

A delegation comprising of Sanjay Parate, Secretary State CPI-M, Vineet Tiwari, Joshi-Adhikari Institute, New Delhi, Archana Prasad, Jawaharlal Nehru University and CC member AIDWA, and Nandini Sundar, Delhi University visited Bastar Division from 12 to 16 May 2016. We visited the following districts: Bijapur, Sukma, Bastar and Kanker. The focus of the visit was on the situation of ordinary villagers who are living through the conflict between the state and Maoists.

The levels of Maoist presence and scale of state repression varies somewhat across the districts. The worst affected at the moment appear to be Sukma district and the Darbha/Tongpal block of Bastar district, but fake encounters and arrests are a problem everywhere. There are other common features:

Preliminary Observations

1. The whole district is heavily militarized with camps every 5 km, and in the villages around Raoghat, every 2 km. These are being set up in complete violation of the 5th Schedule, PESA and the Forest Rights Act 2006. No gram sabha permission is sought, camps come up at night, and people's cultivation is taken over, without their rights being settled. There is massive destruction to the environment.
2. In some places the camps have created a sense of security, with Maoists presence coming down, but in most places they have enhanced the insecurity of the villagers. Civic action programs organized by the security forces in which people are forced to participate bring them into conflict with the Maoists.
3. Across the four districts, villagers said that people were being arrested in large numbers. The villagers have no understanding of the legal system, are forced to pay high fees to lawyers, and their lives are ruined. The law is being used as an instrument of torture rather than of justice or peace keeping.
4. There is almost no implementation of NREGA despite this being a drought year. In many places we heard complaints that people had not been paid wages for NREGA work done seven years ago.
5. The living conditions of villagers are at starvation levels. Average incomes are Rs. 1000-2500 per household per month, with the maximum cash generated by tendu patta collection and wage labour in Andhra Pradesh.
6. In this context, the vast amounts of money being spent on militarization, rewards to security forces, surrenders, and civic action spectacles amounts to a criminal diversion of money from the welfare of the people. The Maoists also bear responsibility for not allowing work on roads, and use of panchayat funds, etc. but in areas where there are no Maoists, we found no evidence of the developmental state.

Demands

To Political Parties

1. An all-party delegation should visit Bastar, especially some of the interior villages, and initiate conversation with a wide range of stakeholders to suggest measures for conflict resolution.
2. The parties should demand that the Centre and state government initiate a dialogue with all political parties and the Naxalites, and come up with a comprehensive plan that recognizes the rights and development needs of the people.

To the Central and State Government

1. There should be a high level judicial enquiry on all the encounters, arrests, surrenders and rapes and other atrocities by police, security forces and Naxalites since 2005.
2. There should be prosecution of all these cases and compensation should be paid regardless of perpetrator.
3. The camps should be removed.
4. The forest rights, and land rights of the people should be recognized. No projects should be implemented, including mining, without the full knowledge and consent of the gram sabha.
5. There should be a full accounting with on the ground verification of all works done under government schemes. In particular NREGA should be implemented, and all pending dues must be immediately paid.

To the Maoists

1. The Maoists must allow all development works to take place.
2. They should allow political activity such as standing for elections.
3. They should stop beating people, and killing informers.

Specific Incidents

1. Marjum fake encounter
2. Beating of villagers in Kumakoleng by Maoists following police arrests and mass surrender induced by police threats
3. Arrests and alleged rape in Tadmendri
4. Rape and sexual exploitation by BSF SPO in Etebalka
5. Arrests in Tadmendri, Bastar, Antagarh (Badrangi)

Marjum fake encounter:

In first week of May, 2016, two police personnel died in a cross firing incident near the Marjum village in Dantewada district between Police force and the Maoists. After few days, on 8th May, 2016, the villagers went to a nearby village to celebrate Beej Pandum, a traditional festival of the villagers. Two boys of the age around 17-18 years, namely Markam Mangloo and Podiyam Vijja went to take bath in the nearby river stream. The patrolling force found them alone shot them there and declared them as the Maoists. The villagers were informed at around 12 in the

noon that there was some firing near the river. The villagers found the two boys missing and contacted the police where they were informed about the death of the two boys. The newspapers were informed from the Police that both the boys were Maoists and they were killed in the encounter. On 12th May, 2016, ex MLAs of CPI Nanda Sori and Manish Kunjam brought the villagers to Dantewada and organised the press conference where villagers accused Police of the fake encounter and said that both the boys had no connection with Maoists at all. The Sarpanch of the village and the Anganwadi Karyakarta also were present along with the family members, relatives and other villagers in the press conference who also confirmed that the Police is making false allegations and these were nothing else the murders of the innocent tribal boys. CPI announced to stage a protest demonstration for the fair enquiry of the incident on 19th May, 2016.

The effect of staged surrenders, mass arrests and civic action programs on villages – Maoist beatings, revival of Salwa Judum style division of villages

Kumakoleng: We visited Kumakoleng, thana Leda, Tongpal block, and found that the village was largely deserted, after the Maoists had beaten up villagers on 17 April. 8 villagers had to be hospitalized, including two women. People were scared to return to the village for fear of being beaten by the Maoists. The sequence of events that we could piece together is as follows:

The Maoists came to this area in 2004. These villages were considered by the police as Maoist garhs. They beat up any villager who opposed them. But several people also joined the dalams and sanghams were formed.

There was a firing in Chintalnar near Kachiras, in which one of the dalam leaders, Sonadhar left his diary (Sonadhar was later killed by the police in Odisha). The diary contained the names of many villagers who had contributed food etc. to the Maoists. The police put pressure on these villagers, threatening to arrest them. Therefore in March 2016, approximately 50 people from Kumakoleng panchayat 'surrendered' to the police; some of them were later brought around to identify others. The Maoists then put pressure on the villagers for surrendering. On 15 April, the police held a camp in Kumakoleng and distributed sarees, vessels etc. This was attended by the Additional SP among others. At this shivir, some of the villagers, especially the non-adviasi castes which have traditionally not been so close to the Maoists asked the police to set up a CRPF camp in their village. On 17 April, the Maoists came looking for two people who had surrendered, Sukhman Yadav and Bhagirath, and beat up a large number of people in Kumakoleng, including those who had asked for a police camp. Only 35 out of 110 households are still left in the village.

In neighbouring Nama village, Soutnar panchayat, all the villagers have resolved to keep the Maoists out and have been patrolling the villages with bows and arrows and axes for the last three months. They have not given their initiative any formal name like a gram suraksha dal and laughingly called themselves the 'tangiya gang'. In their case too, tension with the Maoists was

created after the surrender of a former Maoist Shankar, who then identified villagers. Under pressure from the Maoists for surrendering, the villagers asked for a CRPF camp. They were also put off by the beating and killing of a villager Somaru in 2010 on charges of being an informant, when the villagers felt he was innocent.

In Koleng village, the police held a camp and distributed sarees, vessels, mobile phones etc. There too villagers think they will be safer with a camp.

In Darbha, police arrested Bhadri Mahu villagers. Villagers were told to come to Darbha enmasse to get the men released, but it turned out to be a staged spectacle in which the police distributed sarees etc. The men were not released. Instead, journalist Sabtosh Yadav who came to report on the arrests was arrested.

Arrests and Alleged Rape in Indrawati National Park area

The villagers in Tadmendri village allege that the police is carrying out arrests in the name of anti-naxal operations. During the time of Judum Mahendra Karma held a meeting in Koyenar and during the meeting a police jeep was burnt. There after the Sarpanch was arrested. Recently three people have been arrested from Tadmendri on 23 April 2016 by the name of Aytu Kursum (23-24 years), Valle Vardam (19-20 years) and Dudda Vedke (28-29 years). They have been arrested in the Rani Bodli Murder Case and no investigations have started yet. The villagers have been in jail since this.

A rape case was also alleged in Chichkunta village where Phullu Devi was surrounded by SPOs while she was in the field and arrested on the pretext of being from Platoon 2 of the local area Dalam. She was raped by the two men from the Security Forces from the Farsegarh camp on 17-18 January 2016. She is now in Jagdalpur jail and the police deny that there has been any rape or illegal arrests in the case.

Rape and Sexual Exploitation by BSF SPO in Etebalka

A visit to Etebalka resulted in the revelation of a case a young girl being exploited by a BSF SPO, Budu Ram, s/o Phagu Ram. He regularly visited her houses and raped the girl 2-3 times. When the girl protested, the SPO threatened her and said that "the reward for being a police informer and SPO is that he is free to do all these things". The girl was married off to a third person by her family in June 2015 without any knowledge of this incident. Her in-laws discovered she was pregnant and she was sent home with a demand that the husband's family should be compensated. The SPO already had two wives. A Panchayat was called to settle the matter. It decided that the SPO should pay Rs 51000 to the girls family, but only Rs. 25000 has been so far paid. The girl wrote a complaint to the district collector for which she has not got any response. There is no action by the BSF against the SPO.

The existence of such camps and the authority it gives jawans and SPOs/sahayak arakashak/DRG leads to sexual exploitation, and makes all women in the vicinity vulnerable. We also heard allegations of rapes in the vicinity of other BSF camps but the families were unwilling to talk.

Illegal Arrests at Badrangi Village

Two brothers Pinashi and Raju have been picked up by the Police on the pretext of being a Naxal. Pinashi had been picked up twice before but he has now been in jail for the last one year. The villagers allege that a tiffin bomb was planted in his house to prove that he is a naxal. When he was arrested earlier he was beaten up at the camp and told to give a bribe of Rs. 20000 to finish the case. Now he has taken a loan for that purpose but villagers are not ready to repay the loan since Pinashi is in jail. Raju was picked up 3 months ago. His wife died and he has three small children, two of them girls, who have been left helpless. The villagers claim that he has nothing to do with Naxalites.