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Lalgarh: Hundreds flee as forces push deeper

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Security forces in West Bengal have intensified the anti-Maoist Operation Green Hunt, setting up four new bases inside villages since Saturday night.

The move has driven out at least 200 more tribals from their houses. They have joined another 500 villagers evicted earlier at makeshift camps organised by the Trinamool Congress and the Socialist Unity Centre of India (SUCI).

On Sunday morning, the joint forces entered Baragachia village in Lalgarh; Bandowan and Balarampur in Purulia; and Sarenga and Ranibandh in Bankura. They set up their camp and bunkers and cleared the paddy fields to prevent interruption while dealing with the Maoists. "The objective is to restrict Maoist to a small area," a senior police officer said. "We are moving forward to Goaltor, which is located north of Lalgarh; Salboni to the east of Lalgarh; the Jharkhand border to the west and Baxibandh to the south of Lalgarh, Purulia and Bankura. The Jharkhand Police is also aware of our plan and are ready to provide us assistance." In last six days, 11 companies of security forces, including [CRPF](#), Commando Battalions for Resolute Action (CoBRA), Border Security Force (BSF), Eastern Frontier Rifles (EFR) and State Armed Police (SAP) personnel have been pressed into action from different directions.

"To avoid surprise attack from the Maoists, we have positioned some of our shooters in the bunkers. Some have also been provided night vision binoculars. We will move inch-by-inch, only after sanitising the area," said a senior officer.

"Minesweepers have been deployed to avoid casualties. We are clearing the passage. After that, it will be the job of the elite central forces to combat the Maoists," a senior police officer said. Sensing danger, the villagers fled to shelters at Dhulagera in West Midnapore – one of the biggest camps to accommodate villagers in the Maoist stronghold.

"There was some resistance from the villagers but the forces managed to set up their bases," West Midnapore superintendent of police Manoj Verma said.

But Asit Mahato, the spokesperson of People's Committee Against Police Atrocities, blasted the

operation. "The joint forces are supposed to help the innocent villagers. Instead, they are on a looting spree," he said.

On Sunday morning, hundreds gathered in front of Belatikri police camp to demand the immediate release of two villagers who had been picked by the jawans [soldiers]. They also alleged that jawans forcibly took mobile phone recharge coupons from several shops without paying the money.

"There are some allegations and we are looking in to the matter," the superintendent of police said.

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