

The UPA's New CMP of Unified and Unfettered Repression

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As Union Home Minister and Deputy Prime Minister of the previous NDA government, LK Advani had dubbed Naxalism 'the worst enemy of the Indian dream'. As Prime Minister of the Congress-led and Left-backed UPA government, Dr. Manmohan Singh has now identified Naxalism as the greatest threat or challenge to India's internal security as well as the Indian 'way of life'. This demonstration of Congress-BJP consensus on 'governance' and 'domestic politics' comes close on the heels of Advani's offer of bipartisan cooperation after Sonia Gandhi accused the detractors of her government's pro-US policies of 'communalising' India's foreign policy, and coincides, remarkably enough, with the 'Bharat Suraksha Yatras' taken out by Advani and Rajnath Singh.

The PM's address to the conclave of chief ministers of Maoist-affected states marks a new high point in the Indian state's ongoing campaign against what it calls Leftwing extremism. It is also impossible to miss the fact that the articulation of this new official strategy of 'tough and stern action' is accompanied by a high-intensity media campaign aimed at raising a countrywide Maoist scare and thereby manufacturing a public 'consent' for greater repression. Newspapers and television channels in almost all languages are awash with stories about the military prowess of the Maoists and how their operations and 'control' have now extended to 40% of India's territory and 35% of the country's population and so on and so forth.

Outlining his strategy of 'walking on two legs' - rapid development and pro-active policing - Manmohan Singh has acknowledged that there is a growing 'sense of alienation and deprivation' among large sections of the rural poor, especially among tribal communities fuelled by a host of factors including "exploitation, artificially depressed wages, iniquitous socio-political circumstances, inadequate employment opportunities, lack of access to resources, under developed agriculture, geographical isolation, lack of land reforms". What he can however never acknowledge is that this sense is rooted in and driven by a growing reality of mass deprivation and disparity, and that this reality is being daily aggravated by the ongoing neo-liberal policies of his government. His prescription for tackling this 'sense' therefore entails a greater injection of the very mode of 'governance' and 'development' that has led to the present situation.

Manmohan Singh has been more emphatic and specific with regard to the other aspect of his two-pronged strategy, viz., pro-active police response. And, here he talks not just of 'sense' but reality. He points to the growing militarisation and superior army-style organization of the Maoists and wants all wings and layers of the state to adopt a concerted strategy and coordinated approach to make sure that "all responses on our side [are] guided by this new reality". In particular, he wants state governments to set up dedicated anti-Naxal wings under 'capable officers' on the lines of the 'greyhounds' in Andhra Pradesh, undertake joint operations under unified commands and improve 'intelligence gathering'. Most importantly, he calls for "measures to protect policemen from undue harassment for actions taken against Naxalites".

The record of all anti-Naxalite operations till date has been replete with instances of systematic violations of democratic rights and blatant harassment of ordinary citizens. In the 1970s it was the anti-Naxalite repression campaign of the state which eventually culminated in the infamous

Emergency. Draconian laws like TADA and POTA have been used either to fix political opponents or terrorise common citizens. There are any number of examples of detention and even conviction of activists of peasant and agricultural labour organizations and trade unions and innocent dalits, adivasis and members of minority communities, not only while these acts were in force but even after these laws have supposedly been withdrawn in the face of widespread evidence of human rights violations. It is indeed remarkable that instead of calling for protection of human rights, Manmohan Singh calls for protecting policemen from 'undue harassment' - a euphemistic call for giving the police total immunity from charges of human rights violations.

Manmohan Singh has also mentioned possible foreign links of the Indian Maoists, describing the Maoist insurgency as being antithetical to 'our democracy, our way of life'. This is a standard way to seek legitimacy for indiscriminate repression. During the McCarthy era of anti-communist witch-hunt in the US, all progressive ideas and individuals were denounced as being Un-American! Even today, Bush invokes the so-called American way of life to invade and occupy once sovereign countries like Afghanistan and Iraq. The BJP and the Sangh have perfected the art of perpetrating the worst kind of communal violence and state repression in the name of defending their 'Indian dream'. And now Manmohan Singh too invokes 'our democracy, our way of life' to initiate a major state-led assault on the democratic rights of the aam aadmi.

It is true that the Maoists themselves usually express scant regard for the democratic rights of other people including the oppressed and deprived people in whose name they claim to be operating. Their acts of political killings and massacres of ordinary people, including large-scale killings of dalits, adivasis and Muslims, are patently indefensible. By indulging in sensational military activities devoid of any mass political agenda, they leave the masses unorganised and defenceless in the face of the repression unleashed by the state. But in spite of all these follies of the Maoists, democratic forces can certainly never give the state a licence to wage a war on people's liberties and rights in the name of tackling the Maoist insurgency. Enhanced vigilance and active defence of democratic rights can be the only answer of the people to the emerging UPA agenda of unified and unfettered repression.

P.S.

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