

Continuing Conflict

History does seem to repeat itself as far as Union Government is concerned. After the bloody Tuesday in the thick jungles of Makrana in Dantewada district of Chattisgarh the Centre raises the spectre of naxalism with renewed vigour to fight the ultras ensconced in Central India's mountains. Union Home Minister P Chidambaram is facing problems at every turn. But some of his colleagues in the administration are talking in multiple voices these days questioning his "bullet-all" strategy against the naxalities. In other words the massive crackdown on the people in the naxal-infested areas has virtually created a perennial war-like situation in which poor tribals, security personnel and naxalite fighters are dying with increasing intensity.

Chidambaram may have a Gandhian platform and make all the speeches he likes, there are no other words to define this war scenario. In truth Chidambaram's speeches are a lot like George Bush's : he promises to hunt down naxalites (or Maoists) wherever they might be and hopes with re-sounding conviction to erase the phenomenon of naxalism from India's map within two or three years. He took all the trouble to visit the obscure village of Lalgargh of West Bengal's junglemahal bordering Jharkhand with a view to pacifying the aggrieved tribals who do not subscribe to official theory of naxalite threat. They say the naxalite threat is only an excuse. What is really at stake is how to undermine democracy before the voiceless become vocal. Mr Chidambaram had to return empty-handed because he didn't really address the issues that made the junglemahal headlines in the first place. It was for the first time Mr Chidambaram came to the eastern fringe of the so-called red corridor after anti-Maoist operation was launched in June last year. Other than appealing to the villagers not to support the Maoists, he gave no assurance to the people that police atrocities would stop. For all practical purposes police atrocities are multiplying, all in the name of curbing naxalism.

The Chattisgarh ambush in which about an entire CRPF company was wiped out came two days after the Maoists triggered a landmine blast in Orissa's Koraput killing 11 personnel of the Anti-Naxal Special Operation Group. 'Operation Green Hunt' has not reduced violence. On the contrary it has escalated a terrible war in which casualties on both sides are likely to mount.

Since the turbulent seventies they have been killing naxalities in 'encounters' but the conflict is still not over. Even Mr Chidambaram would now like to revise his timetable for final solution because 'security options only' are unlikely to bring in permanent peace. The gap between the economic basis and security expansion is one of the major factors in the continuing decline of civil administration. It is happening in Kashmir, it is also happening in the north-east. True, cross-border terrorism has material and moral support from overseas but no insurgency, communist or otherwise, could survive for long without internal mass sympathy.

Fortunately, or unfortunately, a section of the ruling Congress Party at the centre has called for a re-think on the 'Operation Green Hunt' involving the Central Paramilitary Forces and the naxal-affected state police personnel in a big

way to neutralise the naxalities. They are questioning the wisdom of driving the naxalities to the wall from where they could only retaliate because they had nowhere else to go. The moderates in the ruling camp are advocating a multi-pronged approach to tackle the naxalite problem, allowing some democratic space to ensure redressal of mass alienation. But the hardliners are not listening. They are interested even in arresting human rights activists because of their opposition to human rights violations by security forces.

Though Union Home Minister is drawing flak from some Opposition Leaders for his aggression, all political parties irrespective of their colour and differing ideological orientations, are united to crush the 'Maoist menace' by any means, fair or foul. As Chattisgarh is a BJP-ruled state, the saffron party like their counterpart of marxist Bengal, called for launching an all-out "fight-to-finish" offensive against the Maoists while urging people to support their efforts. No party, left or right, is really talking about starting meaningful dialogue with the naxalites. The reason is simple : they cannot endanger the status quo. After every bout of Maoist offensive they talk of political engagement but their enthusiasm subsides when the Maoists retreat. □