

Five killed, 50 injured in Assam blasts

Five people were killed and at least 50 others wounded, six of them critically, as three powerful explosions rocked crowded areas in Assam's main city of Guwahati on New Year's day Thursday, a few hours before Home Minister P. Chidambaram arrived on a scheduled visit.

A police spokesman said two of the blasts took place in crowded market places, while the third took place in a roadside dustbin.

'Five people have died so far and about 50 injured, according to preliminary reports,' a senior Assam Police official said.

The first blast took at Birubari area in the city in a garbage bin, injuring two people. The blast occurred at around 4.30 p.m.

The other two were near simultaneous blasts that took place at the Bhootnath and Bhangagarh markets.

One of the blasts occurred along the route that Chidambaram took on his way to the Raj Bhavan. Chidambaram arrived in Guwahati on a scheduled visit and is expected to hold an informal meeting with Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi. He is to chair a meeting of the Unified Command Headquarters in Guwahati Friday.

'The nature of the explosives is not immediately known although it appears to be some improvised explosive device,' Assam police chief G.M. Srivastava said.

He said in two places the bombs were planted on parked bicycles.

'We suspect it to be the handiwork of the ULFA (United Liberation Front of Asom),' Deputy Inspector General of Assam Police G.P. Singh said.

The injured were shifted to hospital with multiple wounds.

'We had indications that militants were planning to strike either on Dec 31 night or on Jan 1 night, targeting New Year revellers, but due to pressure from security forces the militants planted the bombs and escaped,' the police chief said.

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