

## Not Maowadi But Hinsawadi

■ Dr, M.N. Buch

This article is being written with great sadness because what has happened at the Darbha Ghati of Bastar region is heart- rending. Vidya Charan Shukla and I go back a long way, because I first made friends with him fifty-one years ago when I was D.C. of Betul. Nandkumar Patel, Mahendra Karma and Laxman Karma are politicians I knew when Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh were one and I was still in service. Ajit Jogi was then a young officer who had just started in the IAS. Despite all the criticism by so-called activists Mahendra Karma's Selwa Judum was the right approach of consolidating scattered villages and taking the fight to the Naxalites through the tribal people.

Looking at my own records I find that I have been writing to P.M. about Naxalism for over three years. In an interview my wife, Nirmala, gave to Hindustan Times she said that Naxalite terror has now reached a stage where there is virtually a declaration of war against the Indian Union and the territorial integrity of India by well organised groups of armed and trained insurgents whose avowed objective is to destroy the Indian Union. The defence of India is the duty of the Union Government as per Entry 1, List 1, Seventh Schedule of the Constitution. Under Chapter 2 of Part XI of the Constitution the executive power of the Union under Articles 256 and 257 extends to ensuring compliance with the laws made by Parliament and for this purpose give any necessary directives to the States, which will be binding. Equally important is the fact that it is the mandatory duty of every State Government to ensure compliance with the laws of Parliament and the State Legislature as provided in Article 256. Under Article 51-A it is the duty of every citizen to uphold and protect the sovereignty, unity and integrity of India. The Naxalites are in violation of this fundamental duty and, therefore, it is the duty of the Executive to treat them as enemies of the State and take every legal step to suppress and eliminate them. In addition we have section 121A, Indian Penal Code which defines the offence of waging war against the Government of India and providing for it the same penalty as that for murder, that is, death or imprisonment for life. The Naxalites are certainly waging war against the Indian Union.

I have given this background because there are certain fundamental changes we need in our thinking about the Naxalites, their philosophy, their modus operandi and our own attitude towards them. The Naxalites have been looked upon as poor tribals fighting against injustice, whose movement cannot be suppressed through police action. At least that is what the so-called activists would have us believe. The tribals are poor, they are exploited, the development programmes of government have bypassed them and, therefore, they are entitled to an armed struggle. The fact is that at least in Madhya Pradesh (I include Chhattisgarh in this) they are nothing of the sort. This State has, by and large, been a ryotwari area and the tiller of the soil has always been its bhoomiswami. Even in old C.P. and Berar this was true. Regarding land ownership, in the combined State of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh village commons, including village forests were, all managed by the Malguzar and the partially elected village Patel, but the rights of the villagers were governed by the Nistar Patrak prepared at the time of Settlement and subsequently updated from time to time by the Collector of the district.

In 1951 when the State enacted the Abolition of Proprietary Rights Act the Malguzar had no control left over the village commons and for ten years these lands remained virtually without any management. The State lost more than four million hectares of ex Malguzari forests from

which the villagers were given their nistar requirements, that is, their requirements of fuel, fodder, bamboo and timber. 2.8 million hectares came under straight encroachment and massive deforestation of these lands led to the villagers turning to the reserve forests for their nistar requirements, thus bringing them into conflict with forest officials. The problem of our tribal districts is not an iniquitous tenure system but rather the push by politicians to regularise the encroachment of 2.8 million hectares of what should be forest land. The system came under some control in 1961 when the ex Malguzari forests were notified as protected forests and made over to the Forest Department for management, but the damage had already been done in those ten years between 1951 and 1961 in which we lost our village forests and our reserve forests came under increasing biotic pressure. It is touted that in the matter of land an unthinking State has exploited the tribals. Madhya Pradesh never had the Telangana type of iniquitous land holding pattern and, therefore, this is not the cause of tribal unrest in Chhattisgarh.

In December 1983 Arjun Singh, then Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh, asked me to extensively tour South Bastar because some signs of Naxalism were becoming visible. I found that Naxalism was not home-grown and that antisocial elements from Andhra Pradesh, uncomfortable because they were under pressure from that State, were trying to spread their wings in Madhya Pradesh. Administrative measures could be taken to counter them but in my report to the Chief Minister I told him bluntly that there was no political presence of any party in the area which could counter the Naxalites at a political level and that my officers were neither in a position nor would be permitted to look at Naxalite philosophy and advise people against it. That is not the job of a civil servant, nor is he equipped for it. Bastar has a political vacuum into which the Naxalites have entered. Most of the Naxalite leaders are non-tribals and their entire support system consists of people like Swami Agnivesh, Nandini Sunder, Binayak and Ila Sen, B.D, Sharma and a whole host of so-called activists who are busy exploiting the situation for their own advancement. The reaction of the State is weak, hesitating and not clear about how it views Naxalism and, therefore, it is the activists who are winning the day. This prepares the ground for almost unfettered Naxalite violence against which State action is so weak as to be almost laughable.

The Naxalites are not protectors of the tribals because that is not in their agenda, nor is it their objective. In fact in all the tribal districts where there is Naxalism all development has halted. My institute, the National Centre for Human Settlements and Environment, conducted an evaluation study for the Government of India of five Naxalite hit districts in Chhattisgarh to see the progress of development schemes and their effect on the tribal economy. Broadly speaking we found that: (1) All development programmes were halted, but with schools being a major target. (2) Such activity as was permitted by the terrorists carried a price. (3) Unless peace was restored there could be no development.

Let me give two examples. The first relates to construction of a road in Dantewada District, the contract of which went to a person from Nagpur. Before he started work he had to pay Rs. 20 lakhs to a Naxalite dalam. Thereafter another dalam made a further demand which he obviously could not meet. He was shot dead by that dalam. His outraged wife travelled to Dantewada and confronted the Naxalites, who had no answer to her searching questions. The second example is of a person whose name and location I am keeping confidential because his life could be endangered if the facts are in any way broadcast. Though hailing from Raipur District he lives outside the State. He has taken a tendupatta contract in the Bastar area, for which he has paid a handsome bribe to the Naxalites and continues to pay protection money. He

says that so long as he meets their demands he is not only free to collect tendupatta from the contracted area, he is even free to collect it from outside the area but under Naxalite protection.

In Bastar Division no bus or taxi can move except with Naxalite permission, which has to be purchased. The Naxalites seem to have an unending supply of weapons, rations, clothing and other equipment. Where does it come from? The Naxalites are not social activists. One can safely say that they are not 'Maowadi' but 'Hinsawadi'. Please, therefore, remove from government's lexicon any reference to the Naxalites as people fighting for the rights of the tribals. They are murderers and traitors and they must be treated as such, with no mercy and no compunction at extreme action against them. This must be instilled in every official who is dealing with the Naxalites or administering Naxal affected districts so that there is no confusion in their minds about how to deal with Naxalite terror. All the statements and actions of so-called activists who sympathise with the Naxalites must be swept aside as chaff.

In Jammu & Kashmir separatism and militancy are Pakistan inspired and fuelled. In fact there is active and live support by the Pakistan Army. Despite this neither the police nor the army have ever been in a situation where they seem to have lost control. In the Naxalite affected areas government has effectively lost control. This is what unleashed and encouraged an attack on the convoy of Congress leaders, which resulted in so many deaths. This situation must be corrected forthwith and though I have made many suggestions in the past I am repeating them here.

- (1) Every police station in the Naxalite affected areas should be fortified, armed and equipped to become a stronghold which cannot be breached by Naxalites under any circumstances. Andhra Pradesh has done this.
- (2) The police station be made a point from which the police aggressively patrols the area under its jurisdiction. Every patrol must be composite in that it should have a representative of the Revenue Department, Forest Department Agriculture Department, Medical Department, the Development Block or Panchyat and any other government organisation necessary so that every patrol establishes in the villages not only a police but a civil government presence.
- (3) There must be fighting patrols sent out from police camps which can bring Naxalite dalams to encounter.
- (4) The police must be equipped and trained with weaponry which can break an ambush. These must include armoured personnel carriers (not so-called mine protected vehicles) mortars, rocket launchers and other infantry weapons which can bring heavy fire power to bear on a Naxalite ambush, together with helicopter gunships which can strafe an ambush from the air.
- (5) Every ambush which succeeds raises Naxalite morale and brings them more recruits. For example, the Darbha Ghati ambush is probably worth five hundred recruits to the Naxalites. Every ambush which is broken lowers Naxalite morale and raises that of the police. The objective of all police action should be to inflict very heavy casualties on the Naxalites, preferably resulting in the complete wipe out of an entire dalam. The day an entire dalam is destroyed and the bodies with their weapons are available for public viewing Naxalite morale will take a nosedive and we shall begin to win the war against them. Great care must, of course, be taken to avoid innocent casualties, which means that every operation has to be well planned and ably commanded.

- (6) These measures are defensive, but wars require offensive action if we are to win them. My suggestion is that in the Bastar area we should organise one or more corps level training exercises in which an entire army corps with all its tanks and guns is asked to stamp around the jungle like a herd of elephants, driving everything before them. The Naxalites who are flushed out should be driven on to police guns waiting for them, resulting in their capture if possible or their death if they attack the police. Please do not allow dilution of the level of exercise because the terrain is hilly and heavily afforested and a fewer number of troops would be swallowed by the jungle.
- (7) The corps level exercise would have two components, plenty of noise and movement in order to create confusion and fear in the area and stealth when some definite intelligence is available about the location of a terrorist group so that the forces can silently infiltrate the area and then launch a massive strike on the identified target.

It is about time that our armed forces realise that the war against Naxalism is a real war being fought by the country, as important as the Kargil campaign. Let us stop pretending that everything is fine and let us deal with this in the most effective manner by using the entire power of the State against persons who are traitors. A change of government's mindset regarding Naxalism has one more requirement, which is that Jairam Ramesh should be told very firmly that he will not open his mouth in sympathy for the Naxalites, he will not tout development as the panacea for Naxalism till law and order is restored and he will stop making theatrical gestures such as riding around the area on the pillion of a motorcycle after the D.M. of Sukma was abducted. It is not his dramatics which resulted in Alex Paul Menon's release. It was the hard-line negotiations of Nirmala Buch which brought the Naxalites to their senses. We are fighting a war, so let us fight it.

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