

Chhattisgarh on alert after Maoists' I-Day boycott call

An alert was sounded in Chhattisgarh and thousands of police and paramilitary personnel were shifted to vulnerable areas in the interiors of the Bastar region following Maoist rebels' call for boycott of Independence Day functions Wednesday.

'Maintaining the trend of boycotting the national days, Maoists have called for a boycott of Independence Day functions this year too and have called for observing Aug 15 as black day,' Girdhari Nayak, Chhattisgarh's inspector general (Maoist operation), told IANS Monday.

'Police and paramilitary forces deployed in the state, mainly in the vast forested interiors of the Bastar region spread out over 40,000 sq km, have been put on high alert in the wake of the rebels' call,' Nayak stated.

'Security has been revamped all over Bastar with extra police personnel deployed in and around government schools, buildings and establishments that will host I-Day functions Wednesday.'

The mineral-rich Bastar region, comprising five districts of Kanker, Bijapur, Narayanpur, Bastar and Dantewada, is known as the Maoists' hotbed since the early 1980s and has emerged as the country's terror nerve centre.

The region has witnessed several cold-blooded murders of civilians and security personnel since June 2005 when locals launched an anti-Maoist civil militia movement called Salwa Judum, which was later backed by the government with arms and money.

The movement has so far forced over 50,000 people - mostly indigenous tribals - to desert their villages and settle in government-run relief camps due to threats from Maoist rebels.

Police estimate that there are at least 5,000 hardcore Maoists equipped with sophisticated assault weapons, landmines, rocket launchers and explosives active in the state, backed by at least 20,000 workers armed with rifles and traditional weapons such as bows, arrows and axes.

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