

LOST LIVES: ON GADCHIROLI NAXAL ATTACK

Relevant for: Security Related Matters | Topic: Linkages between development and spread of extremism incl. Naxalism

The death of 15 security personnel in a [landmine attack in Gadchiroli](#) on Wednesday is another grim reminder of the Indian state's continued failure to crush naxalism. Less than a month ago, a legislator and some security personnel lost their lives in a similar attack in the neighbouring State of [Chhattisgarh](#) ahead of polling. That this attack should occur despite the deployment of 30 companies of the Central Reserve Police Force — a company comprises 135 personnel — and 13 companies of the State Reserve Police Force as well as 5,500 personnel of the local police in Gadchiroli and neighbouring Chandrapur district shows not only the audacity of the perpetrators but also the unpreparedness of the security forces. A Quick Response Team was going down the road to Dadpur in Kurkheda where extremists had set fire to three dozen vehicles of a road construction company earlier in the day when the explosion blasted the team to smithereens. The ease with which the extremists were able to torch so many vehicles is alarming, and the manner in which the response team blithely drove into an ambush is a shocking example of poor planning. The naxals set the bait and the security forces blindly took it. In the process, standard operating procedures, including letting a road-opening team lead the way, seem to have been ignored. Yet, the authorities still remain in a state of denial.

It is no coincidence either that the perpetrators chose the Maharashtra Foundation Day, after the polling in the district, to send this violent message. That the naxals should be able to control the narrative, remain on top of the intelligence, stay nimble and several steps ahead of the security planners should be a matter of deep concern. It is some comfort that the polling percentages in both Gadchiroli and neighbouring Chandrapur have risen, compared to the 2014 Lok Sabha election, from 70.04% to 71.98% and from 63.29% to 64.65%, respectively. But the path of the voter to the polling booth in the naxal-dominated districts is still paved with disincentives. And, the security forces deployed in the region have not been able to instil in them a greater level of confidence. On top of everything else, most of the police personnel who perished in this latest attack seem to have been local citizens. What effect could this have on the larger process of weaning away the populace from the naxalites? Reality beckons. Even in the prevailing circumstances of a hostile external environment, India cannot afford to take the challenges of internal security lightly.

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