

Maoists in India

To advocate seizure of power and to work to change the world is a legitimate project. Whether this should be through an armed struggle, peaceful means or a fusion of all is an open question. But to advocate as an absolute must the disarming of people concedes to the government the right to a monopoly over violence.

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The annual report of the ministry of home affairs (MHA) 2005-06 says that “(n)axalism...is not merely a law and order problem but has deep socio-economic dimensions” (p 23). The ministry of defence in its annual report for 2005-06 claims that “left wing radicalism and extremism (is) motivated by prevailing socio-economic deprivation...” This gives the impression that the government is walking on two legs; fighting a “low intensity war”, as well as promoting good governance and development. Officials executing the policy on the ground in Bastar district, Chhattisgarh, however, describe this to be an “undeclared war”.¹ The language of war, if not a war effort is evident in the statement of the union minister of home affairs, Shivraj Patil, in the Lok Sabha on March 1, 2006:

“Sir ...26 battalions have been given to the states which are affected by Naxalite movement...(which) mean 26,000 men and officers. It is equal to an army of a small state...(W)e have said that if they need air support, we will give...(we are ready) to supply medicines, supply foodgrains required by the police for the purpose of evacuating injured persons or any other purpose....Initially they (Maoists) were using axes and swords. Then they started using pistols and guns. Then they started using AK 47 rifles and now they have started using hand grenades and landmines...Yes they are also using rocket launchers”.

A 14-page report by Shivraj Patil to the Lok Sabha on March 13, 2006, asks the “affected” states not to enter into dialogue with the CPI (Maoists) unless they give up arms. The minister told the standing committee of chief ministers of 13 Naxalite affected states on April 13 that, “local

resistance”, in particular, ‘Salwa Judum’, will be “upscaled”. The 20th meeting of the Coordination Centre of Naxalism concluded that the Salwa Judum had been a “huge success” with 142 rallies held so far. It was decided that it would now be concentrated in three-four blocks, and “only after these blocks have been adequately secured and dominated by the forces that the movement would be taken to new areas” (*Economic Times*, April 1, 2006). Meanwhile the affected states have been asked to set up a unified command and undertake joint operations. Therefore, prosecution of war remains the preferred course of action of the central and state governments.

Use and Abuse of Resources

The forces deployed against the Maoists have at their core 26,000 personnel of the central paramilitary forces (CPMF). A special elite anti-Naxal force comprising 11,000 personnel, currently undergoing training in Silchar (Assam), will be available soon for deployment. The army chief has announced the raising of an auxiliary force comprising ex-servicemen in consultation with concerned states. Bihar, meanwhile, became the first state to begin enlisting ex-servicemen for a 5,000 strong special task force for anti-Naxal operations. In Andhra Pradesh, the “greyhounds” comprise 18,000 personnel. They are setting up two new centres in Rayalaseema and Visakhapatnam (Newsblog:Andhra café, February 1, 2006). Each centre is to have 20 units and each unit is to have 35 persons. Andhra Pradesh is also raising two ‘giriyan’ battalions from agency areas, which would comprise people from tribal as well as settler communities. The Orissa government plans to raise a tribal force of 3,000. Jharkhand is raising ‘pahari’ battalions, apart from having recruited a special force of 14,000 to fight Maoists. Each state is also being financially aided to raise India Reserve Battalions (IRBs). Nineteen such battalions have been raised until 2005 by the nine affected states. They have been asked to raise 19 more. They can avail their services and, at no cost to them, requisition IRBs from other states such as Chhattisgarh from Nagaland, or Orissa from Haryana. They can also request armed police battalions from other states. Gujarat has sent one battalion of its armed force to Chhattisgarh. As part of a centrally coordinated plan, nine Naxal hit states will enlist about 40 “villagers” in each of the

police stations, falling within 55 of the worst affected districts. Assuming the number to be 500 police stations, this implies 20,000 personnel. On April 25, the Bihar government announced distribution of arms licences to “help villagers combat Maoists” as well as to provide arms to five persons in each village in Aurangabad district. While the home minister of Chhattisgarh says “we need 50 battalions of paramilitary forces” as against the 11 battalions the government now has (*Indian Express*, March 26, 2006). Over and above these are the special police officers (SPOs) and village defence committees (VDCs). Chhattisgarh plans to recruit 10,000 SPOs who will be deployed with VDCs.

Financial allocations also go towards augmenting police action. A sum of Rs 825 crore has been provided every year to 55 Maoist-affected districts for three years under the Backward District Initiative component of the Rashtriya Sam Vikas Yojana scheme. This will be utilised “to fill in the critical gaps in physical and social infrastructure” such as building roads, bridges, culverts, etc, for easy movement of security forces. Naxalite-affected states have been exempted from paying deployment charges since July 2004, thus saving Rs 1,100 crore of their revenue outgo (*Hindustan Times*, February 9, 2006). Under “police modernisation” in 13 states, Rs 3,085 crore was spent from 1996-97 to 2004-05. In 2005-06 a sum of Rs 517 crore was allocated. Central support for raising IRBs have been hiked from Rs 13 crore to Rs 20 crore for each battalion, or Rs 380 crore for raising 19 battalions. Furthermore, employment is being created in the CPMF for youth from Naxalite-affected areas. In 2004-05, 29,000 persons were employed and 18,241 more posts were to be filled in 2005-06 (*Asian Age*, April 25, 2006). The MHA annual report (2005-06) speaks of meeting security related expenses of the nine states including for newly recruited SPOs and VDCs as well as encouraging “local resistance groups”. For this purpose, from 1996-97 to 2005-06, Rs 160 crore has been spent. Towards “management of public perception” the centre reimburses “expenditure incurred on publicity material” (All-India Fact Finding Report or FFR, p 31). The CRPF has a budget of Rs 50 lakh to counter anti-establishment propaganda of the Naxalites (*Asian Age*, January 1, 2006). Finally, in Dantewada district of Chhattisgarh central funds are paying for 28,000 tribals living in camps as part of

the government’s policy to de-populate villages considered strongholds of Maoists. Thus, suppression is the preferred policy.

Maoist Growth

Speaking to the standing committee of chief ministers of Naxalite-affected states, the prime minister stressed that the Maoist movement had “gained in strength and spread to 160 districts all over the country”. This is remarkable when there is no middle class youth rebellion as in the 1960s. And joining them now means inviting incarceration or death. The cadre strength of the CPI (Maoist) climbed from 9,300 in 2004-05 to 10,500 in 2005-06. Reports suggest they have a 25,000 member people’s militia and 50,000 members in village level units. Weapons in their possession rose from 6,500 to about 7,300 with a large quantity of explosives. However, only “(p)arts of 76 districts in the nine states of Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Orissa, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal are badly affected by Naxal violence...in varying degrees”. Government claims that “violent activities” were reported in 2005 from 509 out of a total of 12,476 police stations located in 76 districts in the country (MHA, annual report, 2005-06, pp 24). While they are better armed than before and their cadres receive arms training, incidents of violence were confined to just 4 per cent of the total police stations.

A distinction must be drawn between spectacular raids such as for looting armouries, freeing prisoners and defending what is called the “janta sarkar” as in Bastar. The Jehanabad raid of 2005, for example, was criticised for inviting possible retaliation by landlord armies in Bihar. Nothing like that has happened so far. Instead the raid exposed the administration as being capable of stopping landlord armies if it so wished. This enhanced rather than eroded the sense of security of landless dalit agricultural labour. The war in Bastar is altogether different. The district collector of Dantewada admits that the Maoists’ strength lies in their village level units which comprise “the illiterate common man who like others takes care of his family through earning daily wages” (FFR, p 11). Local CPI leaders in Dantewada also point out “98 per cent of the Maoists are adivasis”. For nearly three decades, Maoists have lived, mobilised, radicalised and

empowered the tribals to set up their own "governance". What began in the early 1980s as a campaign against forest, revenue and police departments and money-lenders started to address "internal contradictions" in adivasi society, including land ownership. (FFR, pp 10-11). And the Maoists took up issues of fixing prices for forest produce, the most important being raising of prices of "tendu patta" from Rs 2 for 100 bundles (of 100 leaves each) in the early 1980s to Rs 80 for the same by mid-1990s. The "janata sarkar" runs schools, health system, rural credit and seed bank, small irrigation projects, etc.² They have also introduced social reforms, pushed gender sensitive reforms within the adivasi society including inside families (newsblog: Naxalwatch, February 2, 2006). Evidence for changes brought about by them is available in a rather striking manner. The prime minister gave away the first R N Goenka Award in the category "Uncovering India Invisible" to C Vanaja for her article in *Andhra Jyothi* of April 10, 2005. That was an account of the development work undertaken by the parallel

Maoist government in Dandakaranya! (*Economic Times* and *The Tribune*, April 14, 2006).³ Against this background, the district collector of Dantewada is categorical: "To end the problem of Naxalites it is not enough to kill Naxalites but...to crush and destroy their system operating at the village level" (FFR, p 33). Thus, in the war in Bastar one side is bent on destroying the "janata sarkar" and the other determined to defend it from being destroyed.

Elsewhere, in spite of extraordinary efforts to stem their growth, Maoists have shown perseverance. The anti-Naxal campaign is said to have been most successful in AP. The Maoists retreated from North Telangana and took roots in coastal Andhra (*Hindu*, April 1, 2006). In north Bihar, a relatively new area compared to central Bihar, the MHA accepts that they enjoy local support (*Asian Age*, April 11, 2006). Maoists are helping people to tide over acute water scarcity in Gaya district of central Bihar. After three consecutive years of scarce rainfall, water shortage was expected. While the administration

slept, the cadres are digging wells, paying for repairs of hand pumps, installing new ones, getting well-to-do farmers to use diesel pumps to create water reservoir for village use, as well as ensuring equitable distribution of water (*Jansatta*, April 14, 2006). Thus, the Maoists pose a challenge unlike anything posed by other insurgences.

Faulty Data

The statistics churned out by the home ministry on Maoist violence are in any case misleading. For instance, the Maoists assert that in Dantewada district alone they have recorded 31 instances of rape by security forces or the Salwa Judum between January and October 2005. Six of these women were raped and killed. (FFR, p 19). And the police refused to record this. In Mankelli village in Bijapur block, villagers were afraid of filing complaints against the security forces and the Salwa Judum, fearing a backlash from them (FFR, p 26). Besides, the data does not show whether the Maoists who were killed were armed

Call for Papers

Conference on Multidimensions of Urban Poverty in India, jointly organised by Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research (IGIDR), Mumbai, and the Centre de Sciences Humaines (CSH), New Delhi, on October 6th and 7th, 2006 at Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research, Mumbai.

Deadline for submission of paper/extended abstract of 1500 words: July 31st, 2006

Email address for submission: urban@igidr.ac.in

Researchers are encouraged to submit original papers based on rigorous case studies and/or empirical or theoretical research work with an India focus. The organising committee wishes to reach a balance between research on large cities and metropolises and that on small and medium towns. Papers assessing the impact of public policies and specific programmes are also welcome.

The identified sub themes are:

- (i) Characteristics and determining factors of urban poverty (at the national scale or at a city scale, links with size of cities, role of migration, structure of labour markets etc)
- (ii) Access to social (health, education) and physical (water, sanitation) infrastructure
- (iii) Inequalities in access to credit markets
- (iv) Formal and informal housing markets
- (v) Urban Livelihoods

Further information is available on the website of the institutes:

<http://www.igidr.ac.in> and <http://www.csh-delhi.com>

All submissions will be refereed and authors will be informed on the status of their papers no later than August 18th. Authors of accepted papers are requested to send the final version by September 15th. Since we are able to provide only limited travel support, authors are encouraged to seek their own travel funding. Outstation participants will be provided with accommodation at IGIDR. For further information, please send an email to urban@igidr.ac.in

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or unarmed. And whether the civilians killed were SPOs or members of VDCs. Not much is known about the nature of the incidents. For example, the union home secretary pointed out that if instead of four-year data if just first quarter figures for 2005 were compared with that of 2006 then the picture is that there were 475 incidents in the first quarter of 2005 compared to 391 in 2006. The number of casualties goes up from 114 to 157. Remove Chhattisgarh from the data, and the picture changes: In contrast to 97 incidents in the first quarter of 2005, this year there were 162. And as opposed to nine deaths last year, including three security force personnel, in the first quarter of 2006, 105 people, including 27 security force personnel, were killed. What, however, the home secretary did not share was that this increase in incidents and deaths is linked to initiation of the "local resistance", the Salwa Judum, since June 2005 in one Bastar region, which since December 2005 has become worse. The fact-finding report by the PUDR team says that the Salwa Judum leadership represents "those sections of tribal and non-tribal society who have been adversely effected by the Maoist policies, e.g., those in traditional positions of authority within the village, those whose lands have been redistributed, those traders whose profits have been hit by the struggles over tendu patta and forest produce, etc" (FFR, p 15). One Salwa Judum leader has been indicted by the Central Bureau of Investigation for looting the forest. Another allegedly murdered his teacher (FFR, p 29). Such persons spearhead violent government-funded and organised attacks against the Maoist movement (FFR, pp 32-33). And there is "a pattern in evicting people from their villages. Sometimes the entire village is evacuated; in other instances, only a few families are moved out. A meeting is announced to be held in a targeted village. On that date, a Salwa Judum crowd accompanied by security forces descends on the village and asks people to come to the camp and sangham members to surrender. If villagers show reluctance, they are attacked, their belongings looted, houses burnt and some people either lynched or killed by soldiers" (FFR, p 35). Those killed in the attacks are said to have been killed by the Maoists while those arrested are shown as Maoists, both to enable claiming of compensation or awards as the case may be. Ex-gratia payment of Rs 1.5 lakh is given to next of kin victims of Maoists

violence. In the case of Maoists arrested, a reward of Rs 2 lakh and Rs 1 lakh for an AK 47 is available. (Jharkhand has gone a step ahead and announced a reward of Rs 25 lakh for villages which organise surrender of Naxalites.) This commerce enables the blaming and hunting of Maoists. Against this background the appointment of K P S Gill of Punjab as security advisor to the Chhattisgarh government is only to take the war notch higher. Forty years of low intensity warfare has seen them emerge, in the prime minister's words, as the "single biggest internal security challenge".

Arresting Development

When the central government speak of Maoists obstructing development, such as in tribal areas, it means the Maoists' presence obstructs corporate exploitation of minerals, forests, water and land resources of adivasis. Corporations come with capital intensive, low job creating investments, which necessitates import of skilled labour from outside and token employment for locals as members of an unskilled low wage labour force. The National Mineral Development Corporation's Kirandul and Bachel mines, in Dantewada district of MP do not employ local people (FFR, p 8). The entire iron ore mined here is exported through a dedicated railway line to Visakhapatnam and exported thence to Japan. To ensure smooth passage for expropriation of land, the poor are now being offered "equity" of 5 per cent in big projects. In what could be a precursor of things to come, a mining summit organised by the Federation of Indian Mineral Industries on February 9 and 10 at Bhubaneswar argued for demarcating mining tracts in revenue records and for keeping them outside the Scheduled Tribe (Recognition of Land Right) Bill 2005 (*Times of India*, April 4, 2006). This would enable corporations to escape opposition put up by local communities. Not that gram sabhas, notified under the Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas Act 1996, are able to stop corporations from taking over their lands. By simply doctoring gram sabha records, consent can be manufactured. In Nagarnar (district Bastar) the state government "used violence against protestors, and resolutions that were unfavourable to the government, were simply replaced by pro-(NMDC run steel) plant resolutions in the (gram sabha) book" (FFR, p 8). This was done as well in Kocheipadar gram sabha in Rayagada district of Orissa where consent

for the Alcan-Hindalco project was forcibly acquired (*Times of India*, April 4, 2006). A note prepared by a member of the Planning Commission, B Mungekar, shows that between 1951 and 1990, 40 million people were "moved out" or displaced in rural and urban India. Of these 40 per cent were tribals. And only 25 per cent of those displaced have been rehabilitated (*Times of India*, March 27, 2006).

Final Point

Politics is a struggle for power. To advocate seizure of power and to work to change the world is a legitimate project. Whether this should be through armed struggle, peaceful means or a fusion of all is an open question. But to advocate as an absolute must the disarming of people concedes to the government the right to a monopoly over violence, and a free run to exploiters and oppressors. Nevertheless, the question of means and ends are important. In the sense that whatever be the form of struggle, it has its dos and don'ts. Armed struggle does not mean a licence to loot and kill. Between the two extremes of valorising war and abhorrence of war lies a middle ground of social reality, which accepts that internal war cannot be prevented until governments opt for a peaceful resolution of conflicts. What policies or changes are being introduced that restore to people their right to live in dignity and freedom? Why should people wait patiently for a change in their lives while the prosperity of the already privileged rises exponentially? By all means fault the Maoists for their shortcomings and crimes. But respect them for fighting against exploitation and oppression, which refuses us the luxury of ignoring the plight of the sovereigns. **EW**

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Notes

- 1 People's Union for Democratic Rights, 'When the State Makes War on Its Own People', All India Fact Finding Report, April 2006, p 28.
- 2 *Safarnama; Jangalnama: Bastar ke jangalon mein* by Satnam, New Vista Publication, Delhi, 2006.
- 3 In his speech the prime minister told the journalists, "I submit to you that a 'journalism of courage' also implies taking sides. Objectivity does not imply neutrality. It implies respect for truth and facts and willingness to take positions, however, contrarian or contentious". If only his government would practise what prime minister espouses.