

644 extremists from eight banned outfits surrender in Assam

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Altogether 644 extremists, belonging to eight banned outfits, surrendered at an official ceremony in Guwahati on Thursday. Almost half of them were from a little-known Bengali group. The event, attended by Assam Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal, was in a series of “mainstreaming” of extremist groups since 1992. But the State’s Director General of Police Bhaskar Jyoti Mahanta said it was one of the biggest in scale.

Most (301) of the surrendered extremists belonged to the National Liberation Front of Bengali (NLFB), followed by 178 of the Adivasi Dragon Fighter and 87 of the National Santhal Liberation Army. Eight members of an unspecified faction of the National Democratic Front of Boroland took part in the surrender ceremony, as did 50 of the United Liberation Front of Asom-Independent (ULFA-I), 13 of the Rava National Liberation Front, six of the Kamatapur Liberation Organisation and one of the Communist Party of India-Maoist.

The extremists deposited 177 firearms, 71 bombs and 52 grenades. The NLFB, formed by one Amar Paul with the aim of stopping “harassment of Bengalis in Assam”, deposited 75 of these firearms, besides 1.93 kg explosives, the only outfit to do so. Mr. Sonowal praised the extremists and appealed to them to dedicate their lives to the interests of the nation. “There cannot be development without peace. We all have to work together for peace and prosperity... Each one of you has strength. You may not be aware of it. I urge you to use it to build the nation and society,” he said. He also advised them to take advantage of various Central schemes.

Rehabilitation Programme

Assam has a rehabilitation programme for surrendered militants in place. They get financial

assistance from the government and can also avail of a bank loan to start a business or invest the money in farming or entrepreneurship, according to officials.

A screening committee comprising the civil administration, the police, the Army and other security agencies decide the eligibility for rehabilitation package. There have been reports of non-extremists becoming beneficiaries in order to show a certain number of “surrendered militants”.

SOURCE: *The Hindu*