

IPCS SPECIAL REPORT

No. 54, June 2008

Terrorism in India (Jan-Mar 2008)

A Review

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TERRORISM IN INDIA (JAN-MAR 2008)

A REVIEW

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This report provides a review of all forms of armed conflict in India including separatist movements, left-wing extremism, and religious fundamentalism. In this text, the word ‘militants’ refers to groups operating in Jammu and Kashmir and, to a large extent, in the Northeast, while the word ‘extremists’ refers to groups in the Naxal-affected areas.

The defining features of armed conflict, as drawn from the definition of Non-International Armed Conflict provided by the Additional Protocol (II) to the

Geneva Conventions, 1977, include ‘armed conflict... taking place within the territory of a Nation-State (since India is not a party to the AP II, the word ‘High Contracting Party’ has been replaced by Nation-State) between its armed forces and dissident armed forces or other organized groups which, under responsible command, exercise such control over a part of its territory as to enable them to carry out sustained and concerted military operations...’

This report uses Maoist and Naxal synonymously and inter-changeably. This report takes Security Forces to include police forces, para-military forces and the army depending on the area of conflict.

An Overview

The security situation in India showed little improvement during the first quarter

of the year as each center of conflict – Assam and Manipur in the Northeast, Jammu and Kashmir in the north and the Naxal-affected states

across the mainland – witnessed intense violence and clashes.

The Northeast accounted for the highest percentage of violence in India at 49.92% followed by Naxal-related violence at 33.06%, and Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) at 17.01%. In the Northeast, the situation deteriorated considerably with several targeted killings of civilians both in Assam and Manipur.

Table 1
Total Number of Deaths in Terrorist-related violence in India
Jan-Mar 2008

| | Security Forces | Civilians | Militant/Extremists | Total |
|------------------------|-----------------|------------|---------------------|------------|
| Northeast | 12 | 131 | 171 | 314 |
| J&K | 12 | 23 | 72 | 107 |
| Naxal-related violence | 45 | 89 | 74 | 208 |
| Total | 69 | 243 | 317 | 629 |

As per the Status Paper on Internal Security, Ministry of Home Affairs, 31 March 2008

Among the Naxal-affected states, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand recorded the highest casualties. In J&K, the security forces further consolidated their gains in controlling militancy in the state, although the frequent blasts in public places and repeated attempts at infiltration across the Line of Control (LOC) continue to pose a threat to the security of the state.

**I
JAMMU & KASHMIR**

At the end of the first quarter, terrorist-related fatalities included the death of 12 security forces, 23 civilians and 72 militants in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Building on the successes of the last few years, the security forces recorded a number of gains in their fight against militancy. Doda and Poonch recorded the highest militant casualties. The militants, however, continued to display their intent and capability in waging jihad against the state. This was manifested through several attempts at infiltration across the LOC, frequent targeting of civilians and security forces, particularly in Srinagar, throughout the first quarter, and the ability to engage in pitched battles with the security forces.

Gunbattles and Clashes

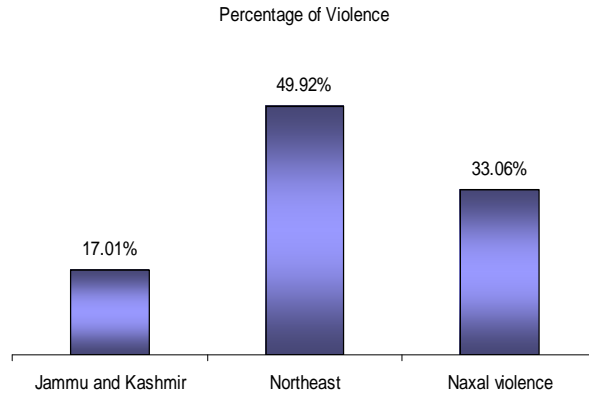
A number of gunbattles and clashes between security forces and militants took place during the first quarter causing a large number of deaths. The major gunbattles fought include a 30-hour long battle in January between

three Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT) militants and a joint team of Special Operations Group and the Rashtriya Rifles 30 Bn in Handwara area of Kupwara district; an overnight gunbattle on 28 February between four militants of Hizbul Mujahideen

(HM) in Shopian district; and a long gunbattle between one-odd member of LeT and the SOG of the district police in the Dal Lake peripheries in Srinagar on 23 March. While the first two ended successfully with the killing of the militants, the third one resulted in the death of four police men. Apart from gunbattles, two blasts took place in civilian areas: a blast on 21 February in the heavily-guarded Srinagar Court Complex, injuring a police official, and an IED blast on 19 March on the only flyover in the capital city, killing one person and injuring 16.

Several Key Militants Killed

The security forces reportedly eliminated a number of leaders of the militant outfits in the state, including three district commanders of LeT, the Kashmir Valley chief of the LeT, Hafiz Nasir (a Pakistani militant), four district commanders of HM, an area commander of HM, a battalion commander of HM, and the divisional commander of HM for south Kashmir, Hanief Khan. As many as 40 militants were also arrested during this period, a majority of them from HM, but also from LeT, Al Badr and the Hizbul-ul-Mujahideen (HuM).



Infiltration across the Line of Control (LOC):

Infiltration, however, continues to remain a security concern, even though the Home Ministry has applauded its decline within the state. This is because, as the Army Chief General Deepak Kapoor cautioned, there have been increase infiltration bids, despite a decline in the infiltration numbers. This sentiment was echoed by the Director General of the Border Security Force (BSF) when he acknowledged that ‘middle-or-lower-level cadres continue to infiltrate through

Table 2
Total Number of Deaths in Jammu and Kashmir

| | Jan-March 2007 | Jan-March 2008 |
|-----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Security Forces | 30 | 12 |
| Civilians | 37 | 23 |
| Militants | 70 | 72 |
| Total | 137 | 107 |

(As per the Status Paper on Internal Security, Ministry of Home Affairs, 31 March 2008)

the Line of Control’. In the first quarter of the year, the most common infiltration routes noted were the Mendhar sector and Digwar sector in Poonch district and Keran sector in Kupwara district. At the same time, infiltration attempts are being frequently foiled across the LOC, as a result of which the security forces apprehend a growth of training camps within the state.

Women Recruits

A woman member of the LeT, arrested by the Doda police revealed that the outfit is focusing on recruiting young women to act as militants for purposes such as planting grenades and mobile telephone bombs to kill targeted persons. Women have mainly been

involved as Over Ground Workers (OGW) in the valley so far.

II
NORTHEAST

In the restive Northeast of India, militancy-related casualties included the death of 12 security forces, 131 civilians, and 171 militants. The states of Assam and Manipur continue[d] to account for maximum violence (see Table 4).

ASSAM

The state of Assam witnessed a spurt of terrorist incidences in the first quarter of the month, with a sharp increase in the total number of fatalities.

Table 3
Total Number of Deaths in the Northeast

| | Jan-March 2007 | Jan-March 2008 |
|-----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Security Forces | 30 | 12 |
| Civilians | 148 | 131 |
| Militants | 114 | 171 |
| Total | 292 | 314 |

(As per the Status Paper on Internal Security, Ministry of Home Affairs, 31 March 2008)

Attack on Civilians

Attack on civilians can be broadly classified under two categories, general and specific. General attacks include attacks in public places without any specific population target. At least five such blasts were carried out: a grenade attack in Paltan Bazar, Guwahati, on 13 January, injuring 14 persons; a blast on 4 March at the Laksminath Bazbaruah park in Sivasagar, killing one person and injuring two others; a series of blasts on 8 March near the Baruah market in Guwahati, killing one person and injuring around 32 people; a series of blasts in Udalguri and Mazbat towns on 12 March injuring over 10 people; and a

blast near the Jonai circuit house in Dhemaji on 16 March, killing four people and injuring over 50. Specific attacks include those carried out against a select population. The workers and security personnel of development projects, especially in the North Cachar Hills District, have been repeatedly attacked,

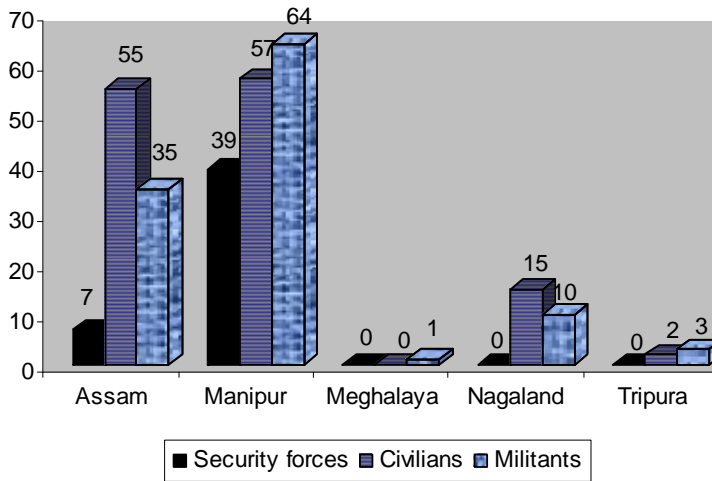
leading to high casualties among the employees. So far, at least ten workers of the North Eastern Electric Power Corporation (NEEPCO) have been killed this year.

Perpetrators of Violence

The most active militant groups in the state were the ULFA and the Black Widow faction of the Dima Halim Daogah (DHD). While the hand of ULFA is suspected in the general blasts, the outfit denied its involvement in the Dhemaji blast, stating that it was against killing innocent people. Significantly, the city police had warned against possible ULFA attacks earlier this year. Security officials however, suspect that since the outfit has faced several setbacks in the past few months, it is relying on such fear tactics to remain visible. Meanwhile, the attacks against the workers were carried out by the Black Widow faction. The outfit has been using coercive methods to extract huge ransom amounts from these

developmental projects and is suspected of receiving support from the NSCN-IM. The main objective of the DHD is to create a separate State of 'Dimaraji' for the Dimasa tribe and is mainly concentrated in Cachar, N C Hills, Karbi Anglong and Nagaon districts of Assam.

Table 4
State-wise Break-up of Casualties, January-March 2008



*As per the Status Paper on Internal Security, Ministry of Home Affairs, 31 March 2008

Rising Concern over Jihadi Groups
Security forces have raised serious concern over the rise of jihadi groups in the Northe

ast. The outgoing Air Officer Commander in Chief, Eastern Air Command, Air Marshal PK Barbora forewarned against the spread of sleeper cells by al Qaeda in the Northeast that is waiting to strike. This sentiment was echoed openly for the first time by the Assamese government while it admitted the presence of jihadi groups in the state with their headquarters in Bangladesh. This follows the arrest of a couple of suspected members of jihadi groups.

Counterinsurgency Measures

The government of Assam is following a two-pronged approach against militancy: while it continues with its military operations against the ULFA, it is also keeping its doors open for talks. The outfit however, has not responded yet to the government's offer. According to

media reports, the districts of Tirap, Changlang, Lohit, Upper Dibhang, and Lower Dibang valley have been identified for intense military operations.

1.4.2. New Security Measures: In order to improve the security of workers and security personnel in the North Cachar hills district, the government of Assam decided to procure four bulletproof buses and four small vehicles for their safe movement. The government of India is further set to impose a ban on three militant outfits of Assam, namely the All Adivashi National Liberation Army (AANLA), the DHD (J) and the KLNLF. The AANLA, formed in 2004, has grown in strength following its links with the NSCN-IM and is active in the districts of Golaghat, Jorhat and parts of Karbi Anglong. Its main objective is to secure the status of Scheduled Tribe for the Adivashi community. The DHD too has been gaining in strength since 2003 and is suspected to have links with the NSCN-IM. The Karbi Longri National Liberation Front (KLNLF) has been involved in kidnapping and extortions of traders and is suspected of having links with the ULFA. It captured limelight last year following its campaign against Hindi-speaking people in the Karbi Anglong district.

Surrender of Militants

During the first quarter of the year, as many as 54 ULFA cadres surrendered before the security forces and gave up their arms. These cadres belonged to the Nos 27, 109 and 709 battalions of the outfit and were involved in a large number of acts of terrorism and extortion.

MANIPUR

Insurgency-related violence continued unabated in the state in the first quarter, with March recording intense violence in the state

Gunbattles and Encounters

Several gunbattles and encounters between the security forces and militants accounted for maximum casualties in the state. In most instances, the security forces succeeded in neutralizing the militants. Apart from encounters, while the militants continued to target security posts and police stations, most of the attempts were unsuccessful as the bombs (mainly rocket-propelled grenades) failed to explode. Government officials also came under militant attacks. Notably, the residences of a number of Congress MLAs such as MLAs Bijoy Kojiam, M Mahindra and N Mangi were attacked using guns and bombs in Imphal's west district. No casualty was however, recorded in these instances. In a significant incident, the Manipur Assembly Secretariat was bombed for the first time on 8 March, although there was no casualty reported.

Abductions

The state also witnessed a number of abductions, especially of government workers and engineers. Saleem Indrajit Singh, a section officer in the engineering cell of the department of education, was abducted for 15 days in January; Naorem Keshwar singh, an assistant engineer in the state department, was abducted on 31 January; and a public works department engineer was abducted on 28 January.

Attack on Non-local Civilians

The state witnessed a gruesome campaign against non-locals, with the killing of at least 15 non-local manual laborers, over a span of two days, beginning 17 March. Since no militant group claimed responsibility for the attacks, the motive behind the killings remains unclear.

Imphal East and west districts, Chandel, Thoubal were the most severely affected by insurgency-related violence.

Perpetrators

The UNLF and the PREPAK remained the most dominant groups in the region. The UNLF engaged the security forces in several encounters, loosing at least 12 of its cadres. The PREPAK on the other hand, claimed responsibility for most of the attacks on government officials and buildings, including the one at the Manipur Legislative Assembly. It must be noted that the perpetrators and groups responsible for a large number of incidents in Manipur have not been identified

III NAXAL VIOLENCE

Among the Naxal-affected states, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand have recorded the maximum casualties as a result of the ongoing counter-Naxal operations in these states.

Table 5
Total Number of Deaths in Naxal-related Violence in India

| | Jan-March 2007 | Jan-March 2008 |
|-----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Security Forces | 91 | 45 |
| Civilians | 119 | 89 |
| Naxals | 53 | 74 |
| Total | 263 | 208 |

As per the Status Paper on Internal Security, Ministry of Home Affairs, 31 March 2008

Attack on Security Forces

Among the various attacks carried out against police forces across the Naxal-affected states, Orissa suffered the maximum due to such attacks. It recorded at least three attacks in the first quarter, the most daring being the Nayagark attack in which a number of police establishments were raided by the Maoists on 15 February, killing at least

13 police personnel and two civilians. The attacks were executed by a group of 500-600 extremists that included cadres from the bordering states of Andhra Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. Since the Nayagarh district was so far not included in the Naxal-affected districts of Orissa, the attack revealed the extent of Maoist penetration in Orissa and further raised the level of Naxal threat by adding a 'surprise' element to the Maoist strategy across India. The other attacks include an attack on the police outpost at Bansjor on the Orissa-Jharkhand border, killing of a policeman, and landmine attacks on newly-built houses for police officials in the Malkangiri district.

Attack on CPM leaders

In West Bengal, the Maoists continued to target CPM leaders in pursuit of their resolve to fight the Marxist party, which they have declared 'fascist', especially since the Nandigram violence in March last year. The Maoists killed three leaders of the CPI-Marxist on 2 January in Purulia district of West Bengal. These included Palan Kumar Majhi, suspected to be a police informer and on the hit list of the Maoists for a long time; Ramprasad Mandal, a coordinator of the Sarbasiksha Kendra in Putia village; and Sisir Chatterjee, a primary school teacher in Burdwan district. Following the killings, the Maoists issued warnings against six other CPM leaders from Purulia to quit the party, which the members complied with within five days.

Attack on Police Informers

The Maoists also continued to target police informers, in an attempt to spread fear among the villages. Several villagers in Bihar's southern districts such as Rohtas, Kaimur, Aurnagabad, and Gaya (bordering Jharkhand) were assaulted on the charge of being police informers. Three villagers in Karimnagar

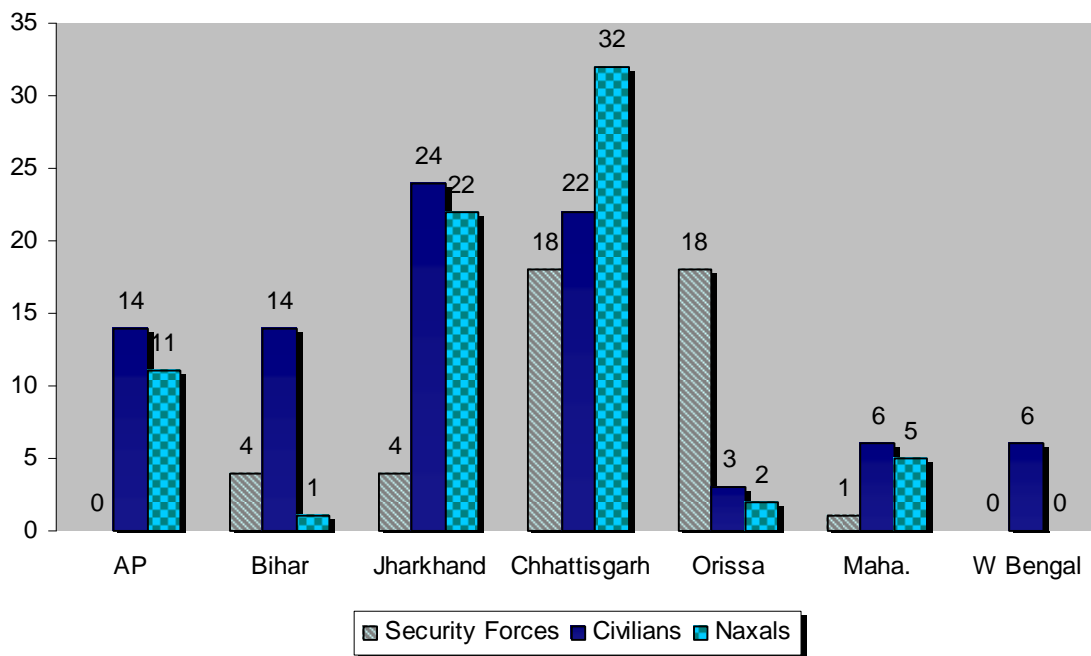
district of Andhra Pradesh were also killed on the same charge.

Encounters and Gunbattles

Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand witnessed a number of encounters between the extremists and security forces, as a result of the launch of counterinsurgency

special operation against the extremists in Garwah district. In Orissa, the government launched anti-Naxal operations following the Nayagarh attack. Naxal violence also stepped up in Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra with a series of skirmishes between the extremists and the police in the first

Table 6
State-wise Break-up of Casualties, January-March 2008



**As per the Status Paper on Internal Security, Ministry of Home Affairs, 31 March 2008*

operations. Chhattisgarh saw joint operations by the elite anti-Naxal force of Andhra Pradesh called Greyhounds and the Chhattisgarh security forces (including the police and CRPF personnel) in the forests of Bastar region, resulting in the killing of around 30 extremists and 6 CRPF personnel.

The gunbattles lasted for long hours, indicating the ability of the extremists to engage in pitched battles with the heavily-armed security forces. The identity of those killed remains unclear. In Jharkhand, the police managed to kill a zonal commander of the Maoists in a

quarter of the year.

Counter-Naxal measures

As part of its counter-Naxal policy, the government took several measures on both security and developments fronts.

Owing to the shortage of police personnel in the two worst-hit states of Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand, the Centre has decided to send five additional companies (approximately 600 personnel) of para-military force to the two states. 13 battalions of the central forces are already engaged in anti-Naxal operations in Chhattisgarh. The

Union Home Ministry is also planning to help the states raise 35 India Reserve Battalions to confront the extremists. On the development front, the centre has decided to allocate Rs 500 crores during the 11th Five-Year Plan for development of infrastructure in Naxal-hit areas. Emphasis will be laid on upgrading existing roads and tracks in inaccessible areas and securing camping grounds at strategic locations.

During the first quarter, as many as 37 Maoist cadres were arrested. These included the arrest of a Women Wing Area Commander, Vineeta, in Jharkhand and a hardcore Naxalite, Satendra Kushwaha in Sonebhadra district of Uttar Pradesh. Significantly, five women Maoist activists were held in Kolkata on the charge of spreading Maoist activity in West Bengal. Even in Bihar's Begusarai district, 6 of the 18 arrested Naxalites, were women. More and more women are participating in direct Maoist attacks.

According to official estimates, around 35 cadres surrendered during the first quarter, of which 33 were from Andhra Pradesh alone.

Supreme Court on Salwa Judum

In a significant development, the Supreme Court on 31 March disapproved the constitution of the controversial government-sponsored counter-Naxal campaign by the name of Salwa Judum, launched in June 2005 in the Dantewada district of Chhattisgarh. Responding to a petition filed by prominent civil society members Nandini Sundar, Ramachandra Guha and E.A.S. Sarma challenging the setting up of the Salwa Judum, the SC arraigned the Chhattisgarh government of abetting in criminal act and called for setting up a neutral agency to investigate the nature and formation of the vigilante group.

Maoist Activity in Southern India

The Tamil Nadu police cautioned against the spread of Maoist bases in the state, following the looting of rifles from the Adhiyamankottai police station on the busy Salem-Bangalore highway in Dharmapuri district on 9 February.

Last year, the discovery of a training camp near Theni had indicated the resurgence of Maoist activity in the state. Since then, Maoist activity has been witnessed in the southern districts of the state, especially Theni where a group of Maoists were arrested last year, on a hillock near Murugamalai. Later, the state police had nabbed V. Sundaramoorthy, said to be the Maoist kingpin in the state. In Kerala, the CPI-Maoist openly confirmed their presence in the state, where so far they had been functioning under their frontal organization – the Revolutionary People's Front, formed in 2005. The party has already established full-fledged district committees in Wayanad, Kozhikode, Kannur, and Palakkad. Raja Reddy, who is known as Sathyanna among Maoists, has been deputed to coordinate the party activities in southern states including Kerala, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu.

IV

OTHER TERRORIST-RELATED ISSUES IN INDIA

SIMI Arrests

The Students Islamic movement of India (SIMI), the local face of the jihad within India, received a major blow with the arrest of 13 of its top leaders in a recent crackdown by the Madhya Pradesh police on 27 March. These included Safdar Nagouri, former general secretary of SIMI, Shiblee, its South India chief and Hafiz Hussain, its Karnataka chief. Since then, at least 50 suspected SIMI operatives have been rounded up in

Madhya Pradesh while two operatives were held in the Thane district near Mumbai on 10 April. With this, the outfit's leadership has been seriously affected as its national president, Shahid Badar Falahi, had been arrested previously in December 2001. SIMI has been linked with several terror strikes in India, including the latest serial blasts in three courts across UP in November 2007, the Samjhauta blasts in February 2007, and the Mumbai train blasts in July 2006. The arrests have proven crucial for India's police forces in unearthing significant facts about the nature, objectives, and growing network of the outfit.

LeT Arrests

In an instance of a rare breakthrough on terror strikes in India, six LeT militants, involved in the terror attacks on the CRPF Group Centre in Rampur in Uttar Pradesh (1 January 2008) and the Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore (28 December 2005), were arrested by the Uttar Pradesh Police on 10 February. These include Fahim Ahmed Ansari alias Abu Zaraar alias Saquib, Mohammad Sharif alias Mohammad Anwar, Jang Bahadur alias Baba, Mohammad Sabahuddin alias Abu Qasim alias Sameer Singh, Amar Singh alias Abu Jaar, and Abu Osama alias Aavesh. Of these, Mohammad Sabahuddin, who posed as a medical student in Bangalore, is believed to be one of the Lashkar's senior-most Indian operatives and the mastermind behind both the attacks. The arrests have provided useful insights into the designs of the LeT and the complex network of terrorists operating in India. Four of the arrested men held legitimate Pakistani passports, whereas interrogations revealed that the men had received training in intelligence-gathering and handling explosives from Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence. Resources including weapons, used in

both the attacks, were reportedly provided by Pulwama-based LeT commanders, who were subsequently killed in an encounter on 15 February following the arrests. Significantly, the arrests are said to have averted an attack being planned by the men on the Bombay Stock Exchange.

V CONCLUSION

With various armed conflicts raging across the country, India is fast emerging as the worst terror-hit nation. As the security forces intensify their operations, civilians are being increasingly targeted in almost all the conflicts across India. Attacks in open public places continue to be carried out with ease despite heavy security presence. As the state of J&K gears up for elections at the end of the year, the blasts in public places and continuing infiltration bids do not augur well for the security scenario in the state and are likely to cast a tense shadow across the valley.

The impunity and the increasing frequency of Naxal violence indicates the gravity of the threat posed by them in several states in the heartland of the country. In the Northeastern states, as the security forces step up their operations, militants are likely to engage in violence of retribution that could hike up the violence in the region. Furthermore, the use and employment of newer methods and techniques by armed groups and the threat of a deeper spread of the terror networks to newer regions of the country, pose a formidable challenge to the Indian security apparatus