Basava Raju would be in West Bengal one day and in Srikakulam the next, all for the party, it was said in local tales, the official said.

"He was not just their ideological head but also their combat head, having grown up in the party from a very young age. His death is a major blow and the party could even be disbanded because of it," the officer claimed, adding that there is no one in the party who could bring the cadre together like Basava Raju. "It is almost impossible for the Maoists to regroup without him."

After Kishanji's (Mallojula Koteswara Rao) killing in 2011 at the age of 56, Basava Raju's loss will dent the party's Telugu roots, officials said. "In the ideological warfare, the party's morale would be pretty low because of this death," an official said. With the party finding no fresh recruits from Telangana in the past few years, the death of old cadre is fatal for the banned outfit, top officials said.

"We would ask the rest of them, the politburo, to surrender as soon as possible," an official said.