

Indian government continues its offensive against Maoist insurgents

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Despite several cease-fire proposals from the Communist Party of India (Maoist), which is mounting a guerrilla insurgency in India's "tribal belt," and the Indian government, the latter is continuing a massive, multi-state military offensive dubbed Operation Green Hunt.

Launched with considerable fanfare last fall, the Indian government's offensive is being spearheaded by tens of thousand of heavily-armed paramilitary troops. The Indian army is providing logistical support.

The ostensible aim of the offensive is to restore the state's writ over a large swathe of forest and hill territory—largely populated by historically marginalized tribal people and covering parts of the states of Jharkhand, Chattisgharh, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, and West Bengal—so that the government can bring "development." The truth is India's ruling elite covets these resource-rich lands for mega resource-extraction projects and wants to dispossess their tribal inhabitants and transform them into a cheap-labor workforce.

No sooner had India's Congress Party-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government won re-election last May than it labeled the Maoist insurgency the country's greatest "internal security" threat, surpassing "jihadi terrorism" and the separatist insurgencies in Kashmir and the north-east. It vowed that suppressing the Maoists would henceforth be a top government priority.

In a speech last fall, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh conceded that the Indian state has failed the tribal peoples, combining neglect and indifference with land-seizures and repression. But this admission was an artifice, aimed at rallying support for Operation Green Hunt with the claim that the government is now truly concerned about the welfare of the tribal people and only wants to suppress Maoist "terrorism" so it can right its past errors and promote socio-economic development. (See: "Manmohan Singh admits Indian state has failed tribal peoples")

The size of the government offensive and especially the growing involvement of the Indian military in the planning

and execution of the counterinsurgency campaign has caused some apprehension in ruling class circles. It is common knowledge that security forces and a Chattisgharh government-sponsored militia, the Salva Judum, have committed numerous atrocities, summarily executing insurgents and murdering and terrorizing tribal villagers.

Last fall several prominent members of India's military-security establishment criticized plans to use Indian military planes to transport troops, warning that this could ultimately result in strafing and widespread civilian casualties. This, they argued, would only further feed the Maoist insurgency.

In an attempt to shift responsibility for its Operation Green Hunt onto the Maoists, the government has said on several occasions that it would be willing to enter into talks with the Maoists if they abjure violence. In late February, Home Minister Palaniyappan Chidambaram went somewhat further, offering to initiate talks with the Maoists (who in India are commonly known as Naxals or Naxalites) if they suspended their military operations for 72 hours. Declared Chidambaram, "We never said to the Naxals that they [must] lay down arms or disband their organisation. Let there be no violence for 72 hours and we are willing to sit down to discuss the issues."

Previously, the Maoists had said they would be willing to enter into talks if the government unconditionally released several of their senior leaders, restored lands taken from tribal groups, and cancelled Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with various Indian and foreign corporations for further mega-projects in tribal areas. But in response to Chidambaram's late February offer, Maoist spokesman Koteswar Rao offered a 72 day ceasefire, stretching from February 25 to May 7, with the only condition being that the government halt Operation Green Hunt.

Rao suggested that the talks could be mediated by prominent intellectuals and human rights activists, suggesting among others the writer Arundathi Roy and Kabir Suman, a musician and Trinamool Congress MP.

After waiting several days, Chidambaram dismissed the Maoist ceasefire offer as “somewhat bizarre.” He charged that barely three hours after Rao had floated his 72-day ceasefire proposal the Maoists had attacked a joint West Bengal police-Central Reserve Border Force patrol in the West Midnapore district of West Bengal. This attack was not far from where a week before Maoist insurgents had overrun a paramilitary camp at Shilda killing 24 security personnel.

On March 2, in an unexpected development, West Bengal police arrested one of the top CPI (Maoist) leaders, Venkateshwar Reddy. Reddy, who is also known by the *nom de guerre* Telugu Deepak, was the reputed mastermind of the Shilda attack.

In response to Deepak’s arrest, Maoist spokesman Koteswar Rao threatened a “full scale offensive” in West Bengal if Deepak and another CPI (Maoist) Politburo member were not soon released. He also said that the Maoists were prepared to spread their campaign of armed attacks into India’s cities: “We will intensify our strikes if the government does not initiate talks. If need be, we will proceed towards towns and cities.”

Predictably, the UPA central government and the West Bengal state government, which is formed by the Communist Party of India (Marxist)-led Left Front, rejected the Maoists’ demands and are using their threats to justify the intensification of the military offensive.

The Stalinist Communist Party of India (Marxist) or CPM is playing an utterly foul role in the Indian state’s anti-Maoist counter-insurgency war. The CPM—which propped up the UPA government for its first four years in office and which in West Bengal is ruthlessly pursuing pro-big business “reforms,” including banning strikes in the IT sector and expropriating peasants for Special Economic Zones—has repeatedly trumpeted Manmohan Singh’s claim that the Maoists are India’s greatest internal security threat.

In their statements there is not even a suggestion that the current anti-Maoist drive is directed at consolidating the state’s control over the tribal peoples so as to facilitate capitalist exploitation.

This puts them to the right of even much of the liberal corporate media. Thus the *Deccan Chronicle* in a February 24 editorial conceded that the Maoist insurgency is centered in an area that is “India’s wealthiest mineral belt [and] which is being eyed by the government and by foreign and Indian mining interests” and that “there are instances of tribals being driven out of their homes so that the government can go ahead with its industrialization programme.”

Mimicking the rhetoric of the Hindu supremacist BJP, the CPM claims that the spread of the Maoist insurgency is due

to violence and intimidation, not the deprivation and repression to which the tribal peoples have been subjected by the Indian state, including governments formed or supported by the parliamentary Left.

Indian workers and toilers must oppose the Indian state’s counterinsurgency war against the Maoists. It is directed at upholding and intensifying the oppression of the tribal peoples. Moreover, the Indian ruling elite is using the purported threat of Maoist “terrorism” to justify the state repression of all manner of political movements.

That said, the Maoists offer no progressive alternative for the working class and oppressed of India. The Maoists—like the mainline Stalinist parties, the CPM and the CPI or Communist Party of India—insist that the struggle for socialism is not on the agenda in India.

The Maoists make occasional ritual references to the revolutionary role of working class, but the thrust of their political activity is mobilizing the tribals and other sections of the rural population in support of “anti-feudal” measures and promoting various ethno-linguistic secessionist movements, which seek to reshuffle the boundaries of the capitalist nation-state system in South Asia.

The Maoists’ armed struggle, which often takes the form of “revenge attacks” on petty oppressors, goes hand-in-hand with maneuvers with various sections of the political establishment. Thus in West Bengal, the Maoists have established a quasi-public alliance with the Trinamool Congress (TNC)—a right-wing, Bengali split-off from the Congress Party and sometime partner of the BJP—and have justified this alliance in the name of fighting the “social fascist” CPM-led Left Front. At present the TMC is the second largest component of the UPA government. Similarly, the Maoists have indicated a favorable attitude to the current state government in Jharkhand, which is headed by the Jharkhand Mukti Morch, another UPA constituent.

While the Indian government’s offer of “talks” to the Maoists was a propaganda ploy to rally public support for Operation Green Hunt, India’s rulers are mindful that in India in the past and more recently in neighboring Nepal, Maoists have been persuaded to forsake peasant-based insurgency for integration into capitalist parliamentary politics.



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