

Consequences of delinquency

The administration's claims that capabilities of Maoists are diminishing are vastly exaggerated



***Maoists attacked* Maoists attacked the convoy of BJP legislator Bhima Mandavi in Dantewada, Chhattisgarh on April 9 , ANI**

Amid the heat and dust raised by the great Indian elections, two major attacks by the Communist Party of India-Maoist — Maoists in short — have missed the serious attention of the media and policymakers.

On May 1, 2019, Maoists killed 15 security forces belonging to the commandos of elite C-60 force of the Maharashtra police and a civilian, with an improvised explosive device (IED) in Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra.

As reported, the Maoists had earlier torched around 26 vehicles employed for construction work at the National Highway-136 site, to attract the attention of security forces and create a diversion.

The incident came at a time when Maoists were observing a week-long protest to mark the death anniversary of fellow cadres eliminated by security forces in two separate operations last year.

Earlier, in another incident, Maoists attacked the convoy of a sitting MLA, Bhima Mandavi, belonging to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), in Chhattisgarh on April 9, killing him two days before the first phase of

the general elections. In this case too, the Maoists used IED to target the MLA's convoy.

While these two major attacks have been lost in the general din of elections, the strong message that the Maoists have sent out, particularly in their areas of influence, needs to be critically engaged with.

In case of the MLA, the message has to be seen through the prism of Maoists and their views on Indian democracy and parliamentary form of government. Terming Indian democracy and the parliamentary system as a sham, the Maoists, through their armed movement, aim to herald a new democracy.

The protest against democracy by calling for boycotting elections and attacking polling booths, has been a permanent feature of Maoist politics.

However, by killing an elected representative during the election period, the Maoists have reasserted their stand against democracy, as well as exposed critical vulnerabilities in the state machinery.

The Maoist killing of elected representatives is not new, at least in the case of Chhattisgarh. In May 2013, just a few months before the state legislative election, Maoists carried out a brutal attack on the convoy of Mahendra Karma, one of the biggest leaders of the Congress party, killing a total of 27 people.

While responses from the governments of the day are largely ritualistic, at the level of political parties, the all-familiar blame game comes into play. Amidst the blame game, the Maoists assert their position against democracy very sternly and in unequivocal terms.

The Maoist messaging through the killing of security forces in Gadchiroli district is even stronger. The incident, which came at a time when Maoists were observing the death anniversary of cadres killed by security forces a year ago, can be seen as an act of vengeance. The coordinated tactics through which they trapped the security forces and then killed them highlight the negligence of the state machinery and the vastly improved guerrilla tactics of the Maoists.

This single act contradicts the position on the diminishing capabilities of the Maoists that successive governments have been keen to propagate in the last few years.

Against this official position of the state, Maoists have, time and again, demonstrated their capabilities in carrying out major attacks, especially against security forces.

Of late, Maoists seem to have made a critical tactical shift in terms of targeting big numbers and major figures. It is this tactical shift that has prompted attacks on security convoys and major political figures.

Repeated Maoist attacks and the killing of security forces can be seen as consequences of the government's delinquency. Two critical positions on the Maoist movement explain the government's repeated mistakes.

First, the government claims it has been successful in containing the Maoists to a great extent. The

accuracy of the claim comes only from fatality statistics. The success and failure of the Maoist movement, which has the stated objective of seizing political power through protracted violence, is unfortunately being determined only by the number of violent incidents. Using this approach, the state overlooks an important aspect of the movement, that is, the protracted nature of violent activities that the Maoists believe in.

De-escalation of Maoist-related violence in some places, or a few military successes against the radicals should not become the only point of engagement with the movement.

Secondly, a fundamental mistake in the government's position has been to dominantly look at the Maoists through the prism of security framework. An over-emphasis on military response limits the possibilities of exploring negotiations with the Maoists to a significant degree.

Hence, the government's responses against the Maoists seem to be overtly reactive in nature. It has not helped in reaching a solution to a violent conflict that has been going on for more than five decades.

As successive governments continue to repeat such mistakes, these 'occasional' violent activities seem to be a permanent feature of the Maoist movement.

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