

## **PAKISTANI-LINKED TERROR GROUPS TARGET ELECTORAL PROCESS IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR**

*By ESISC team*

13 people had been killed on December 5 in one of the deadliest wave of attacks carried out for years in the State of Jammu and Kashmir by suspected Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) terrorists.

- In the first attack, 6 jihadi fighters allegedly from Pakistan's Azad Kashmir attempted to enter an Army fortified camp located in the Mohura area of Baramulla district's Uri sector, only 18 kilometers from the "Line of Control" (LOC).

According to local reports, 7 soldiers, including a senior army officer, and 3 policemen lost their lives in the fighting, which lasted for nearly 12 hours. None of the 6 attackers survived.

- A few hours later, two suspected LeT terrorists, including a Pakistani "commander" identified as Qari Israr, were killed in the Soura area of Srinagar, only 11 kilometers from the center of the State's summer capital. According to security sources, the two men had attempted to overcome a security checkpoint.

It is important to note that the police had set up the checkpoint after they received information about the high risk of suicide attack in the city during the election period.

- In a third incident, unknown assailants hurled a hand grenade inside a police station in the southern district of Shopian, causing no casualties. According to security reports, the terrorists might have infiltrated from the Doda district through the Pir Panjal Range.

To recall, army troops and paramilitary forces had carried out a joint operation on November 27 in order to destroy terrorists' hideouts and recover caches of arms and ammunition disseminated across Doda district's forest areas.

- Lastly, 7 people were injured in the attack when unidentified assailants threw a grenade at a bus stand in Pulwama district's Tral town.

All these attacks took place as Jammu and Kashmir are holding their State Assembly elections through a process in five phases, taking place from November 25 until December 20.

One has to note that the Uri sector, which was the theatre of Friday's most intense fighting, is going to polls in the third phase on Tuesday December 9. It could therefore be assumed that the attack was part of a strategy aimed at derailing the whole electoral process in the State. Until now, neither the fear of terrorist violence nor the calls for a boycott launched by separatist parties have succeeded to affect the electoral turnout in areas which have already held the elections.

Moreover, this new wave of violence hit Jammu and Kashmir ahead of the visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi planned for Monday December 8. One should note that the head of New Delhi's government got personally involved in the campaign, asking people to vote in favor of his a BJP party in order to "rid the state of corruption".

This arrival of the nationalist leader on the local political stage has immediately provoked the ire of the legal separatist movements. Their main leaders indeed called for a "complete shutdown", in order to prevent Narendra Modi from addressing two election rallies scheduled in Srinagar and Anantnag. In the same way, we can assume that Kashmiri terrorist groups were eager to demonstrate their strength on this occasion. To recall, Modi's first visit to Kashmir as Prime Minister in July triggered a shutdown in protest against plans to reduce the State's autonomy.

In the coming days, we can therefore expect that Pakistan-based terror cells and local separatist groups will carry out more ambushes, bombings and suicide operations at least until the counting of the votes, which are scheduled for December 23.

**FIN**

**Copyright© ESISC 2014**