

Illusions of Change?

Despite the assassination of Azad and that too in a Machiavellian way, the Maoists have not yet lost faith in the mechanism of peace process initiated by social reformer Swami Agnivesh. There is no perennial necessity for things to be this way—a peaceful and better world can always be brought into being through accommodation and recognition of ground reality. They are ready to announce a 3-month period cease-fire provided the Centre and State governments withdraw joint forces, release political prisoners and allow democratic outfits to function democratically. The renewed Maoist stance came in the wake of independence day speeches by prime minister and president who appealed to the Maoists to abjure violence. Not that they love violence and would like to roam in the killing fields and jungles risking their lives all the time. They are being forced to resort to violent path because all peaceful channels to air grievances are blocked; for them democracy doesn't exist. A blanket ban on all their frontal organisations has created a situation in which they have no option but to try to organise and influence masses covertly. And it is really difficult to run 'underground' mass organisations.

The issue of violence and non-violence seems irrelevant even in today's parliamentary culture. All political parties, left and right alike, that participate in elections literally maintain their private armies to reach the heaven—parliament. Criminalisation of politics is no complete that elections become violent even at local levels. Cadres, activists and sympathisers die to ensure electoral fortunes of a few people, all in the name of democracy. Parliamentary struggle or extra-parliamentary struggle it is violence all the way. For one set of people it is legal but for another set of people it is illegal.

The hard fact is that the Centre is reluctant to assess the gravity of the problem. Their diabolical approach is aimed at buying time while the authorities are busy to allocate more funds to modernise security forces. The Maoist demand that Rs 8000 crore that had been sanctioned for modernisation of police forces and Rs 60 lakh per day being spent for anti-naxal operation be utilised for employment and income generation is a modest one. But the Centre is not listening. Nor are they serious enough to create a democratic and peaceful atmosphere without which no negotiations can start. Their democracy is for a limited few. They refuse to recognise an India that doesn't figure in sensex. For them the stakes are extremely high. What happens—or doesn't happen—now will reverberate for decades, even generations. They cannot wipe out an ideology, even if it is flawed in many respects, from the face of the earth because the wretched are realising their importance in society, under the sway of Maoists and dozens of left radical outfits that don't believe in violent campaign at this phase of social revolution.

The hawks in the administration are more interested in war, not peace. They behave more like warlords of pre-liberated China. They are viewed, and quite justifiably, as commanders of mercenaries in J&K, Northeast and in the so-called naxal-affected areas.

Having failed to combat naxalism through terror, they are spreading war to newer areas while deliberately blaming it on the Maoists for all the evils under the sun.

But the warlord attitude of Centre won't make things easier for creating an atmosphere of tranquillity. Industry needs peace to thrive but the corporate tycoons of India think otherwise. What is true nationally is also true internationally. Not for nothing China has shelved the Taiwan issue and the contentious India-China border dispute for the time being as it would allow its industry and business to flourish at a rapid pace. America is negotiating with the Taliban, though secretly, hopefully to exploit mineral wealth of Afghanistan which may become a new Saudi Arabia when its lithium finds way to the silicon valley. Then the Americans resorted to cease-fire many a time during the brutal Vietnam war and the communists of Vietnam had no problem in having some breathing space through cease-fire exercise. New Delhi has no problem in honouring cease-fire obligations, moral or otherwise, with the Naga insurgents. If they think they could annihilate the entire naxalite spectrum by treating it as a law and order problem which it is not, they are likely to invite more trouble and complicate the situation in the coming days.

With democratic space continually shrinking even for the civil society, human rights movement and environmental groups, the Maoists won't need much effort to rationalise their activities. Unless they stop fake encounter killings, gagging any voice of dissent branding it as Maoist-inspired, the situation won't change for the better. The much talked about change and peace will remain an illusion.

The release of political prisoners framed under false charges is a serious issue that the Centre is conveniently avoiding, notwithstanding repeated representations by national and international human rights bodies. Maoist prisoners are not regarded as political. Nor are they 'human beings' in official treatment. But as human beings they have the right to develop as critical thinkers and explore alternative solutions to the plight of the people. □□□ 20-08-2010