

'OPERATION ANACONDA'

Targeting Saranda

Jharkhand is fast becoming a military state. Similar to operation green hunt which was started three years ago in mineral rich forest areas resided by adivasis, brutal operations are being carried out continuously in Jharkhand as well. 'Operation Anaconda' was launched as a special operation in August 2011 in Saranda forest area of West Singhbhum district of Jharkhand. Reasons for speeding up of such military operations by the state can be viewed in a twofold context. On the one hand mining activity in Saranda has been on the rise. Saranda is Asia's largest mineral reserve and holds immense economic importance. On the other hand, contrary to the government claim that the area has been cleared of Maoist activity, infact it is far from being crushed.

In order to gather first hand details of the manner in which the state has reacted to the changing conditions on ground, an all-India team from the Coordination for Democratic Rights Organisations(CDRO) was set up constituting members from human rights organisations of Andhra Pradesh, Delhi, Punjab, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand. The team conducted an investigation in Saranda and the adjoining areas between 20th and 22rd May 2012.

What follows is a brief summary of the observations made by the team. In Puraiyahaat, in January 2011, hundreds security forces entered Kamaay village. They beat up people and arrested four of them called Marshall Bhuiyaan, Nelson Bhuiyaan, Premanad Bhuiyaan and Pinky Bhuiyaan. The first two are still imprisoned while the other two have to appear regularly at the Thana. They are all falsely implicated in helping the Maoists. The CRPF also destroyed property, and mixed food grains in this village.

On the 20th of May itself, a security operation was conducted in Pandua village. Around 500 jawans entered the village at around 5.30 in the morning. Hallan Huttar was taken away blindfolded and handcuffed by the forces. Villagers now fear his death. Abraham Munda's property was destroyed, and 3500 rupees were taken away. 15 year old Mithun Bhuiyaan was beaten black and blue. Munda's wife and 1½-year-old son were also beaten up by a high rank police official. One villager was looted of Rs 10,000 which she had kept aside for buying ox for her fields. Also, a para-doctor here is frequently oppressed with the accusation of treating Maoists. According to the villagers this destruction continued in the village for almost three hours during which the forces also consumed liquor and marijuana. Few villagers were even forced to flee from their village on that day. In the same village, on the 10th of this month when the forces attacked the village, they also misbehaved with the women here. It was shocking to know that there were no women in the force while women were tortured brutally.

The team also visited 4 villages of Manoharpur block: Tirilposi, Raatamaati, Deegha, Tholkobaad. In all of these villages, forces converted whole villages into their base camp for an

entire month. Villagers had to hide in the jungles and many ran away to their relatives in nearby villages to escape oppression. Of those who were left in the village, men were held captive separating them from the women. They were tortured and even had to relieve themselves wherever they were locked up. Old people who couldn't run away were beaten up so badly that some of them even died. Houses were burnt and people jailed. Most of them are still in Chaybaasa jail, and according to their families they are not even sure of the offense of which they are accused. In Tirilposi alone 17 people have been imprisoned. Economically dented, these villagers are totally unable to follow legal proceedings to get relief. In one of the copies of charge sheets observed by the team, a villager was implicated in UAPA, CLA, and in addition also blamed of sedition and waging war against the state.

A trajectory can be spotted in the actions of the government in Saranda. It is clear that the government has failed to estimate the real needs of the people. And with the maoist activity refusing to fade away, the government with the fear of losing ground has reacted frantically by launching brutal operations on the people. By terrorizing the tribals, the state is simply trying alternatives to sustain a larger foothold over them. □□□