

Tackling LWE Menace through a Holistic Approach

The problem of left wing extremism (LWE) has often been linked to the alleged development deficit in the country. The Union and the State Governments have been trying to deal with the problem in a holistic manner through better synergy in the areas of security, development, ensuring rights of local communities, improvement in governance and public perception management.

An integrated approach, as charted through careful study and planning, aims at the relatively more affected areas for being able to deliver better results. With this in view, a detailed analysis of the spread and trends in respect of LWE violence has been made and 83 most affected districts in nine States have been selected for special attention with regard to planning, implementation and monitoring various developmental schemes.

Having described the Maoist problem the largest security threat to the country and appreciating the gravity of the problem, the Prime Minister himself monitors the situation closely. A good number of initiatives have been taken by the Central and State Governments for addressing the problem. A well-thought programme to provide larger assistance to the affected States in curbing the menace of Left Wing Extremism has been put in place. The most important of these initiatives being the setting up of a Unified Command in Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Jharkhand and Odisha, the most affected states by the LWE violence. The Unified Command is to have officers from the security establishment, besides civilian officers representing the civil administration to execute carefully planned anti-LWE measures.

The command and control set-up in the LWE affected States of West Bengal, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Odisha have been re-structured and an IG from CRPF posted in each of these states to work in close coordination with IG (anti-Naxal operations) in the State. A new Government scheme is already underway for strengthening of around 400 fortified police stations in LWE affected districts. An Empowered Group of Officers (EGO) has been set up at the level of the Central Government to override or modify existing instructions on

implementation of various development programmes and flagship schemes, with regard to the local needs and conditions in these LWE affected areas for accelerated development. The EGO is headed by the Member-Secretary, Planning Commission and has among its members the officers from the development Ministries and the Planning Commission to oversee effective implementation of development schemes in the LWE affected States.

Special attention is being given on planning, implementation and monitoring of development schemes in Maoist affected areas. Under the Backward Districts Initiative, which covered 147 districts, an amount of Rs 45 crore per district has been allocated on a non-lapsable basis. This has now been replaced by the Backward Regions Grant Fund in 250 districts. National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme, which was originally being implemented in 200 districts, and was extended to 330 districts in April 2007, has now been extended to all districts in the country, having regard to the need to universalise this demand-driven programme for wage-employment. These schemes are in addition to various income-generating, public-utility and social-security schemes of different Ministries like Rural Development, Agriculture, Health and Family Welfare, Youth Affairs and Sports, Panchayati Raj and Tribal Affairs.

It is being ensured that all the LWE affected States effectively implement the provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA) on priority, which categorically assigns rights over minor forest produce to the panchayats, one of the key demands of the people in these areas.

The Government of India has established a number of review and monitoring mechanisms in this regard. They include a Standing Committee of the Chief Ministers of States concerned under the chairmanship of the Union Home Minister, to work out a coordinated policy and specific measures to deal with the LWE problem on the political, security and development fronts. A Review Group, earlier called the Task Force, under the Cabinet Secretary is already functional to review coordinated efforts across a range of development and security measures.

A Coordination Centre chaired by the Union Home Secretary is also reviewing and coordinating the efforts of the State Governments, where the Chief Secretaries and the Directors General of Police represent the State Governments. Besides, a Task Force under the Special Secretary (Internal Security), Union Ministry of Home Affairs ensures coordination on inter-state issues with senior officers from the Intelligence agencies, the Central Armed Police Forces and the State Police Forces. An Inter-Ministerial Group under Additional Secretary (Naxal Management) in the Ministry of Home Affairs oversees effective implementation of development schemes in the LWE affected areas for accelerated socio-economic development.

It is felt that through a holistic approach, focusing on development and security related interventions, the LWE problem can be effectively tackled. However, it is clear that the Maoists do not want the root causes like underdevelopment to be addressed in a meaningful manner since they resort to targeting school buildings, roads, railways, bridges, health infrastructure, communication facilities, etc. in a major way. They wish to keep the population in their areas of influence marginalised to perpetuate the hold of their outdated ideology. The same has resulted in the process of development being set back by decades in many parts of the country under LWE influence. This needs to be recognised by the civil society and the media

to build pressure on the Maoists to eschew violence, join the mainstream and recognise the fact that the socio-economic and political dynamics and aspirations of 21st Century India are far removed from the Maoist world-view.

Salient Points

- A detailed analysis of the spread and trends in respect of LWE violence has been made.
- The Prime Minister himself monitors the situation closely.
- Special attention is being given on planning, implementation and monitoring of development schemes in Maoist affected areas.
- The most important of these initiatives being the setting up of a Unified Command in Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Jharkhand and Odisha, which are the most affected states by the LWE violence.
- An Empowered Group of Officers (EGO) has been set up at the level of the Central Government to override or modify existing instructions on implementation of various development programmes.
- It is being ensured that all the LWE affected States effectively implement the provisions of the PESA Act, 1996 on priority.
- However, it is clear that the Maoists do not want the root causes like underdevelopment to be addressed in a meaningful manner since they resort to targeting school buildings, roads, railways, bridges, health infrastructure, communication facilities, etc. in a major way.
- They wish to keep the population in their areas of influence marginalised to perpetuate the hold of their outdated ideology.