

[Rebel ring around cordon of 'security' Maoists' military tactic](http://www.telegraphindia.com/1090902/jsp/bengal/story_11440093.jsp)

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Lalgargh, Sept. 1 [2009]: The Maoists' brutality in Lalgargh does not lack method.

First, they have carried out their operations outside the security forces' "circle of domination" — the roads ringing Pirakata, Goaltore, Kadashole, Ramgarh, Kantapahari and Lalgargh. That speaks of a military mind and a tactic called "counter-encirclement".

Second, the Maoists have effectively cut off most field intelligence assets the security forces could seek to cultivate. Across three police station areas — Salboni, Lalgargh and Goaltore — CPM activists have put up posters in villages proclaiming they have abandoned the party.

Counter-encirclement has also meant that the Maoists have expanded their area of influence.

"In my area, only Pingboni was Maoist-affected till June," said Sharmistha Ghosh Roy, block development officer at Goaltore.

"But from the reports I'm getting now, Maoist squads are roaming around at will in all seven panchayats."

Currently, 40 companies of central and state forces are involved in Operation Lalgargh. There were 50 at one time in June. These forces include the CRPF, BSF, India Reserve Battalion, Bengal Armed Police and Cobra units.

A senior officer visiting Midnapore indicated, but did not confirm, that the Cobra units were being retreated temporarily. Contingents of the Calcutta police that were sent have been mostly re-deployed.

The officer said, on the strength of the expansion of the Maoist area of influence as in Goaltore block, that there was an urgent requirement for at least 10 more companies of forces. But he is prepared to wait out the monsoon.

That means the offensive is likely to be more vigorous as soon as the season turns drier — coinciding with the all-India operation the Centre is planning and a hammer-and-sickle move with the aid of forces in Jharkhand, across the district and state boundary.

Chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee insisted (in absentia) on the move from Jharkhand at the conclave convened by Union home minister P. Chidambaram last week.

This means more guns and mortars are likely to be poured into Lalgarh, increasing the likelihood of a bloody crackdown that Bengal, heading into an election with the potential to be regime-altering, can probably ill-afford.

“Had it not been for Nandigram, Lalgarh would not have assumed such a scale,” said the officer.

In an oblique way, Chhatradhar Mahato corroborated this. “Look at what the CPM government did in Nandigram,” he said.

“Why do you think it does not want to repeat its violence here? It is only the resistance of the people and popularity of our movement that is stalling it.”

The possibility that the powder keg in the lab called Lalgarh will still blow up is high because this has ceased to be a Nandigram-Singur-Bengal only dispute. The Centre has planned to test and learn from here.

“Lalgarh is the laboratory for the kind of operation we will carry out in Chhattisgarh (and elsewhere),” Union home secretary G.K. Pillai had said in New Delhi on August 20.

“When they (the Maoists) learn from us, we also learn from them.”

Chidambaram, soon to visit each of the states where the Maoists have bases, has stated that he has a clear, two-pronged strategy: first, use the forces to clear and hold; second, fire a development surge.

But Lalgarh has shown the Maoists have a three-pronged strategy as well: first, resist and revolt; second, cut off the forces from the people, if necessary by butchering suspected informers.

A third, and more complex tactic they have adopted, is to gain/retain popularity by initiating new social reconstruction projects or by hijacking the state’s dole-giving role.

For instance, in Lalgarh where their writ ran unchallenged for eight months till June, they dug tanks and, in Kantapahari, opened a community hospital.

Now, they are also seeking to cut into the administration’s own welfare schemes. They have asked villagers to question why the Rs 81 per head promised under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme in these parts should not be distributed by the “people’s own committees”.

How strange that in this, too, they should mirror the CPM’s style of functioning. Just as the party ruling Bengal has converted welfare plans into a patronage distribution system, the Maoists too are doing image-building by hijacking government schemes.

Two days back, in Kuldiha, a village where the Bengal police brutally beat womenfolk in June, a woman herding goats said she was looking forward to getting some of the old-age pension for tribals that she has heard is doled out by the administration.

"I don't care where and who, *era dik ba ora dik* (whether these people give it or those people give it), as long as I get it," she said.

In the lab called Lalgah, they simply seek deliverance. **II**