

SAIL steps up security of its Chhattisgarh mines

Public sector major Steel Authority of India Ltd (SAIL) has strengthened security of its iron ore mining facilities in Chhattisgarh after Maoist guerrillas looted about 1.75 tonnes of explosives last month from one of its mines in the state, a senior official said Tuesday.

'Security has been strengthened with additional forces deployed at the mines in the state's Durg district to avoid such lootings in the future,' R. Ramaraju, managing director of Bhilai Steel Plant (BSP), the flagship unit of the SAIL, told reporters here.

About 100 heavily armed insurgents raided Mahamaya, an iron ore mine of SAIL, March 27 in Durg district and walked away with 1.75 tonnes of explosives.

Police officials said the looted items were gelatine sticks that could be used for landmine attacks. Gelatine was a mix of ammonium nitrate and sulphur that together make a devastating combination.

SAIL uses Mahamaya mine to feed BSP, also in Durg district. BSP alone contributes about 45 percent to SAIL's profits.

'We were taken by surprise by insurgents when they raided Mahamaya mines. We had an extensive discussion with state police and Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) after the incident and now additional force are deployed,' Ramaraju said.

He admitted that the police and CISF have so far failed to find the looted explosives.

He said BSP would soon begin excavation of a new iron ore block near its existing Dalli Rajhara mines in Durg district to meet increased raw material demand of the plant.

BSP has smashed its previous records during 2007-08 and raised its annual production to 5.3 million tonnes of hot metal, 5.1 million tonnes of crude steel and 4.43 million tonnes of saleable steel.

Ramaraju said BSP was now facing competition from private steel makers in long rail production sector but it would continue maintaining quality.

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