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Maoists growing stronger, waging war of the mind: CRPF chief

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The fight is between 7,000-8,000 armed Maoist rebels versus 60,000-70,000 security personnel. But the enemy is "incisive, self critical and educative", armed with sophisticated weaponry and is constantly changing tactic in what is increasingly become a war of the mind, says the paramilitary Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) chief.

As the government gears up for a massive offensive against the guerrillas, top officials of the CRPF say the guerrillas are "growing stronger" and must not be underestimated.

"They are changing their tactics depending upon what we are doing," CRPF Director General A.S. Gill told IANS in an interview.

Giving an example, he said they have increased the usage of pressure mines. "They are also using sharpened iron nails. They have dug ditches in jungles and covered it with normal grass after hiding nails inside. Though these nails do not kill any trooper, it affects swift movement of the security agencies," Gill said.

The Maoists, he said, were also avoiding direct contact with security forces. "They just pass from nearby areas," added Gill, who heads one of the world's largest paramilitary forces. The CRPF has 207 battalions with a strength of over 200,000 personnel.

The security forces had also changed strategy to minimise operational casualties from improvised explosives used by the guerrillas.

"For a long time, we did not acknowledge that the Maoists were growing stronger, but there is a greater realisation now. We have changed our tactics and training. Theatre specific training has also been introduced for the first time to enhance specific capabilities in fighting the problems of militancy and insurgency," he said.

The CRPF was also raising 10 new commando battalions and acquiring the best available weapons and equipment to fight the guerrillas.

"We will have Maoists on the run very soon. The areas under their control would be taken back," he promised.

His colleague, CRPF Special Director General Vijay Raman, added: "We are facing an enemy which is fighting from the brain. They are very incisive, self critical and educative. The documents seized from them shows the meticulous planning behind their strikes."

Raman is a celebrated police officer who has been appointed by the home ministry as national coordinator in the anti-Maoist campaign.

Though the government has not specified any time frame for the launch of the nationwide operation against the guerrillas, it is believed that the offensive will begun in March next year.

Asked how long would the operations last, Raman said: "No such time frame could be set. The task is very challenging and it might take some time."

Estimating that about 7,000-8,000 armed Maoist cadres would be up in arms against 60,000-70,000 security personnel, CRPF chief Gill listed what makes the guerrillas formidable enemies.

"They are armed with light machine guns (LMG), AK-47s, AK-56s, Insas rifles, satellite phones, modern communication gadgets. It also believed that some of the top rungs have managed to acquire bulletproof jackets," he said.

"They are in touch with anti-national elements in northeastern states and are getting weapons from them. The people in the northeast are getting weapons and money from across the border. They are also in touch with Maoists in Nepal and extorting money from miners to fund their activities," he added.

Gill said the Maoists enjoy the advantage of having a significant presence in each village of their stronghold states. "We would be also focusing on breaking up their information network."

The CRPF that has been dealing with internal security challenges all across the country has this year gunned down 70 terrorists, 56 Maoists and 53 extremists in northeast. During these operations it also incurred heavy loss by sacrificing its nearly 200 men.

Troops from other central paramilitary forces like Indo-Tibet Border Police, Border Security Force, Central Industrial Security Force and Sashastra Seema Bal have started grouping and upgrading their infrastructure in preparation for the offensive against the Maoists.

They were also familiarising themselves with the terrain and undergoing training. The government has left commandos of the National Security Guard (NSG) out of the operation.

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