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Hundreds of Maoist Rebels Storm a Relief Camp in India, Killing 25

By REUTERS

RAIPUR, India, July 17 (Reuters) — Hundreds of Maoist rebels stormed a government relief camp in central India on Monday and killed at least 25 people, including members of a state-backed, anti-Maoist group, the police said.

More than 50 people were wounded at the camp, which houses the Salwa Judum (Campaign For Peace) group, in the Dantewada district of Chhattisgarh State.

At least 100 people were missing after the attack but all returned safely later in the day, the state interior minister, Ramvihar Netam, told reporters.

The rebels also set at least 20 houses on fire.

“The death toll has reached 25 with the recovery of 8 charred bodies from debris of burned houses,” said the Dantewada police chief, Om Prakash Pal.

He said three children and three women were among the dead.

Another police officer said the rebels first attacked armed police guarding the camp and then stormed the camp itself, mostly inhabited by people of local tribes.

The camp is at Arabore, 320 miles south of Raipur, the state capital. Many of the seriously wounded were taken to the neighboring state of Andhra Pradesh for treatment.

“The majority of them were women and children suffering from burn injuries and also from cold-blooded attacks by the Maoists,” said a police official, Uday Bhaskar.

The police said a majority of those killed belonged to the Salwa Judum group, a militia set up by the state government a year ago to resist the Maoists. It draws on many local tribal people, and members are often armed only with bows and arrows. Maoist rebels have made it a frequent target. Hundreds of extra state and federal police officers have been sent to the heavily forested area to search for the rebels.

Chhattisgarh is the worst-hit of 13 states across eastern, southern and central India affected by the Maoists, who say they are fighting for millions of India’s indigenous people, poor peasants and landless laborers.

The authorities say more than 200 people, including police officers and Salwa Judum activists, have been killed in increased violence this year in Chhattisgarh.

The New Delhi-based Asian Center for Human Rights said Thursday that at least 460 people had been killed in violence related to the Maoist rebels in the first half of 2006 in nine Indian states, including 181 civilians and 90 security men.

In the past two decades, nearly 6,000 people have been killed in rebel-linked violence.

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