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Maoists Gain in the State

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Barely five years ago, hardly anyone in West Bengal was aware of the presence of Maoists in the state.

Today political circles and civil society are abuzz debating how the Maoists are outwitting 50 companies of central paramilitary troops amassed in a small place called Lalgarh and whether their dream of building a corruption/exploitation free society will ever bear fruit. The Maoists never hoped to dominate the minds of argumentative Bengalis as they are doing now.

In the process, the rebels have been able to raise several issues hardly ever touched upon in Left Front-ruled West Bengal.

Their landmine blasts and politics through the barrel of their guns have killed many CPI(M) as well as police personnel. But they have also drawn public attention to the abject poverty and governmental neglect in large parts of the state. The "Marxist" government swore by the poor and yet did nothing for the truly marginalised population.

More significantly, the Maoists have slowly but surely begun to inch forward to occupy the Opposition space in the state.

So long, Mamata Banerjee had remained the only voice against "CPI(M)" s misrule." Now the Maoists are raising a similar voice but more vigorously. And despite the massive police operation in Lalgarh, they are having a free run and organising huge rallies, showing that they enjoy the support of locals.

Mamata is expectedly uneasy.

For the first time she has started criticising the Maoists saying that the rebels were in fact agents of the CPI(M) and that because of their call for election boycott, the Left Front could win the Lok Sabha polls in West Midnapore, Purulia and Bankura. Not many are accepting her charges though.

An altogether different form of dilemma has gripped a section of the ruling Left. Though they are critical of the Maoist violence, they are also quietly appreciating the Maoists" commitment to the cause. "True, they are extorting money. But they are not living in five-star luxury. They are staying in the forests even in this monsoon. On the contrary we can't move without air-conditioned cars anymore," rued a CPI leader.

Can the ills of our political and social system be extirpated through democratic means or is a revolution that the Maoists are seeking desirable, is the issue that Bengali civil society is now hotly debating.

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