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## **Kishenji: "Without Expansion, We Can't Retain our Existing Bases"**

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Maoists are eyeing areas beyond their forest and rural strongholds and speaking in a language that would do opposition political parties proud.

This strategy, which has also seen the Left-wing extremists surface in a new, media-savvy avatar, comes even as Maoist violence has increased in the country.

The ultimate goal of the banned CPI (Maoist) — the rebel outfit's writ runs across large swathes of Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Bihar, Orissa, Jharkhand and West Bengal — remains "seizure of power at the Centre to change the constitution and establish new democracy".

But strategically, Maoists feel the need to expand their base to newer areas, since this would also keep security forces diverted, and speak on issues that resonate with voters.

"Without expansion, we can't retain our existing bases," CPI (Maoist) politburo member and eastern operations in-charge, Koteswar Rao alias Kishenji, told *Hindustan Times*.

The need for an urban base has made the Maoists behave more like a mainstream political party, if recent events in West Bengal and other rebel-affected states are anything to go by.

The various issues Maoists have recently spoken about include price rise; industrial pollution; coal theft; daily working hours and wages in factories; hike in education fees and municipal taxes; protection of national wealth and corruption in the political system and bureaucracy.

But there has been no let-up in violence: there were more than 2,000 incidents of violence involving Maoists last year, up from 1,591 incidents in 2008, according to the Union Home Ministry.

Yet, the Maoists are trying to give the impression that they are playing a proactive role in the issues of the state, a senior bureaucrat in Kolkata said.

Kishenji even commented on the Copenhagen climate summit and its fallout. He raised a storm of sorts by calling up the West Bengal environment secretary M.L. Meena in December to "discuss" environmental issues.

Director General of West Bengal Police Bhupinder Singh said it was evident from the Maoists' media interactions that they were trying to address the urban and semi-urban populations.

“This is the largest target audience of the media so Maoists are trying to portray themselves as good people fighting for just causes,” he said.

Maoists have also shown willingness to father movements jointly with mainstream parties on common issues. “These forums help them build contacts and expand the strength of cadres,” Singh said. “Students in urban areas are soft targets.”

Kishenji reportedly called up several leaders fighting for the cause of Telangana’s statehood to chalk out a joint action plan.

In Jharkhand and Orissa, the rebels are attempting to build a mass movement with other parties against polluting sponge iron factories.

In November, Maoists supported a Bengal bandh called by the Socialist Unity Centre of India to protest price rise. Kishenji called up Forward Bloc central committee member Hafiz Alam Sairani during the party’s meet in December, proposing a joint movement against price hike and SEZs.

Police reports say Maoists send “political observers” to places of unrest in urban and semi-urban areas

In Andhra Pradesh, though about a dozen small Maoist groups operate besides the CPI (Maoist), their influence is limited to small pockets. Of these, two groups — CPI-ML (Janashakti) and CPI-ML (New Democracy) — have participated in elections in the past. In Jharkhand, Maoists are not only influencing polls, but also fighting elections in a big way.

Polush. S, a “commander” of a CPI (Maoist) breakaway faction, defeated Koche Munda of the BJP from Torpa assembly seat in Khunti district sparking celebrations in the Simdega jail, where Polush was lodged.

In Chhattisgarh, the police had “dismantled the urban network” of the rebels but “their urban connections and groups have again expanded”, state police spokesman RK Vij said.

Overall, as the pressure on the rebels increases in their hideouts across the country — with Home Minister P. Chidambaram taking a tough line against them and several senior politburo members behind bars — the Maoists are trying to make inroads into urban areas and simultaneously gain political ground.

*(With inputs from Ashok Das in Hyderabad, B Vijay Murty in Jamshedpur and Ejaz Kaiser in Raipur)*

<http://www.hindustantimes.com/News-Feed/kolkata/Guns-and-poses/Article1-499944.aspx>