

SSB takes over security of relief camps in Chhattisgarh

The paramilitary force Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) has begun taking over from the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) the security of 23 government-run relief camps for villagers of Maoist affected areas in Chhattisgarh, a top police official said here Thursday.

A SSB battalion, which reached the capital city Raipur Tuesday, is now on its way to the southern insurgency-hit region of Bastar to join another SSB battalion that has taken over from the CRPF.

'About 2,000 SSB personnel have begun taking over security of 23 government-run makeshift relief camps from the CRPF in extreme southern districts of Bijapur and Dantewada to protect about 48,000 camp settlers,' Girdhari Nayak, inspector general heading anti-Maoist operation in the state, told IANS.

Officials say at present 36,991 people from 201 villages in Dantewada district and 10,949 people from 275 villages in neighbouring Bijapur district are living in the relief camps.

The mass exodus of villagers from these two districts began after they launched a controversial government-backed civil militia movement, Salwa Judum, in June 2005 to take on the Maoist insurgents.

'The SSB, earlier known as Special Services Bureau, will be handy for the Chhattisgarh to guard the relief camps, which are always soft targets of the rebels to send out terror message across the nation,' B.K. Ponwar, director of counter-terrorism and jungle warfare college (CTJWC) based at Kanker in Chhattisgarh, told IANS.

Sources at the police headquarters say the CRPF troopers to be moved from relief camps' security will be shifted to deep interiors of Bastar's 40,000 sq km forested area, where rebels are traditionally strong.

The CRPF troopers will team up with the Special Task Force, the Chhattisgarh Armed Forces and the local youths recruited as special police officers (SPOs) to combat decade-old Maoist terror network, and tackle dozens of training camps around which the Maoists have laid landmines.

The banned Communist Party of India-Maoist (CPI-Maoist) carried out several deadly attacks on relief camps in both Dantewada and Bijapur districts in the past two years and the government was forced to deploy the CRPF to protect the terrified villagers.

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