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## Indian troops cross into Myanmar to attack rebel bases

*Parachute commandos use helicopters in cross-border raid to retaliate against deadly ambush that killed Indian soldiers.*

by **Subir Bhaumik**

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The Naga-Manipuri rebel squad which attacked the Indian army last Thursday denied heavy losses  
[Source: NSCN-K]

Indian parachute commandos in helicopters have crossed over the border into Myanmar to strike separatist bases in retaliation against an ambush in Manipur state last week that left 18 Indian soldiers dead, officials said.

Military officials said between 30 to 50 rebels were killed in Tuesday's surprise raids, but a rebel group led by Burmese Naga leader S S Khaplang said the Indian claims were "exaggerated" and that there were few casualties.

India's junior information minister Rajyavardhan Singh Rathore told TV channels that the "hot pursuit strikes" on separatist bases in Myanmar had been authorised by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

“Be it Yemen or Iraq, attacks on Indians are not acceptable. This is also a message to our neighbours who shelter terrorists,” Rathore said.

The strikes were in retaliation for last Thursday's ambush by rebel groups, who fired rocket-propelled grenades and detonated explosives on an Indian army convoy.

The toll of 18 Indian soldiers was the heaviest loss for Indian security forces in Manipur in two decades. Two rebels were also killed in that raid.

Major-General Ranbir Singh, of the Indian army's Military Operations Directorate, told Al Jazeera that Tuesday's "surgical strikes" were carried out with the "specific intelligence that these rebels were planning more attacks".

“Our soldiers did not suffer any casualties ,” said Singh.

Military officials said commandos of India's 21st Para Regiment were involved in at least two attacks; one on a Naga rebel base across from Noklak in India's Nagaland state and the other across Chassad in neighbouring northeastern Manipur.

Intelligence officials said a third rebel base jointly run by the Naga and Manipuri rebels at Onzia inside Myanmar was also attacked .

## **Myanmar 'informed'**

Myanmar officials said that India's ambassador Gautam Mukhopadhyay had informed the country's foreign ministry about "some attacks on rebels".

India has long persuaded Myanmar to flush out its northeastern rebels who have bases in the jungles of its Sagaing region, so far without much success.

The countries have an agreement in which their armies can cross into each other's territory to act against "terrorists".

While Bhutan and Bangladesh have killed and captured many of the rebels, Myanmar has said its army was already stretched fighting its own anti-Myanmar insurgencies in Kachins, Kokang and Karen regions.

Myanmar's forces have also occasionally crossed into India's Mizoram and Manipur states chasing its own ethnic Chin and Arakanese rebels, and India has looked the other way.

"Now it seems Myanmar will do the same ," said retired military official Gaganjit Singh, who commanded an army division in the northeast during the peak of ethnic unrest in the region.

"We have good military-to-military cooperation with Myanmar and we both understand each other's compulsions. They have bigger insurgencies to fight, we have our own northeastern rebels to tackle."

Myanmar's army cooperated with India on "Operation Golden Bird" in 1995 to attack northeastern separatists bringing in weapons from the Arakan coast but has done little since, Binoda Mishra, an authority on Myanmar, said.

A top Indian security analyst told Al Jazeera on Tuesday that it was unwise for India to brag about cross-border military raids.

"Covert operations are best when they are kept secret," said analyst Ajay Sahni.

Zaw Htay, director of Myanmar's presidential office, said in a Facebook post the assault occurred in India, not Myanmar.

"According to the information sent by Tatmadaw [Myanmar army] battalions on the ground, we have learned that the military operation was performed on the Indian side at India-Myanmar border," Zaw Htay said.

"Myanmar will not accept any foreigner who attacks neighbouring countries in the back and creates problems by using our own territory," he added.

SOURCE: **AL JAZEERA**