

Maoist kills six cops in Bihar

2nd phase of assembly polls today

AP, IANS, Patna

Suspected Maoist rebels triggered a land mine in eastern India as a police vehicle drove past, killing six officers, a police official said yesterday.

The policemen were returning to their base late Friday after inspecting security arrangements for local elections this weekend. The guerrillas have called for a boycott of the polls and have put up posters in the district ordering people not to vote.

"The land mine attack was aimed to create terror among the voters," police official Neelmani said.

The mine went off as they passed under a bridge in the Sheohar district of Bihar state, said Neelmani, who uses only one name. All six policemen in the jeep were killed.

The rebels, inspired by Chinese revolutionary leader Mao Zedong, have been fighting the government in eastern India for more than four decades, demanding land and jobs for the poor. Their influence has spread as they have tapped

into anger among the rural poor who feel left out of India's economic gains.

The fear of more Maoist violence has led the Election Commission to change the poll timing in Bihar's Sheohar district, a day after Maoist guerrillas triggered a landmine blast, killing six policemen ahead of the second phase of assembly elections today.

Polling will now be held between 7am and 3pm instead of till 5pm, sources in the office of the Bihar chief electoral officer here said.

Bihar police chief Neelmani has assured voters that heavy deployment of security forces, including central paramilitary personnel, has been made to provide protection to voters during the polls.

The Communist Party of India-Maoist had declared early this month that it would intensify attacks to disrupt the election process and to enforce its boycott of the polls.

The state government has admitted that 33 of Bihar's 38 districts are Maoist-affected.

The next election rounds will be held Oct 28, Nov 1, 9 and 20. Votes will be counted Nov 24.

OBAMA'S INDIA VISIT US books all 547 rooms at Taj Hotel

THE INDIAN EXPRESS ONLINE, IANS

Not wanting to take chances with President Barack Obama's security, US authorities have booked all 547 rooms at the Taj Mahal Palace Hotel as well as its banquet hall and restaurants for the duration of his visit to Mumbai next month, sources said on Friday.

The sources said sketchy details of the President's itinerary had been made available to local authorities at this stage. A team of US officials visited the city at the beginning of the month to lay the groundwork for the visit. An advance security liaison team is due to arrive here a week before Obama lands, the sources added.

Obama is scheduled to visit India Nov 5-8.

"As expected, the US authorities are leaving absolutely nothing to chance. All 547 rooms as well as banquet halls and restaurants at the Taj Mahal Palace Hotel have been booked by them, so that they have exclusive use of the building," one senior official said.

"In addition to this around 80 to 90 rooms have been booked at the ITC Maratha near the airport to accommodate their airline staff. All three theatres at the NCPA (National Centre for Performing Arts) have also been booked in preparation for a possible business interaction. There will be around 45 cars in Obama's convoy including the specially reinforced Lincoln Continental in which he will travel," the officer added.

Elaborate security arrangements are also being put in place at The Oberoi-Trident Hotels, Mani Bhavan and the 26/11 Mumbai Police Memorial at Marine Drive, which Obama is expected to visit.

There are also tentative plans for first lady Michelle Obama to visit Kamathipura along with representatives of a local NGO working in the area.



US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton (R) answers a question as Pakistani Foreign Minister Mahmood Qureshi looks on during a press conference at the State Department in Washington, DC on Friday. The United States will offer two billion dollars in fresh military assistance to Pakistan, Hillary said, hailing Islamabad's efforts against extremist groups.

Suicide attack rattles UN office in Afghanistan

AP, AFP Kabul

A suicide attacker driving an explosives-packed car blew up the entrance to a United Nations office yesterday in western Afghanistan, allowing at least three other militants wearing bomb vests to rush into the building, officials said.

An unknown number of UN employees were inside the building when it was attacked, said Dan McNorton, a spokesman for the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan.

There were no casualties among UN workers, deputy police chief of Herat province, told after the raid, which was claimed by the Taliban.

The suicide car bomber destroyed the gate and at least three other militants all wearing explosives vests went inside, said Nabiq Arleen, a spokesman for the provincial governor of Herat province.

Lanka 'pays PR firm £3m to boost post-war image'

BBC ONLINE

The Sri Lankan government is paying a top British PR firm about £3m (\$4.7m) a year to try to enhance the country's post-war image, the BBC understands.

Bell Pottinger Group was recently hired to lobby UK, UN and EU officials.

The government says it employs several PR companies but will not disclose their names or the amount paid. Bell Pottinger also refused to give details.

Sri Lanka's authorities strongly deny alleged human rights abuses in the defeat of Tamil Tiger rebels last year.

Bell Pottinger - whose motto on its website is "Better reputations, better results" - is believed to be lobbying on Sri Lanka's behalf in Brussels, following an EU decision to withdraw special tax concessions called GSP Plus.

The European Union decided in July to withdraw Sri Lanka's preferential trade access to EU markets, saying it had failed to improve its human rights record.

It is thought the firm was also employed in Sri Lanka's attempts to prevent the UN secretary general appointing an advisory panel on alleged war crimes committed during the civil war.

WikiLeaks to publish more Afghan war documents

AP, London

Whistleblowing organization WikiLeaks says it will soon publish 15,000 more secret Afghan war documents.

The group has already published some 77,000 US intelligence reports about the war in Afghanistan, and just released almost 400,000 alleged secret US documents about the Iraq war.

WikiLeaks has said the 15,000 additional Afghan files were held back because of their sensitive content. Kristinn Hrafnsson of WikiLeaks told reporters Saturday in London that the documents had now been fully vetted for release and will be published shortly.

He said the Iraq documents have been edited to conceal people's names and "contain no information that could be harmful to individuals."

Curfew lifted from all parts of Kashmir

THE INDIAN EXPRESS ONLINE

Authorities yesterday lifted curfew from all parts of Kashmir as the Valley limped towards normalcy despite a strike call given by headline faction of Hurriyat Conference.

"Curfew has been lifted from all parts of Kashmir," a police spokesman said.

He said the situation so far was peaceful with no untoward incident reported from anywhere in the Valley.

Although most of the shops and business establishments around commercial hub of Lal Chowk remained closed, life in Kashmir showed signs of limping towards normalcy, official sources said. They said shops were open in many localities of Srinagar city and other towns and hamlets in the Valley.

Cyclone wreaks havoc on Myanmar coast

REUTERS ONLINE

A cyclone that hit the west coast of Myanmar has caused widespread damage, a local resident said yesterday, while a meteorological official said it was expected to weaken as it moved north-east along the coast.

There was no word from the authorities on damage or deaths. State television said on Friday that Cyclone Giri had struck the coast near the town of Kyaukphyu, with winds reaching 160 km per hour (100 miles per hour), and could trigger a tidal surge of up to 12 feet (3.7 metres) in some towns on the Bay of Bengal coast.

Telephone contact with the area was interrupted overnight after the cyclone hit but a resident of Kyaukphyu contacted by phone on Saturday morning said the area had suffered badly.

"Everything is gone. All the trees and lamp posts have fallen. Many buildings were damaged. Many people were left homeless," Ko Ba Phyu told Reuters.

He said he had heard there had been a tidal surge at some points along the coast.

"We haven't got any information about casualties. It's too early to know the exact size of damage due to poor telecommunication," he added.

An official at the Department of Meteorology and Hydrology in the capital, Naypyitaw, described Giri early on Saturday as an inland storm but had no details on the impact on coastal areas.

Coastal and delta regions in the Southeast Asian country are often hit by strong storms. More than 130,000 people were killed or went missing when Cyclone Nargis struck the Irrawaddy delta in May 2008.

Operation starts to curb Karachi target killings

ANI, Karachi, Quetta

A secret operation has been launched to counter the incidents of target killings in Karachi, Pakistan Interior Minister Rehman Malik has said.

"We shall restore peace in Karachi and other parts of the country including Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and northern areas. Strict action will be taken against those challenging the writ of the state," The Nation quoted Malik, as saying, while addressing a joint press conference with Sindh Home Minister Dr Zulfiqar Mirza.

The government would not talk with militants, he said, adding that the backbone of terrorists had been broken as a result of the successful operation in the northwestern parts of the country.

Malik said that during the last two days, the incidents of target killing had stopped due to the government's swift action against the criminals.

He said that the government had chalked out its strategy during the meeting with all the political parties in Karachi, and added that though terrorists had no affiliation with any political party, they used and took shelter in different parties.

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