

The Juggernaut of Junglemahal

IT'S FINALLY HERE. AFTER MONTHS OF DILLY-DALLYING 'WAR ON Maoist Terror' is in full swing in junglemahal though peace talk, rather talk of peace process is not yet out of focus. That's politics. Whether it will materialise on the ground is another matter.

For the maoists of junglemahal it is the same old story of how to resist the renewed onslaught of joint forces and engage the civic society to create some breathing space. As there is no immediate election of any major significance, the newly elected administrative dispensation under the baton of Trinamul Congress and Congress Party can now talk tough and they are really talking tough by launching massive armed operation against the so-called maoist suspects who are in most cases ordinary poor tribals having no proper political platform to voice their grievances.

Meanwhile, the duel between pro-changers and no-changers in Bengal politics is more like a nice staple of inaction for intellectuals and politicians who have nothing to do other than dishing out their expert opinions on maoist violence on TV screen. It is unlikely to change the ground reality anytime soon. After all the maoists, notwithstanding their shortcomings and some questionable actions, are not in favour of a doctrine of submission. Nor do they want to be condemned to an early death or a life of misery and brutality. Development has different meanings in different times and for different classes and groups in society. It cannot be otherwise in junglemahal. For the people of junglemahal development continues to elude them despite so many lucrative economic packages that are being periodically flashed by the media, particularly the electronic media, to hide the glaring agony of the region.

The patent allegation against the maoists is that they are indulging in unnecessary violence and indiscriminate killings. Not that the charges are totally baseless in all cases as awarding capital punishment to anybody with dubious distinction of being an alleged police informer seems too harsh a measure because of low level of political consciousness of the poor people. Nor is it desirable to terrorise all political parties and civilians who would like to fight the maoists ideologically and politically. A sense of political monopoly and dictatorship seems to have gripped the maoist psyche and it can only further alienate them from basic masses, defeating the very purpose of maoist revolution. Much to the satisfaction of Union Home Minister Palaniappan Chidambaram, West Bengal Government has now openly declared a war against the maoists of junglemahal despite its earlier softer stance while ignoring pre-election promises. And Bengal Governor, a former national security top brass looks equally happy because the new government in the Writers' Buildings has issued an ultimatum to the maoists toeing the Centre's hidden policy of liquidation and disappearance *a la* Latin America.

In truth joint forces are not combating the maoists. They are in reality harassing and torturing ordinary people who are voiceless for all practical purposes while taking full liberty to rape tribal girls and women. Human Rights Activists are not safe in junglemahal which today literally

stands for jungleraj. In September eight persons who went to Belpahari in the West Medinipur district of junglemahal for an on-the-spot investigation were arrested by the West Bengal police and then handed over to the Jharkhand police for booking them under the notorious UAPA. In other words the government too doesn't want normal political activities in the region. And a vigilante group *bhairav bahini* has emerged under the active patronage of the ruling combine, to finish the unfinished agenda of the CPM's *harmad bahini*, the fascistic hoodlums who would go down in history as the most obnoxious creatures of the era.

Peace talk or no talk, maoists demand withdrawal of joint forces and unconditional release of all political prisoners. But the government surprisingly though, in contravention of the Centre's stand, demands unconditional surrender of arms for any negotiations to continue. The net result : the much talked about peace process hits the road-block as two parallel lines can hardly meet. This government, much like its predecessor, has very little faith in civil initiative for peace as they are more inclined to rely on superior fire power to wipe out what they call 'maoist menace'. No scope for political manoeuvring. It is the same old strategy of law and order. Instead of withdrawing joint forces they are actually planning to induce more security forces with a long-term perspective of imposing a permanent seize on the entire stretch of junglemahal bordering Jharkhand. More guns mean more violence. And violence begets violence.

What is really behind the so-called 'war on maoist violence' is a grand strategy aimed at redefining corporate interests under the garb of development. The campaign against the maoists in the junglemahal and elsewhere has been—and remains—a campaign of the corporates. No matter whether the government is left or right, they try to cash in on every opportunity to carry out long standing corporate plans. □□□