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NAXAL VIOLENCE IN 2015

Naxal Might and Ideology | Enclaves of Strength | The Maoist Expansion |
Combating Naxal Violence | A Strategy for the Government

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IPCS Forecasts

Naxal Violence in 2015

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Leftwing Extremism in 2015: A Forecast

At the onset of 2015, left-wing extremism (LWE) in India under the aegis of the Communist Party of India-Maoist (CPI-Maoist) is confronted with a choice of either coming to terms with the realities of its weakness and revisit the strategy of sustaining a protracted war with the state; or continuing with carrying out periodic attacks on the security forces and other state protagonists with the long-term aim of resurrecting itself yet again in the coming years.

Although the past few years have reinforced the notion that CPI-Maoist has ceased to be the force it used to be, there is little hope that in 2015, the outfit would halt pursuing its strategy of carrying out intermittent raids as well as expanding into newer areas. How the state responds to this challenge via its reformulated strategy would be something to watch out for.

Continuing Decline

In 2014, the trend of declining fatalities in LWE-related violence continued. According to provisional data, only 314 fatalities were registered, which is the lowest since the formation of the CPI-Maoist in 2004. While Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand account 67 per cent of these fatalities, Odisha, Maharashtra and Bihar are the other states that reported the remaining fatalities. The CPI-Maoist, which once wielded influence over almost one-third of the country's geographical expanse, now operates with a constrained presence in these five states. A sudden expansion in the CPI-Maoist's area of operation is unlikely in 2015. The outfit would mostly be involved in guarding its remaining influence in these states.

Persisting Weakness

Affected by surrenders, killings and arrests of a large numbers of its cadres, the CPI-Maoist is clearly on a back foot, necessitating a phase of tactical retreat when the outfit rebuilds its strength. Among the many denominators that point at the state's tightening grip over LWE is the former's ability to carry out largely peaceful elections in various states. Jharkhand went for an assembly elections in November and December 2014. Additionally, the CPI-Maoist largely failed to carry out its threats of disrupting the poll; the over 66 per cent voter turnout – a record percentage in the state – demonstrated a growing popular confidence in the State's ability to provide security. A stable government, now a reality in state, has an opportunity of heralding an era of decisive action against the extremists.

Morale-boosting Assaults

The operational weakness of the CPI-Maoist, however, has not curtailed its ability to carry out periodic attacks resulting in high casualty among the security forces. In fact, such attacks would

remain part of the CPI-Maoist's continuing attempt of seeking relevance, rebuilding its organisational strength, and inflicting setbacks on the security forces. The fact that the security forces in each of the LWE-affected theatres continue to face issues of coordination, leadership and direction, would aid the extremist efforts. Successful attacks such as the one that resulted in the killing of 14 Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel in Chhattisgarh's Sukma district on 1 December 2014, has already led to a defensive mindset among the forces, with the CRPF headquarters insisting that all major operations against the extremists must be cleared by the top brass of the organisation. In view of this, the highly publicised anti-extremist security force operations launched in Jharkhand in January 2015 may not result in its intended results of wiping out extremism.

Enclaves of Strength

New Delhi has assured the affected states of support in dealing with LWE. However, for the states, emerging from an era of overwhelming dependence on the central forces has proved to be difficult. Progress in enabling its own police forces to take a lead role in countering extremism has remained a non-starter. This is apparent in the significant level of popular compliance to the CPI-Maoist's periodic calls for shutdown in various states. Even as the state makes advance establishing its writ over hitherto extremism-affected areas, several enclaves of extremist domination, especially in states like Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Odisha would continue to mock the official claims of success.

Missing Bureaucracy

Resurrecting governance over the erstwhile Maoist-dominated areas has proved to be New Delhi's Achilles Heel. As of the beginning of 2015, the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs is pushing the state governments to appoint "officers with zeal" as district magistrates and superintendents of police in the extremism-affected districts. Even as the security forces register some successes in ending extremist domination over select areas, bureaucratic inertia in kick-starting governance has remained one of the primary hindrances in cementing success. Government functionaries are either reluctant to function in such hazardous zones or are indulging in rampant corruption exploiting the lack of accountability a conflict situation provides. The attempt to inculcate "zeal" among functionaries, both in the higher and lower levels of bureaucracy is likely to be a tough one for the state governments.

Southern Expansion

One of the less highlighted aspects of the CPI-Maoist's activities in 2014 was its foray into Kerala. With a handful of incidents involving attacks on a forest department office and an outpost, and KFC and McDonald's outlets, the Maoists have announced their presence in the southern state. While expansion into new areas remains an avowed objective of the CPI-Maoist exploiting fertile grounds, the divided official response has helped the outfit gain strength and sympathisers. Amid the Kerala police's steps to deal with the emerging threat, a senior government functionary has called for a stop to the hunt and has praised the Maoists for "energising the government machinery in tribal areas." The CPI-Maoist would continue its attempts to spread its activities into new areas in 2015. Sans a national consensus on dealing with the threat, some of these areas would lapse into new hunting grounds for the extremists.

2014: A Review

I

The Naxal Might and Ideology

Naxalites and the Might of a Fragile Revolution¹

On the morning of 18 October 2014, Shiv Kumar, a personnel belonging to the Chhattisgarh Armed Police was pulled out of a passenger bus in Sukma district by a group of Communist Party of India-Maoist (CPI-Maoist) cadres and killed. Kumar was ill and was on his way to the hospital when the bus he had boarded was waylaid by extremists. On the previous day, Raghunath Kisku, Founder Member, Nagarik Suraksha Samity (NSS), an anti-Maoist organisation, was killed by Maoists in Ghatshila sub-division of Jharkhand's East Singhbhum district.

Kumar was the 69th security force personnel and Kisku, the 164th civilian, to be killed by Maoists in 2014. Other activities perpetrated by the Maoists till 15 September include 125 attacks on the police; 40 occasions of snatching of weapons from the security forces; and holding of 25 arms training camps and 46 jan adalats in areas under their influence. While the occurrences of larger attacks have substantially decreased, the numbers of extremism-related incidents roughly remain the same compared to the corresponding period in 2013 – indicating the continuation of the challenge.

And yet it is a hard time for the Maoists. Till 15 September, 1129 CPI-Maoist cadres were neutralised, including 49 who were killed in encounters, and 1080 cadres, arrested. While the outfit can take pride from the sacrifices made by these men and women, what continues to trouble it is the perpetual desolation creeping into its ranks and files, leading to a large number of surrender of its leaders and cadres.

Among the 395 who have surrendered till 30 September are leaders like Gumudavelli Venkatakrishna Prasad alias Gudsa Usendi, Secretary, Dandakaranya Special Zonal Committee (DKSZC), arguably the outfit's most potent military division based in Bastar and his wife Raji; GP Reddy, Member, the DKSZC, and his wife Vatti Adime; and Bhagat Jade and his wife Vanoja. According to the Chhattisgarh police, over 140 cadres have surrendered between June and September 2014 in Bastar alone, partly due to the disillusion with the outfit's ideology and partly convinced by the police's method of highlighting the discrimination suffered by the local Chhattisgarh cadres at the hands of those drawn from Andhra Pradesh.

Press statements of the CPI-Maoist, while condemning these surrenders as demonstration of opportunism and desertion of the movement by corrupt and politically degenerated persons, admit that the revolution is currently undergoing its most difficult phase. The CPI-Maoist has accused the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government in New Delhi of launching the third phase of Operation Green Hunt, a ruthless war aimed at annihilating the Maoists who are the "biggest threat" to its "pro-reform" policies. Asserting that it has merely only engaged in a "war

¹ Originally published as IPCS Commentary on 20 October 2014. See <http://www.ipcs.org/article/naxalite-violence/naxalites-and-the-might-of-a-fragile-revolution-4705.html>

of self defence," the outfit has called for a "widespread struggle to fight back the threat by uniting all the revolutionary and democratic forces."

Its progressively declining capacity to annihilate enemies since 2010 – in spite of the ability to pull off some of the most spectacular attacks on security forces and politicians in recent years – has remained a matter of worry for the CPI-Maoist. Its failure to disrupt the parliamentary and state assembly elections coupled with a regular desertion of its cadres has descended as an existential threat on the outfit that once controlled one-third of the country's geographical area. Even with the persisting bureaucratic inertia and unimaginative security force operations, most of the affected states have gained in their fight against the extremists.

However, the outfit's domination over large swathes of area in Chhattiagr, Odisha and Jharkhand with significant presence in states like Bihar provides it with the ability to continue with its small ambushes. Its recruitment and fund raising ability appears to have shrunk. And yet, the outfit harps about a people's militia "now in thousands" united by apathy of the state and carefully calibrated image of the government being a representative of the exploitative industrial houses. Hence, a scenario in which surrenders and killings of the Maoists would push the outfit into oblivion is remote.

The Indian Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), after months of deliberation, is now armed with a new policy to counter the Maoists. The policy, subject to cabinet approval, would remain open to use "any element of national power" against the extremists. Although it does not rule out peace talks with the extremists, it makes the peace process conditional to the CPI-Maoist renouncing violence. It plans to make the state police the lead counter-insurgent force against the extremists while assigning the central forces, especially the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), the responsibility of holding the counter-insurgency grid together "like a glue." While impressive in its nuances, the approach is guided by the belief that it is possible to wipe out the Maoists by force alone.

The impact of the new official counter-Maoist policy remains to be seen. However, in the clash between a militarily 'down-and-not-yet-out' CPI-Maoist and the official security apparatus that has its own set of serious problems, little more than persistence of the logjam can be expected.

Six Thousand Plus Killed: The Naxal Ideology of Violence²

How does one analyse the killings of 6105 civilians and security forces in incidents related to left-wing extremism between 2005 and 2013?

Given that the Communist Party of India-Maoist (CPI-Maoist), since its formation in 2004, has been responsible for majority of these killings, conventional analyses have mostly focused on big and small incidents that produced these victims. While such methods are useful in terms of attempting to grasp the growing or declining capacity of the outfit, it is also useful to analyse the unceasing violence as upshot of an ideology that has for decades underlined the necessity to shed the enemy's blood to bring about a change in social and political order.

Three leaders – Charu Mazumdar, Kanu Sanyal and Kondapalli Seetharamaiah – dominate the discourse on Naxalism, which began in the 1960s. Mazumdar, in his 'Eight Documents' in 1965,

² Originally published as IPCS Commentary on 15 September 2014. See <http://www.ipcs.org/article/peace-and-conflict-database-naxal/six-thousand-plus-killed-the-naxal-ideology-of-violence-4657.html>

exhorted the workers of the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) to take up armed struggle against the state. He underlined that action and not politics was the need of the hour. Such calls resulted in a number of incidents in which the CPI-M workers started seizing arms and acquiring land forcibly on behalf of the peasants from the big landholders in Darjeeling. These incidents went on to provide the spark for the 1967 peasant uprising.

Following the formation of the All India Coordination Committee of Revolutionaries (AICCR), that emerged out of the CPI-M in November 1967 and was renamed as All India Coordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries (AICCCR) in May 1968, Mazumdar further reiterated his idea of khatam or annihilation of class enemies. Although incidents of individual assassinations influenced by khatam resulted in repressive state action targeting the naxalite cadres, the Communist Party of India-Marxist-Leninist (CPI-ML), which was formed in 1969 breaking away from the CPI-Marxist, continued professing violence as the key tool of revolution.

While Mazumdar's preference for using violence to overthrow existing social order and seizing state power remained the CPI-ML's mode of operation till 1972, a counter ideology with a stress on agrarian consolidation preceding an armed struggle was reiterated by Kanu Sanyal following Mazumdar's death. Sanyal was not against the idea of an armed struggle per se. However, he opposed Mazumdar's advocacy of targeted assassination.

In the subsequent years, the CPI-ML split into several factions. Although Sanyal himself headed a faction, he gradually grew redundant to the extreme left movement and committed suicide in 2010. Towards the last years of his life, Sanyal maintained that the CPI-Maoist's reliance on excessive violence does not conform to original revolutionary objectives of the Naxalite movement. On more than one occasion, Sanyal denounced the "wanton killing of innocent villagers". In a 2009 interview, Sanyal accused the CPI-Maoist of exploiting the situation in West Bengal's Lalgarh "by using the Adivasis as stooges to carry forward their agenda of individual terrorism."

In Andhra Pradesh, since the 'Spring Thunder' of Srikakulam in 1970, Kondapalli Seetharamaiah, was responsible for the growth of the Naxalite movement under the aegis of the CPI-ML. After leading a faction of the CPI-ML and forming the People's War Group (PWG) in 1980 Seetharamaiah oversaw a regime of intense violence, thus, earning the outfit the description of "the deadliest of all Naxal groups". Even after the expulsion of Seetharamaiah in 1991, the PWG and its factions remained the source of extreme violence targeting politicians and security forces in the state.

Kanu Sanyal's reluctant support for armed violence was, thus, somewhat an aberration. Playing down the importance of mindless bloodshed remained a peripheral of the Naxalite movement. Each transformation of the movement thereafter in terms of splits, mergers, and formation of new identities escalated the ingrained proclivity to use violence as an instrument of expansion and influence. The CPI-Maoist represented a natural progression of this trend. And as the fatalities data reveal, each passing year, since its 2004 formation through a merger of the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) and the PWG, it became more and more reliant on violence, rationalising the strategy as a defensive mechanism essential to its existence.

In 2009 Koteswar Rao alias Kishenji, who led the outfit in West Bengal termed the violence as a "struggle for independence". Ganapathy, the CPI-Maoist general secretary, reiterated in his

February 2010 interview that the violence is only a "war of self-defence" or a "counter-violence" in response to a "brutal military campaign unleashed by the state". Maoist Spokesperson Azad, who was later killed in controversial circumstances, rejected the appeal for abjuring violence by then Home Minister P Chidambaram in April 2010 indicating that such a move would allow the "lawless" security forces "continue their rampage". Azad also maintained that while the outfit generally avoids attacking the non-combatants, "the intelligence officials and police informers who cause immense damage to the movement" cannot be spared.

Thus understood, few conclusions can be drawn, in contrast to beliefs that a peaceful resolution of the conflict could be possible. Its current frailty notwithstanding, regaining capacities to maximise violence would be a priority for the CPI-Maoist. It will continue to reject other methods of social and political change and maintain an unwavering faith in the utility of violence. Even while realising that a total victory vis-a-vis the state is unattainable, the outfit would remain an agent of extreme violence in its own spheres of influence.

II

The Maoist Expansion

Surrender of Gudsa Usendi: Ominous beginning for the Naxals?³

Beginning of 2014 could not have been any worse for the Communist Party of India-Maoist (CPI-Maoist). The outfit lost one of its trusted lieutenants. On 13 January, spokesperson of Dandakaranya Special Zonal Committee, GVK Prasad alias Gudsa Usendi, who not only was in charge of issuing press statements on behalf of the outfit, but was also responsible for some of its military successes in Chhattisgarh, surrendered to the Andhra Pradesh police. He complained of ill health and disillusionment with the outfit's excessive reliance on violence. He would receive the Rupees 20 lakh which was the bounty on his head. Usendi's surrender was followed by few other surrenders of low and middle ranking cadres in Chhattisgarh.

The CPI-Maoist came out with an audio statement trivializing the impact of Usendi's surrender. Calling him a 'traitor', a 'morally flawed' individual; criticising his ways with the women cadres and the fact that Usendi chose to abandon his wife and surrender with another woman cadre, the statement noted that such surrenders, which is 'not a new phenomenon for the revolutionary movement' would have no impact on the revolution that the Maoists are waging.

At one level, the statement appears to be a natural reaction of the outfit, which has suffered from a series of splits and surrenders, and has also lost a number of senior leaders to arrests and killings in the past years. While deaths and arrests are unavoidable parts of its military campaign, the outfit is most perturbed by the possible impact of the public denouncement of its ideology by its erstwhile lieutenants. By criticising the surrendering cadres and idolising the ones who got killed in encounters with the security forces, the Maoists want to keep their flock together.

Recent history of left-wing extremism in India bears testimony to the damaging impact of neutralisation of key leaders on the outfit's overall activity. Kishenji's killing in November 2011

³ Originally published as IPCS Commentary on 19 January 2014. See <http://www.ipcs.org/article/peace-and-conflict-database-naxal/surrender-of-gudsa-usendi-ominous-beginning-for-the-naxals-4264.html>

led to the marginalisation of the Maoists in West Bengal. Sabyasachi Panda's in August 2012 rebellion in Odisha was a serious setback for the outfit's plan of expansion in that state. The September 2009 arrest of Kobad Ghandy and the July 2010 killing of Cherikuri Rajkumar alias Azad constituted blows to the outfit's policy making apparatus as well as to its expansion strategy in southern India. Usendi's sudden departure from the scene would certainly affect the outfit. That the outfit would find a leader to replace him and would eventually overcome his loss is, however, a different debate.

At the other level, the satisfaction expressed in the official circles, post Usendi's surrender that the CPI-Moist would eventually crumble because of its excessive reliance on violence and disenchantment of its cadres from the party's ideology, may be misplaced. That Usendi's surrender and fair treatment accorded to him by the state would lead to a stream of surrenders of top cadres is farfetched. That Maoist violence would die a natural death without any substantial effort from the state is an unreal expectation.

Ground reality in the Maoist conflict theatres may be different. While the level of violence orchestrated in 2010, so far the worst year of Maoist violence, resulting in the deaths of over 900 civilians and security forces would possibly remain unmatched, an upswing in violence, albeit marginal, was recorded in 2013 over the previous year. 270 civilians and security forces were killed in 2013 in various states compared to 250 deaths in 2012. In spite of the killing of 151 Maoist cadres in 2013, the outfit's level of violence did not show much signs of abatement. States like Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Bihar and Odisha remained affected by significant amount of extremist mobilisation as well as violence.

Although deployment of about 150 companies of security forces minimised violence during the state assembly elections in Chhattisgarh, there was little to suggest that the state is in the process of developing its wherewithal to replicate the Andhra Pradesh success on its soil. Bihar's unique approach towards the problem has merely translated into its diminishing ability to neutralise the Maoists, where as the extremists continue to kill, abduct and snatch weapons. While Maoist inroads into the northeast remains mostly an exaggerated claim by the Assam government, the CPI-Maoist appears to have made concerted efforts for expansion into the southern states.

In 2013, small victories were scored by the security forces against the Maoists. But the year also witnessed setbacks in the form of the Darbha attack in Chhattisgarh in which 27 people including some senior politicians were killed and the killing of an Superintendent of Police in Jharkhand. Moreover, the security forces in Chhattisgarh were also involved in at least two encounters in which civilians rather than extremists were killed, highlighting the persistence of intelligence collection problems. It is the continuing ability to inflict damages on the state, which would keep the CPI-Maoist relevant in the eyes of its sympathisers.

Usendi's surrender was an ominous beginning for the CPI-Maoist, but certainly not the end game.

Maoists in the Northeast: Reality and Myth-Making⁴

On 9 June 2013, just before the clock struck midnight, a police contingent in Assam's Tinsukia district boarded the Chennai-Egmore Express, minutes before its three-day long journey, and pulled out 66 youths. A critical intelligence input received by the police had indicated that these youths from tea gardens, Ahom and Moran communities were going to join the Communist Party of India-Maoist (CPI-Maoist). Following two days of interrogation and confirmation from the employers of the youths in Chennai, all were released. To cover up a major embarrassment, the police establishment forced the parents of the youths to sign undertakings that they would produce their wards before the police whenever asked for. The incident in a way summed the mindset of the security establishment in Assam, which for the past couple of years, has been pursuing a non-existent enemy, invariably under political orders.

Media reports on the alleged inroads made by the CPI-Maoist into the Northeast in general and Assam in particular have produced alarming narratives comprising encounters, arrests, shadowy extremist game plans, and a vision for taking over the region. While few of these incidents are real, most, like the incident narrated earlier, are unsustainable.

Arrested Maoist cadres identified as central committee members, training instructors, and key leaders of the outfit's eastern wing have been found to be old men in the age group of 65 to 70 years, a clear departure from the mainstream Maoist movement whose leaders and cadres are much younger. Post-arrest, the so called high profile cadres like Aditya Bora have been given instant bail by the courts in view of the weak and unsubstantiated charges brought against them. The so called extortion notes recovered in upper Assam districts contain expressions such as 'Maubadi 147' and symbols of a rising sun, indicating the involvement of petty criminals posing as Maoists or even cadres of the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), whose party symbol is the rising sun. The 'disappearance' of 300 youths from various Assam districts has been described as a successful recruitment drive by the CPI-Maoist. The Assam-Arunachal Pradesh border region has been described as the new hotbed of Maoist activity. Hundreds of kilometres separate the area from the nearest Maoist area of activity in West Bengal, violates the principle of contiguity, which the CPI-Maoist steadfastly hold on to in its expansion drive.

Such disquieting narratives, as a result, coexist with saner assessments, incidentally by some of the senior police officials in Assam. They in fact, insist that there is no constituency in Assam which the Maoists can exploit to spread their ideology. In January 2014, Assam's director general of police confirmed that "Maoists have also not yet been able to make strong inroads into Assam."

The purpose of this column here is not to argue that Maoists have no plans for the Northeast. They do. However, that is not a near or medium-term plan for sabotage, armed struggle and carving out of liberated zones in the region, but a more rational and realistic stratagem for using the region's weaknesses and vulnerabilities for weapons procurement and services of the insurgent outfits for training purposes. The joint declaration between the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in Manipur and the CPI-Maoist goes back to October 2008. As part of the declaration, the PLA in 2010 organised arms training camps for the Maoist cadres in Jharkhand. Maoist leader Kishenji (who was killed in November 2011) travelled to the PLA and National

⁴ Originally published as IPCS Commentary on 17 February 2014. See <http://www.ipcs.org/article/terrorism-in-northeast/maoists-in-the-northeast-reality-and-myth-making-4315.html>

Socialist Council of Nagaland-Isak-Muivah (NSCN-IM) camps in Manipur and Nagaland respectively to deepen partnership and explore arms purchase and joint training opportunities. The NSCN-IM purchased arms from a Chinese company intended for the Maoists. ULFA chief Paresh Baruah has congratulated the Maoists for their successful ambushes in Chhattisgarh and sent condolence messages following the killing of Maoists in encounters.

However, none of the outfits in the Northeast have ever expressed any desire to let the Maoists operate in what they consider to be their exclusive playing field. The CPI-Maoist has indeed attracted some youths from the region. But those journeys from the Northeast to Maoist camps in the Indian mainland in some ways resemble those undertaken by Muslim youths from all nooks and corners of the world to join the anti-Soviet Mujahideen in Afghanistan in the 1980s. The objectives of those cadres are certainly not to wage a guerrilla war inside the Northeast but to enforce the ranks of the CPI-Maoist, conforming to their personal ideological affiliation.

This, however, has not stopped Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi from repeatedly demanding the 'Maoist-affected' status for Assam's nine districts, which would entitle the affected districts to Rupees 30 crore additional developmental funds every year. Notwithstanding New Delhi's rejection of the demand, Gogoi continues to label civil rights groups and anti-dam movements as Maoist-backed and calls for deployment of additional security forces. If acceded, Assam, which has not reported a single civilian and security force fatality in Maoist violence, would rank along with some of the worst extremist affected states of the country.

III Combating Naxal Violence

Transient and Permanent Success⁵

Would the Maoists continue to carry out intermittent attacks targeting the state in the foreseeable future? Or would they eventually disintegrate and disappear owing to a leadership crisis because the state has been able to neutralise some of their top leaders while the remaining are too old for a continuous fight? The answers would shape the response to what has been the most potent case of extremism in India.

Commentary on the activities of the Communist Party of India-Maoist (CPI-Maoist) has been in a state of flux in recent years. Commentators have shifted their positions along with incidents and with rising or diminishing death tolls. Two recent instances can be cited. Neutralisation of seven Maoists in Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra on 17 February, for instance, underlined that advancement of the state and weakening of the Maoists. However, following two Maoist attacks within a fortnight in Chhattisgarh that killed 20 security force personnel in February and March 2014 in Dantewada and Suka districts, the narrative shifted and the potency of the extremists was reconfirmed. The Maoists, who appeared to have previously weakened, have resurfaced as a real threat to the 2014 Lok Sabha elections in certain states.

Much of these fluctuations in analyses owe their origin to the states' claims of success against the extremists. There is no denying the fact that the security forces have indeed made some

⁵ Originally published as IPCS Commentary on 17 March 2014. See <http://www.ipcs.org/article/naxalite-violence/combating-naxal-violence-transient-and-permanent-success-4341.html>

advances in the Maoist-affected theatres. The most usual parameter to judge this is the dip in violence in recent years. Compared to 2010, when 1,005 civilians and security forces were killed in extremist attacks, 394 deaths occurred in 2013. Additionally, combined with figures of killings of Maoist cadres, the number of surrenders as well as occasional confirmations from the outfit, the CPI-Maoist's capacity to orchestrate violence has been interpreted as having declined.

If these conclusions are true, how does one interpret the 28 February and 11 March attacks in Chhattisgarh? Are these attacks only aberrations and constitute desperate attempts by the extremists to reiterate their presence, more so before the elections? Or do they indicate that the success of the state was more of a tactical favour granted by the extremists and hence, the lull in violence was merely temporary?

While the assertion that Maoists have indeed killed less civilians and security forces in recent years is sustainable, whether this decline in extremist violence is demonstrative of augmented capacities of the state remains a relevant question. With particular reference to the 11 March attack, the security force establishment has argued in defence of the ambushed Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) team, vouching for its bravery. While some arguments have tried to locate Maoist successes in the violation of standard operating procedures (SOPs) by the security force personnel, the CRPF chief has stated that SOPs are not sacrosanct and can be improvised if situations demand. Similarly, criticisms regarding lack of intelligence and coordination between the central and the state police have all been rebuffed.

If all is well with the mode of operations, why are the security forces regularly falling prey to attacks by a so called weak and demoralised extremist outfit? The answer to this seemingly complicated question is relatively simple. The state, with all its instrumentalities of power, has failed to dominate the extremism-affected territory under question. Blame it either on the lack of adequate strength of security force personnel or a cohesive strategy to dislodge the extremists, the fact remains that much of the territory which report incidents of violence continues to remain under the grip of the extremists.

Either the state's success of neutralising key Maoist leaders through encounters, arrests and surrenders or its inflicting of losses through disruption of means of communication and logistics has not enlarged its writ into the ungoverned territories. As a result, security force raids into extremist-held territories, while making impressive media headlines, have not converted those areas into state-only areas. The lack of a strategy to gradually expand the state's domination is also the reason why the development initiatives of the state have failed to win over the tribals. One cannot expect to have loyalists in areas that are controlled by one's adversary. And in such areas under extremist domination, the losses undergone by the outfit are recovered fairly rapidly. This is precisely the reason why the statement of the Union Home Minister Sushil Kumar Shinde that the state will 'take revenge' for the 11 March attack in Chhattisgarh appears hollow.

A few hours after the 11 March attack, a social network page, ostensibly supportive of the extremists, uploaded a picture of a bloodied Indian map along with a gun totting rebel. "Politics is war without bloodshed while war is politics with bloodshed," Mao Zedong's famous line, was scribbled across the picture. The picture is a pointer towards the future. The Maoist war against the state, as long as it lasts, will be bloody. The least that the state can do is to embark upon a

strategy to ensure that the areas in which the Maoists launch these bloody wars are shrunk on a gradual basis.

Maoist Attack on the CRPF: Time for New Counter-strategies⁶

The 1 December 2014 killing of 14 Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel in Chhattisgarh's Sukma district by the Communist Party of India-Maoist (CPI-Maoist) should invariably go down as one of the country's worst security force operations in recent times. In terms of the killing of trained personnel, looting of their weapons, and the follow up response of a well established security establishment in the state, the attack surpasses even the far bigger extremist attacks of the past in which the force had lost far larger number of personnel. The incident further gives rise to the question whether a victory over the Maoists is at all possible under a CRPF-State police force combination formula?

The attack took place as over 2000 personnel of the CRPF were conducting a four-phase operation against the extremists in the district. As expressed by the involved personnel to the media, without much of intelligence to back these initiatives, there was little objective behind the operations rather than what broadly is described as area domination exercises. During the end of the third phase of the operation, a section of the force, variously described as consisting of 200 to 700 personnel came under attack by the Maoists – who apparently used civilian villagers as shields. There was little resistance from the forces, who as reports suggest got away only 14 fatalities. While 12 perished in the combat, two personnel died while being shifted. Had the Maoists persisted and continued their attacks, the toll could have been much higher, perilously close to the 2010 Dantewada attack in which the CRPF lost 76 troopers. The attack has led to an early conclusion of the area domination exercise in Sukma.

The attack raises several questions regarding the ability of the force that has been designated as the country's lead counter-insurgent force after the Kargil attack, vis-a-vis the Maoists. There are issues of leadership, logistics, intelligence and coordination with the state police force. However, none of these concerns are new. Each investigation following a major attack has unravelled the same ills affecting the force that has been fighting the extremists for nearly a decade and whose battalion strength in the conflict theater has grown manifold over the years. While some incremental improvements in the way operations have been conducted are natural and are there for everybody to see, fundamental issues such as the CRPF leadership's strategy of fighting the war with well-motivated and adequately supported personnel have been chronically absent.

This explains why the transient successes that have pushed the 10-year old CPI-Maoist arguably to its weakest state notwithstanding, the CRPF's own history of engagement with the extremists is replete with mistakes, setbacks, and a perennial search for the right principles of operational accomplishment. The force's projects to generate intelligence by setting up an dedicated wing; its initiatives of developing bonds with the tribal population by providing them with gifts, medical facilities, and organising sports and cultural events; and its efforts to narrow down the differences with the state police forces have all achieved marginal results. Even the 10-battalion strong Combat Battalion for Resolute Action (COBRA), raised with the specific objective of

⁶ Originally published as IPCS Commentary on 15 December 2014. See <http://www.ipcs.org/article/naxalite-violence/maoist-attack-on-the-crpf-time-for-new-counter-strategies-4777.html>

fighting the Maoists, which has since been diluted to make them deal with the insurgents of all denominations in the northeast, have minor achievements to demonstrate, in the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)'s own assessments.

The uncomfortable conclusion one can derive from the state-of-affairs is that the CRPF, in its present state, is not the force that can deliver significant successes in the Maoist conflict theaters. Even with an ever-expanding budget of Rs. 12,169.51 crores for the current financial year - amounting to almost 1/5th of the MHA's entire budget – the successive chiefs of the force have failed to provide its fighting troops even the basic of the provisions. Media narratives indicate soldiers keeping themselves operationally fit with rice, lentils and Maggi noodles. Worse still, seen in combination with poor condition of the state police forces and their virtual irrelevance to the conflict resolution project, it points at an ignominious future of a permanent state of conflict in a sizeable geographical expanse of the country.

In response to the Sukma attack, the MHA plans to induct more forces into Chhattisgarh. Such a move, in the pipeline since the new government assumed power in New Delhi in May 2014, is based on the premise that more boots on the ground would be able to reverse the success of the Maoists. Nothing can be farther from truth. The CRPF's failure needs to be seen in the context of the overall lack of imagination among the country's policy makers in dealing with the Maoist threat. Ever since the CPI-Maoist emerged as a major challenge, lackadaisical, reactionary, and adhoc-ish measures have been passed off as official policies. Even as such experimentation continues, the soldiers, among others, are paying with their blood and lives in conflicts mainland Indians are completely oblivious to.

IV

A Strategy for the Government

The day Prime Minister Narendra Modi unfurled the national flag from the precincts of the historic Red Fort to mark India's 68th Independence Day, the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) authorities in Chhattisgarh unfurled the tri-colour at Tadmela in Sukma district. Flag hoisting at the site of the bloodiest massacre that claimed the lives of 75 CRPF personnel four years ago was apparently to make a statement that the forces have reclaimed the territory from the extremists and are asserting their authority over the piece of land. This avoidable symbolism, in the backdrop of apparent extremist domination over the area, in a way, sums up the country's stagnated approach towards the Naxal problem.

Anti-Naxal Operations: Seeking Refuge in Symbolism⁷

The 2010 attack at Tadmela (then in Dantewada district which was bifurcated in 2012 to create the Sukma district) still counts as the worst attack ever to have been carried out on the central forces by the Communist Party of India-Maoist (CPI-Maoist). The loss of an entire company of the CRPF cast a pall of gloom, and more importantly, pushed the forces into a defensive mindset. It also brought New Delhi's attempts to subdue the extremists through a multi-theatre military offensive to an abrupt halt. Subsequent inquiry by a retired police official revealed serious command and control lapses among the forces. The CRPF has not suffered a loss of that

⁷ Originally published as IPCS Commentary on 18 August 2014. See <http://www.ipcs.org/article/peace-and-conflict-database-naxal/anti-naxal-operations-seeking-refuge-in-symbolism-4608.html>

magnitude thereafter. Whether this has been achieved by addressing the weaknesses exposed by the attack or merely by becoming more defensive in its approach is debatable.

Behind the 'successful' flag hoisting at Tadmetsla, however, were painstaking preparations. A CRPF contingent consisting of the specialised Commando Battalion for Resolute Action (COBRA) commandos and led by an Inspector General, camped in the area for several days. A detailed sanitisation exercise was carried out in the area during which a CRPF personnel was injured in an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) explosion and had to be air lifted for treatment. A senior official told the media that the ceremony was essential "to mark the domination of this area."

Extremism related incidents reported in 2014, however, do not indicate any security force domination over the area. Sukma continues to be among the worst extremism-affected districts in Chhattisgarh. On 9 February, two CRPF personnel, including a Deputy Commandant, were killed and 12 others injured in a landmine blast carried out by the CPI-Maoist. Not far from the site where the tri-colour was hoisted, three COBRA personnel were killed and three others injured in a Naxal ambush on 9 April. And on 11 May, extremists killed 15 security force personnel at Jeerum Nullah in the district. Several other incidents of ambush, attack and explosion have been reported from the district. In fact, the domination of the extremists has forced to the CRPF to take upon itself the task of building a seven km road stretch as no private contractor has agreed to take up the job.

In October 2013, Union Home Secretary Anil Goswami had pulled up the central armed police force organisations including the CRPF operating in Chhattisgarh for their "defensive strategy." Goswami regretted the fact that there was a lull in the action by the security forces despite New Delhi's directive to engage in result-oriented operations. The forces were not just reluctant to carry out sustained offensive operations against the extremists, even the routine area domination exercises were avoided. It is not clear whether the flag hoisting in Tadmetsla, with significant sanitising preparations, marks the beginning of a change in the tactic of the forces and is demonstrative of a newfound vision.

It is unfair to blame the CRPF personnel deployed in Chhattisgarh for the lull in action, for the current state of affairs emanates from a policy stagnation that marks the anti-Naxal initiative. Apart from their own internal problems and the continuing confusion whether to remain a supporting or lead counter-Naxal force, lack of coordination with the state forces, lack of adequate progress in state police modernisation, inertia at the level of bureaucracy, and lack of a national consensus with regard to solving the Naxal issue, have affected the performance of the central forces. This could be pushing them to find refuge in symbolic events rather than attempting decisive gains.

At one level, such policy stagnation is strange especially when the CPI-Maoist has lost several senior leaders across states and has failed to maintain a level of violence necessary to keep its own internal mechanism alive and kicking. At the other level, however, it underlines the country's predominantly reactionary counter-insurgency doctrine, which does relatively well in responding to extremist violence, but dithers when violence dips, either due to the setbacks suffered by the extremist outfits or because of the latter's tactical retreat decision.

The task for New Delhi, thus, is well cut out. It has to find a way to instill a sense of purpose among the state as well as the central forces. It has to ensure that the bureaucracy and grass

root politics works in tandem with the security forces. And it must ensure that the acts of symbolism come to a grand halt.

A 'New' Counter-Naxal Action Plan⁸

Days after the formation of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government in New Delhi, contours of a new policy vis-a-vis Left Wing Extremism (LWE) remained a matter of speculation. Whether tough measures would replace the ad hoc ones and clarity would substitute confusion were commented upon. Some of the statements of the Home Minister and the Ministry officials in the early days following the formation of the government raised hopes that a policy change, if not the prospect of an immediate solution to the problem could be on the anvil. However, the new 29-point Action Plan evolved by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) for addressing the LWE challenge point towards the continuation of the past policies and does not indicate a radical departure from the approach pursued by the previous government.

Three principal assumptions mark the new counter-LWE policy:

- a. Security force operations must precede developmental initiatives
- b. The Communist Party of India-Maoist's (CPI-M) military capacities can be crippled by targeting its top leadership
- c. Security force operations, with modest gains so far can be made effective by additional force deployment and augmenting intelligence collection.

While each of these assumptions is relevant, whether such measures can be implemented without broad-based security and governance sector reforms, remains a matter of debate.

Ruling out negotiations with the CPI-M has been one of the most highlighted aspects of Home Minister Rajnath Singh's statements in recent times. Speaking on 27 June, Singh, at the meeting of chief secretaries and Directors General of Police (DGPs) of 10 Naxal-affected states said, "There is no question of any talks now. We will take a balanced approach. But the forces will give a befitting reply if the Naxals launch attacks." Given that several past offers for negotiations have been rebuffed by the CPI-M, Singh's statement aims to serve as a foundation for a primarily force-based approach to the LWE challenge.

The new action plan involves a directive to the Intelligence Bureau to "infiltrate into Maoist ranks" and follow a specific policy of targeting the top leadership for neutralisation. The Naxal-affected states have been advised to raise commando forces similar to the Greyhounds of Andhra Pradesh. Similarly, 10 additional battalions of central armed police personnel are being deployed in Chattisgarh's Bastar region by the end of 2014 for a renewed offensive against the extremists. The new policy further speaks of creating a series of incentives for "good officers" to serve in Maoist-affected areas by offering them monetary incentives and career benefits.

All these measures, incidentally, have remained the MHA's counter-LWE approach in the past. None, however, achieved much success due to a range of deficiencies that include lack of ability as well as coordination between the central as well as state security forces and the intelligence agencies. Years since the LWE emerged as a major security threat to the country, both technical intelligence (TECHINT) as well as human intelligence (HUMINT) gathering mechanisms

⁸ Originally published as IPCS Commentary on 21 July 2014. See <http://www.ipcs.org/article/naxalite-violence/a-new-counter-naxal-action-plan-4572.html>

continue to suffer from serious shortcomings. There is an acute lack of enthusiastic participation of the state police forces in New Delhi's overall design that neither supplements nor aims to replace the central forces in countering the extremists. The new plan is silent on the ways to remove such loopholes and make operations a principally state police-led initiative. Given the fact that state bureaucracy has remained mostly apathetic to restart governance in areas cleared by the security forces, policies need to go beyond the rhetoric of 'posting of good officers' in naxal-affected areas.

In the previous years, evolving a national policy consensus on a challenge that affects at least 10 states has remained one of the main challenges for New Delhi. The 29-point Action Plan falls short of addressing the problem. It merely exhorts the affected states to appoint nodal officers to increase coordination at the centre and asks the chief ministers and home ministers to visit the affected areas in their respective states to develop a favourable image of the government among the tribal population. In the absence of a reward system to make the non-conforming states fall in line with a central approach, such measures of improving coordination are likely to be met with lack of enthusiasm, if not resistance by the states ruled by non-Bharatiya Janata Party parties.

The current LWE situation is marked by scaled down violence by the extremists who understandably are into a consolidation mode after suffering some reversals. Recruitment activities still continue, so do the efforts to ideologically reshape the movement that seems to have deviated significantly from its original objectives and strategies. A tactical retreat of this nature often creates the illusion of victory among the policy makers. At the same time, low level violence creates significant opportunities for the government to revisit its own strategies, make inroads into the extremist areas, and prepare for future escalations. Whether the MHA would use the time well is something to watch out for.

Tackling Naxal Violence: An Agenda for the New Indian Government⁹

In a way the challenge of left-wing extremism the new National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government in New Delhi faces bears close resemblance to the situation that confronted the United Progressive Alliance regime in its second tenure in 2009. However, given that the Congress party-led government failed to contain the threat, the incumbent Bharatiya Janata Party government needs to revisit the overall approach and not repeat the past policies that contributed to the survival of the extremist outfit.

In 2009, the Communist Party of India-Maoist (CPI-Maoist) was in the upswing with a dramatic spike in the deaths of civilians and security forces. Extremism-related incidents and fatalities among the civilians and the security forces increased by 41 per cent and 25 per cent respectively, in 2008. States such as Maharashtra and West Bengal contributed significantly to this upswing, with the eastern Indian state becoming the third most extremism-affected state of the country, in 2009, with 255 incidents and 158 fatalities. The CPI-Maoist was indeed looking at expanding its sphere of influence.

⁹ Originally published as IPCS Commentary on 16 June 2014. See <http://www.ipcs.org/article/naxalite-violence/tackling-naxal-violence-an-agenda-for-the-new-indian-government-4514.html>

The UPA government sought to tame the rise of extremism with an iron hand.. The change of guards in the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) following the 2008 Mumbai terrorist attacks led to a series of brain storming sessions, and a new policy aiming to annihilate the CPI-Maoist, titled 'Operation Green Hunt' took shape. However, hope expressed by the then Home Secretary that security forces would be able to liberate the areas quickly and the civil administration would kick-start development work in those areas met an early end in 2010 with the Central Reserve Police Force receiving a series of setbacks at the hands of the extremists.

Over the next four years, the UPA government experimented with a cocktail of force-centric and development-oriented approach. However, even with improvements in the overall situation, the CPI-Maoist continues to remain a formidable adversary. As per the official data, each day of the year recorded over three Maoist-related violent incidents resulting in the death of at least one civilian or a security force personnel, in 2013. An identical situation has prevailed over the first six months of 2014 as well. Maoists might have been prevented from expanding their area of operations into newer territories, but the old theatres such as Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Bihar, parts of Odisha and Maharashtra continue to report significant violence. The number of attacks carried out by the CPI-Maoist and close to 50 deaths in the days preceding and following the parliamentary elections underlines the military capacities of the extremists.

Three significant deficiencies, among many, that have marked India's response to the challenge of left-wing extremism are: first, there is no national consensus on ways to meet the challenge. States and ministries have debated on whether to pursue a social development or a force-centric model of conflict resolution. Second, although the security forces have made some advances vis-à-vis the extremists, the civil administration continues to be a reluctant partner in reintegrating the former Naxal hotbeds through development administration. Third, there is an acute leadership crisis at the political as well as the security establishment levels, hindering success. These deficiencies must be addressed by the new government in New Delhi in order to make a substantial impact in the extremist-dominated areas.

Policy Prescriptions to Deal with the Red Menace

First, the unity of purpose is a key element for success in any counter-insurgency campaign. The lack of success vis-à-vis the Naxals is predominantly rooted in the diverse as well as conflicting prescriptions made not just by the states, but also by the various departments within the UPA government. Annual meetings of the chief ministers organised by the government merely provided platforms for airing diverse opinions, but made little progress in terms of arriving at a common approach. The new government must find a way to bridge the divide between the prescriptions. The prime minister as well as the home minister must not be seen as detached actors expressing helplessness at the state-of-affairs, but should lead from the front.

Second, contrary to the common perception that periodic military setbacks suffered by the security forces are the primary reasons for the continuing extremist domination; the lack of enthusiasm of the civil administration is a bigger reason for areas freed from the extremists relapsing into chaos. Development projects planned for the Saranda region in Jharkhand is an example of this malaise. A solution must be found to make the bureaucracy both at the centre as well as in the states sensitive and participatory in the development projects.

Third, small achievements would remain critical for the state's campaign against the CPI-Maoist. A leaf must be taken from the book of the Maoists, who persevered for years to find support among the tribal population and subsequently dominate the areas. The state must attempt incremental and non-reversible progress against the extremists.

Naxalism: The Insufficiency of a Force-Centric Approach¹⁰

In the first week of May 2014, security forces launched a fresh anti-Naxal operation at the Saranda forests in Jharkhand's West Singhbhum district. The operation was started following intelligence inputs that a squad of armed Maoists had entered the forests. Few days into the operation, the state police Director General of Police (DGP) led a contingent of troops and spent a night deep inside the forests. The motive was to make a point. The media personnel were told by an assertive DGP, "We have conquered Saranda and nobody can dispute it now."

It was, however, strange for the DGP to affirm the success of his forces, for Saranda had reportedly been conquered three years back. Considered to be a Maoist liberated zone, which housed the Communist Party of India (CPI-Maoist)'s Eastern Regional Bureau (ERB) headquarters and also a large number of arms training camps, the impregnability of Saranda had been shattered in 2011.

Between July and September 2011, about 10 battalions of Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel conducted Operation Anaconda seeking to liberate the area. Not many encounters took place during the operations, probably due to fact that the Maoists had decided to desert the area rather than to put up a fight. The state duly claimed victory. The domination of the security forces over the 855-square kilometre area had apparently been established.

The recovery of Saranda was important for two reasons. Firstly, it came after the failure and subsequent abandonment of Operation Green Hunt, the multi-theatre counter-Maoist operation which was launched in 2010. The OGH's failure, following a series of Maoist attacks on security forces, had convinced the MHA of the criticality of small area operations as opposed to a nationwide blitzkrieg against the extremists. The recovery of Saranda through a focussed area approach, thus, became a reaffirmation of the fact that an incremental approach is key to ultimately defeat the extremists.

Secondly, for the Union Ministry of Rural Development, Saranda became a test case for a development-led solution to the Maoist problem. Under Minister Jairam Ramesh, support was extended to Jharkhand's 'Saranda Development Plan' that sought all round development for its inhabitants. It was hoped that the establishment of the civil administration's writ over the area would provide a bulwark against the relapse of the area into extremism. Among the schemes sought to be implemented in the area were housing, connectivity, forest rights, watershed development, drinking water, and employment as well as free distribution of solar lanterns, bicycles and transistors.

Under ideal circumstances, the retreat of the extremists from the area and intervention of the development administration would have been able to make wonders. However, the government's ambitious plans of seeking loyal citizens among the tribal population were

¹⁰ Originally published as IPCS Commentary on 19 May 2014. See <http://www.ipcs.org/article/naxalite-violence/naxalism-the-insufficiency-of-a-force-centric-approach-4445.html>

nullified to a large extent due to the lack of enthusiastic participation by the civil administration. A prominent newspaper's op-ed piece summed up the developments in Saranda, nine months after the SDP came into being. "Nine months on, police camps sole development in Saranda Plan", the piece appearing in *The Hindu*, June 2012, read. Other reports detailed how bicycles procured for distribution were rusting in the government offices, solely because no official was prepared to do the ground work of preparing a list of beneficiaries.

Over the passing months, even as Minister Ramesh pleaded to the media to give SDP a "second chance", Saranda saw only a haphazard development initiative, providing enough opportunity for the extremists to attempt a comeback. Although the area has not seen much violence in recent times, the necessity for re-launching a security force operation to dominate an area that had already been cleared, underlines the reversal of gains made by the state.

In the near decade-long endeavour of conquest vis-à-vis the CPI-Maoist, a realisation has dawned over the policy-makers that the extremists cannot be defeated through military means alone. Therefore, in spite of what appears to the human rights and civil society organisations to be a predominantly military effort against the Maoists, a number of developmental as well as perception management initiatives have been undertaken by the government. However, this strategy of "clear, hold and develop" has not been able to make much headway mostly due to the fact that the civil administration has remained somewhat reluctant to build upon the accomplishments of the security forces.

For the new government in New Delhi, ways to make the bureaucracy an enthusiastic partner in the counter-Naxal endeavours would remain a key challenge. The political leadership both in New Delhi as well as in the affected states would have to make extra effort to inject vigour into what till now remains a mostly a sluggish civil administrative establishment. In fact, Jharkhand DGP's victory speech on 6 May underlined the key steps required to avoid relapse of recovered areas into extremism. "The villagers now require immediate administrative attention", he said.

Naxal Violence: Old Challenges for the New Government¹¹

That the Communist Party of India-Maoist (Maoist) does not believe in democratic principles and an electoral process is too well known. The 2014 Lok Sabha elections provided the extremist outfit with yet another opportunity to reassert its vision for the country. In words and as well as with accompanied violence, it proved once more that the probability of a negotiated settlement to the long-standing conflict is rather low.

The CPI-Maoist released three sets of somewhat contradictory statements in March 2014, two signed by the spokesperson of the outfit's Central Committee (CC) and one on behalf of the outfit's Eastern Regional Bureau. Dated 24 March, the CC released its customary boycott of elections calling the affair "another huge financial burden on the people", which cannot transform the "present exploitative system." Critiquing all the political parties for their dishonest policies towards the tribals, the statement termed the government's peace proposals "deceptive."

¹¹ Originally published as IPCS Commentary on 21 April 2014. See <http://www.ipcs.org/article/naxalite-violence/naxal-violence-old-challenges-for-the-new-government-4395.html>

Interestingly, another 19-page document was released by the CC on the same day, which contained answers to 11 questions posed by the media persons to the outfit. Responding to a question on the outlook of the outfit on peace talks with the government, the spokesperson stated that while the outfit is "not against Peace Talks with the government", since talks are "an integral part of the political struggle." However, five demands were outlined which the government must fulfil before a peace process could begin. These included declaring the CPI-Maoist a political movement; de-proscribing the outfit and its front organisations; initiating judicial inquiries into the killings of its senior leaders; stopping of security force operations; and releasing arrested leaders/cadres of the outfit.

The statement surprisingly was hailed as the outfit's declaration for peace by the media, ignoring the fact that the conditions outlined have remained an integral part of the outfit's statements in the past. While the outfit expects the government to fulfil some of its most impious demands, the outfit itself has rebuffed the minimum condition laid down by the home ministry to "stop violence for 72 hours" as the lone condition for starting of a peace process.

Few days prior to the release of the twin CC statements, the CPI-Maoist's Eastern Regional Bureau had issued a four-page 'short-term vision document' appealing the masses to chose between "real democracy" or a "pseudo-democratic system." This document, which effectively constituted a manifesto of the outfit, reiterated the need for a "new constitution" including provisions for "equal socio-economic rights to women" and "death penalty compulsory for molestation and rape." It further called for "freedom of speech and expression, right to congregate and protest, form an organisation, primary health care, access to primary education, primary and minimum employment and compulsory participation in daily governance system." The outfit additionally promised not to suppress the separatist movements with the power of the gun, but to "honour nationalist movements and self-decision to allow them dignified and peaceful co-existence (*sic*)."

Neither the proclamation of intent for peace nor the declaration of its own manifesto, however, stopped the outfit from carrying out a series of attacks on security force personnel, poll officials as well as civilians in the affected states that went to polls. Compared to the 2009 Lok Sabha polls, during which 19 people were killed by the outfit, till the writing of the article, at least 20 civilians and security forces had been killed in Maoist attacks.

These contrasting signals emanating from the outfit signify two possibilities. One, peace negotiation as an instrument of conflict resolution does not figure in the imagination of the extremist outfit and its utterances on a peace process are merely rhetorical. Two, the outfit intends to use violence as a bargaining tool in case a peace process with the government comes to fruition.

Faced with this deceptive extremist strategy, the action plans of the political class to deal with the challenge, remains highly fractured. Going by the manifestos of the political parties, the probability that the new government in New Delhi would be able to address the anomalies of the past and chart a new course looks blurry.

While the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) promise to deal with the problem with a "firm hand" and a policy of "zero tolerance" respectively, the Aam Admi Party (AAP) prefers a "multi-lateral dialogue." The Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) opines in favour of

"specific measures to tackle the socio-economic problems" faced "particularly by the tribal people." The BJP insists that "talks with the insurgent groups will be conditional and within the framework of the constitution." The Congress, on the other hand, is silent on the process of dialogue and prefers to pursue "a development agenda to empower people" in the affected areas. While the CPI-M insists that left-wing extremism is "not just a security issue," the AAP reiterates that "socio-economic development and effective political de-centralisation" hold the key.

A project that attempts to reconcile these stark differences is not only difficult, but is likely to produce a compromised and ineffective policy. Thus, in all probability, left-wing extremism will continue to be a challenge, inhibiting growth, development and governance, in the foreseeable future.