

Northeast overtakes Kashmir in terror deaths

Terrorist attacks are claiming more civilian lives in India's northeast than in Jammu and Kashmir. The region is also witnessing more insurgency-linked violence.

According to latest central home ministry figures, there were 1,489 incidents of violent incidents in the northeast in 2007 compared to about 1,000 in Jammu and Kashmir.

'Civilian casualties in the northeast during the same period stood at 498 as against 158 civilian in Jammu and Kashmir,' said the home ministry report titled 'Status Paper on Naxal Activities' released Tuesday.

Of the 498 civilian casualties in the northeast, 287 cases were reported from Assam alone.

'This is a really dangerous trend with Assam now witnessing a new form of terrorism where militants or terrorists are striking innocuous civilian targets to get maximum mileage without really confronting the Indian security forces,' Nani Gopal Mahanta, coordinator of the Peace and Conflict Studies department at Gauhati University, told IANS.

Assam witnessed more than 100 explosions last year, most of them in crowded marketplaces, besides organised attacks against non-Assamese people, particularly Hindi-speaking migrants.

Police blame the outlawed United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), a rebel group fighting for an independent homeland since 1979, for the continuing violence the state.

The home ministry report on the internal security was confined to the insurgency-hit states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Nagaland, Meghalaya, and Tripura.

The impact of terror on the region's already beleaguered economy has doubled, with investors shying away from setting up businesses in the states coupled with flight of capital.

'Security is the single most important issue for investors, besides poor infrastructure facilities in the northeast,' Minister of State for Commerce Jairam Ramesh told journalists here recently.

'Any investor would like to have a safe security environment and should not be bothered about bomb blasts and other such things,' he said.

'This is the general perception that many investors have about the northeast, although not all the states are affected by insurgency. This mindset needs to be addressed,' the minister said.

There are about 30-odd militant groups active in the northeast with demands ranging from secession to greater autonomy.

Another disturbing fact is that Assam has ranked fourth among Indian states with the highest number of custodial deaths last year with 14 people dying while in police custody.

Out of 188 custodial deaths in 2007, Uttar Pradesh topped the list with 32 deaths, followed by Maharashtra (25) and Gujarat (16), according to the report.

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