



Indigenous Issues

[The occasional briefing papers of the Asian Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Network (AITPN)]
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Embargoed for: 10 July 2006

ADIVASIS:

Victims of India's Red Spectre Sandwiched in the Naxalite conflict

In his address to the Second Standing Committee Meeting of the Chief Ministers of the Naxalite affected States on 13 April 2006, Prime Minister of India, Dr. Manmohan Singh called Naxalism the "single biggest internal security challenge ever faced by our country". Naxalism named after ultra left wing armed movement in Naxalbari area of West Bengal in late 1960s had been brutally suppressed. After the suppression of the Naxalite movement in West Bengal, the Peoples War Group was the first Naxal group formed in Telengana region of Andhra Pradesh in 1980. Lately, it has risen like a spectre and has spread to over 160 districts out of a total 604 districts of India. During January - June 2006 alone, at least 453 persons were killed in nine Naxalite-affected states, including 90 security personnel, 182 alleged Naxalites and 181 civilians. Majority of the victims were Adivasis, the indigenous peoples of India.

The Naxalites on their part have also been responsible for violations of the rights of the Adivasis. However, in the areas where the Naxalites are active, the edifice of the State structure does not exist. Protests against the dictat of the Naxalites were violently silenced.

I. Salwa Judum: Adivasis caught between the devil and the deep blue sea

In June 2005, episodic resentments against the Naxalites took organised shape under the leadership of Mr Mahendra Karma, the Member of Legislative Assembly and Leader of the Opposition in the Chhattisgarh State Legislative Assembly. Mr Karma, an Adivasi himself, christened it in a local Gondi language, "*Salwa Judum*" or Peace Initiative. It soon received the State sanction and became part of Chhattisgarh government's experiment with counter-insurgency operations to tackle the Naxalites. The civil war began in earnest.

The *Salwa Judum* has been far from a peaceful campaign with hundreds of the cadres (3200 in Dantewada alone) being given full military training as Special Police Officers. It has created a civil war where one is either with the

Naxalites or with the *Salwa Judum*. As the Naxalites followed the policy of forcibly recruiting one cadre from each family, in numerous cases, members of the same family have been pitted against each other.

The Adivasis have been caught between the devil and the deep blue sea. While the security forces and the *Salwa Judum* cadres have been terrorizing the innocent villagers if they do not support the *Salwa Judum* campaign against the Naxalites, the Naxalites retaliated by intensifying attacks against the tribal civilians irrespective of whether they support *Salwa Judum* campaign on their own volition or by force. On 28 February 2006, the Naxalites exploded landmines at a group of civilians who were returning from a *Salwa Judum* meeting, killing 28 Adivasi civilians at Darbhaguda village in Dantewada district of Chhattisgarh. On 25 April 2006, Naxalites abducted 52 Adivasi camp inmates, including 13 women from Manikonta village in Dantewada district of Chhattisgarh and brutally killed 15 of them.

Chhattisgarh has turned into the epicenter of the Naxalite conflict.

Salwa Judum campaign has resulted into sharp increase of killings of civilians. Yet, the Central government, bereft of any strategy, has decided to instruct the police of the affected states and other Central forces to actively support "*Salwa Judum*" type counter insurgency operations.

II. Plight of the IDPs

Salwa Judum campaign has become synonymous with displacement of the tribals from their villages and providing them temporary shelter in government managed camps with a view to disconnect the Maoists from the populace. More than 50,000 Adivasis have been displaced and have been provided shelter in 27 relief camps. An unknown number of tribal villagers have also taken shelter in the camps run by the Naxalites in the areas controlled by them. Many have fled to neighbouring States like Andhra Pradesh and Orissa. As the conflict intensifies, the displacement also increases.

The situation of these internally displaced persons is deplorable. The relief camps lack basic facilities. Most of the makeshift camps are roofed with leaves of trees and open from all sides while only a few have tarpaulin

roofing. Life becomes more difficult during the rainy days as water pours in through the roofs and all sides. In the name of ration, the inmates get a square meal of rice and dal, which is thin and watery. Many of those displaced tribals were starving and desperate in the relief camps. They have been left without any work, and the government provided little monetary assistance.

There are little medical facilities in the camps. Educational facilities are non-existent.

Most importantly, there is no security around the camps. There have been a couple of attacks by the Naxalites at the camps. On 16 April 2006, at least 10 security personnel, including 6 special police officers (SPOs), were killed in a Naxalite attack at the Murkinar relief camp in Bijapur police district in South Bastar. The Naxalites also looted arms and ammunition including AK-47 rifles, grenades and rocket launchers from the security forces.

III. Need for accelerated socio-economic development

In its latest Annual Report, the Ministry of Home Affairs acknowledged the fact that "Naxalism is not merely a law and order problem but has deep socio-economic dimensions." Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in his address on 13 April 2006 has also pointed out that "Exploitation, artificially depressed wages, iniquitous socio-political circumstances, inadequate employment opportunities, lack of access to resources, under developed agriculture, geographical isolation, lack of land reforms, all contribute significantly to the growth of the Naxalite movement."

However, apart from Karnataka and West Bengal, other State governments such as Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Orissa and Uttar Pradesh only announced security measures. Special programmes undertaken for the upliftment of the tribal areas seldom reach the beneficiaries. The Planning Commission's evaluation of Integrated Tribal Development Projects found misutilization and diversion of funds meant for the tribals. But, these issues have not been addressed. In many rural areas including those vacated because of Salwa Judum campaign, the edifice of the State structure simply does not exist to implement any programme. The so-called socio-economic programmes are unlikely to have any positive effects without a "Ministry for

Development of the Naxalite-affected States" which will accelerate socio-economic development in the Naxalite-affected states on war footing.

With the state governments recruiting more Adivasi youths from the Naxal-affected areas into the armed forces exclusively to fight the Naxalites, the war has come home. Tribals in the Naxalite affected areas do not necessarily share the ideology of the Naxalites. But dispossession, deprivation and exploitation against them provide the classical situation for the ultra-leftist uprising. The problem cannot be bad governance, sub-human conditions and hunger inside the government-run Salwa Judum camps.