

Maoist attacks will spiral unless countered, warn experts

The audacious killing of 49 policemen by Maoists in Chhattisgarh early Thursday has again proved what security experts have long been saying - that the Maoist movement has consolidated itself and holds sway over wide underdeveloped swathes of India.

Time and again the Maoists, also known in the country as Naxalites, have shown that they have the firepower and resources to hit out. And the latest attack on the Rani Bodali police camp in the Bijapur area of Bastar is no different.

The Maoists, numbering around 300, also took away a huge cache of arms and explosives before setting the camp on fire.

A total of 74 policemen - 24 personnel of the Chhattisgarh Armed Forces (CAF) 9th battalion and 50 of the Special Police Officers (SPOs) - were present at the camp in Bijapur, 510 km south of state capital Raipur, when the rebels attacked.

Earlier this month, the Maoists claimed responsibility for the killing of Jharkhand Mukti Morcha MP Sunil Mahato during Holi festivities and followed it up in quick succession by killing Prakash, a Congress leader in Andhra Pradesh.

'Mahato's killing and a spate of other incidents over the past months have not prevented the national security leadership from celebrating a six percent decline in Maoist 'incidents' between 2005 and 2006 (though fatalities have not dropped),' argues Ajay Sahni, executive director at the Institute for Conflict Management.

'It is also useful to remind ourselves that violence is not the only index of the threat.

'Security experts and the media continue to be obsessed about the 'Red Corridor' and the 'Compact Revolutionary Zone', but Maoist plans and projections have gone far beyond these confines and are now engaged in a process of mobilisation and militarisation that spans virtually the length and breadth of the country,' he said.

Despite the best attempts of the Empowered Group of Ministers headed by Home Minister Shivraj Patil to deal with the country's biggest internal security challenge, there seems to be no stopping the rebellion that is growing in strength.

Till date, the government has deployed 33 paramilitary battalions on anti-Maoist duty and sanctioned 29 additional India Reserve (IR) battalions, besides setting aside Rs.3.71 billion under the police modernisation scheme for weaponry, telecommunication equipment and other infrastructure.

Sahni said at their ninth Congress, held between the last days of January and Feb 1, 2007, the Maoists resolved, 'to advance the people's war throughout the country'.

In effect, the Maoist game plan seems to utilise each existing grievance and exploit the groundswell of disaffection amongst the poor to engineer a gradual consolidation across the country.

Maoist extremism currently affects 172 of the country's 602 districts, according to a home ministry official.

Unless the enormity of this threat and the patterns of its subtle diffusion are recognised and systematically countered, says Sahni, the Maoist consolidation will continue and will eventually translate into a bloody upheaval far beyond anything currently imagined.

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