

Shifting Rationale for Corporates?

ROBBING PETER TO PAY PAUL—THAT'S HOW Indian Corporates have carried out their business in a situation of desperation, particularly in disturbed areas. But Union Home Minister P Chidambaram looks visibly upset and annoyed with the revelation that Essar Steel in the state of Chattisgarh paid money to the maoists to transport iron ore for their steel industry from the 'disturbed' Dantewada district. In other words the corporate houses by their acts admitted, much to the dismay of the governments, both at the centre and in the state, the existence of dual power in the so-called disturbed areas in Chattisgarh which reportedly accounts for roughly one-fourth of the country's total maoist incidents. While reviewing the progress of anti-maoist campaign by the security forces in Chattisgarh at a high-level meeting in Raipur last month, Chidambaram came down heavily on the corporate bosses who indulged in unfair business practice.

But judging from the past trends and records there was no abnormality in corporate behaviour. Not that this was the first time big business bypassed the government authorities to keep their house in order. Militants having no maoist tag, in the north-east have long been collecting taxes—or levies—without raising any hassle. And ULFA—United Liberation Front of Asom—in its hey days, used to get good patronage and attention from India's top monopoly houses, having enormous stake in Assam's plantation industry. There was no problem for corporate tycoons to provide high-tech medicare to some ULFA leaders in faraway Mumbai and no furore was raised about the corporate action.

After all business cannot be run in an atmosphere of violence and unrest. And steel magnates understand the ground reality better than Chidambaram. But Home Minister, otherwise most controversial and ruthless, always suffers from restlessness as he thinks not enough is being done to crush left-wing extremism.

For the Union Government it is no problem to make a deal with the underground Naga Liberation Movement that runs a parallel government. As for the Chidambarams, they are not opposed to the phenomenon of small contractors and traders paying protection money to maoists or other insurgent groups. The problem is with the big business funding the maoists. The arrests of a few officials of Essar Group, the company that allegedly paid money to the maoists to lift iron ore, may not have much impact on the prevailing corporate culture. What has been going on for decades in the north-east is now being extended to other regions as well.

Meanwhile, the junglemahal scenario in Bengal's western fringe adjoining Jharkhand is becoming increasingly volatile as two warring sides—maoists and joint forces—are in a state of confrontation once again, after a brief period of lull.

For some time tribal hamlets in this hapless region known as junglemahal, didn't witness much violence and bloodshed because the joint forces didn't venture into forests to take on the maoists and maoist guerillas too were avoiding direct engagement with security forces, hoping,

somewhat against hope, to have peace talks with the newly elected government anytime soon. But the situation is now back to square one. The much talked about peace talk was abandoned in the middle even before it took off in real terms.

Surprisingly enough, the maoists of Bengal urged the government to allow mass organisations, rather independent initiatives of locals, to conduct mass meetings and rallies as any mass agitation in the region is being dubbed as maoist-inspired and joint forces immediately resort to combing to foil it, threatening random arrest, rape and terror.

If anything the difficulties faced by the maoists in developing viable mass fronts today, were faced by the underground naxalites in the seventies as well. Perhaps they have realised that talking violence cannot garner mass support. No guerilla activity can sustain itself without voluntary mass support. While analysing the modus operandi of Vietnamese guerillas in their struggle against American troops and South Vietnamese puppet forces, Douglas Pyke elaborated how they developed a chain of mass organisations at different levels involving different age groups, without being identified as guerilla controlled. Nearer home the undivided communist party once upon a time clandestinely infiltrated into reactionary political outfits like Muslim League and police organisations to change them from within while strengthening overground communist activities.

How to articulate mass aspirations into organisational channel without being exposed as naxalite affiliates has been a dilemma since the seventies and it continues to dog the movement even today.

For the Chidambarams what matters most is written laws but corporates believe in unwritten laws of their own and in the final analysis corporates are fated to continue their forward march, behaving 'responsively' and 'irrespon-sively' to suit their purpose. □□□