

Naxalites In Mithila

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A room on an upper floor of a West Bengal university. It is the headquarters of North Bihar Naxalites. The watchman of the building is also an active member of the group. To enter you have to produce a plastic coupon with code words. The experienced, searching eyes of the watchman examine you. The plastic coupon then goes into that particular room. There it is examined, very minutely. It is O.K. The watchman again appears at the gate—this time to fetch the handbag brought by the arrival. The handbag is opened in the room. A smaller one, fully sealed, comes out of it. The seal, after being carefully examined, is broken open. The secret documents, dealing with Naxalite activities in various districts of North Bihar, are taken out and studied... The poor visitor is still waiting at the gate. When the documents are studied carefully and the identity of the visitor is fully established, the watchman again goes, this time to fetch him. The "boss" present in the room talks with the visitor at first in the secret Naxalite jargon which gradually turns into day-to-day language. After necessary negotiations, papers dealing with future plans and a large amount of money

are kept in the handbag and re-sealed.

The passage, reported by the Special Representative of a leading Patna daily, depicts very clearly the anxiety and fear which have gripped the ruling classes. The paper, giving out the true flavour of yellow journalism in a semi-colonial and semi-feudal set-up, is owned by the Darbhanga Raj, one of the richest feudal houses in Bihar.

Mithila is not in existence in G.O.I. records and has become a thing of the past. With a common language and culture, geographically speaking, in the north, running parallel with the Indo-Nepal boundary, it covers the area from Jaynagar of Darbhanga district to Yoghani of Purnea district. In the south it extends up to the northern bank of the Ganges. The region covers three districts and parts of two districts—Darbhanga, Purnea, Saharsa, North Monghyr and North Bhagalpur.

With about two dozen murders, one dozen attempted murders and hundreds of cases of bomb explosions to their "credit," the Naxalites have created a region of terror in Mithila. The threat they pose is of a serious nature in view of the 350 km open border with the kingdom of Nepal. Danger is also being apprehended from

the 35 km long border between Purnea district and Naxalite-infested West Bengal. Then there is the East Pakistan border to worry about. As expected, the Nepal border is very much helpful to the border-area Naxalites. It is said that there is an understanding between the Nepali Maoists and Indian Naxalites and both help each other in providing shelter etc.

In Mithila, the Naxalites are particularly active in Darbhanga district, which is taken as one of the four most troubled spots in Bihar, the other three being, Mushahari in Muzaffarpur district, Surajgarha in south Monghyr and the tribal zone of Chotanagpur. Besides Darbhanga the Naxalites are active in Purnea and the Begusarai-Barauni industrial belt of North Monghyr. Recently they have stepped up their activities in Katihar, the headquarters of Purnea district.

Darbhangha is one of the most backward regions of this backward country. People are, by and large, among the poorest and economically the most depressed. Any outsider roaming in this poverty-stricken district may be astonished to find that there are hardly any good buildings in the rural areas of Darbhanga: 99.99 per cent of the people live in huts. On the agrarian side it is the same old story of land concentration in the hands of a handful while the bulk of the population are either share-croppers or landless labourers. Eviction of share-croppers is a very common thing. Agrarian clashes are nothing new for Darbhanga, where during every harvesting season many of the poor and landless peasants used to be killed by the hired goondas of landlords and big landowners.

But this monopoly of violence has been broken. In 1968, the main activities of the Naxalites were confined to a few crop-looting cases in the traditional communist style: planting red flags etc. on the land and organising mass movements against the zamindars etc.

The first victim of the Naxalite 'enemy-annihilation programme was a

landlord-cum-advocate of Darbhanga town. He was killed on October 2, 1969. Since then at least a dozen 'class enemies' including landlords, 'prominent' citizens and businessmen have been annihilated. About half a dozen persons were injured in various raids by Naxalite guerillas. Many cases of bomb explosions have also been reported. About 150 people, most of them doctors, businessmen, zamindars and even policemen have received threatening letters allegedly written by the Naxalites.

"Anti-Doctor"

A special feature of Naxalite activities in Darbhanga is their 'anti-doctor' movement. It is common knowledge that the doctors are among the worst exploiters in rural areas. With them, money comes first. Hence, the 'anti-doctor' movement.

Mr Sukhdeo Rai, the alleged master-mind behind all these actions, was arrested in April. A large crowd gathered to see the arrested leader, who had been absconding for about a year and for whose arrest the Government had announced a reward of Rs 1,000. His photographs were published in the Patna dailies. The arrest, which was a big shot in the arm for the police, was the result of a month-long special drive in the Jaynagar and Samastipur areas of Darbhanga district to round up the Naxalites.

Till early June about 125 persons had been rounded up in various parts of the district on charges of murder, loot, dacoity etc. Alluring rewards for the arrest of many Naxalites have been declared and photographs of the alleged absconders were (and are) published in Bihar newspapers. Extra military forces have been deployed in the disturbed areas of Darbhanga district, too.

It is said that the Darbhanga Naxalites have a special feature—inclusion of so-called 'criminal' groups in their ranks. Most of these groups were formed in the pre-Independence days to fight the British. Their activities were confined to dacoities of a political nature. After independence the groups were dissolved but

most of the members reportedly joined the Naxalites.

On the economic scene the situation in flood-torn Purnea district is more or less the same. Economic disparities, as expected, are very high. There are 'farmers' keeping helicopters and thousands of acres of land. Hence, modern farming of a mechanized nature in Purnea. As a result there is large-scale unemployment among the rural proletariat.

Therefore it was not surprising when a Syndicate leader 'informed' the press that the Naxals have their own government in some parts of Purnea district where the administration appears to have no grip. They have also set up a 'people's court' which tries and punishes the 'offenders'. Expressing his anxiety, the Syndicate leader said that if the Government was unable to deal with the Naxalites they should hand over the areas to the army for some time.

Why so much fuss when the Naxalites are less active in Purnea? About five murders (mainly of zamindars), the same number of attempted murders, one dozen cases of bomb explosions and a number of threatening letters to millowners, cinema proprietors, businessmen and political leaders are not a very alarming phenomenon in today's India. But the reason for the anxiety of the ruling classes can be traced to the important geographical situation of Purnea. In the north there is the open Nepal border, in the east West Bengal. The Indo-Pak border is also hardly 10 miles away. Naxalbari is very near. Thus situated on the tri-junction of Nepal, East Pakistan and West Bengal, Purnea occupies a very important place on the Indian map. If Purnea is lost, India will remain virtually cut off from its entire north-eastern frontier.

Naxalites are said to have a strong organisation among the railway and jute-mill workers of Katihar, the headquarters of Purnea district. They have also a good number of student sympathisers in Katihar and Kishanganj, a town bordering West Bengal.

In the past few months about one dozen cases of bomb throwing, on cinema halls, police stations and the divisional office of the NF Railway have been reported from Katihar, in which about half a dozen persons were injured.

The mounting Naxalite activities in Katihar compelled the 'order and law' authorities to call a high-level discussion.

The conference was attended by the Commissioner and DIG, Bhagalpur Range, besides district officers. Security measures were tightened in the area. Weapons were supplied to the police personnel and new methods of carrying rifles by policemen were introduced in Katihar town and its neighbouring areas. All police officers up to the rank of assistant sub-inspector were provided with spears. Traffic constables were withdrawn from several places and deployed for patrolling duties. Armed police were posted at all sensitive points in the town.

An intensive "anti-goonda drive" was launched in the town resulting in a good number of arrests. But to what purpose? A largely attended public meeting jointly sponsored by the Congress(R), PSP, SSP, CPI and CPI(M) protested against what it described as "indiscriminate arrests of railway employees, mill workers and students by the police in the name of curbing the Naxalites." It was further alleged that the arrested men were beaten up and tortured in the police lock-up.

Purnea is very near to Naxalbari and the "spring thunder" was heard soon enough here. Often the law and order machinery has to be geared up and the three borders (East Bengal, Nepal and West Bengal) are sealed following reports of the CPI(ML) leader Charu Mazumdar intruding into Purnea—sometimes to escape CRP bullets in West Bengal and sometimes to "train guerilla cadres" in Bihar. It seems the Naxal leader has taken a fancy to this district (at least in the eyes of the administration).

But the actual influence of Charu

Mazumdar and Naxalbari was seen in November last when Naxalite guerrillas attacked the Magurjan police picket on the trijunction of Purnea, West Dinajpur and Darjeeling and snatched away six rifles and some ammunition. This raid occupies a very important place in the CPI(ML) strategy. Charu Mazumdar described it as being of much significance, for the successful attack was carried out even after all the intellectual and old leaders of that area had been arrested. According to the Naxal leader this incident gave the peasant armed struggle the character of a liberation war.

There are many Naxalite groups active in Bihar. One of these, led by Mr B. K. Azad, was active in and around the Khagaria sub-division of North Monghyr. This group is now virtually defunct. Even when it was in existence, its activities were confined to crop-looting.

The CPI(ML) is active in the important Begusarai-~~Barauni~~ industrial belt. Some of the important industries located in the area include the Barauni Thermal Power Station, the Barauni Oil Refinery, a factory of the Fertiliser Corporation of India, and the Garahara Yard (the biggest in Asia).

About six landlords and businessmen have been killed and many injured by the Naxalites. Besides, numerous cases of bomb-throwing on libraries, schools, colleges, railway stations and factories have been reported.

Perhaps this was why the District Magistrate of Monghyr declared that almost entire North Monghyr is in the grip of Naxalites and the question of law and order is posing a serious problem for the administration.

From Saharsa only two or three cases of bomb explosions of a minor nature have been reported. Though no such incident has yet been reported from North Bhagalpur, the Naxalites are said to have a good influence among the rural proletariat of the area.

Who says that peaceful revolution

is not possible? Harinandan Thakur, an o'd Congress worker of Darbhanga, died the other day of a heart attack. He had received a threatening letter from the Naxalites a few hours ago. No bloodshed and yet a revolution accomplished.

(This article was written in early July.)

CPI Gimmicks

FROM A CORRESPONDENT

THE Dangeites have always been good at gimmicks. And they did it again—in Bihar. However, the recent drama enacted in the state capital was not taken seriously by anybody, including the CPI members themselves.

The first act of the drama, described as "a competition in phoney radicalism" included letters exchanged between the Bihar unit of the CPI and the Congress(R) regarding the "controversy" over two "radical" bills on the reduction of land ceiling and fixing a ceiling on urban property. The Congressites were a party to it in the first act as much as their communist comrade-in-arms. But the second act was written, directed, acted and produced by the party bosses at Ajoy Bhavan, the Bihar headquarters of the Dangeites: the party decided to withdraw its support from the Congress(R)-led progressive Vidhayak Dal Ministry following a Cabinet decision to scrap the Dutta Inquiry Commission. But alas! nobody took the CPI gimmicks seriously. Soon enough Mr N. K. Krishnan of the CPI Central Committee announced that the party was yet to take a final decision about its stand in Bihar. Though the final act of the drama is yet to come, it can well be forecast that the CPI would be back in the fold of the Congress(R)-led alliance.

Why these gimmicks? The 1972 elections are not too far off. However, it is not just that.

In their "war of statements" Mr Jagannath Sarkar, the Secretary of the Bihar CPI, and the State Congress(R)