

CPI (Maoist) and Urban Movement

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May 12, 2014

The detention of G N Saibaba, on May 9, 2014, in New Delhi, by the Maharashtra police has, once again, brought into focus the urban network and presence of Naxalites of the Communist Party of India (Maoist), or Maoists in short. Saibaba is an English lecturer at Ramlal Anand College, Delhi University. He has been arrested for allegedly being an over-ground activist of the CPI (Maoist) and for allegedly providing logistics, helping in recruitment and maintaining contacts with the Maoist leadership.

He is well known to be an active leader of the Revolutionary Democratic Front (RDF), a front organisation of the Maoists that has been proscribed in Andhra Pradesh.

The Maoists had prepared an urban perspective plan – a blue print for their urban movement/activities in September 2007. It is believed that Gobad Ghandy alias Rajan, who was arrested in September 2009 in New Delhi, played a major role in the preparation of this urban perspective plan.

The Urban Movement has a defined role in the political strategy and military strategy of the CPI (Maoist). According to the CPI (Maoist), "... being the centres of concentration of the industrial proletariat, urban areas play an important part within the political strategy of the new Democratic Revolution". The Maoists envisage that they would mobilise and organise the industrial workers and channelise them towards playing "leadership role in organising the agrarian revolution by sending by sending ... advanced detachment to the rural areas".

In the Maoist scheme of things the objectives/tasks of the Urban Movement could be classified under three broad heads: (a) mobilise and organise the basic masses and build the party on that basis ; (b) build the United Front ; and (c) Military tasks .

The urban movement has served the Maoists in a number ways. These are discussed briefly in the succeeding passages.

Logistics Support

The utility of having a presence in urban centres and operate there was best illustrated in recent times when police seized empty rocket shells and rocket launchers on September 8, 2006, in Mahabubnagar district, Andhra Pradesh. The kingpin, 'Tech Madhu', later surrendered to the police on October 17, 2006, in the district headquarters town of Warangal, Andhra Pradesh. The seizures and surrender led to the detection of an elaborate network the Maoists had built to manufacture rocket parts and transport them to different parts of the country. The network originated in the industrial centre of Ambattur, a suburb of Chennai where these were fabricated in separate foundries, and stealthily transported in private commercial carriers to different parts of

the country. The network spread across five States: Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Orissa .

Rest and Recuperation

On many occasions important top-level leaders of the CPI (Maoist) have been arrested from cities and towns. Malla Raji Reddy alias Sattenna was arrested on December 17, 2007, in Angamaly town, Ernakulam district, Kerala. He is a member of the Central Military Commission that guides all military activities, member of the all-powerful and apex Central Committee and the core Politbureau. Earlier, Sridhar Krishan Srinivasan alias Vishnu was arrested on August 19, 2007, in Mumbai. He is a member of the Politbureau and Maharashtra State Committee Secretary of the CPI (Maoist). Separately on the same day, Vernin Gonsalves alias Vikram, member of the Maharashtra State Committee, was arrested in Mumbai.

Tapping Industrial Workers

The detection of Maoist activities in towns such as Surat, in Gujarat, earlier in 2006, clearly indicates that the Maoists are attempting to penetrate the urban-based working class movement in the country. Besides, there have been reports since September 2006 of the detection of Maoist activities in Haryana — in Jhind, Kurukshetra, Panipat, Sonapat, etc. A closer look at these areas reveals that these industrial hubs. In Delhi, the Maoists have reportedly infiltrated the Delhi Safai Karmachari Sanghatan (DSKS). In fact, according to a media report quoting unnamed intelligence officials: “The rebels, the sources add, have plans to strike in the industrial belts of Bhilai-Ranchi-Dhanbad-Calcutta and Mumbai-Pune-Surat-Ahmedabad to take their battle into the heart of India.”

In Maharashtra, too, the Maoists apparently devised a plan to operate in urban areas in a big way. Some Maoist documents, reportedly, contained encrypted writings and code names for various cities and towns in Maharashtra . As one journalist noted: [these] “efforts are part of a grand strategy to mobilise a section of the discontented population, especially industry workers... by aiming at heightened ‘mobilisations’ around industrial establishments and simultaneously indulging in disruption strategies.”

Thus, the Maoists seem to be acting on a long-term perspective plan. In their scheme of things, they hope to gain control over the working class movement and use it appropriately at a later stage when their so called New Democratic Revolution advances and furthers. In the immediate to short-term the objective is to gain control over key (strategic) industries with a view to inflicting ‘damage’ on the state’s capacity to fight the Maoists, either through organising sabotage activities or bringing production to a halt. According to an internal document of the CPI (Maoist) they envisage penetrating the working class movement in industries such as communication, oil and natural gas, coal, transport, power, defence production, etc .

Students and Youth

The Urban Movement has attracted students towards the Maoist fold in various parts of the country. In the 1980s, hordes of students from Kakatiya University and Regional Engineering College (now National Institute of Technology), Warangal and Osmania University, Hyderabad, joined the then PW cadres. In fact, Nambala Kesava Rao, the lynchpin of the Central Military Commission of the CPI (Maoist) holds a Masters degree in Technology (M Tech).

Besides, according to one media report, "...security agencies believe that the front organisations have started vigorous movement in the education sector, to rope in students from several reputed colleges for their cause... [they] warned the [Nagpur] city police about these student-oriented revolutionary organisations. People working under banners with hints of revolution, like 'sangharsh' and 'kranti' are under the scanner".

Following The arrest of Himadri Sen Roy, a very senior Maoist leader, and Somen alias Sumanand, West Bengal State Committee Secretary, near Kolkata, police claimed that "[t]he CPI (Maoist) has initiated a drive to spread its network in the city (Kolkata) and its outskirts and the outfit has brought some youths and students from premier educational institutions like Presidency College under its fold in the last two years".

In Bangalore, too, Maoist activities in colleges have been noticed. According to a media report the police suspected that a group known as the Karnataka Communal Harmony Group (KCHG), a congregation of intellectuals and activists, is a Maoist-front. Apparently, top police officials visited the famous Jesuit college—St Joseph's—to investigate the involvement of students with the KCHG and the Maoists. In fact, in Karnataka, it was the Urban Movement that was stronger than the rural movement.

Conclusion

Moreover, if and when the Urban Movement catches on among the industrial workers, the state will have to deal with possible sabotage activities and industrial unrest. When the Urban Movement becomes strong, the state will then have to deal with urban terrorism. Urbanisation itself has some faultlines and the Maoists could well exploit these to their advantage. Also, the stronger the movement becomes in the urban areas the more it is likely to contribute to the agrarian revolution — in terms of providing leaders and men and material to the people's war. Besides, the Maoists enjoy some degree of sympathy and support among the urban intellectuals and middle class, including students and teachers in schools, colleges and universities.

It is, thus, essential to keep a close watch on Maoist activities in towns and cities.

Views expressed are of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the IDSA or of the Government of India.