

More of the Same

No Indian newspaper is complete without news on maoists. Maoist violence has been a staple for all the leading dailies and periodicals for the last one decade or so. In other words it is one way to tell the world that maoist reality is a fact of life in today's India. No matter whether the authorities downplay it or exaggerate it to further their gameplan. The ruling circles have no option but to confront this bitter truth, violently or otherwise, because they cannot share their privileges with the underprivileged. With 'Operation Green Hunt' going on in full swing, they also try, occasionally, if not reluctantly to win over the 'misguided youth' by way of offering some sops. Then they orchestrate 'surrender drama' as they did earlier in case of ULFA and Kashmir militants, hopefully to boost the sagging morale of the security establishment. Despite all sweet words maoists are not surrendering enmasse to live in paradise as offered by the government. So there seems to be no light at the end of the tunnel.

Bihar is the only state that has not officially launched 'Operation Green Hunt' though anti-naxalite drive by police and paramilitary forces shows no laxity in some disturbed areas otherwise euphemistically called naxal-infested, as if naxals are creatures, inferior to human beings.

Bihar under Nitish Kumar rejected the Centre's offer of unified command structure and advanced logistics including choppers to help coordinate a massive offensive against the left-wing extremists. But the absence of unified command has not really given breathing space for the maoists. Not really. Maybe Nitish Kumar's soft posture is too clever by half. Maybe not. After all he will have to face assembly poll in a month or two and maoists matter in a number of sensitive constituencies. So they look sympathetic to the 'misguided youth', it is a well calculated move. Earlier Siby Soren did the same thing in Jharkhand. They don't practise what they preach. For one thing because of their Lohia-ite background, they unlike Chidambarams, cannot deny social problems, social and economic injustice to the vast majority of the population, that breed naxalism or maoist violence in the first place. Recognising social and economic inequity is one thing and showing no inclination in earnest to start a meaningful dialogue is quite another. The best way to solve a critical problem is not to solve it!

Not that naxalite movement in Bihar is a recent phenomenon. The recent spurt in maoist violence including killings and kidnapping of policemen, has its roots in the past. In truth peasant organising in Bihar under the sway of different naxalite groups used to hit the headlines in the seventies and early eighties. The era of sena—private army—witnessed unprecedented brutality. That phase is over, thanks to maoism.

Right now maoists make their presence felt in 33 out of the state's total 38 districts, albeit during the previous RJD regime they had organisational presence in 17 districts only. One reason the naxalites have been able to spread their influence across the state of Bihar despite heavy state repression is continuing degradation of human life of the downtrodden under the twin tumbling blocks of caste and feudal notoriety that literally stand in the way of minimum social mobility. Also, the virtual absence of revisionist political culture as manifested in its fascistic march in Bengal and Kerala, has helped the

naxalite activists consolidate their base though it is shifting with ups and downs because of its typical guerilla nature.

The people of Bihar are lucky that no rich mineral deposits are there. After separation of Jharkhand from old undivided Bihar, it is at worst an agricultural land without any solid industrial base, periodically facing natural vagaries of drought and floods. One area that is something unique to Bihar is its vast migrant labour force working outside the state in most laborious and hazardous jobs, mostly as unskilled workers, generation after generation which has created a kind of money order economy. Back home they hardly play any progressive role in furthering radical politics—abolition of caste prejudices and all that. So long as they continue to seek their economic fortunes in old land relations and themselves become exploiters in relation to the most deprived, it won't be that easy for the maoists to radicalise Bihar according to their formula.

Also, Bihar is one maoist field that has been witnessing inter-group rivalry among naxalites for long. The fight is over turf, not ideology in the popular sense and it leads to violence and unnecessary deaths. The Nitish Kumars won't need Chidambaram-prescribed unified command, if internecine fight among the naxalite groups continue unabated. For all practical purposes, the political atmosphere in Bihar is now charged with both animosities and new hopes for bettering the world. □□□