

A Sensible Democratic Alternative to the Proposed Military Offensive

by Sanhati, Undated but probably from October 2009 [<http://sanhati.com>]

The government's proposal for large-scale military offensive in Central and parts of Eastern India has been opposed by democratic minded people from across the world. Democratic sections of civil society in India have called for an immediate halt to the government's military offensive. They have argued that the conflict be resolved through negotiations between the government and the CPI(Maoist). In response, the Home Minister has stated that in a "democracy", such negotiations can only be held if CPI(Maoist) "abjures violence". This is, to say the least, disingenuous. As these sorts of conflicts are by definition "asymmetrical", and since the military might of the Indian state is incomparably superior, it is the responsibility of the government to take the first steps to win over the confidence of the adivasis and the rebels by calling off the military offensive. When the government is sending in thousands of paramilitary troops, encircling key areas and continuing military action on the rebels, asking the rebels and the people to give up arms as a precondition for negotiations, is certain to ensure that no negotiations take place.

Therefore, in order to gain the confidence of the common people that the government is sincere in its intention to end the conflict through negotiations, it needs to take at least the following concrete steps.

1. The military offensive must be immediately and unequivocally called off and all military and paramilitary from the forested and semi-forested areas of Central and Eastern India must be withdrawn. Moreover, in order to create a genuine atmosphere of trust, all state agencies should stop issuing threatening and hostile statements against the CPI(Maoist) and stop harassing its activists and sympathizers. The CPI(Maoist) should also, on its part, reciprocate by suspending all armed activities and desist from issuing threatening statements against anyone.
2. The Unlawful Activity (Prevention) Act and Chhattisgarh Special Public Security Act must be repealed. Also, specifically, the ban on CPI(Maoist) by the government of India should be lifted and the CPI(Maoist) and its frontal organisations, if any, should not be banned by creating some new laws. Political prisoners jailed or in custody for being involved with so-called left extremist activities and hundreds of adivasis/non-adivasis imprisoned using fabricated charges need to be freed unconditionally.
3. All Memoranda of Understanding (MoU-s) signed with different corporations, for the extraction of natural resources from the vast areas of East-Central India, must be revealed and immediately canceled.

4. Salwa Judum and similar bodies must be disbanded. A tribunal be appointed to investigate their atrocities carried out in connivance with the police, para-military forces and government agencies.

5. Negotiations must not be used as a ruse to liquidate activists of the CPI(Maoist) or any people's movements. To ensure this, the Central and concerned State Government should submit an undertaking to a mediating body, composed of representatives chosen by the government and the CPI(Maoist), that no encounter deaths, armed actions, espionage activity would be carried out during the mutually agreed upon ceasefire.

Most importantly, we reiterate that the crux of this conflict is the neo-liberal model of development pursued by the Indian state, which has been threatening the life and livelihoods of the common people. The government's declaration that developmental packages will follow the victory over the rebels raises fear that it has plans ready to roll in the kinds of "development" that suit the interests of multinational and domestic big corporations once these regions, rich with natural resources, have been cleansed of political dissent and the entire population has been either killed or displaced and pauperized as a result of the military offensive. If the government does not have any such plans, it should immediately engage in dialogue with people of the regions along with the suspension of military operations.

6. Thus, a wide-ranging debate on the model of development for these regions must be conducted without any delay. Given the stiff opposition by the local population to the development model that is being pushed down their throats by the government, there should not be any attempt to implement any pre-determined "development package". Rather, there must be a serious initiative to comprehend and document what measures constitute development in the eyes of the local population and what are the ways to implement these measures such that the people concerned are in primary control of this process. Any developmental process and its modalities must be an outcome of such discussions.

7. In view of the above scenario, the government should also immediately repeal the SEZ Act 2005 and stop all the projects that have so far been cleared. It should also address the concerns related to laws of acquisition of land for corporate interests. Moreover, the government must immediately cease all evictions and diversion of forest land, under the guise of industrialisation, resource extraction or conservation, and expeditiously settle rights to forest land and forest produce.