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DODA GUNFIGHT

The attack is the 11th in Jammu this year, in which 11 security personnel killed and 11 civilians have been killed. Five terrorists have been killed either in these encounters or in operations carried out by security forces.

The spate of attacks in the erstwhile peaceful region has sparked concerns that Jammu has emerged as the new hub violence in the Union territory where tens of thousands of people have died in extremist attacks since the 1990s.

Defence minister Rajnath Singh said counterterrorism operations were underway. "Our soldiers remain committed to eliminate the scourge of terrorism and restore peace and order in the region."

Defence spokesperson Lieutenant Colonel Suneel Bartwal said that the army launched a joint counterterrorism operation with the Jammu & Kashmir Police in Uri, 55km north of Doda town.

"At 8.40pm on Monday, the search party was able to establish contact with the terrorists hiding in the thickly forested and mountainous areas with restricted visibility due to low clouds and rain. In the initial volley of fire, four Indian Army personnel were injured, who later succumbed to their injuries," Bartwal said.

Bartwal said additional troops and equipment were brought in to flush out foreign terrorists who infiltrated into India and spotted moving in the upper reaches of Jammu in Udhampur, Doda, Kishtwar and Bhaderwah districts. "Similar operations are being conducted in Kathua in a relentless manner. The series of operations in the recent past have resulted in the neutralisation of three terrorists in Ganderbal on June 26, besides successfully thwarting the Chhattalgad terrorist attack on June 11," Bartwal said.

On Monday night, a group of three to five terrorists ambushed

the search party—comprising the captain and seven soldiers—on a hilltop. The security forces chased them into the treacherous terrain and thick foliage, leading to another firefight in the woods around 9pm on Monday, said officials aware of developments. The terrorists escaped while five personnel were wounded, they added. Kashmir Tigers, a proxy outfit of Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), claimed responsibility for the attack.

The attack renews worries about the increased movement of terrorists in Jammu and Kashmir to adopt similar tactics in Jammu region as they did in Kashmir to contain terrorism. Shah, during a meeting, issued clear directions to replicate the success achieved in the Kashmir Valley through "zero terror" and area dominance plans in the Jammu region with a focus on sensitive areas.

A senior Jammu & Kashmir police officer said that Monday's search operations were launched in the Dessa forests since April 28

when terrorists killed Mohammad Sharif, a village defence guard, in the Basantgarh area of Udhampur district, bordering Doda. Security and intelligence agencies suspect that eight to 10 groups of three to four terrorists, trained in guerrilla warfare and being helped by overground workers, are active in Doda.

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