

## OPINION

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

Here are home truths about “Urban Naxals”. It’s a cheesy label, easy to apply and difficult to dismiss in times of right-wing ascendancy. But it’s true. There are such people.

The Maoist rebellion—“Naxal” is often used interchangeably and incorrectly—uses their support. Other rebel movements and groups, say, from North-east India, too, almost always have an urban factor, handy for shelter, support, propaganda and recruitment.

The problem of human rights violations by government arrives not because such support centres for rebels exist. They arrive when governments, political parties and security agencies use the label as a broad brush to paint strident critics, even those who aren’t pro-Maoist. Subsequently, there is reluctance to furnish proof in either courts of law or to the public—for whose benefit arrests of such folk were spectacularly staged.

Pro-government and conservative media usually go along with the government version. They did so with the arrests in early June of five activists and academics on the charge of being over-ground Maoists and for triggering violence around a major pro-Dalit commemorative event near Pune in January. They did so in late-August when five activists, lawyers and writers were arrested in northern and western India.

Similar things have happened even with a centrist government in Delhi and various states. In May 2013, after the attack on a motorcade containing Congress politicians in southern Chhattisgarh, establishment-led media reaction ranged from calls for engaging the army in this conflict over the lack of governance and development, and for the airforce to bomb Maoist strongholds. Some analysts, including retired generals, suggested that Maoists are only a step away from urban India.

The Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government was in power at the time, but the optics were near-identical to those applied by the subsequent Bharatiya Janata Party-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government since mid-2014. Indeed, the last government to renege on a possible peace deal with Maoists was the UPA government, back in 2010. Now, as then, the move was to escalate war instead of escalating peace.

The Maoists have, for years, had a plan to infiltrate urban India. Rebel recruitment in urban areas continues to groom future ideologues and leaders, even though the rebellion is severely stressed. Urban sanctuaries continue to offer shelter. Several top leaders have been arrested from cities. But a plan is not the same thing as a letter-perfect execution.

First, Maoists are methodical practitioners of anger management in a manner designed to change what they perceive as a deeply corrupt system. And second, Maoists perceive their battle as being exceedingly difficult in rural spaces and more so in urban areas.

Observers and analysts of the rebellion occasionally refer to a document, *Urban Perspective: Our Work in Urban Areas*, dated to 2004. This document is held as a Maoist blueprint for urban ingress, and details various things from establishing front organizations and shielding behind civil society groups, to establishing cellular structures to carry out propaganda and recruitment among disaffected industrial labour and urban poor; and beefing up technological prowess to carry out “military tasks”, including infiltration of the police. This is a lateral shift from focusing on,

say, purely agrarian and caste issues, and discrimination against tribal populations.

But many urban spaces have good policing. Some also house massive army cantonments—evidently a deterrent for all but Jihadist suicide teams. Cities remain a magnet for livelihood. The “Urban Perspective” document acknowledges this: “We cannot repeatedly replicate in the city the offensive tactics suited to the rural movement.”

The document adds: “Thus, we cannot expect to regularly use armed strength to threaten factory owners, conduct negotiations through secret organizers, or annihilate managers, as would be possible in rural areas of a guerrilla zone.”

Stealth is how it works. “Urban Naxals” help it work. And, there is a pipeline of recruitment, shelter and assistance that extends from some cities to rural conflict zones. But to label all critics of the system as “Urban Naxals” is as dangerous, delusional and cynical as expecting Nariman Point to become a Maoist business district.

*This column focuses on conflict situations and the convergence of businesses and human rights and runs on Thursdays. Read Sudeep Chakravarti's earlier columns at [livemint.com/rootcause](http://livemint.com/rootcause)*

**END**

Downloaded from [crackIAS.com](http://crackIAS.com)

© **Zuccess App** by [crackIAS.com](http://crackIAS.com)

CrackIAS