

At least 28 Naxalites killed in Chhattisgarh operation

INTERNAL SECURITY

At least 28 Naxalites were killed by security forces in a gunfight in the Abujhmad area of Narayanpur district in the left-wing extremism-affected Bastar region in Chhattisgarh on Friday. After Friday's anti-Naxal operation — the second biggest in terms of casualties inflicted by the State this year and in the conflict zone's history — the number of Naxals killed by the forces this year has shot up to 185.

Arms found

A joint team of security forces from Dantewada and Narayanpur set out on an operation after receiving specific information about the presence of Naxalites in Abujhmad, a largely unsurveyed area in southern Bastar. The clash broke out around 1 p.m., after which firing continued at regular intervals. An AK47 rifle, a self-loading Rifle and other weapons were found at the site of encounter.

There has been a surge in anti-Naxal operations since the new BJP government came to power in December 2023. Union Home Minister Amit Shah's asserted for the elimination of Naxalism from the State by March 2026.

Red alert

Encounters between security forces and Maoists have become frequent this year. A look at the encounters since April this year



Oct. 4, 2024:
28 Maoists killed in Bastar area, the second highest in terms of casualties

Sept. 3:
Nine Maoists killed in Dantewada

April 16:
29 Maoists killed at Kanker-Narayanpur border, recording the biggest ever toll

April 10:
12 Maoists killed in Bijapur
April 2, 2024:
13 Maoists killed in Bijapur

Jaishankar to visit Pak. for SCO's Heads of Government meeting

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar will travel to Islamabad to attend the Heads of Government meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) on October 15 and 16, the first such visit in nearly a decade. The last time an Indian External Affairs Minister travelled to Pakistan was Sushma Swaraj in 2015 for the Heart of Asia conference and bilateral talks.

External Affairs Minister's visit was based on "reciprocity", given that despite bilateral tensions, Pakistan had sent its then-Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto to attend the SCO Foreign Ministers' meeting in Goa in May 2023. It is also significant that the Narendra Modi-led government is sending a Minister for an SCO conference, but has refused to attend the SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) summit, due to be held in Pakistan since 2016.

The invitation to the SCO meeting was sent to Prime Minister Narendra Modi by the Pakistan government last month. Mr. Modi normally attends meetings at the Head of State level, and deputes either the External Affairs

Minister or the Vice President in his place for the Heads of Government meet. The government was keen to send a high-level official for the SCO meeting, in order to express its commitment to the Eurasian grouping, especially after Mr. Modi cancelled his participation at the SCO Summit in Kazakhstan in July this year due to a scheduling issue.

New Delhi has thus far avoided sending any Ministers for the SCO process in Pakistan, including the Trade Ministers' meeting last month, the Heads of Government meeting is seen as an opportunity to meet with the Prime Ministers of several Central Asian States, as well as high-level dignitaries from Russia, China, Iran, and Belarus, which could not be missed. It is also an occasion to prepare the ground for Mr. Modi's participation in the 10-nation BRICS Summit to be hosted by Russian President Vladimir Putin, as many countries are members of the SCO and BRICS.

SC sets up new SIT with CBI officers to probe Naidu's claim on Tirupati laddu

POLITY & GOVERNANCE



The Supreme Court on Friday constituted an "independent" five-member Special Investigation Team (SIT), with two Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) officers in it, to replace the one formed by the Andhra Pradesh government to probe Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu's allegations that contaminated ghee was used to prepare Tirupati laddus in the previous Yuvajana Sramika Rythu Congress Party (YSRCP) regime. The probe would be based on an FIR that ghee received in two tankers supplied on July 6 and July 12 by the same supplier was adulterated. Mr. Naidu had held a press conference on the issue on September 18.

On Friday, the court roped in the Centre saying it too should play a role in unearthing the truth about the allegations. Besides making the CBI a part of the probe, the Bench brought the inquiry directly under the supervision of the Central agency's Director. The court's

move to give the CBI a larger role in the probe was despite Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre, expressing confidence in the competency of the State's SIT. But the Bench on Friday emphasised the gravity of the allegations of adulterated ghee used in the manufacture of the temple prasadam.

The court disposed of petitions, including one filed by former Rajya Sabha member Dr. Subramanian Swamy, seeking a direction to constitute a committee consisting of a retired Supreme Court judge or a former High Court Chief Justice for a "deeper probe into the allegations about the preparation of prasadam" at the Tirupati temple.



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The other monsoon

GEOGRAPHY

India's southwest monsoon has ended on an optimistic note, with 8% more rain than anticipated. Reassuringly, the rainfall forecast by the India Meteorological Department (IMD), particularly since July, was accurate. Monsoon clouds continue to prevail over the country but given the centrality of rainfall to the Indian economy, focus has already shifted to the 'other monsoon', the northeast monsoon. It is named so because of the direction in which the winds exit from the land mass into the sea. Following the withdrawal of the southwest monsoon in mid-October, the northeast monsoon is characterised by a reversal of winds that brings rain to parts of coastal Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and parts of southern Karnataka. For Tamil Nadu, the northeast monsoon is the main source of rainfall. The northeast monsoon brings in only about 11% of India's annual rainfall.

The IMD has forecast that this year's post-monsoon rainfall is likely to be 'above normal' or about 12% over the historical average. Because of its limited spread and quantity, the northeast monsoon does not get as much attention as the southwest monsoon. However, it significantly affects the productivity of rice and maize in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. Records show that in years of deficiency, there was a considerable decrease in agricultural production in the region. The northeast monsoon rainfall, averaged over the five subdivisions where it is predominant, has a variation of almost 25%, exceeding that of the southwest monsoon rainfall (10%). This translates into years of massive deluge followed by dry spells. In 2015, Chennai experienced a deluge during the northeast monsoon, resulting in significant loss of life and property. In 2019, the city faced severe water shortage. If this year's forecast holds, it will be the second consecutive year of a normal northeast monsoon. Expectations are high that a La Nina, or cooling of the equatorial central Pacific, will support this. However, most global models have struggled to forecast the timing of La Nina this year. Thanks to improved forecast systems, the northeast monsoon is less neglected than before. Nevertheless, more focus is needed on modelling its impact regarding urban flooding. Climate change uncertainty makes such prognosis essential, and disaster management agencies in States must develop credible strategies to incorporate these buffers into budgets.

Modi says conflict-hit regions are important for energy security

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Prime Minister Narendra Modi made oblique references to the widening conflicts in West Asia and the Russia-Ukraine war on Friday, saying the two regions were crucial for the global economy and energy security. His comments came amid fears of further escalation in West Asia if Israel were to retaliate and attack Iran, potentially its nuclear, and oil facilities. This, analysts fear, could fuel a surge in energy prices and draw the region into a wider conflict. Mr. Modi on the domestic front committed to continuing structural reforms to help India become a developed nation by 2047.

'War-like situation'

"This conclave is happening at a time when two big regions of the world are close to war-like situations. These two big regions are crucial for the global economy as well as energy security," he said without naming any country.

India is more than 85% dependent on the import of crude oil, which is converted into fuels like petrol and diesel, and about half of its gas needs.

A bulk of these come from West Asia, and in scenarios of Israel-Iran getting into prolonged conflict, the supplies could be impacted.

"In the midst of these big global uncertainties, we are all here witnessing the Indian era, we are discussing India. This shows the confidence in India... Whether it is science, technology or innovation, India clearly is at a sweet spot," Mr. Modi said.

Jaishankar meets Dissanayake, pledges India's support for economic recovery

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on Friday met Sri Lanka's newly elected President Anura Kumara Dissanayake in Colombo and pledged India's "full support" to the island nation's economic recovery and growth. The meeting discussed India's security interests, the persisting fisheries conflict, and the pending political settlement of Sri Lanka's Tamils.

'Full support'

Dr. Jaishankar reaffirmed India's full support for Sri Lanka's economic rehabilitation, highlighting India's commitment to assisting in tourism, investment, electricity, energy services, and the dairy industry. He emphasised that Sri



Lanka could leverage India's vast market to boost its economic recovery. Mr. Dissanayake expressed his appreciation for India's support — totalling nearly \$4 billion — when the island nation faced a crushing financial meltdown two years ago.

Mr. Jaishankar highlighted ongoing India-backed initiatives in the field of energy production and transmission, fuel and LNG supply, solar electrification of religious places, connectivity, digital public infrastructure, health and dairy development. He highlighted that they would contribute to economic sustainability and provide new streams of revenue.

The readouts from both sides did not mention the controversial Adani power project in Sri Lanka's Northern Province, which is currently mired in a court battle following stiff opposition from locals and environmentalists. Mr. Dissanayake had in the past questioned its approval, outside of a tender process, and the former government's power purchasing agreement with the company, which he contended was not in Sri Lanka's favour. However, New Delhi's statement following Friday's meeting said Mr. Dissanayake referred to the "potential of export of renewable energy to India, which could help reduce production costs in Sri Lanka and create additional resources.

Mr. Jaishankar discussed matters of India's security interest in the region. Across meetings, the Sri Lankan leadership assured the top Indian official that they were mindful of India's security concerns and would not allow their territory to be used in a manner inimical to India's security interests.

Mr. Jaishankar reiterated India's support for "the aspirations of all communities, including Tamils, for equality, justice, dignity, peace while maintaining the unity, territorial integrity and sovereignty of Sri Lanka. The full and effective implementation of the 13th Amendment of its Constitution and the early conduct of Provincial Council elections will facilitate these objectives.

Mr. Jaishankar also raised concerns pertaining to Indian fishermen who are detained in Sri Lanka and pressed for their early release, as well as of their boats, and reconsideration of the heavy fines imposed on them.

SC dismisses pleas to review verdict upholding States' right to tax mines, quarries

POLITY & GOVERNANCE



A nine-judge Bench of the Supreme Court, in a majority decision, has refused to review its July 25 judgment upholding the power of State legislatures to tax mineral-bearing lands and quarries. The review was decided on September 24.

Any dilution in the taxing powers of the State legislatures will necessarily impact their ability to raise revenues... Fiscal federalism entails that the power of the States to levy taxes within the legislative domain carved out to them and subject to the limitations laid down by the Constitution must be secured from unconstitutional interference by Parliament.

Chief Justice Chandrachud

The majority led by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud had ruled that the power to tax mineral lands and quarries was not the exclusive power of Parliament. In a replay of the July 25 judgment, the Review Bench, repeated the majority view. The sole dissenting judge on the Bench, Justice B.V. Nagarathna, continued to disagree with the majority view. While the majority on the Bench dismissed the pleas of review by the Union government, Karnataka Iron and Steel Manufacturers Association, and others, Justice Nagarathna found a case for review.

The majority declared "there is no error apparent on the face of the record. No case for review under Order XLVII Rule 1 of the Supreme Court Rules 2013 has been established". In her separate opinion on the review petitions, Justice Nagarathna said they should be heard in open court and issued notice.

The July 25 judgment had freed the States from the restrictions of the Centre. The court had found the States's liberty to tax mines and quarries a part of the federalist principles of governance.

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Private sector activity grew at 10-month low pace in Sept.

ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT

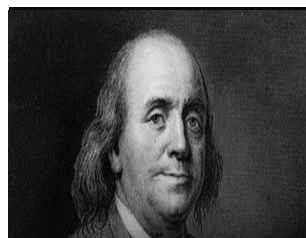


Growth in India's private sector activity slowed to a ten-month low this September, as per the HSBC India Composite Output Index, which slipped from 60.7 in August to 58.3 last month, as factories and services players clocked a reduction in momentum.

While manufacturing sector activity mellowed in September, with factory output and sales growing at the slowest pace so far in 2024, and export orders rising at the mildest pace in 18 months, the HSBC India Services PMI [Purchasing Managers' Index] released on Friday showed that total new business, international sales and output all rose at the slowest rates since late-2023.

While the PMI slipped from 60.9 in August to 57.7, the headline Business Activity Index fell below 60 for the first time in 2024, HSBC's chief India economist Pranjul Bhandari noted. While she flagged the possibility of softer output growth in the coming months, Ms. Bhandari also pointed out that Services companies' margins had likely been squeezed further as prices charged rose at a slower pace when input cost inflation intensified.

Services export orders grew at the weakest pace so far in 2024, while overall new business intakes' growth hit a ten-month low. Firms attributed the slower growth to fierce competition, cost pressures and changes in consumer preference, that is mainly a switch towards online services.



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