

Rising concern about India's bloody Maoist insurgency

AFP, Raipur

The killing of 24 Indian troops this week by Maoist rebels has raised concerns over whether security forces can successfully battle the insurgents, officials and analysts said yesterday.

The jungle clash in central India erupted after a unit of 100 soldiers and armed police went to check on a suspected rebel camp only to find themselves heavily outnumbered and outgunned, security sources told AFP.

The estimated 500 guerrillas in insurgency-hit Chhattisgarh state were equipped with bullet-proof jackets and helmets, mortars, automatic weapons, rocket launchers and advanced improvised explosive devices.

"The security men had almost entered the rebel stronghold but heavy firing from every side stopped them," a Chhattisgarh police official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

"It indicates they are even pre-

pared for an air strike or to counter tanks," said another senior top police official, who also requested anonymity.

Dozens of troops apparently ran away from the clash in the mineral-rich state's forested Dantewada district, 500 kilometres (310 miles) south of state capital Raipur.

Other police sources said troops ran out of ammunition while the Maoists quickly summoned reinforcements.

The debacle has prompted serious questions over how India is fighting the rebels -- described last year by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh as the biggest threat to the internal security of the world's largest democracy.

The guerrillas appear to enjoy massive support among the region's vast tribal population and landless farmers neglected by governments and fed up over unemployment and rampant corruption.

Locals can be involved "when police dominance has been established, not as a forward force," he

said.

"There are enough resources" to deal with the problem, he added, but blamed "lack of will."

Chhattisgarh police said the incident has led to a serious security review -- although similar action was promised in March when 55 policemen were killed in the worst-ever Maoist assault in the state.

"We're reorganising our forces," said Inspector General of Police RK Vij, without elaborating.

Security analyst PV Ramana said government forces, helped by good intelligence, managed to get the Maoists "on the run" in southern Andhra Pradesh state, which was worst hit by the rebels.

But Ramana said the new Maoist attacks in Chhattisgarh are the "mere beginning of what they envisage launching."

Better intelligence and training are needed to deal with "battle-hardened guerrillas," he said, adding: "This is going to take some time."



PHOTO: FOCUS BANGLA

5th suspect held over NY airport attack 'plot'

AFP, The Hague

A fifth suspect has been arrested over an alleged plot to blow up fuel tanks and pipelines at New York's John F Kennedy International airport, the Dutch ANP news agency reported yesterday.

It said the unnamed man, from Guyana and the subject of an international warrant, had been arrested on Sint Maarten, the Dutch part of a West Indies island shared with France.

Last month a court in New York charged Trinidadian Kareem Ibrahim and three men from Guyana, parliamentarian Abdul Kadir, Russell Defreitas, who worked at the JFK airport terminal, and Abdel Nur, with plotting between January 2006 and June 2007 to bomb the airport.

All were arrested earlier in June, Defreitas in the United States and the other three in Trinidad.

Critics however, played down the import of the conspiracy, saying the defendants could have caused little damage.

Security situation improving in Haiti: UN spokeswoman

AFP, Port-au-prince

Security conditions in Haiti are improving, although more work remains to be done, a UN peacekeepers' spokeswoman said Friday.

"Security is improving in Haiti but we have to continue to bolster Haitian police's capacities," said Sophie Boutaud de la Combe, spokeswoman for the UN Stabilization Force for Haiti.

The UN force, set up in Haiti in June 2004, has 7,200 military troops and 1,500 police from around the world.

The spokeswoman said that when the mission is up for renewal in October, staffing would have to be reevaluated. But she allowed that while "arrests have declined, that does not mean that stabilization has been consolidated completely."

UN peacekeepers were deployed to Haiti after then-President Jean Bertrand Aristide fled an uprising in February 2004.

Haiti is the poorest country in the Americas.

Badultala Pond in the port city has turned into a garbage dump because of indiscriminate dumping of garbage.

Indian peacekeepers in DRC accused of gold trafficking with rebels

AFP, Kinshasa

Indian UN peacekeepers have been accused of gold trafficking with Rwandan Hutu rebels in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, according to UN documents and witnesses.

The UN soldiers serving in DR Congo exchanged food and information for gold and dollars for some months in 2005 and 2006, several officials from the UN mission in the DRC (MONUC) told AFP, on condition of anonymity.

The exchange took place with rebels of the chiefly Hutu

Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), they said.

The Indian MONUC troops in Nord-Kivu province were based at Nyabiondo, more than 80 kilometres (50 miles) northwest of the provincial capital, Goma.

MONUC spokesman Kemal Saiki said Friday the UN's internal investigation department, based in Nairobi, had opened an inquiry as soon as the mission had been made aware of allegations concerning gold trafficking.

But he was unable to say when the investigation had begun or what period it covered.

In a confidential note dated July 2006 to one of MONUC's most senior officials, a copy of which was obtained by AFP, a mission official recommended that the then commander, a general, be immediately sent back to New Delhi.

"Serious allegations have been made against the Commander of the Indian Brigade, to the effect that he and other Indian officers acting under his instructions have been trading in gold," the note stated.

It said that "some North Kivu Brigade have sold their rations, reportedly for gold", adding that "the rations have come on sale in

the market at Nyabiondo".

The area of Nyabiondo has long been under the control of the FDLR who work the gold mines there.

The FDLR have been based in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo, bordering Rwanda and Uganda, for the past 13 years and are seen as a major source of instability in the Great Lakes region.

Many members are suspected of taking part in the 1994 genocide in Rwanda which, according to the United Nations, claimed the lives of 800,000 ethnic minority group Tutsis and moderates of the majority group, the Hutus.

FDLR officers, whose statements AFP obtained, described close links in the summer of 2006 between FDLR commanders and UN peacekeepers at Nyabiondo, who fed them advance information of anti-rebel operations.

CA's wife visits school for children with disability

Begum Neena Ahmed, wife of Chief Adviser Fakhrudin Ahmed, visited Ashar Alo, a school for disabled children run by Bangladesh Navy Family Welfare Association (BNFWA) in Chittagong on Thursday, says an ISPR press release.

During the visit, she was accompanied by BNFWA President and wife of Chief of Naval Staff Begum Munira Nizam.

Being established in 2003, Ashar Alo has provided education, medicare facilities and other social assistance to a total of 70 disabled children.

Disabled students of the school also presented a cultural programme on the occasion.



Begum Neena Ahmed, wife of Chief Adviser Fakhrudin Ahmed, visits Ashar Alo, a school for disabled children run by Bangladesh Navy Family Welfare Association (BNFWA) in Chittagong on Thursday.

Powerful typhoon injures dozens in Japan

AFP, Tokyo

Thousands of people were forced to flee their homes as a powerful typhoon lashed Japan's southern island of Okinawa Friday, grounding hundreds of flights and injuring at least 34 people, reports said.

Typhoon Man-yi, described as one of the strongest in memory, whipped up waves of 12 metres (40 feet) off the subtropical island's coasts and overturned trucks.

The typhoon is expected to smash into mainland Japan's southern island of Kyushu on Saturday and may then hit the Tokyo region, according to the Japan Meteorological Agency.

In Okinawa, television footage showed men who had been trying to clear the damage forced to cling to trees to withstand the violent wind and rain, which uprooted trees and flattened large fences.

"This is one of the biggest typhoons we've experienced in Okinawa," a local hotel employee said by telephone.

"We islanders are very nervous. It's fairly dangerous to go out or even drive a car as trash and broken trees are flying in the air," he said.

Two men aged 78 and 66 were seriously hurt when they were

blown over in high winds, news agency Kyodo reported, citing the local authorities.

They were among 31 people injured in Okinawa alone since the typhoon approached Thursday, it said, adding that the storm had cut off electricity to 134,000 households in the Okinawa archipelago.

"The winds are so strong. Our staff are on standby at branch offices, waiting for the winds to calm down," a spokeswoman at Okinawa Electric Power said.

In a separate incident, a 48-year-old man was injured after falling six metres while trying to fix a television antenna on his roof, officials said.

More than 10,000 people were forced to evacuate their homes as the typhoon approached.

Authorities in Kagoshima prefecture on the southern island of Kyushu advised more than 8,760 people to evacuate, while in neighbouring Miyazaki prefecture, 2,390 people were told to evacuate as 78 houses were flooded.

Heavy rain was also reported in parts of the Japanese mainland, with 79 millimetres (3.16 inches) drenching the city of Hyuga on Kyushu island in one hour alone, raising fears of landslides.

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5X3