

NEWS WRAP

AGD

The CPI(Maoist) has strong support among the long neglected tribal and rural population, whose lands are often rich in minerals, stretching across eight Indian states, including West Bengal, Orissa and Chattisgarh. On 28 May 2010, an express passenger train, travelling from Kolkata to Mumbai, derailed before dawn in a Maoist stronghold of Sardiha-Rajabandh (West Midnapore) in West Bengal, killing 150 people, and injuring more than 250 others. Railway officials maintain that a section of the track had been removed, causing the accident. A freight train had rammed the derailed train, causing more mayhem. It is not clear whether explosives were used. The Criminal Investigation Department of West Bengal have detained/arrested several people, some of whom are members of People's Committee Against Police Atrocities (PCAPA) and gangmen of the Railways. Phone conversations intercepted by police point to a PCAPA faction from the Manikpara-Sardiha area (West Midnapore), led by Bapi Mahato, involved in removing the pandrol clips from the tracks. Prior to the sabotage, as the security forces launched a pincer attack on Manikpara-Sardiha-Indraboni forest areas, from both sides of the Kangsaboti river, the militia members of the local PCAPA unit allegedly decided to sabotage the rail tracks. Trained in arms, without lessons in ideology, teenagers and village youth, who are located in remote forest areas, had carried out the sabotage.

Meanwhile, the union government is considering the deployment of elite infantry platoons, known as '*Ghatak*' platoons against the ultra-left Maoist guerrillas in West Bengal and the neighboring states. The *Ghataks* are commandos, trained to operate as shock troops, specializing in search and destroy missions, who minimize collateral damage. These snipers, trackers and spotters have been deployed in Assam and Manipur. The Maoists are using Chinese wireless communications sets, known popularly as 'walkie-talkies', to intercept radio communication between police and security forces. Though India has experienced numerous regional rebellions, the Maoists have spread across several states and considerable police jurisdictions, which has raised complications of a co-ordinated response. The Maoists usually attack security forces ; but the train attack is the latest evidence that Maoists are striking civilians also, albeit CPI (Maoist) has officially denied the allegation through a press release. The states with weak, inefficient governments have witnessed a spurt in Maoist expansion. The union government's warnings to civil society groups and intellectuals, against supporting Maoist ideology provoke protests against attempts to curb free speech.

INADEQUATE WATER

Growing water shortages may hamper growth in India, one of the world's fastest growing major economies. There are a large number of villages, where trucks bring water twice a week. A daily struggle occurs over tainted or inadequate water. In the next two decades, water demand will double in India, to 1.5 trillion cubic metres, or 53 trillion cubic feet. 1614 cubic metres of water are available per year, in India. Farmers use 80% of available water. India's population of 1.2 billion people is expected to exhaust their fresh water supplies by 2050, at the current rate. The weak monsoons of 2009 had cut rice output by 10%.

DISPUTES OVER SINKING

On 26 March 2010, an explosion torpedoed a South Korean warship, killing 46 sailors. In both the Koreas, there is a prevailing mythology that Koreans do not kill Koreans. Rather than South Korean troops on battle rampage, gory murals in North Korea predominantly display American soldiers butchering North Koreans. A 400-page technical report on the sinking by an international team, including experts from the US have led to conclusions that North Korea was to blame, and that together sanctions were required at the United Nations Security Council. Other conspiracy theories point to a US submarine sinking the South Korean vessel. So far Beijing's response to the March sinking has been guarded. North Korea denies the attack, and has expressed regret at the deaths of "fellow countrymen". Even after four months of the incident, Seoul is in doubt about whether to use the phrase "arch enemy" in official policy documents. South Korea's president, Mr Lee Myung-bak has stated that he was "shamed by the behavior of his compatriots" in the North.

The South Koreans still view the North Koreans as poor fellow countrymen. Information trickles that siblings long believed dead are alive, across the divided peninsula since 1950-1953. There are rare and fearful border reunions of families divided by the frontier. North Korea has a population of 24 million, which is half of the size of South Korea. Despite North Korea's threat to sever ties with Seoul, hundreds of South Korean workers are allowed to travel to Kaesong, an investment enclave in North Korea, which is the most important trade link between the two Koreas. The enterprise managers from South Korea operate about 100 small enterprises in the North Korean city of Kaesong, which manufactures products such as clothes and watches. In 2009, the trade zone represented about 56% of trade between the two Koreas.

MILITARY THEMES

Hizbollah, the armed Lebanese Shia movement, has established a martial theme park of size 60,000 sq metres hilltop in Mlita, South Lebanon. Mlita is an old Hizbollah base, complete with bunkers, tunnels and look-outpoints. At the site, in one of the main halls a large map of Israel lists "targets for Hizbollah missiles", including Dimona nuclear reactor and Ben Gurion international airport. Displayed are weaponry and a captured Israeli Merkava tank. The theme park complete with cable car and motels, is dedicated to the "resistance", and records the history of the "resistance". The exhibits portray the rise of a small guerilla movement to become a regional power. The park rallies Hizbollah's popular support base, and reassures its own community and other Lebanese to resist Israeli attacks. The opening of the site at the end of May 2010, coincided with Israel holding a large scale annual civil defence exercise.

Around the same period, in a pre-dawn raid, Israeli naval commandos, attacked a civilian six ships flotilla, carrying humanitarian aid and hundreds of pro-Palestinian activists to Gaza Strip, which is under blockade. The six-ships convoy had on board a Nobel Laureate, European lawmakers, authors, journalists and an elderly Holocaust survivor. Nine activists were killed as Israeli forces stormed a Turkish aid ship. More than fifty people were wounded in the attack. The Israeli army maintains that the troops returned fire after they were confronted with the live rounds, knives, iron bars and clubs.

DRONE ATTACKS

The CIA's continued drone strikes against people suspected of belonging to Al Qaeda in western Pakistan, has been a reliant tactic for USA. The laws of war stipulate that soldiers in traditional armies cannot be prosecuted and punished, for killing enemy

forces in battle. USA has maintained that Al Qaeda are not “privileged combatants” entitled to battle field immunity, as the Al Qaeda fighters do not conform to Geneva Convention requirements, like wearing uniforms. The CIA drone operators do not wear uniforms. Targets are spotted and drones are steered by the military, sitting in consoles in Creech Air Force Base, Nevada. In the ninth year of NATO operations in Afghanistan, the overwhelming civilian deaths in Afghanistan are caused by insurgents. The growing intensity of the fighting has raised civilian casualties, to their highest levels since 2001. “Inaccurate and unprofessional” reports by Predator drone operators lead to air strikes, resulting in the deaths of several groups of innocent men, women and children. □□□