

## Four million people fear Maoist attack in dark Chhattisgarh

About four million people in Chhattisgarh's southern restive Bastar region are living in fear of a major attack by Maoist guerrillas, who cut off power supply to the area Thursday.

Officials said Saturday that the state home department has made elaborate security arrangements across the forested region, but people are apprehensive of a major Maoist attack at night. Police personnel posted in interior areas are spending sleepless nights.

Seventeen Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) battalions have been deployed in Chhattisgarh. After Kashmir, the maximum number of CRPF troopers are in the state. The police officials have started re-locating them to vulnerable areas to enhance security.

'Some vital steps are being taken due to the blackout. Definitely security has been tightened at 23 government-run relief camps (located in the area),' Girdhari Nayak, inspector general, state's Maoist operation, told IANS at the state capital here.

The relief camps are shelters for about 50,000 tribals in Bijapur and Dantewada districts of Bastar region. The districts have been prime targets of rebels in recent years.

The guerrillas blew up 220 KV high tension electricity towers in Dantewada district Thursday that plunged the region into darkness. Besides Dantewada, the other districts which do not have power supply are Bastar, Bijapur and Narayanpur.

Chief Minister Raman Singh held an emergency meeting soon after the blackout and ordered that a team of engineers begin work on a war-footing to resume supply.

Singh described the blackout as 'extremely grim' and appealed to the people to maintain calm.

The engineers and technicians of the Chhattisgarh State Electricity Board (CSEB) are cautiously heading towards the area under heavy police protection after reports that rebels had placed landmines there.

CSEB chairman Rajib Ranjan, who is in Bastar, told media persons Saturday: 'Supply may be resumed by June 11.'

But an engineer tasked with resuming power supply said: 'It will need more days than our expectations because we are now struggling to reach the damaged tower site through forested pockets that are heavily mined.'

The state government has sent high-powered generator sets from Raipur to all the four districts for emergency medical works at government-run hospitals and water supply for a brief period every day in the district headquarter towns - Jagdalpur, Dantewada, Bijapur and Narayanpur.

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