

'AREAS UNDER MAOISTS HAVE SHRUNK BY 40% IN PAST THREE YEARS'

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

The Central Reserve Police Force has been the main force fighting Maoists in 10 States affected by left-wing extremism. CRPF Director-General R.R. Bhatnagar says the force was undertaking several operations to choke the presence of Maoists in south Bastar, their core area, in Chhattisgarh.

What is the position

of the red corridor as of

now as many areas have been cleared of Maoist presence?

If you look at the number of districts, then the areas under the influence of left-wing extremism have shrunk by more than 40% in the last three years.

Any particular area where the thrust is on?

Today, the main challenge is in south Bastar and also some areas on the Odisha-Andhra Pradesh border and certain parts of Jharkhand.

There have been reports of Maoists recruiting children?

Maoists are known to use children and women for gathering information. Sometimes, they are also sent as advance teams to track the movement of forces. They are also used as a cover whenever there is confrontation with the security forces.

What will be the strength of the Maoists?

It varies in different regions. In Jharkhand, the number of active cadres wouldn't be more than 300. In Chhattisgarh, large groups are operating. The Dandakaranya Special Zone Committee, the strongest military formation in south Bastar, presents most challenge to us. We have opened 15 new camps in Chhattisgarh this year, and we are getting closer to their core areas, so that the striking distance and striking time decreases.

What has been the other challenge?

IEDs (improvised explosive devices) have been the main threat this year. Last year, 575 IEDs were detected; maximum were in Jharkhand (292) followed by Chattisgarh (159) and Bihar (81). This year, already 230 IEDs have been recovered, mostly from the three States. Last year, there were 29 IED explosions and this year, 16 such blasts have taken place. Central forces will clear the areas but subsequently these areas have to be developed by opening of roads, bridges, schools, banks, mobile towers... People realise Maoists are anti-development, that is why the areas of influence have been shrinking.

Who is the number one target of the security forces in the current Maoist leadership?

The main military formations are in south Bastar. Hidma leads one of these formations. This is their core area. We are approaching it from north and plugging in from the Telangana side also. From all the sides, we are getting in more forces and more personnel are to be inducted in Chhattisgarh ... frequent operations are planned to deny them the space.

What about action against supporters operating in villages?

The CRPF has helped local police apprehend around 500 people who had warrants against them. People who are part of the support system of the Maoists, in terms of logistics, providing intelligence to the Maoists, raising manpower, helping them in planting IEDs, identifying potential recruits. So they have different layers ... not just military organisation, they have a very tight control over the villagers and keep a check on their movement and what they do.

Where are they getting the explosives from?

Most explosives are assembled through commonly available materials. Urea, diesel, gelatine (used in quarrying), cordex wire and detonators (used in mines), etc. are used to make IEDs. There are quite a few suggestions to plug the gaps like delay mechanism in detonators at the time of manufacturing. Government is also considering if detonators could only be activated with the help of security codes. With the introduction of such advanced technologies, the detonators could be tracked and its misuse restricted.

There were reports of Maoists concealing IEDs under roads at the time of construction. Has the issue been addressed ?

Recently, we recovered IEDs weighing more than 50 kg that were inserted at the time when the road was being constructed. That threat is not entirely removed ... there could be more IEDs there, constant effort being made to defuse them. We are looking at mechanised ways of detecting the IEDs, rather than the handheld detectors because they cannot cover much area. If we need to cover 40 km of a road, then a vehicle with an array of detectors in front can check the entire road in one go.

In 2017, we recovered 847 kg of explosives, this year already 1,151 kg have been recovered. As much as 90% of our losses and injuries have been through IEDs. The threat from IED was already there, but now they are resorting to it even more as we are able to defend ourselves better in combat situations and they are not able to inflict much damage.

Where is Muppala Lakshman Rao, alias Ganapathi, the elusive head of the banned CPI(Maoist)?

I would not like to disclose it.

Do you have his recent photograph?

It is the work of the intelligence agencies and as I said earlier, I can't share anything on his whereabouts.

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