

THE CIRCLE OF VIOLENCE

By A Correspondent

With successive governments resorting to the gun to resolve the Naxal crisis, over a 1000 lives have been lost in the brief history of the state of Jharkhand.

Soon after the assassination of MLA Ramesh Singh Munda by the Naxalites, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said that the Naxalism is the biggest threat to India. Jharkhand might be in the grip of the Red Army but the Dishum Guru Sibum Soren does not think so. After the recent swearing-in as the Chief Minister, addressing the media, he said, "Naxalism is not a big problem and can be resolved through dialogue."

The very next day, 12 policemen including the officer-in-charge of Digha police station were killed in a landmine blast near Burudih Dam in the Maoist dominated East Singhbhum district. The incident clearly indicates the might of the red army. Before the formation of the state, 8 districts were termed Naxal-affected, but within five years of BJP government rule, 18 districts came under the sway of Naxalites. Now, all 24 districts are Naxal prone. According to the government report, 2635 Naxal-related incidents took place in Jharkhand from January 2001 to August 2008, wherein 286 policemen, 204 Naxalites and 731 civilians have lost their lives. 2004 was the bloodiest year with 189 deaths.

The major question is why Naxalism is spreading rapidly in spite of the hue and cry raised by successive governments taking over the reins at Ranchi? One has to look back the ways and means; the issue has been addressed by the previous governments. When Babulal Marandi became the first Chief Minister of the state with 8 Naxal-affected districts, he announced the Naxal problem as the top of his agenda and initially showed his commitment to address it. But by addressing the issue, he meant using the gun. He was always against holding talks with the Naxalites. His mantra was that "Naxalites should be put down by force". He was not ready to accept that the violence-driven ideology of the Naxals planted and nourished by the age-old injustice, inequality and discrimination cannot be uprooted with the gun.

The dreaded legislation "POTA" was also enforced in the state during his regime, which forced the Naxalites to put on an even more violent garb because there was not a single case of terrorist attack or bomb blast but 654 cases were registered under POTA naming 3,200 people in these cases and 202 of them including 10 minors were arrested. Innocent people were booked under POTA and were terrorized and tortured. This paved the way for the masses to join the Naxalites to counter the state's repression. Soon, Babulal Marandi also began advocating the amend-ment of Chotanagpur Tenancy Act 1908 and Santhal Pargana Tenancy Act 1949; both Acts were enacted to protect the rights of the Adivasis. This offered another opportunity for the Naxalites to take the issues to the villages and mobilize the masses in their favour.

When Arjun Munda took over the driver's seat in 2003, he also stuck to his predecessor's stand. He never shied away from taking any bold step to address the issue of Naxalism. Instead, he was very much engaged in signing MoUs with the multinational companies. A number of these meant displacement for the rural masses. Naxalites once again got into the act. They impressed the people with their agenda fighting for justice and challenging the inequality.

During the BJP regimes, a division was created among Adivasis in the name of Christian and Sarna, again helping Naxalism to flourish. The Naxalites always opposed the communal clashes and 'Hinduisation' of the Adivasis and UPA supported CM Madhu Koda, busy playing politics, did little for Naxal cause.

The fact is the Adivasis and Moolvasis have not benefited from the modern development and industrialization of the state except a few city dwellers who were already well-off. Therefore, the Naxalites gained popularity. They won over the common man with their agenda of socio-economic, political equality and justice. The rampant corruption, failure of the judiciary to deliver justice added fuel to the problem. The Naxalism has its genesis in inequality, injustice and discrimination and in tackling these issues lies the solution. □□□