

## The Naxal Menace: Need for a National Policy

**T**he recent Naxal attack in Jharkhand, Odisha and Bihar resulting in the death of many civilians and security forces has once again drawn attention to the dreaded malaise that Naxalism has become in this country. Naxals' increasing activism, growing reach and killing power should make us give a more serious thought to this problem.

Skilled in guerrilla warfare techniques, Naxalites have excellent intelligence system. With committed leaders, motivated cadres, better trained armed militia and sophisticated weaponry, Naxals, today, are better equipped to intercept police communication and strike the desired targets at will.

Spread over 170 districts, the Naxals have been taking advantage of the rising agrarian distress, destruction of forests, uprooting of tribal and marginal peasantry due to predatory mining, irrigation, metallurgical and other developmental projects, not to speak of growing regional disparities. It is quite disconcerting to know that more than two-third of the severely Naxalite-affected districts lies in the tribal areas.

The tribal and the marginal farmers form the main part of their cadre strength. They even have few doctors, engineers and educated persons providing the technical expertise required for their various subversive activities. With very committed and motivated leaders, legion of workers and sympathisers and with help from the forces hostile to this country, Naxals have been growing from strength to strength, posing a real threat to the national security of this country.

The 'Red Corridor' comprising the so-called 'compact revolutionary zone' (CRZ) is said to stretch from Nepal through some of the most backward regions of the country including Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha and Maharashtra. The Naxals first aim to establish a base area inside the Dandakaranya forest, spanning MP, Chhattisgarh, Odisha and parts of Maharashtra.

Termed variously as 'the enemy within', 'the fifth columnists' and 'the Trojan Horse', the

Naxals find it easier to operate from the backward and underdeveloped areas as people in these areas respond better to their propaganda machinery. Untouched by the light of education and benefits of development, poor and hungry people fall easy prey to disaffecting influences from the Naxalites.

In some of these predominantly tribal areas, Naxals are known to run parallel administration. They run Kangaroo courts called 'Jan Adalats', schools, primary health centres, and taxation system imposing levis on contactors, mine owners, businessmen and even on government officials.

Fearing loss of popular support, the Naxals conveniently oppose any developmental activities inside the forest areas misinforming people that such acts are directed at taking their lands, mineral and forest wealth which rightfully belong to them. Successful governmental initiatives and intervention may deprive them of the issues for popular mobilisation against the government. Continued underdevelopment and backwardness make it easier for them to mislead and misguide the innocent people against the government.

It is more that established now that Naxals have fraternal ties with disruptive and fissiparous forces within and without the country. They also support many such separatist forces and their nefarious cause including their right to self-determination which has serious implications for the security and integrity of this country. With such ideological stance, it does not leave them any scope for pangs of conscience to affect them, while tying up for ulterior purposes with anti-national forces. In fact, they pose a great ideological threat to the Indian State as they question the very legitimacy of the same. To Naxals, 'Naxalism' is not a problem; rather it is a solution to the many ills afflicting the country.

Naxals are learnt to have teamed up today with Nepal's Maoists to create disaffection among people of Nepalese origin who have been living for generation in Darjeeling and Dooars regions of West Bengal and lower Sikkim. Their purpose is to engineer a movement for 'self-determination', which could unleash violence on a wide scale, much worse than what was witnessed during the 'Gorkha Land' agitation.

Today, Naxalites are being used by Pakistan's ISI for carrying out subversive activities in this country including drug trafficking and fake currency rackets. In return, the ISI is providing the Naxalites with sophisticated weaponry and know-how for making and using improvised explosives devices. Seized weapons and ammunition bear witness to this. There is an increasing possibility of the emergence of a grand coalition of Islamic fundamentalist and Marxist-Leninist forces who are united by the common purpose of subverting the Indian state.

More than a law and order problem, Naxalism needs more specialised attention and coordinated action than seen so far. We need to explore and address its socio-economic dimensions.

Today, if we really mean to solve the Naxal problem, we need a multi-pronged strategy therefor. A pro-active planning and better synergised coordination among the central and affected state governments through a well-thought out national policy on Naxalism is the first step in this direction. We not only need to modernise our police forces and equip them

with state-of-the-art weapons and equipment, there is also an urgent need for enhancing our force levels. Better training, better area-specific counter revolutionary strategies and better motivation of forces are other important pre-requisites for tackling the Naxal threat.

Such innovative measures as creation of a 'public peace force' as experimented in Chhattisgarh in the form of 'Salwa Judum' where locals have been employed as 'Special Police Officers' with a monthly remuneration of Rs. 2000 need to be reconceived and reorganised in the light of experiences gained since its inception in 2005 in Dantewada district. Such an experiment has contributed positively towards counter-terrorism efforts in Jammu and Kashmir and there is no reason why the same should not succeed vis-à-vis Naxalism in other parts of the country. But it should be seen that such a measure does not result in the vertical divisions of the civil society to the detriment of the larger public good.

And, if any such counter revolutionary planning has to be successful, the local people of the Naxal-infested regions should definitely be taken into confidence. The government machinery must do the utmost possible to neutralise the negative government image as created and sustained by the Naxalites through their agitprop.

It should be ensured that the benefits of all government anti-poverty and development schemes including National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme, Member of Parliament Local Area Development Programme, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, National Rural Health Mission, Special Component Plan, Tribal Sub-Plan, Integrated Tribal Development Plan, Indira Awas Yojna, Integrated Child Development Scheme, Swarna Jayanti Gram Swarajgar Yojna, Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojna and Pradhan Mantri Gramin Rojgar Yojna reach the targeted beneficiaries.

Special schemes and programmes aimed at the overall economic development of Naxal affected regions should be chalked and implemented. Improved and pronounced government interventions and presence would also help bridge the confidence gap between the government and the public, thereby strengthening the intelligence set-up, so required for countering the Naxal menace.

## Salient Points

- With committed leaders, motivated cadres, better trained armed militia, Naxals, today, are better equipped to intercept police communication.
- More than two-third of the severely Naxalite-affected districts lie in the tribal areas.
- Fearing loss of popular support, the Naxals conveniently oppose any developmental activities.
- To Naxals, 'Naxalism' is not a problem; rather it is a solution to the many ills.
- Naxals are learnt to have teamed up today with Nepal's Maoists to create disaffection among people.
- Today, Naxalites are being used by Pakistan's ISI for carrying out subversive activities in this country including drug trafficking and fake currency rackets.
- More than a law and order problem, Naxalism needs more specialised attention and coordinated action on socio-economic dimensions.
- A pro-active planning among the central and affected state governments through a well-thought out national policy on Naxalism.
- The government machinery must do the utmost possible to neutralise the negative government image
- Improved and pronounced government interventions and presence would also help bridge the confidence gap between the government and the public.