

Pentecostal Pastor Beheaded After Revival Ignites Among Tribal People

The body of a pastor was found beheaded on the shore of a reservoir in eastern India on May 2, hours after he was abducted by around 25 masked men whom police believe to be Maoists.

Residents of Kubasal village, in the Tamar area of Jharkhand state, identified the body lying on the shore of Surangi reservoir as Pastor Abraham Topno and alerted police. He is believed to have been murdered in the late hours of May 1.

The 46-year-old pastor was last seen by villagers traveling in a jeep with a local taxi driver named Ranga Singh Munda.

"It was late in the evening, as they entered the thick forests surrounding the state capital, Ranchi," Inspector Gimal Kumar told World Watch Monitor. "They pulled the pastor and the driver out, blindfolded them and tied their hands with a stiff rope. Then they cut his throat.

"The masked men told Ranga Singh Munda to go away and that that they have no business with him. 'We only want him [the pastor],' they said, and asked Munda to run away."

The inspector added that the pastor's body, whose head had been severed, had been taken for a post-mortem.

The pastor's teenage niece, Susari, told World Watch Monitor that her aunt (the pastor's wife) and family had been waiting for him to return home for dinner last night when the news came from the taxi driver that he had been captured by armed men.

Police Inspector Kumar confirmed that the taxi driver is now

in their custody and that they are in the process of filing an official police First Information Report, or FIR.

“We have a hint that [the Maoists] travelled via Arahanga and the surrounding forest range to reach Tamar. It is a very common path of the Maoists to enter Jharkhand from Odisha,” he said. “The Odisha border is only 50 meters away.

“This kind of attack can take place anywhere, but the presence of the forest range in this jurisdiction makes it a soft spot. It is a home to Maoists passing by and highly unsafe for ordinary citizens.”

The inspector added that the jeep was found near the body and had been set on fire.

A note was found in red ink in the Hindi language that said, “Death to police spy. Long live PLGA [People’s Liberation Guerrilla Army],” and signed “Your Maoists.”

“It appears that Maoists have targeted and murdered him simply based on the suspicion that he is an informer to the police,” Inspector Kumar said, adding: “I know there’s a church in Kubasal and am aware of the presence of Christians in the area, but never really interacted with any particularly because there was never a need.”

Who was Abraham Topno?

Pastor Nuas Mundu, a close friend of the murdered pastor, said: “He served in this area for nearly 25 years. After graduating from the Bible College in Itarsi, he was very keen that he wanted to go and serve among the tribal people.

“I have known him since he begun to serve Christ in his youth. I am ten years older than him and he regarded me as his brother. When he was looking for a Bible college, I suggested him to study at Itarsi. After that, he was determined that he wanted to serve in the Tamar region, where most of the

indigenous tribals have settled. On several occasions, he shared about the difficulties in doing ministry in this area, which is under police scrutiny because of the Maoist movement. He faced opposition from the tribal leaders also, yet he continued the work.”

He said the region was notoriously dangerous as “Maoists take shelter in these woods and so it is under the close scrutiny of police” and that the pastor had been attacked once before—in 2016—when he was also accused of being a police informer.

“But Abraham told them, ‘I am pastor and I am here to serve to God. I share the gospel with everyone, whether it be a policeman or Maoist or common man. I have no association with anyone at a personal level’, and that he is only accountable to God. They spared his life.”

His niece, Susari, who is 19, told World Watch Monitor that her uncle was very fond of animals and had set up an animal farm within the premises of his house and has kept pigs, cattle, dogs, fish, kittens and chickens.

She added that her uncle and aunt are childless, and that they had great interest in farming.

“He would get the plant waste and fodder from the CRPF [Central Reserve Police Service] camp office, which was just a walkable distance away from his house, for the animal farm and garden,” Pastor Mundu said.

“The police-camp people identify him as the local pastor. He was very kind and was always at peace with everyone. He received threats earlier also but he kept going.”

Susari told World Watch Monitor that her uncle’s murder came as a shock.

“How can anybody kill him?” she said. “The police have not revealed any details yet.”

“The tribal people have just started coming to Christ,” she added. “The church has grown in numbers very recently; at least 60 to 70 people gather for prayer services. He was a great support system to many. My aunt also contributes to the ministry work, and he also appointed an assistant pastor, but his absence will be felt.” {eoa}

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