

People Tip Off Cops on Maoist Activities

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A couple of months ago, an attempt had been made in this column to draw attention to the Maoists' gradual isolation from the people in West Bengal. We had talked about the "hows" and "whys" of the Naxalites' popularity and then about the gradual decline in the appeal they had for the people. Today it is time to talk about why the villagers are increasingly passing on information to the police on the Maoists' movements--a development unthinkable even six months ago.

Till recently it was common among police officials posted in Lalgarh to lament the lack of field level intelligence on the movement of the rebels. The villagers were not cooperative, the police always said. Some even went to the absurd extent of assuming that all the villagers in the Lalgarh-Belpahari-Salboni area had become Maoists.

But early last week, the police received specific information from the villagers that the Maoists were holding a training camp near Salboni. The raid helped recover the elusive politburo member Kishanji's laptop.

Less than 24 hours later, the police were once again tipped off by villagers that the same group was imparting training in Belpahari. The subsequent police raid resulted in a fierce gunbattle and the death of one Maoist.

Yet in the last 10 years or so, in tribal dominated West Midnapore, Bankura and Purulia--the three western districts of the state which border Jharkhand on one side and Orissa on the other--the Maoists were the only political force that fought against exploitation and demanded equal rights and opportunities for all. They fought for higher daily wages, better health care facilities and schools, managing to get some of the demands fulfilled. Naturally they became popular.

Since the deployment of the central paramilitary forces, however, the Maoists seem to be ignoring the people's issues and are busy militarily resisting the police and gunning down "CPM informers." The Maoist-led Peoples' Committee against Police Atrocities (PCPA), too, has largely given up its mass movement on the people's grievances and is fighting the police with guns. Also, the PCPA has begun to "punish" the wayward after trying them in "peoples' courts." Those who drink alcohol and those who are not serious enough about resisting the police are beaten up publicly.

The brutal methods resorted to in these peoples' courts and the regular killings of CPI(M) men are instilling a sense of fear among the people. This is leading to their isolation from the masses. This is a distinct change. Union home minister P. Chidambaram is coming to Kolkata on February 9 to meet the chief ministers of Bengal, Jharkhand, Bihar and Orissa and kickstart the long-awaited Operation Green Hunt against the Maoists in the backdrop of this changed scenario.

<http://www.indiatoday.intoday.in/site/Story/81985/India/People+tip+off+cops+on+Maoist+activities+.html>