

Battle for Space

As a union Finance Minister he was a terror to the low and middle class salaried people—P Chidambaram. He had developed a kind of special fascination to tax wage earners even with a single telephone set. Also, his priority was to allow the tycoons of corporate world to cheer about unexpected incentives in almost every budget. Now as a home minister he looks notoriously terroristic to intellectuals, artists, writers and notable personalities from the world of art and culture who show sympathy to the oppressed bearing the perennial brunt of police brutality. While addressing a gathering of distinguished persons and citizens in Mumbai recently, he made an appeal to the democrats and liberals not to extend even moral support to any movement, allegedly led by the maoists. In other words if somehow even a democratic movement against police atrocities, gets support in any form, peaceful or otherwise, it may be termed maoist inspired and organisers run the risk of being put behind bars under the draconian detention law.

For quite some time union ministers including the prime minister have been exaggerating maoist danger as the biggest threat to internal security, possibly with a grand plan of isolating them politically from broad masses. Indications are that the Centre is all set to launch a massive military operation involving regular army and air force against the naxalites or maoists across the country. And the security authorities in the states of Chattisgarh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Jharkhand and West Bengal, are doubly encouraged to silence even a feeble voice of dissent against police repression. Police officers and their sub-ordinates in these states think they have the authority to do whatever they want. So they are arresting indiscriminately innocent people and torturing them in the name of curbing maoism. They in league with big business media always portray the naxalities as a mindless killing machine which they are not. The way they are brutalising maoist suspects in custody is bound to make liberals and democrats restless. Custodial violence is endemic in the country and it is nowhere as bone-chilling as in the left-ruled state of West Bengal. The way they are criminalising a generation is simply horrifying. They never explain why this system—they call it the biggest democracy in the world—offers thousands and thousands of youth no greater purpose in life, no better fate other than despair and frustration. They have reason enough to challenge this system.

Though the security establishment has stepped up vigil against people who are under the sway of naxalites or maoists, civil liberties movement shows no sign of activism. They are in reality trying to bring back emergency rule by the back door to create a state of fear psychosis.

Not that the maoists are the sole torch-bearer of violent campaign against the unjust system. There are insurgencies in Northeast and Kashmir without any maoist tag. Many of them are as old as Indian republic. Despite heavy military repression they continue to trouble the ruling clique. One reason they have failed to destroy what they call 'terrorist modules' is popular support these movements enjoy, albeit sometimes people suffer badly under cross-fire. If the maoists face the danger of brutal destruction it is the same reason in reverse—lack of popular support among the majority of the people. In Bengal they are active in jungle

mahal inhabited by the poor tribals. But the ruling circles won't hesitate to defoliate the fragile forest cover to flush out the maoists.

The tragic aspect of the maoist movement—or the naxalite project in general is that the tradition of 'split within split' continues unabated. Taken together they are numerically more powerful than the official left and yet they can hardly influence the national events. They have a different ideology to offer and yet they cannot ideologically motivate the political space. They are better equipped to fight communal fascists and yet sham secularists steal the limelight to project themselves as the true crusaders against communalism.

India is not Latin America. Nor is it pre-liberated China. Isolated semi-liberated zones if they can be so-called cannot sustain themselves for long. With the immediate possibility of large-scale maoist-hunt by security forces and paramilitary units, panic seems to have gripped the civic society.

Violence begets violence. And state-sponsored terrorism is bound to produce counter-terrorism. Pakistan is a classic example of how state-sponsored terrorism doesn't take much time to create its opposite. If the maosits refuse to end the internal fighting for the sake of the broader mass movement, the future course of their politics, may hang in the balance. Already, their political isolation reveals the limits of maoist upsurge in the Indian context.

Strangely enough, for the beleaguered marxists of Bengal, the presence of maoists in some tribal hamlets may be blessing in disguise. It has allowed them to gear up propaganda at the national level to placate the Trinamul Congress—the main threat to the 3-decade-old dictatorial left rule—with the maoists in a bid to isolate the opposition party in electoral battle. Trinamul Congress is being continually accused of abetting maoist violence by way of their tacit understanding with the maoists in this most backward state of West Bengal. But the same allegations are being labelled against the marxists by their sole political challenger. Critics say there are grains of truth in both the charges. Electoral calculus, rather manipulation takes curious turn—it doesn't matter whether it is violent or non-violent. □□□