

Uneasy calm in Siliguri, paramilitary force to be deployed

An uneasy calm prevailed in Siliguri and other areas of West Bengal's Darjeeling district Friday as intensive police patrolling continued a day after the Gorkha Janamukti Morcha (GJM) activists clashed with Bengali-speaking groups, who are opposed to the separate Gorkhaland demand.

'Three companies of paramilitary force have reached Siliguri and would be deployed shortly,' West Bengal Inspector General (Law and Order) Raj Kanojia told IANS.

He said the situation is normal with no untoward incident reported since Thursday night.

Vehicles were plying and shops and markets were also open.

Assembly of more than four people was banned in parts of Siliguri town after the two rival groups fought a pitched battle, hurled crude bombs and set afire police vehicles, besides injuring nine police personnel as the disturbances spread to the plains Thursday.

The administration passed the ban (under section 144) in parts of Bhaktinagar and Siliguri and over the entire Pradhannagar police station areas in Darjeeling district.

Expressing 'greatest anxiety' over the continuous turmoil over the last few days, state Governor Gopal Krishna Gandhi asked everyone concerned to desist from any activity that might provoke violence.

The Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) and Indian Reserve Battalion (IRB) personnel have been called to patrol the violence-hit areas of Siliguri.

The GJM, led by its president Bimal Gurung, has been spearheading a movement in the hills for a separate state, besides opposing the Sixth Schedule status for Darjeeling district.

The central government in 2005 conferred the Sixth Schedule status on the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF)-led Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (DGHC) that ensures greater autonomy to the district's governing body.

The DGHC was formed in 1988 through an agreement between the central and state governments and the GNLF after the hills witnessed violence for about two years.

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