

# Launch anti-Maoist operation in Jharkhand immediately: WB govt

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New Delhi: The Left Front government on Monday asked the Centre to immediately launch an anti-Maoist operation in Jharkhand in tandem with the ongoing joint operations in West Bengal, saying the Left extremists were using their bases in the neighbouring state to launch attacks.

Noting that there was a "significant" increase in Left extremist violence in Bengal this year, Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee said as many as 18 police stations in three districts were affected by Maoist violence.

Bhattacharjee, whose speech at the Conference on Internal Security was read out in absentia by Chief Secretary Asoke Mohan Chakraborti, said there was "a need to launch such an operation without delay and to continue the operation in our state."

The Chief Minister said the Maoists operating in West Bengal were using their bases in Jharkhand to mobilise their squads.

"The joint operation (in West Bengal) can be successful only if a similar operation is launched in Jharkhand in collaboration with our state," he said, adding the operation by Central forces and the state police has been "acclaimed by a large section of the people."

He said it (anti-maoist operation) has "restored order in most of the villages and made it possible to restart development work."

Noting that 59 civilians and police personnel have been killed in Maoist violence this year as against only 29 last year, Bhattacharjee said the second phase of counter-insurgency operation was in progress and 67 Maoists have been arrested since the joint operation was launched on June 18.

"Intelligence inputs indicate that three squads of 20-25 armed persons are still in the area, staying mostly in the forests," he said.

The joint operations to regain control over Lalgarh has led to the completion of the road-opening phase, the Chief Minister said, adding that control has been established over the road connecting Pirakata, Bhimpur, Lalgarh, Kantapahari, Ramgarh, Kadasole, Pingboni and Goaltore.

"This had the effect of driving the Maoist squads out of their strongholds," Bhattacharjee said.

On relief and developmental activities being carried out in the affected areas by the Left Front government, he said a programme was launched for distribution of dry food to families who have lost income opportunities when the operation was launched.

"This was followed by a programme of expediting irrigation and forestry and the supply of drinking water and health services," he added.

Bhattacharjee could not attend the Conference convened by the Prime Minister due to fever. Chakraborti and Home Secretary Ardhendu Sen attended the meeting.

Bureau Report