Fire in Forest
Tackling Maoist Menace

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Abstract
Over the years, thousands of civilians and hundreds of Police personnel belonging to the State Police and Central Armed Police Forces have become the victims of Maoist violence. The murders of many Ministers, public representatives and Police officials by use of automatic weapons and landmines and the string of systematic kidnappings of officials—public representatives and continued fatal attacks on Police personnel and damage to the private and public property in different parts of the country and Maoist’s rising political power in neighbouring Nepal have given a jolt to the authorities for realising the urgency of initiating effective countermeasures.

Introduction
THE Communist Rural Insurgency in various parts of the world is generally known as Left-Wing Extremism or Naxalism/Maoism in India and Maoism in Nepal. It has proliferated on a phenomenal scale in its ideology, logistics and areas since the Naxalbari uprising of 1967 in Darjeeling District of the West Bengal Province in India. An armed peasant’s revolt against the landlord was led by Charu Muzumdar and Kanu Sanyal. But according to Sanyal, this was an armed struggle not for land, but for State power. This underscores the political objective of the party from its inception.

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These two leaders became the torch-bearers of Naxalism in India and spread its romanticism to other parts of the country. In its heyday, the Naxal Movement attracted a multitude of promising youth, students, and weaker and marginalized sections of society.

The Union and State Governments’ efforts to contain and curb the problem of Naxalism have not borne the desired fruits. The divergence and different perceptions in diagnosing the problem and regional political compulsions in tackling it have, in fact, helped move the Left-Extremist Movement ahead. Half-hearted measures are destined to meet the defeat.

Over the years, thousands of civilians and hundreds of Police personnel belonging to the State Police and Central Armed Police Forces have become the victims of Maoist violence. The murders of many Ministers, public representatives and Police officials by use of automatic weapons and landmines and the string of systematic kidnappings of officials—public representatives and continued fatal attacks on Police personnel and damage to the private and public property in different parts of the country and Maoist’s rising political power in neighbouring Nepal have given a jolt to the authorities for realising the urgency of initiating effective countermeasures.

The students of Communism know that Comrade Mao - the mentor and torch-bearer of the Left-Wing Extremism had said, “War is politics with bloodshed and politics is war without bloodshed.” Left-Wing Extremists are engaged in a political war - a struggle, which might go on for hundreds of years. The ups and downs are the accepted phases of this political-social revolution. Every small or big contribution and every martyrdom is a rung on the ladder taking them forward. Any defeat or setback is an experience to learn and rectify its mistakes in the long march to the alleged have-nots’ power.

I. What is Naxalism/Maoism?

Inspired by the leftist ideology of Marx, Lenin and Mao, it is a politico-socio-economic movement manifesting in law and order problem, threatening or capable of threatening the very foundations of a democratic society.

II. Extent of Problem

Since its inception in 1967 in West Bengal, the Maoist Movement has split into more than two dozens of groups of different names
and slightly varied ideological moorings. The Movement in India has now spread its tentacles in West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka Provinces. The problem in Bihar, Orissa, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh has assumed serious law and order problems. About 160 Districts are affected in 13 States in India. In the last few years, the Nepal experience has given a new hope to the Maoist militants and they are beginning to gain the upper hand as compared to the Police and Army. The Maoists have, in fact, captured the power in Nepal in alliance with other political parties.

Among the major Naxal groups, the CPI (Maoist) has emerged as the most violent and powerful group after the merger of PWG (Peoples’ War Group) and the MCC (Maoist Communist Centre), orchestrating a continuous offensive against the police and persons coming in its way. The PWG was founded by Kondavalli Seetharammiya in April 1980 a prominent Naxal leader in Andhra Pradesh. The CPI-ML-Party Unity-a powerful Naxal group of Bihar had merged with it in 1998. After that, serious efforts were made to achieve unity with MCC (Maoist Communist Centre) - again an ambitious militant outfit in Bihar and West Bengal and finally, PWG and MCC merged in September 2004, giving rise to this new outfit called the CPI (Maoist).

The Maoist militants have also developed links with other terrorist groups operating in North-East, Jammu & Kashmir and Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist). Recently, it has come on record that Manipur-based, banned outfit - Peoples Liberation Army (PLA) and top Maoist leaders Kishenji and Ganapathy of CPI (Maoist) had signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on October 22, 2008 for extending help to each other in fighting war against the Government. One PLA leader Alok Kumar Singh alias Willow was recently (2011) arrested from Pune. The PLA cadres imparted two months’ basic Military training, guerrilla warfare tactics, communication training and provided wireless transmission sets, AK assault rifles and ammunition to the Maoists. There were unconfirmed reports that CPI (Maoist) were trained earlier in techniques of laying landmines and other uses of explosives by the LTTE of Sri Lanka. Also, over the years, the Movement, despite its splintered character, has received encouragement and support from various Maoist and Communist organizations operating in different parts of the world.
The notions of a red corridor from Nepal to Andhra Pradesh or a golden corridor from Ahmedabad to Pune are exaggerated, but Naxals have enlarged their base and areas of militancy. Not a day passes without any Naxal incident in the country. The problem is quite serious. What we see on the surface is the tip of the iceberg. According to Government of India, the Naxalism today has become the single biggest challenge to the internal security of the country, followed by terrorism. Every visionary person and a policeman would know that it is a low-intensity conflict. According to the Naxalites themselves, it is a Peoples’ War, a beginning of armed revolution for a true democratic society. The Security Forces are fighting a dynamic unconventional war against a very intelligent enemy in jungles, hills and sparsely-populated terrains - mostly inhabited by tribal and other marginalized sections of society.

III. Strategy of Maoists

Maoist militants are using a double-edged weapon of allurement and intimidation to create a mass base in the villages. They are building up village-level cells among the youth, farmers, labourers, women, students and children and cultivating and influencing the intellectuals in the cities. Interior areas, the Maoist cadres learn the local languages, respect the cultures of the people and try to integrate themselves with them. Remaining behind the scene, they have floated as many as 47 front organizations spanning the whole spectrum of society taking up many social-political issues, organizing agitations, demonstrations write-ups against the Government. Maoists have District, Regional, State-level and Central Committees deciding and disseminating through their strategy of two-way communication. Maoists have their plain-clothes revolutionary cadres in cities merging in the environment and running dens and organizing material supplies as well as inciting the front organizations.

In forest areas, the Maoists have their armed Dalams (groups) in olive-green Military uniforms. They are equipped with simple as well as sophisticated weaponry, almost mastering the techniques of laying landmines and using explosives in myriad ways. They have well-established channels of printing and circulating their clandestine literature. Even our Electronic and Print Media has not been unkind to them. Their immediate aim is to make the Government Administration totally ineffective and discredited and turning the masses in their
favour; and to overthrow the present semi-colonial, semi-feudal, system in the country and establish new democratic revolutionary rule - the democratic dictatorship of four classes - workers, peasants, petty-bourgeoisie and national bourgeoisie under the leadership of the proletariat and based on worker-peasant unity. Through tactics and armed revolution, they ultimately wish to carve out a Dandakaranya State in the Central India and so-called democratic-republic in Nepal based on socialism and communism.

IV. Strength of Maoists

Before talking about the strategy for tackling Maoist violence in the region, we must know what are the pillars of their strength in the affected areas.

According to me, if we generalize, there are only three:

- **Support of Locals**

  Rightly or wrongly, whether under fear or for favour, the vast majority of weaker sections of society (tribals, dalits, marginalized farmers, etc.) are either supportive to the Maoists or totally neutral to the administration. Local people provide recruits, food, shelter and intelligence network to Maoists and are lured into their village-level cells whether of farmers, labours, students, women and children. Majority of the locals see the Maoists as their benefactors. It is widely believed (correct to a large extent) that Maoists created a class consciousness among the tribals, provided them freedom from the exploitation of contractors and Government servants; helped to get them higher wages; encouraged them to exploit the prohibited forest produce and encroach upon forest—Government land with almost impunity. Some pseudo-intellectuals give all credit to Maoists for forcing the Government to undertake large-scale development activities in Naxal-affected areas, forgetting a reality that Maoists themselves are a big hindrance to development works.

- **Source of Easy Funds**

  Maoist cadres are collecting huge amount of funds from their areas of influence or active operation. According to the police’s rough estimate - it runs into more than Rs. 100 millions a year from the State of Maharashtra alone, where the Districts of Gadchiroli and
Gondia are badly affected. Their front and supportive organizations are working in Chandrapur and other cities of Maharashtra. In badly-affected States like Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, a sizable chunk of the Government money earmarked for developmental purposes end up in the coffers of Naxalites. With this money, the Maoists purchase and or manufacture their weapons, ammunitions and provisions; organize training camps, build a network of informants and run secret dens in cities.

Money is coming mainly from Tendu / Kendu leaves (used for making beedis for smoking - a natural version of cigarettes) contractors, Paper Mill Owners/Contractors, the contractors working for Forest Department and other developmental agencies as well as other small sources. The major chunk of this money is not through extortion, but is what they call protection money. Most of the Contractors and delinquent public servants have developed the modus vivendi - a kind of strange relations with Maoists, where both parties share the exploits of these undeveloped areas. Many employees of some departments give a share of their (enhanced) salaries for working in Naxal-affected areas to Maoists to ensure their safety and enjoying their dereliction of public duties. Of course, Maoists try to maintain their clean image as ills are inflicted on the heads of contractors and corrupt Government officials.

**Synergy of Hills, Jungles and Interstate Borders**

Forest and hilly terrains and contiguous Interstate borders are being used as training ground and safe sanctuaries by Maoist militants. Vast tracts of jungles and interstate borders have become big barriers for smooth police operations. Jungles are a great equalizer of force and if I quote one British Commander Lt. Col. S.M. Mans, who commanded the operations against the Communist insurgents (other name of Maoists) in Malaya in 1950s that because of jungles, “Never in the history of warfare have so few been chased so much by so many for such a long time.” Therefore, it is a daunting and debilitating task and not simply a policing job for any law and order problem. Non-apprehension of the sandalwood smuggler, Veerappan, by the combined Special Task Force of Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu States for many long years underscores the synergic advantage of jungle terrains to the activists of extremism and insurgency.
V. A Strategy of Success

Such a complicated and serious problem defies easy solutions. It warrants a multi-disciplinary, multi-departmental and unconventional approach. The police alone can just fight the fringe of the problem. It cannot tackle the deep-seated malaise, and the history of the last about 40 years has proved it. Such an unconventional problem cannot be solved through usual bureaucratic approach and means. We have to demolish the pillars of strength of the Maoist Movement. Many may not agree, but it requires the same strategy that is being employed by the extremists themselves, with only one difference that we have to put the gears of their strategy in reverse order. Following are some of the measures for maiming the moorings and slashing the strength of Maoist Movement:

1. Winning the Minds and Hearts of Local People

This is the most important requirement for the State Administration to be successful against this low - (not any more) intensity and protracted conflict.

How is it possible?

- Every human society wants its progress. Tribals and locals are not the exception to it. So, creating a stake of locals in their own development is the foremost requirement.

- Some people have an erroneous assumption that along with the development of an area, the Maoist problem will automatically vanish. This is not true, as insurgencies have occurred at all levels of economic development except at the highest or the mass consumption level. Interestingly, in Latin America, insurgency has occurred in countries with high levels of development as Cuba, Venezuela and Colombia.

- One of the few comprehensive studies on the relationship between economic factors and insurgencies found a curvilinear relationship between Gross National Product (GNP) per capita and political violence. It suggested that there is no simple relationship between economic factors and the outbreak of violence. The study of 24 insurgencies since 1946 in different parts of the world, as quoted by Jerry Tinkar revealed that the level of economic development of a country provides no immunity to
insurgency. There may, however, be some relationship between GNP per capita and the level of violence. The study also found that insurgency is not restricted to countries with rural low-density population or having low adult literacy.

- The most pertinent question is: “Can anyone say that after pumping about hundreds of millions of rupees in the affected area in India, the Maoist problem has lessened or the locals have become favourable to the administration?” My answer to these questions is a big ‘No’. Then what does it portray and clearly convey?

The message is simple and straight. The locals are not with the administration and we should admit it. Even their passive neutrality is advantageous to the Maoist militants and an obstacle for the security agencies. Building up roads, bridges and the electrification of villages, where our 70-80% budget is being spent, has shown little improvement in the quality of life of the locals. We, in administration, perceive roads, bridges, electrification and telephone as symbols of development, but the tribal and locals feel otherwise.

- Unless we involve the locals, create a stake of theirs in their own development, not much is going to change. And, for creating a stake of locals in the process of their own development, we require the gearing up of the entire administrative machinery and not just the police alone. Today, the coordination amongst different Government Departments hardly exists, or even if it does, it exists mainly on paper, as far as anti-Maoist strategy is concerned.

The Involvement of the Locals in the Development Process

It may be accomplished simply by implementing the Central legislation - generally referred as FRA Act or the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006.

To do away the historical injustice (during the colonial period as well as in Independent India) to the forest dwelling Scheduled Tribes and other traditional forest dwellers, the Central Government come out with this revolutionary and promising Act called “The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest
Rights) Act, 2006”. This Act removed the intrinsic flaws in the Central Act of 1996 called “Extension to the Scheduled Areas Panchayats Act and the Maharashtra State Amendment to Panchayats Act, 1997”. This Act recognizes and vests the forest rights and occupation of forest land in forest dwelling tribes. It also gives the right to protect, regenerate or conserve or manage any community forest resource, to Gram Sabha. It also corrected the definition of Gram Sabha and minor forest produce.

According to this Act, ‘Gram Sabha’ means a village assembly, which shall consist of all adult members of a village and in case of States having no Panchayats, Padas, Tolas and other traditional village institutions and elected village communities, with full and unrestricted participation of women.

According to the Act, ‘minor forest produce’ includes all non-timber forest produce of plant origin, including bamboo, brushwood, stumps, cane, tussah, cocoons, honey, wax, lac, tendu- or kendu-leaves, medicinal plants and herbs, roots, tubers and the like.

Case of Maharashtra

The State of Maharashtra also passed the Act - The Maharashtra Panchayats in Scheduled Areas for Self-Government, 1997. But this Act failed to incorporate the spirit of Central Act generally referred as PESA Act or the Extension to the Scheduled Areas Panchayats Act, 1996. Unfortunately, the implementation of the Act had hardly seen the light of the day, barring one or two provisions and that too at a few places. The Act had not found favour with policy planners and other field functionaries. They did not want to give up their privileges and powers to local people. The cry of social activists had fallen on deaf ears.

Gadchiroli District

The worst affected District in the State with Naxalite problem presents an ideal example of ground realities. The Naxalite problem started there approximately 30 years back. Certainly, it was and still is, the most backward District of the State. More than Rs. 15,000 millions have been pumped into the District for development activities by the Government so far. Signs of area development in the form of roads, bridges, schools, hospital, Panchayat buildings are clearly visible. But for the local tribal people, there has been hardly any change. Their
children have better literacy level and more Government works to earn wages. But they feel deprived of the privileges and powers they used to enjoy before political independence of 1947 and certainly before British clamped their controls in these areas in late 19th century. The alienation is alarming.

Gadchiroli District gets about Rs. 600-1,000 millions in Tribal Sub-Plan annually. In return, this District, rich in natural resources, provides about Rs. 1200-1500 millions revenue to the State Exchequer. Much of this revenue stems from the sale of Tendu leaves, timber and bamboos. As I mentioned earlier, in the last 30 years, around Rs. 15,000 millions have been allocated, used and misused in this District, but quality of life of the tribals have marginally changed and the Naxal problem continues unabated and accentuated.

Path We Missed

Where have we gone wrong? The policy-makers have not yet reviewed it honestly and comprehensively. Only the Police Department is asked to explain about the continuity of such a complex phenomenon. The Secretaries of concerned Departments have hardly bothered about it or were ever asked to explain the negligible return on huge investments in their fields. Recently, while reviewing the nationwide poverty alleviation programmes, the Planning Commission of India has stated with great anguish and sadness that had the money been sent to the beneficiaries directly through money orders instead of bureaucratic machinery, their economic condition would have been much improved. The story of Tribal and Agency Areas Development Programmes is the same irrespective of the names of different schemes in various States. And, the same might be true about our immediate neighbour Nepal.

One is never too late to embark upon the path of progress. There are two workable options. First, we may distribute the budget to the Village Panchayats and let the Gram Sabha decide what plans and programmes they would like to execute, as per the provisions of new Act. Let the bureaucrats extend the help and guidance, but not dictate the whole village community or Panchayat in this endeavour. Let us encourage the villagers to become contractors, businessmen, labourers, Government servants etc., so that the locals become a part and parcel of the development process.
The often-advocated bureaucratic logic of scientific management of forest for tendu-leaves collection or bamboo-cutting cuts no ice, because even in the present system of tendu collection, the Forest Department gives in hardly any technical or scientific input. Contractors do it (plucking, drying, storing) or for that matter the tribal, who work for paper mills in cutting the bamboos.

Now, the locals and tribal are illegally cutting the forest, encroaching upon its land, because it does belong to the Government. In the proposed scenario, it would belong to the people. These simple, but historical decisions on the part of the respective Governments, will create a stake for development in the minds of the locals as it will be:

- their own forest (property of Gram Sabha and not of individuals);
- their own roads, bridges, schools, hospitals etc.;
- their own Panchayat system of dispute resolution.

System of Justice

One of the major irritants the tribal society is facing today is our Criminal Justice System. There is no need to elaborate it. Indian Criminal Justice System has already collapsed under its own mounting weight and various intrinsic problems. Justice is a far cry especially for the poor. Today, the standard of justice, as written by the Greek historian Thucydides about 2,400 years ago, depends on the power to compel. The strong do what they have the power to do and the weak accept what they have to accept. The Supreme Court of India recently said that the laws enforcing agencies and prosecution have become the engines of oppression. This is one of the main reasons that the Maoists have adopted to holding People’s (Praja) Courts - Jan Adalats as one of their important tactical tools. They dispense rough and ready justice, and are becoming popular. This forum of Jan Adalat is being used by these militants for dissemination of their ideology, programmes and collection of funds as well as discrediting the Government system.

The powerful antidote against the above problem has to be in consonance with local ethos and traditions. We must revive the customary village elderly Panchayats, encourage and reorganize them for dispensation of justice at least in all civil and non-serious criminal cases. Now, the Supreme Court is also advocating for adoption of Lok Adalats - the alternative mode of dispute resolution instead of approaching the courts every time. Now, Lok Adalats are in existence.
in most of the States, but are not very active. Maharashtra has taken a lead in launching the Mahatma Gandhi Tatha Mukti Yojna (Conflict resolution scheme) in rural areas and doing an excellent work. But this scheme has not been able to make much impact in Maoist-affected region. Why don’t we bring them in insurgency-affected areas? Let the locals be given authority to manage their village affairs as they used to do it in pre-Independence days. A least governed State is the best administered. In February 2012, the M.P. State has resolved more than 30 lakh disputes/cases in one day by activating all Government Departments, local bodies, etc.

The above measures will make the locals proud of their self-reliant and peaceful orderly society. They will prosper very soon as they will be able to decide their wages, their plans, their progress and be the masters of their own destiny. Spoon-feeding and subsidies give no self-esteem and provide no sustainable development anywhere in the world. Development prerequisites a sense of pride for any society. Today's tailored and stereotyped schemes have undermined the confidence and competence of our tribal, creating a sense of dependency.

The State Government should start mobile courts in affected areas, visiting all the Taluka/Tehsil places and big villages, to listen to the grievances and resolve/decide the disputes of people.

**Psychological Warfare**

Besides, Government must go all out to wage a psychological warfare through propaganda and publicity, using mass media and all the Government Departments to turn the masses against the Maoists. The Maoist or Extremist ideology must be countered by a more powerful ideology - touching the hearts and minds of people. An ideology can be countered by an ideology and not simply by ballot box or bullets. This kind of ideology must be conceived and designed by a group of experts having academic and field experience in the fields of counter-extremism. All the poverty-alleviation programmes and individual and family-oriented beneficiary schemes undertaken by the Government in the area must repeatedly be shown. The sincerity of the Government to bring the tribals and marginalized sections of society out of the morass of poverty and alienation must be stressed. Simultaneously, the instances and incidents of thwarting the development work by the Maoists must be highlighted.
The Government, barring some stray or individual aberrations on the part of public officials as a whole, must be projected as the real friend of the tribals and other poor sections of the society. It should be done by the Information and Publicity Department by creating an exclusive cell for this purpose. Police is not an expert in the field.

All political parties, as happened in Andhra Pradesh, must come together on one platform to speak against the Naxals in one voice. For our long-term interests and development of the area, the politicians must eschew their differences and present a united front. The political differences and petty interests create a vacuum for an alleged altruistic political platform as usurped by the Maoists.

We have to design specific programmes to mobilize and impact the minds of all sections of the society - farmers, labourers, students, women, youth and children by creating different exclusive cells and organizations for them. We have to fight the Maoists, as mentioned earlier, with their own strategy simply by putting the gears in reverse. Effective organization and mass mobilization is a must to thwart the systematic and meticulous infiltration of Maoist cadres in village and city life.

**Reach of the Administration**

There is no need to overstress this point that any area maladministered or unadministered or having political vacuum is highly susceptible to the pangs of extremism or insurgency. The State Governments would perform better if all the posts in all departments are filled in and comparatively younger officials are posted. Officers on the verge of retirement will be unable to produce results. This changed initiative will reflect that the State is responsive and welfare-oriented.

Secondly, the shifting and regrouping of the small isolated scattered villages, hamlets, *padas, tolas* would provide better administrative and developmental facilities, besides enhancing the security environment. For example, in 1491 total villages of Gadchiroli District, 47% villages have population below 300 and 76% villages below 600. Vandoli and Makkapalli villages have only one household each. The new villages can offer much improved living conditions, such as new houses, sanitation, accessible drinking water, medical treatment, schools, adult literacy institutions, ration shops, improved cultural facilities, opportunities to market native crafts and collect minor forest produce.
There is also an urgent need, on the part of the administration, to fix up a Minimum Support Price (MSP) for minor forest produce - the tendu (kendu) leaves, bamboo, and non-timber products like mahua, charoli, tamarind, beheda, which are source of income for tribal people. This measure will give a sort of freedom to gullible tribal people from the exploitation of middle men/agents, who try to buy their products for a pittance or barter the produce by giving the tribal a bottle of liquor or some salt. The smaller isolated villages provide shelter to extremists and render them vulnerable to Maoist violence.

1. Change in Surrender Policy

An interaction with and interrogation of most of the surrendered Maoists would reveal that they are not highly-motivated ideologically, except the senior or committed cadres. After a Naxal surrenders, he/she is given some lumpsum money, but not any gainful or sustainable employment. They also risk the threat of being attacked by active militant cadres. Hence, most of them stay in and around Police Headquarters/Stations and do some labour work for earning their livelihood. If an offer is given by the Government that all cadres, who will surrender, will be recruited in District Police, I am sure half of the Naxal cadres will come forward surrendering. This policy offer should be given a time-frame - say one year to begin with, so that it is not misused. Some basic policy guidelines can be decided regarding the parameters of recruitment - like physical standards, educational qualification and barring those cadres, who are involved in serious offences. The Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, New Delhi has issued some guidelines from time to time. And, accordingly, some CAPF battalions were raised in North-East, Punjab and Jammu-Kashmir States. Recently, Chhattisgarh has also recruited surrendered Maoists cadres in its State Police. Instances are rare, where a militant, after being recruited and trained in Government service or police, left his job and rejoined the militant cadres.

2. Cutting the Source of Funds

Regular flow of funds is the fuel for any organizational machinery. Arresting or eliminating a few cadres or leaders would not tackle the problem, because new cadres take over the leadership immediately. Hence, cutting the regular source of money is of paramount importance. In the extremist-affected Central India, the contractual
system of tendu-leaves collection is the main villain. The collection of tendu-leaves is the most important economic activity in the area giving employment to tens of thousands of people, though only for a short span of 15-20 days. In Gadchiroli District alone, about Rs. 500-600 millions are disbursed as wages to labourers. It also contributes about Rs. 500 millions to State coffers as royalty. The Naxalites collect around Rs. 100 millions as protection money from the contractors and one-day wages, as contribution, from the labourers.

In all the areas and activities of contractors’ operations whether collection of tendu-leaves or construction of roads or Government buildings or cutting of forest timber, the Maoist cadres have compelled the contractors to pay much higher wages to labourers as compared to Government rates. The Maoists are happy because of the huge fund they extract and so are the labourers, for having got higher rates of wages because of the militants. Contractors, forest and other development-related bureaucracy are also happy for obvious reasons. In extremist-infested areas, the floor-rates for tenders are hiked at least by 20% on the premise that contractors are not readily available. For some of the works, it is true also. But mostly an artificial phobia has been generated. In the Contractor system, police is also happy in day-to-day affairs as it has no hassles. However, the State is the biggest loser, as the State has to put in millions of rupees in the area for strengthening the law and order machinery for fighting an enemy, which has been made stronger by our own faulty policies.

In late 1980s, the Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra had switched over to departmental collection of tendu-leaves under pressure from security agencies. Border Road Organization (BRO) was brought in the area for the construction of roads and bridges basically to eliminate the source of funds to Maoists emanating from private contractors. But we have messed up the whole set-up by reverting back to contractual collection of tendu-leaves after a few years, much to the chagrin of the law and order machinery. Thanks to the well-entrenched vital vested interests in the region and in the corridors of power.

The best solution lies in giving the ownership of tendu-leaves, along with other forest produce, to local Gram Sabhas. The Central Legislation, the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 has given ownership rights for all non-timber forest produce to village community. Government will
continue getting its royalty. The Forest Department can help in fixing the support price and market-mechanism for the tendu-leaves, which is not a big problem. Maoists cannot extract the money from all Gram Panchayats for fear of losing the people's support and thereby getting their flow of fund dried up with the passage of time.

The second solution, but a somewhat less effective one, would be the collection of tendu-leaves by the Department (Forest) only through the Forest labour cooperative societies. We should also appreciate that the Contractor system is also a dying phenomenon, because every year, rate of wages to labourers is increasing (much more in Naxal-affected areas); money is to be paid to Naxals and the Forest Department can't sell all the tendu-units (an earmarked forest area) below the offset price of last year. When this would become non-profitable, the contractors won't come forward to purchase. But waiting for that time to dawn would be too costly. The number of tendu-units not being sold because of the quoted (tendered) price being less than the offset price is increasing year after year and the Forest Department itself has to get it organized and tendu-leaves collected.

Even if both the above suggestions are not acceptable to policy-makers (but non-acceptance will help the Maoists) at least the State Governments may come up with an administrative order envisaging that after giving fixed royalty per tendu-bag, the tender quoting the maximum wages to labourers will be accepted. At least if not in the entire region, this kind of Government Resolution could be implemented in Naxal-affected areas. Then the credit for increasing the wages of labourers would go to the Government and not to the Naxalites. It will help wean away the locals from the fold of Maoists.

Similarly, let bamboos be auctioned or sold by the Gram Sabhas to the Paper Mills or Contractors operating in the region. The villages Mendha (Lekha) and Maarda in Gadchiroli District have shown the way and patently demonstrated the huge economic benefits and redeemed the self-esteem to villagers. Money will go to the villagers and the village-coffer. The loading of trucks and maintaining the supply at depots should remain to be the responsibility of the Gram Sabhas. The Government, of course, will keep on getting its royalty as of now. In the new scenario, the Maoists cannot force the Paper Mills to pay protection money because, if they do not pay, the Maoists may not be able to stop cutting of bamboos or setting the bamboo depots on fire.
(a usual trick played nowadays). If the Maoists do this, the sufferers will be the local villagers. Also, harassing the villagers will be counterproductive for Maoists in the long run. Again, the ownership of Gram Sabha over bamboos will remove the long-standing irritant between the locals and the administration, which the Government is selling the bamboos to locals for customary requirements at a rate about ten times higher what the Paper Mills are required to pay.

The experiment in villages Mendha-Lekha and Maarda, in Dhanora and Gadchiroli Taluqas of Gadchiroli District is worth quoting. With the initiative, sustained demand and undying spirit of a few village community leaders, like Mohan Hirabai Hiralal, Devaji Tophe, the rights of the villagers on the ownership of bamboos in village limits, were recognized in 2009 and handed over in a function by the Chief Minister of Maharashtra in the presence of Central Minister Shri Jairam Ramesh and the Home Minister of State on 27th April, 2011. The village Mendha-Lekha has shown the way. The villagers got almost five times the wages as compared to wages provided by Paper Mill and collected/deposited about Rs. 80 lakh in Gram Sabha account for the management of forests and village development and that too in just one year. This experiment has led the residents of about 400 villages in the District to demand the replication and implementation of the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights), Act, 2006. However, the alleged deep nexus of Paper Mills and Forest officials and Maoists is preventing the realization of real tribal welfare.

Thus, we will be able to cut the mass base and source of funds to Maoists to a large extent. The villagers and tribal will have gainful employment, their economic condition will greatly improve and above all, they will reclaim and regain their lost self-esteem. There will be hardly any recruits for Maoists. These two measures will bring Maoists on their knees. About 50 to 60% of the problem of Naxalism/Maoism would get reduced.

3. **Breaking the Barriers of Terrain**

**The Police Response**

Promoting disorder is the objective of the Maoists, which is cheap to create and very costly to prevent. They may beat brutally or kill any villager in the interior areas. They might kidnap any village official,
District Officer or public representative and hold Government to ransom to get released their jailed comrades. It is impossible for police to provide protection to each and every village or official. Maoists may attack a lonely Policeman/Post or Station in the jungle or in an isolated area and thus, all the Police Posts and Stations are to be protected, policemen in one, two or three strength, would not be able to venture into interior areas so on and so forth. It is a war where the extremists need so little to achieve so much, and the police need so much to achieve so little. Unfortunately, almost in all the States facing extremist problem, much emphasis is on increasing the manpower rather than enhancing the effectiveness of the Police Force already in place. Andhra Pradesh has done extremely well in raising and training a specialized police unit called 'Grey Hounds' for anti-Naxal operations. Besides, physical fitness, weapon training, field-craft; the most important ingredient for stamping success is the mental attitude of the officers and men deployed for the purpose. From the practical field experience, it can be stated that in manpower, training, weaponry, firepower and logistics, the Police Force is far more superior to the Maoists. In fact, there is no comparison to the extremist cadres. But we are way behind and miserably failing as far as commitment to the cause is concerned.

The Maoist senior cadres, whatever we say for them - the lumpen elements, frustrated, distorted or criminals - the seniors of them have one superior quality, an attitude of mind to do or die, a will to become a revolutionary or a martyr, a dogged determination to achieve results. Otherwise, how many will take to jungles, suffering starvation and sleeplessness, facing snakes, malaria and typhoid and always on the run facing the risk of losing their life. When motivation goes down or frustration sets in - they leave the organization or surrender to the Government.

**Use of Technology**

The edge of latest and field-friendly technology by the Security Forces cannot be overemphasized. The used of UAV (Unmanned Aerial Vehicles) having the latest cameras - capable to penetrate the tree foliage, GPS sets, Satellite phones, Light NVD (Night Vision Devices); scrambler wireless sets for communications or which cannot be compromised, the latest equipments for interception and analysis of phone-conversation; the erection of mobile towers in affected areas,
the Thermal Imagery for enhancing surveillance around the Police Stations/Camps are some of the issues, which must get the top priority of policy-planners. The issuing of UID (Unique Identity Card) passes to the residents of areas will help isolate the Naxal cadres from the local populace.

**Intelligence-based operations**

Intelligence-based operations for chasing the senior leaders are need of the hour. The small teams of dedicated officers and men with sufficient resources and focused mandate must be created. The arrests or neutralisation of lower cadres do not decidedly dent the Maoist organization.

**Population Control Measures**

Population control seeks to accomplish restricting the Movement of the Maoist cadres and to separate them, both physically and psychologically from the general population. To further this, extremist and public movements should be regulated through the institution of collective responsibility meaning thereby that hosting the extremists by one in the village, attending the meeting of extremists, providing them food etc., blocking the roads by felling trees etc., should hold the entire village responsible. A collective fine for all village residents or curfew for 2 days may be thought of. Alternatively, the village Sarpanch, police patil and other village-elders should be punished. Every member of a village, above 12 years of age, must be registered with the District Administration and be issued an Identity Card. For all the regulatory measures, Government should consider the enactment of an appropriate law.

**The Deployment of Central Forces**

The CAPFs cannot fight the extremists successfully. Their SOPs (Standard Operating Procedures) are different from local (State) Police. Secondly, there is always a command and control problem on the ground. And, if the District/Unit Commander happens to be a little junior to the Commanding Officers of CAPFs, it further adversely affects the real-time operations. Thirdly, whenever any battle, on extremism, insurgency or terrorism fronts, has been won, it was when the State Police was in the forefront. CAPFs can support, help in area-domination, fortifying the security umbrella, but expecting them to
win the situation for State Police will be an utopia. The deployment of Central Armed Police Forces for us, the show of force or the status-quoits approach of the police will not be able to alter the ground realities or make an effective dent on Maoist apparatus.

**Three-Point Formula for Police**

The strategy of success for police, according to me, revolves on the acceptance of following three principles:

- **1st Principle:** First movers are the winners. In this competitive world, those who would start first are likely to be the winners. This principle is equally applicable to the domain of corporate world as well as to the strategic frontiers of Left-Wing Extremism/insurgency and counter-offensive. If we want to win the war against the Maoists, we have to make the first move in every respect, as opposed to them. We have to use the Maoist’s strategy in reverse gear. Whether it is a case of:
  - effective coordination and cooperation amongst the affected Nations, States, Districts or Teams;
  - better weaponry and logistics;
  - collection and timely use of operative intelligence;
  - laying ambushes;
  - wooing the locals and weaning them away from the Maoists fold through a policy of all-out friendship and all-out force or with an iron hand in a velvet glove; and
  - establishing village level cells for all sections of society.

- **2nd Principle:** “God is on the side of best shots.” The famous French political thinker, Voltaire, had said, ‘God is on the side of not heavy battalions, but of best shots.” It underscores the pre-eminence of training and training - a meticulous sustained practice for excellence. Whether it is a case of:
  - courage, commitment and loyalty to the cause we are supposed to advance;
  - physical endurance and mental alertness;
  - training in field-craft;
  - expertise in jungle warfare and tactics; and
  - team-spirit and empathy.
Training and more training in all aspects of jungle warfare and counter-insurgency will be the harbinger of success. Like in the demanding world of aeronautics, every part and component - however minute it may sound - is tested and approved before launching and every time, without fail, before any aeroplane takes off. The same type of preparedness and perseverance is required in the fight against Maoist militants.

- **3rd Principle:** “The snake in a home is to be searched, driven out or neutralized.”

This principle may sound to some as violative of animal or human rights. But for our own survival, in our everyday life, almost everyone, except the sickly and coward, believes in it. The Maoist militants have declared a war against the State. Every member of the security agencies is an enemy to them. They don Military uniform, are always armed with illegal and sophisticated weapons and in search of targeting policemen. They do not believe in the constitution or in a democratic system. Violence is their guru-mantra. They have maimed and killed thousands of innocent people and brutally attacked policemen. Vehicles of security agencies and public representatives have been blasted by the use of landmines. Should the security agencies wait for their attack or should it go all out in search of them? When there is a question of killing or be killed, who would prefer to be killed instead of taking the other’s life? Let us face the reality instead of believing in the rhetoric.

At the end, I would like to reiterate again, that serious, well-coordinated and unconventional decisions are the need of the hour as half-hearted or delayed measures are destined to meet the defeat.

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