

Disinheriting Adivasis: The Gadchiroli Game Plan

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In a statement issued on April 16th 2018, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) claimed that the 'National Policy and Action Plan' to combat Left Wing Extremism (LWE) is 'a multi-pronged strategy involving security and development related measures'¹. This *new* policy, apparently in place since the NDA government came to power at the centre, claims to have 'zero tolerance towards violence coupled with a big push to developmental activities so that benefits of development reached the poor and vulnerable in the affected areas'². The statement talks of substantial improvement in the LWE scenario by indicating reduced incidents of violence over the last four years. Within a week of this statement to the press, several Maoists are killed in an alleged encounter in Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra and, then, in Bijapur district of Chhattisgarh³. The Maharashtra state police immediately issued press notes and organised a press conference on April 24th declaring the operation an unmitigated success. A week later, Chhattisgarh police did the same. Even as the death count of Maoists kept rising, the police claimed that none of their personnel, primarily the elite C-60 force in Maharashtra and the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), were seriously injured let alone killed in action.

In the hours following the alleged encounters, think tank executives started predicting 'revenge attacks' by the Maoists. One such report in a leading national daily went on to say, "(w)ithin the logic of war they (Maoists) are waging, executing dramatic retaliation for security forces' success in Gadchiroli will certainly be high among their priorities. Revenge attacks may come wherever and whenever the opportunity presents itself."⁴ Meanwhile, talking heads on news channels, editorial teams in media houses and the police were scrambling to get their story straight and goose step to the narrative of the state. Questions raised by independent journalists, lawyers, and human rights

¹ *Government's new policy paying dividends in containing Left Wing Extremism*

<http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=178704> April 16th 2018, Press Information Bureau, MHA, GOI

² *The Contours of the New Red Map*

<http://indianexpress.com/article/explained/naxalism-maoist-attacks-home-ministry-modi-govt-national-policy-and-action-plan-5140028/>, April 17th 2018 Rahul Tripathi

³ *Bijapur Encounter: Six Women among 8 Maoists Killed*

<http://indianexpress.com/article/india/six-women-among-8-maoists-killed-in-bijapur-encounter-5154537/>

April 28th 2018 Dipankar Ghosh

⁴ *Devastating Impact on Maoists, But be Prepared for Revenge Attacks*

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/opinion/devastating-impact-on-maoists-but-be-prepared-for-revenge-attacks/story-Qa1e7MPUmOG5WJoXgiOqLL.html>, April 24th 2018, Ajai Sahni, executive director, Institute for Conflict Management and South Asia Terrorism Portal

organisations⁵ in the days following the encounters seem to rankle the establishment. Can such large scale losses on one side be termed an ‘encounter’? If it was a large Maoist camp, how was no one captured alive? Besides contradictions in the police narratives, the official report and inquiry is throwing up inconsistencies in police action, forcing officials to run for cover⁶. Since more is known about the incident in Gadchiroli, it is worthwhile to assess what happened in order to unravel the purpose of such operations for security forces, its significance for the political establishment, the way in which the corporate owned media reports on it and, finally, its impact on the people of Gadchiroli.

Ground Zero: Gadchiroli

The alleged encounter, it seems, took place over the two days of 22nd and 23rd April; first in the Boriya-Kasansur area on the banks of the Indravati River and, then, the next day over 40 kms away in the Nainar forests near Rajaram Khandla. In the days after the alleged encounters, the count of those killed rose to 40, with majority being women, some suspected to be civilians and several minors⁷. With this, the jingoistic narrative of the first few days changed to suit the political expediency of the time. Visible in the sudden caution of the officials when addressing the media, the police started speaking of the extraordinary circumstances surrounding the incidents. But the questions kept coming. Questions like the unusually large number of deaths of Maoists; lack of injuries let alone casualties faced by the C-60 forces⁸; lack of efforts to capture, arrest, detain or interrogate those shot⁹; the deliberately slow recovery of bodies from the river¹⁰ advancing the rate of decomposition¹¹; the awkward images of bodies that appeared to have been dressed in ill fitted fatigues post-mortem; the presence of nearby villagers

⁵ *Activists Allege Gadchiroli Operation was ‘Fake’*

<http://indianexpress.com/article/india/activists-allege-gadchiroli-operation-was-fake-5167398/> May 8th 2018
Vivek Deshpande

⁶ *Magisterial Inquiries into Maoist Encounters Yet to Begin*

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/nagpur/magisterial-inquiries-into-maoist-encounters-yet-to-begin/articleshow/64360734.cms> May 28th 2018 Soumitra Bose

⁷ *Were there Civilians among the ‘Naxals’ killed in Gadchiroli ‘Encounter’?*

<https://thewire.in/politics/were-there-civilians-among-the-naxals-killed-in-gadchiroli-encounter> May 7th 2018
Sukanya Shantha

⁸ *Muzzling the Maoist Monster*

<http://www.newindianexpress.com/thesundaystandard/2018/apr/29/muzzling-the-maoist-monster-1807690.html> April 29th 2018 Pushkar Banaker, Abhijit Mulye and Ejaz Kaiser

⁹ *In Gadchiroli, Maoists encountered the Perfect Ambush*

http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/in-gadchiroli-maoists-encountered-the-perfect-ambush/article23713017.ece?utm_source=email&utm_medium=Email&utm_campaign=Newsletter April 29th 2018
Pavan Dahat

¹⁰ *Bodies of 11 more Maoists found Floating in Indravati River*

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/nagpur/bodies-of-11-more-maoist-cadres-found-floating-in-indravati-river/articleshow/63887008.cms> April 24th 2018 Soumitra Bose

¹¹ *Maoists’ Bodies Float in River, Toll now Put at 27*

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/maoists-bodies-float-in-river-toll-now-put-at-27/articleshow/63888035.cms> April 24th 2018 Soumitra Bose

among the dead; and, the heartbreaking account of the 8 missing children of the village of Gattapalli¹² all appeared to sully the designed narrative and cloud over their “best operations in the last 38 years since the Naxal problem began”¹³.

It appears that the C-60 personnel of the Maharashtra police chose indiscriminate firing and, thus, preferred killing all combatants and non-combatants to arrest, detention and interrogation. The police planned this attack in advance and carried heavy artillery including Under Barrel Grenade Launchers (UGBLs) that are designed to have a long and wide range and cause large-scale damage¹⁴. The officers claimed that the alleged encounter in Boriya-Kasansur was swift and the Maoists were completely encircled before being gunned down. But, it is curious that the site was not secured post operation. Several key documents, letters, pictures and evidence remained scattered at the site, ostensibly for the benefit of concerned journalists. This became amply clear when it was revealed that select journalists were especially airlifted to the site by the police officials immediately after the incident. In the second site of the alleged encounter in the Nainar forest, the villagers heard gunshots but nothing to indicate cross-firing as claimed by the police. On closer examination of the site, it appears that six of those captured in Boriya-Kasansur, were transported across the district and shown as killed in Nainar forest. Those living in the area believe the police captured and tortured them to reveal money ‘dumps’. On locating the dumps, the police officials shot and killed them and called it an ‘encounter’.

In the Gadchiroli district alone, a combination of police including C-60, CRPF, State Reserve Police Force and CoBRA Commandos roughly number 12,000 personnel. In the first press conference at the Police Headquarters, the officials claimed that two teams of the C-60 force encircled the Maoist camp and fired in retaliation, thus declaring the firing an act of self-defense. Oddly enough, this was followed by boastful claims of egregious use of UBGLs with 12-13 grenades and over 2,000 rounds fired. This incongruity in police claims reveals an anxiety about public perception of such brutal acts. It is important to note that UBGLs are normally issued to the army and other higher levels of military organisations. These assault weapons, mounted on INSAS and AK-47 rifles, issue large calibre projectiles with a range of between 28-400 meters at 5-7 rounds per minute at 76 m/s velocity. These weapons are intended to cause large-scale damage. Incidentally, each year the Ministry of Home Affairs, under whose jurisdiction the entire Central Armed Paramilitary Force functions, provides ample funds for the purchase of such weapons. These are to be used, not against enemy

¹² *One of 40 ‘Naxals’ Killed in the Encounter was Child, Say Villagers, 7 More Missing*

<https://www.thewire.in/rights/gadchiroli-encounter-lost-children-of-gattepalli> May 1st 2018 Sukanya Shantha

¹³ *Maharashtra Police’s Gadchiroli Naxal Encounter One of the Most Successful in Recent Times*

<https://www.news18.com/news/india/maharashtra-polices-gadchiroli-naxal-encounter-one-of-the-most-successful-in-recent-times-1726235.html>, April 23rd 2018, Arunima CNN News 18

¹⁴ *Gadchiroli Encounter: Reworked Strategy, Better Equipment let to Success*

<http://indianexpress.com/article/cities/mumbai/gadchiroli-encounter-reworked-strategy-better-equipment-led-to-success-5152033/> April 26th 2018 Rashmi Rajput

soldiers but against internal armed resistance, all the while denying to the international community that such an internal armed conflict even exists, presumably to avoid facing UN observers.¹⁵ Along with these assault weapons, the CRPF is provided with Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) and drones, thermal reflex vision sights, night vision goggles, bullet proof vests, shields, among other such gear¹⁶. One would think that the police force that is fitted in such finery is expected to uphold the law of the land responsibly. That does not appear to be the expectation of the senior officials of the police, the political establishment or the media. Senior police officers claimed that as per their estimate roughly 40 Maoists were present at Boriya-Kasansur, and so, “while we have been able to kill 31, a few have managed to flee. Operations are now on to locate them.”¹⁷ There was absolutely no effort to capture those who may have escaped; just kill. The brutality engendered in the policy of the security forces is accentuated by the self-righteous exuberance of the officials while videos of security forces dancing to popular misogynistic music were doing the rounds of the TV news circuit¹⁸. This was also visible as the images of bodies on tarpaulin and several floating on the Indravati River, bloated beyond recognition, in advanced stages of decomposition enveloped in plastic sheets started doing the rounds of the media. In this manner, encounter killings are normalised as the practice for dealing with political crisis. These extra-judicial killings are not just justified but declared necessary implying both the inevitability of brutal action against the people and celebrated as the ideal method of crushing resistance. This disingenuous argument shows the impunity enjoyed by the security forces and is meant to instil fear in the people. But, what it also does is to reveal the desperation of the Indian State to be seen as effective, decisive and dominant.

Historically, the adivasis of Gadchiroli have stood up to the colonial state and its efforts to exploit forest resources to feed the monstrous imperial machine. These forest resources include trees, forest produce, and minerals. The colonial state attempted to acquire it for timber for shipbuilding and minerals for export to the metropolis. The adivasis are dependent on the forests for food, fuel, fodder and medicines; that is, their entire way of life. Today, the people of Gadchiroli are standing up to the corporate state and opposing its efforts to acquire, exploit and export these resources to multinational corporations, entities that have no intention of working for anything other than their own profit. Although calling itself the world’s largest democracy, the Indian government has continued the colonial policy of paternalistic benevolence by asserting that the

¹⁵ *Modern Weapons to Tackle Terrorist and Naxalite activities*

<http://www.pib.nic.in/PressReleaseDetail.aspx?PRID=1527652> April 4th 2018 PIB, MHA, GOI

¹⁶ *Gadchiroli Encounter: Six More Maoists Confirmed Dead, Toll Rises to 22*

<http://indianexpress.com/article/india/gadchiroli-encounter-six-more-maoists-confirmed-dead-toll-rises-to-22-5148893/> April 24th 2018 Express News Service

¹⁷ *Gadchiroli: Naxal Body Count now 37, Police Laid Ambush, and Waited*

<http://indianexpress.com/article/india/gadchiroli-naxal-body-count-now-37-police-laid-an-ambush-and-waited-5150635/> April 25th 2018 Vivek Deshpande

¹⁸ *C-60 Commandos Celebrate Successful Naxal Encounters in Gadchiroli – Maharashtra News*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AG6wAGENBBO> April 23rd 2018 ANI News

people of Gadchiroli do not understand what is good for them. A decade ago, the UPA governments' Expert Group appointed by the Planning Commission issued a report called *Development Challenges in Extremist Affected Areas*. It said, "...the Naxalite movement has to be recognised as a political movement with a strong base among the landless and poor peasantry and adivasis. Its emergence needs to be contextualised in the social conditions and experience of people who form a part of it. The huge gap between state policy and performance is a feature of these conditions."¹⁹ Despite the report by the Expert Group, the previous government minced no words when it linked the crushing of Maoist movement in the mineral rich parts of the country having a direct affect on the 'climate of investment'. Following this pattern, the model of development, sustained by the current government, does not consider the will of the people as worth acknowledging. How has this huge gap between state policy and performance been addressed in the last decade? In what ways has the benefit of development reached the poor and the vulnerable? In Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra, Surjagarh is one such roar of anger waiting to explode into a massive uprising. In 2007, Lloyd Steel Ltd. procured a lease for 348 hectare of forest land to mine in Surjagarh hills in Gadchiroli. The hills have over 180 MMT of high quality iron ore. The hills under question have historically been sacred to Oraon, Madia Gonds and other adivasi communities from Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Maharashtra. Thousands of people from across these states annually come to Surjagarh and Damkondwani for pilgrimage to the deity Thakurdev's shrine. The opposition of the people to this open-cast mining project has been immense and unanimous. Thus, despite starting mining in 2016²⁰, it was quickly shut down after protests all across the district²¹. It is possible to understand the ever increasing brutalities of state forces through political, administrative and military techniques in order to crush all forms of resistance when one sees that it is done to strengthen the economic interests of a few. The policy on LWE, increasing incidents of 'encounter killings', the signing of hundreds of Memorandum of Understandings (MOUs) with corporations with mining interests, and the blatant violation of the rights of adivasis living in these forests are the keys to unlocking this game plan.

State Policy: Salwa Judum to SAMADHAN

The current political regime has taken the previous UPA government policies, re-branded it, and projected it as innovations to assuage the concerns of the

¹⁹ *Development Challenges in Extremist Affected Areas*

http://www.planningcommission.nic.in/reports/publications/rep_dce.pdf Report of an Expert Group to Planning Commission 2008.

²⁰ *Gadchiroli: Iron Ore Mining Project Starts*

<http://indianexpress.com/article/cities/mumbai/gadchiroli-iron-ore-mining-project-starts/> April 10th 2018

Vivek Deshpande

²¹ *Villagers Protest Mining in Gadchiroli*

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/Villagers-protest-mining-in-Gadchiroli/article17094501.ece> January 26th 2017 Pavan Dahat

corporations who are closely watching the climate of investment. This is visible in its operational policy dealing with the 'single biggest internal security challenge'²² ever faced by the country – the Maoist movement. Officially, the Indian State calls it Left Wing Extremism (LWE). This term is variously elaborated as an internal politico-socio-economic issue or a violent insurgency. But a closer reading of the government policy documents on dealing with this internal crisis reveals that it is a protracted war of opposing political ideologies and control. The deployment of well over 3,00,000 paramilitary forces under the direct command of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) with the largest concentration in Central India to contain and crush the armed resistance is indicative of a full-fledged armed conflict in the Indian subcontinent. Over the years, the muffled objections to this crisis being called 'war' have given way to open declarations of war in Central India. The logic for war is barefaced as one think tank strategist says, "...for exploitation of mineral wealth in Chhattisgarh, the government has approved several investment agreements with major corporate houses. But these initiatives have been met with strong opposition from tribals (sic). Thus, it is imperative for the government to eradicate LWE and create conditions for secure investment and un-interrupted mining activities."²³ Thus, in a single breath, all adivasis who oppose exploitation of minerals are extremists. These are the declared developmental goals of the government and are meant to help 'win the hearts and minds' of the local people. Winning hearts and minds, a strategy avowedly used by colonial and imperialist powers in the last century to subject territories to its rule, is used by the Indian State without irony on the people of this country.

The aspirations of the ruling class to expropriate and exploit the resources of this country, their complete disregard for the lives of adivasis living in the forests, and their anxious fervour to 'neutralise', 'cleanse', 'flush out', 'exterminate', and, most bluntly, 'hunt down' those who oppose this open loot of the land needs to be mapped in order to understand the situation in Gadchiroli. This genocidal language of the state is gladly carried forward by the ideological extension of the state – the corporate media. The portrayal of adivasis as either 'innocent villagers' or 'armed rebels' goes on to be projected in the media where the acceptable citizen is one who is compliant, votes every five years and, when the multinational corporations need the land, is entirely dispensable. The only definition of 'development' acceptable to the state is one that will line the pockets of corporate executives and politicians with super profits and kickbacks. Those opposed to this definition, those fighting against being displaced, against mining, against the complete obliteration of their way of life are conveniently branded 'anti-national', 'dreaded rebels' and 'terrorists'. The ways in which the

²² *Naxalism Biggest Threat to Internal Security: Manmohan*

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/Naxalism-biggest-threat-to-internal-security-Manmohan/article16302952.ece> May 24th 2010 PTI

²³ *Left Wing Extremism – A Brief Security Review*

<http://www.vifindia.org/article/2017/july/26/left-wing-extremism-a-brief-security-review> July 26th 2017
Ramanand Garge, Associate Fellow, Vivekananda International Foundation

institutions of the state and the biggest beneficiaries of state policy work to realise their goals is visible in their approach towards tackling political conflict.

With the NDA government coming to power in 2014, Minister for Home Affairs Rajnath Singh reiterated ex-Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's pronouncement that LWE is the biggest internal security threat while proposing a four-pronged strategy – security related interventions, development, securing rights and entitlements to the largely tribal hit population and public perception management²⁴. By 2016, the Integrated Action Plan (IAP) became 'Additional Central Assistance for LWE affected districts'. These evolving catch phrases are meant to convey that the procurement of weapons for paramilitary will be eased, the central government plans to directly intervene on questions of development, will introduce programmes to fight alienation of forest dwellers, and build an effective media plan to make its policies palatable for the urban middle class consumers. Last year, the strategy was elaborated, polished and unveiled by Rajnath Singh, now with its pithy acronym - SAMADHAN²⁵. Operation Green Hunt dealt with 'area domination' and 'clear, hold and develop' strategies. These counter-insurgency measures were emerging from colonial and imperialist strategies all over the world and were hyper-masculine displays of physical force by the security forces. Learning from the Andhra Pradesh Special Intelligence Bureau (APSIB), the CRPF, with training from the infamous Andhra Greyhounds, are determined to conduct 'localised intelligence based operations'. With SAMADHAN, the chief thrust of the policy is to carry forward UPA government's Operation Green Hunt by ensuring that the CRPF is well funded, equipped with advanced weaponry²⁶, ensures involvement of locals in operations, and relies on pointed human intelligence on the ground²⁷. Thus, SAMADHAN is the next chapter from the same book as it attempts to decimate 'capacity of command, control and operations as well as morale' of the Maoists. SAMADHAN expands to – 'Smart leadership, Aggressive strategy, Motivation and training, Actionable intelligence, Dashboard based key performance indicators and key result areas, Harnessing technology, Action plan for each theatre and No access to financing'. Thus, this is a top down aggressive approach with key military personnel guiding the paramilitary in these 'theatres of war'. Security personnel are to train locals as informants, variously called *gupt sainiks* or shadow intelligence officers, to improve 'Technical Intelligence Inputs' and surveillance techniques and access local communication networks. Key performance indicators (KPIs) and key result areas (KIAs) are parameters through

²⁴ *Left Wing extremism discussed in the consultative committee meeting*

<http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=111325> November 12th 2014 PIB, MHA, GOI

²⁵ *Union Home Minister addresses the Review Meeting of Left Wing Extremism affected states*

<http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=161625> May 9th 2017 PIB, MHA, GOI

²⁶ *Use More Drones, Cut of Finances to Deal with Maoists: Rajnath Singh to States*

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/rajnath-singh-calls-for-financial-choking-of-maoists-urges-forces-to-become-more-proactive/story-dYQ3astxImiWTBYSYPi4nl.html> May 8th 2017 Rajesh Ahuja

²⁷ *SAMADHAN: Modi Govt's New Anti-Naxal Mantra*

<https://www.theweek.in/content/archival/news/india/samadhan-modi-govt-new-anti-naxal-mantra.html> May 8th 2017 Namrata Biji Ahuja

which each mission or operation is judged – these are, unashamedly, the count of the dead or kill ratio, setbacks to Maoists in terms of armaments, destruction of adivasi way of life, and sexual assault of women, among others. This aggressive strategy has local contours. Last year in Chhattisgarh, this policy was tested following the Maoist attack on CRPF in Sukma. The CRPF executed Operation Prahhaar I in June²⁸ and II in November²⁹. Both operations were declared successful for eliminating 12 and 6 ‘scalps’ respectively.

In his presentation on SAMADHAN last year, Rajnath Singh made some illuminating comments. He called LWE a ‘cancer’ that flourishes on poverty or backwardness. He stressed the need for Unified Command along with Strategic Command among several phrases familiar to military personnel as well as the Hindutva forces. Without irony, the PIB statement reads, “I believe that the efforts to suppress democracy through the influence of the gun will never succeed.” Phrases like ‘multi-pronged strategy’, ‘paying dividends’, ‘focused deployment of resources’, ‘mission mode’, ‘technology is a force multiplier’, ‘Capacity Building’, among others are littered generously throughout the text. These phrases are familiar to corporate executives with interests in investing in the region. The most revealing statement is, “(i)n the yagya for the security of the country many soldiers have been martyred.” By invoking the notion of sacrifice and devotion within the Hindu ritual traditions and utilising it to show his expectations from the paramilitary, Singh poses the state policy as an act of righteousness and virtue. This directly feeds into the logic of Hindutva as it projects any form of dissent through the moralistic notions of protecting the nation.

In the days following the incidents in Gadchiroli and Bijapur districts, Singh has announced the establishment of an exclusively tribal ‘Bastariya’ Battalion and anti-Naxal combat force called ‘Black Panther’ in Chhattisgarh. 534 tribal youth from Chhattisgarh form the Bastariya Battalion of the CRPF and this battalion will be deployed for anti-Naxal operations in the worst affected LWE areas of Sukma, Dantewada and Bijapur³⁰. This force is expected to counter the intelligence failures of the security forces in these areas and take advantage of familiarity with locals and the topography. This announcement has immediately caused unease and anxiety in the region as it is being seen as a continuation of Salwa Judum³¹. Salwa Judum was a vigilante group led by Congress leader Mahendra Karma with tacit and explicit state

²⁸ ‘Operation Prahhaar’ ends, Dozen Naxals Killed, Three Jawans Dead

<http://www.abplive.in/india-news/operation-prahaar-ends-dozen-naxals-killed-jawans-dead-544194> June 25th 2017 ANI

²⁹ Chhattisgarh: Six Maoists killed in Operation Prahhaar

<http://indianexpress.com/article/india/chhattisgarh-six-maoist-killed-in-operation-prahaar/> November 8th 2017 Dipankar Ghosh

³⁰ ‘Bastariya’ battalion to take on Maoists

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/bastariya-battalion-to-take-on-maoists/article23944624.ece> May 21st 2018 PTI

³¹ Is the Salwa Judum back?

<http://indianexpress.com/article/explained/is-the-salwa-judum-back-bastariya-battalion-crpf-chhattisgarh-5190001/> May 25th 2018 Dipankar Ghosh

support and infamous for brutal violence against the adivasis in Bastar. Salwa Judum recruited untrained youth as 'Koya Commandos' and 'Special Police Officers' who burned hundreds of villages, sexually assaulted adivasis, and forced thousands of adivasis to leave their homes and move to neighbouring states for several years. After the Supreme Court order banning Special Police Officers (SPOs) of the Salwa Judum in 2011, its members were absorbed into the District Reserve Group or made Auxiliary Armed Constables as part of the Chhattisgarh police. Curiously, since one-third recruits in Bastariya battalion are women, a think tank executive feels it will have a 'restraining, perhaps even civilising influence on its actions and operations'³². Despite accepting that the Salwa Judum was a brutal force that escalated violence to unprecedented levels, it is clear that some are keen to see a tribal force face off against tribal communities in the area. This new 241st battalion is being unleashed on the people of Bastar with assurances that since this battalion is "trained", it is not the Salwa Judum. But, unmistakably, this battalion of adivasis is being trained to act as a buffer against any charge of human rights violations against the CRPF. Alongside this battalion, Rajnath Singh has announced a specialised anti-Naxal combat force called 'Black Panther' trained on the lines of the infamous Andhra 'Greyhounds'. Alongside this 200 member Black Panther force, four Indian Reserve (IR) battalions are expected to reach Chhattisgarh for operations³³ taking the total number of paramilitary battalions in Chhattisgarh to 52³⁴. This was followed by a call to investigate all sources of funding for Maoists. He implied that Maoist leaders are minting money and sending it abroad and, thus, he feels all efforts to choke the flow of funds and resources to Maoists should be the next strategy.

Meanwhile, as part of public perception management, the government is funding Surrender-cum-Rehabilitation Schemes for 'Naxals' with pay-to-play benefits. The immediate cash benefits notwithstanding, these schemes are meant to wean youth away from the 'Naxal fold' as a part of Conflict Management and Resolution Strategy and advertised as the ideal path to integration with the mainstream³⁵. Yet, in repeated instances, these *aatmasamarpan*s are found to be fake. Recently, the Gadchiroli police was found to have illegally detained Dasharath Gawade, a Gond adivasi, staged his

³² *Bastariya Battalion's Comparison with Salwa Judum is Ill-Informed*

<https://www.thequint.com/voices/opinion/bastariya-battalion-comparison-with-salwa-judum-ill-informed>

May 28th 2018 Ajai Sahni executive director of Institute of Conflict Management.

³³ *'Black Panther' forces, 4 Indian Reserve Battalions to land soon in Bastar: Rajnath Singh*

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/black-panther-forces-4-indian-reserve-battalions-to-land-soon-in-bastar-rajnath-singh/articleshow/64260740.cms?from=mdr> May 21st 2018 Rashmi Drolia

³⁴ *'Black Panther' to fight Maoists in Bastar*

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/black-panther-to-fight-maoists-in-bastar-rajnath-singh/story-pBggASP8MpWdvKkHLYPj3N.html> May 21st 2018 Ritesh Mishra

³⁵ *Guidelines for Surrender-cum-Rehabilitation for Naxals in Naxal Affected Areas*

https://mha.gov.in/sites/default/files/surrenderPolAendments070909_0_2.pdf MHA, GOI

surrender, confined him for two months and pressurised him to sign surrender papers.³⁶ When he refused, he was threatened and told he would be killed in an encounter. Because of the intervention of his wife, the court released him after he had spent 65 days under illegal police custody. In Chhattisgarh, under ex-DGP SRP Kalluri's regime, the policy of surrenders was so absurdly broad that any adivasi marked by the police who refused to surrender were invariably declared Maoist³⁷. A screening committee for the surrender and rehabilitation policy found that over 90% didn't fit the definition of "Maoist cadre"³⁸. Despite all evidence, the Maharashtra government has termed the Surrender-cum-Rehabilitation scheme a success and extended it for another two years. On another front, recognising the most impoverished tehsils of Gadchiroli, the Maharashtra government has tied up with the United Nations Human Development Mission (HDM) that would look into agribusiness, data analysis, value chain and marketing, as well as poverty alleviation programmes in the region to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Thus, the UN has signed a MOU with the Maharashtra government to help upgrade primary health centres, establish Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) and 'marketing linkages' while functioning out of a war room in the state planning department³⁹. Unsurprisingly, there is a long history of international interest in the dense forested region of Maharashtra and foreign donor agencies like USAID, World Bank, IMF, and others have volunteered to provide assistance in the name of social forestry to the very regions where adivasis reside and where minerals are found in abundance. In yet another image building exercise, the Gadchiroli CRPF organises Civic Action Programmes⁴⁰. On 31st March 2018, the CRPF organised Civic Action Programme where ex-BJP President and current Minister for Road, Transport, Highways and Shipping Nitin Gadkari, State Minister for Home Affairs Hansraj Ahir and other local leaders were present. The CRPF statement claims that 1200 families benefited from this scheme where people were given sewing machines, certificates in tailoring, mason (sic) work, poultry and training in basic computer course and driving among other such benefits. Civic Action Programmes are meant as 'developmental initiatives' that are taken up by the paramilitary, "towards deeper integration of the people in the remote areas with the rest of the country." At the same time, the CRPF and state police are openly funded and organising anti-Naxal platforms like the Naxal Peedit Samiti, Bhumkal, and, now, Janaki Shahid Police Parivar Sanstha

³⁶ 'Sign the Papers and Agree to Surrender, or We Will Kill You In an Encounter'

<https://thewire.in/government/sign-the-papers-and-agree-to-surrender-or-we-will-kill-you-in-an-encounter>

February 26th 2018 Sukanya Shantha

³⁷ *Ground Report: The Truth about Chhattisgarh's Recent Maoist Surrenders*

<https://scroll.in/article/775849/ground-report-the-truth-about-chhattisgarhs-recent-maoist-surrenders>

December 19th 2015 Malini Subrahmaniam

³⁸ *Chhattisgarh Faked Maoist Surrenders*

<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/chhattisgarh-faked-maoist-surrenders/article20543086.ece> November 17th 2017 Vijaita Singh

³⁹ *Maharashtra Government, UN to launch Human Development Mission in 25 tehsils*

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/mumbai-news/maharashtra-government-un-to-launch-human-development-mission-in-25-tehsils/story-k0gIY3F66SXUlibmBxaH9J.html> December 4th 2017 Surendra P Gangan

⁴⁰ *Civic Action Programmes in Gadchiroli* <https://crpf.gov.in/Civic-Action-Programme-western-sector.htm>

(JSPPS).⁴¹ Meanwhile, as per the policy adopted by the CRPF in the last decade, the personnel who participated in the incidents in Gadchiroli are set to receive double promotions, monetary packages and perks as gratuity incentives. However, a quick look at these schemes and policies reveals that the people of Gadchiroli and the foot-soldiers in the paramilitary get next to nothing when compared with the enormous inflow of state funds and corporate capital allotted to crushing LWE. It begs the question, who truly stands to benefit at the end of the day?

The Dust Storm is Rising

The Standing Committee of the Inter-State Council (ISC) met to deliberate on last of the 273 recommendations of the Punchhi Commission⁴² on May 25th 2018. The last 88 recommendations were on Centre-State relations pertaining, first, to environment, natural resources – water, forests and minerals – and infrastructure and, then, to socio-economic development, public policy and good governance⁴³. The Punchhi Commission was constituted in 2007 following objections to the Sarkaria Commission of 1988 for giving extensive powers to the Union government to intervene in inter-state disputes. 18 state governments have objected to the recommendation to include environment as a Central list subject citing that environment-related legislation is often influenced by local political pressures and is too vast a subject to be abdicated to the Centre⁴⁴. The significance of such recommendations and its implications on state policy when dealing with internal political crisis is worth considering. The NDA government is pushing for centralisation of control on questions of ‘environment, resources and infrastructure’ while projecting a model of development that begins and ends with the definition decided by the party in power. Such commissions constituted by the Indian government at various stages have attempted power-sharing agreements across central and state governments and the policy of ‘control, regulation and development’ ensures that this process remains in the hands of the political elite that stands to benefit from it.

The definition of development as per the Indian State and its political elite has actively disregarded the basic rights of the most marginalised people of this country – the adivasis, dalits, landless, women, and children. While POSCO, Vedanta, ESSAR, Jindal, Mittal, TATA, Adani and Ambani are indulged and spoiled silly by the ruling class, those

⁴¹ *Kasnasur Naxalite Encounter a Tribute to all Martyrs, say Police Widows*

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/nagpur/kasnasur-naxalite-encounter-a-tribute-to-all-martyrs-say-police-widows/articleshow/63931287.cms> April 27th 2018 TNN

⁴² *Punchhi Commission* <http://interstatecouncil.nic.in/punchhi-commission/> MHA, GOI

⁴³ *Deliberations on Punchhi Commission Report Completed*

<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/deliberations-on-punchhi-commission-report-completed/articleshow/64320379.cms> May 25th 2018 PTI

⁴⁴ *Ecology as Central subject? Punjab, 17 others say No*

<http://www.tribuneindia.com/news/nation/ecology-as-central-subject-punjab-17-others-say-no/595279.html> May 26th 2018 Aditi Tandon

living on the land vied for by these industrial giants are expected to pack up and move elsewhere, preferably out of sight. As compensation, those living on these lands are given mere assurances of increased standards of living and essential services along with platitudes of 'profitable investment' and 'good governance'. But once foreign direct investment finds roots in a resource rich area, any promise that even suggests it may chip away at the super-profits of corporations is quickly forgotten. But, over the years, after being made to pay the price for progress, the people have learned to recognise hollow promises. The anger at their betrayal takes the form of organised struggles against these corporate interests.

Since the procurement of the lease by Lloyd Steel Ltd., the Surjagarh hills in Gadchiroli has seen an unprecedented increase in security forces, camps, and auxiliary functions. In 2015, Chief Minister of Maharashtra Devendra Fadnavis claimed, "Gadchiroli is mineral rich and along with mining we also want to push for setting up of industries to process the minerals. For that, we discussed as to how much additional security is required... We also want to impart skill training to local tribal youth to include them in this development process and along-side a strong road network should also be in place."

⁴⁵ The justification for setting up mining projects in the area has been an assurance of job creation. But, in a mechanised industry, the promise of jobs for adivasis is a devious ploy and skill training an empty ruse. Meanwhile, the security forces have a lot to do. The substantial increase in paramilitary forces in heavily fortified camps built in the name of 'industrial security' has created an environment of fear and mistrust in the area. Increasing incidents of sexual assault of adivasi women, unprovoked detention of adivasis on fabricated charges, beating up of villagers who oppose such detentions, and, most brutally, the killing of adivasis in fake encounters has convinced more people that the mining projects will destroy their way of life⁴⁶. Projects such as these have resulted in large-scale land acquisition, repeated explorations for mineral ore, uncontrolled felling of trees, and, finally, environmental degradation all over the country. Even as the mines threaten to devour their sacred sites, the people of Surjagarh have to contend with the irreversible damage to their way of life. Run-offs from mines pollute surface and groundwater sources, destroy standing crop and render land unsuitable for cultivation. For adivasis who are dependent on forests for sustenance, the immediate and long term impact on agrarian land, pollution and depletion of water sources, degradation of vegetation cover, debilitating impact on flora and fauna, and consequent impact on the physical and mental health of the people of the region are essential questions that affect the quality of land, life and dignity of the people. Open-cast mines have left open sores on the topography of Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha,

⁴⁵ *To Secure Mining Sector, Devendra Fadnavis asks Centre to Increase Paramilitary Deployment*
<http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-to-secure-mining-sector-devendra-fadnavis-asks-centre-to-increase-paramilitary-deployment-2119542> August 29th 2015 Nikhil M Ghanekar

⁴⁶ *In Gadchiroli the Mining of Another Adivasi God*
<https://thewire.in/environment/in-gadchiroli-the-mining-of-another-adivasi-god> September 11th 2016 Javed Iqbal

Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh with no succour in sight. With a view to avoid this fate, the people of Gadchiroli have organised themselves against the Surjagarh Mining Project. With the threat of being displaced and disinherited from their land, the Gonds, Madia, Halbi and others have jointly fought against the criminalisation of adivasis, stood up to the might of the state apparatus, courted arrest, assault, and, most insidiously, death by encounters to protect their *jal*, *jungle* and *jameen*. Despite years of brutal repression, their resolve remains strong.

Acquisition of land for mining in the Scheduled V Areas requires prior informed consent of the Gram Sabha as per the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 or PESA Act. Consultation with the Gram Sabha is mandatory for granting mining lease to corporations. In 2013, the Maharashtra government and Gadchiroli police went out of its way to stage Gram Sabha meetings in the town of Alapalli. They claimed “security reasons” for not holding the meeting at the villages around Surjagarh. The villagers were threatened, some illegally detained, and warning letters issued by the police threatening action if they didn’t attend such meetings organised to get (read: coerce) consent⁴⁷. As per the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act 2006, better known as Forest Rights Act, the “historical injustice of colonial practices of setting up a forest department, prohibiting adivasi access to forest produce, giving the rights to declare ‘protected area’ to a forest settlement officer ended up creating a vicious pattern of harassment, evictions, extortion, and sexual assaults on forest dwellers by forest officials was to be corrected. This act was meant to recognise the inextricable link between the people who live in densely forested areas and the forest. Instead, this act is being blatantly violated or misused through myopic interpretations of the law. The Maharashtra government has deliberately diluted the PESA and FRA Acts by introducing the Maharashtra Village Forest Rules 2014. This attempts to overtake both the PESA and FRA and give authority back to the Forest Department by constituting Van Vyavasthapan Samiti or Joint Forest Management Committee under the control of forest department officials who, with the permission of Gram Sabhas, take over the management of forests⁴⁸. Interestingly, the Ministry of Tribal Affairs explained the distinctive feature of community ownership to the Secretary to the Governor of Maharashtra in an official correspondence over Minor Forest Produce (MFP). On being asked about ownership under PESA and FRA, the government authority replied, “(t)he notion of ownership under PESA and FRA is quite different from the commonly understood notion of private property. Individual rights

⁴⁷ *Mysterious Missive, Detention during Martyrs’ Week*

<http://epaper.thestatesman.com/895597/The-Statesman-Kolkata/4TH-August-2016#page/1/2> August 3rd 2016 Aritra Bhattacharya

⁴⁸ *How Maharashtra Forest Department is Trying to Regain Control over Community Forests*

<https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/how-maharashtra-forest-dept-trying-regain-control-over-community-forests-22168> February 25th 2015 Aritra Bhattacharya

are nested within the right of the Gram Sabha.”⁴⁹ Incidentally, the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013, or the Land Acquisition Act, also recognises the need to consult local self-government or Gram Sabhas to provide compensation and rehabilitation of land. Here, the government has broadened the definition of ‘public purpose’ in order to acquire and transfer the land to private companies and by setting up Special Economic Zones (SEZs) using eminent domain. Eminent domain as a concept is abused to usurp land and hand it over to a third party using the logic that the state functions solely for public good. A brief look at the history of land acquisition and the protests against it suggest otherwise. This year, the government has amped up its efforts for the smooth running of the Surjagarh mine. It has cleared additional 100 acres of land at Aashti for the treatment of ore extracted from Surjagarh⁵⁰. Interestingly, the iron ore is transported from Surjagarh to Aashti under police protection. While the government meets the concerns and needs of industry at every turn, it is done by running roughshod over the will of the people.

The Indian State scrambles to make palatable its anti-people policies by disguising it in benign words. All this is being done in the name of development. When the people of refuse to buy this logic, when they openly question the intentions of the state, when they oppose this deception, they are declared unsuitable subjects. Even think tanks vying for the sanction of the state have admitted that the C-60 forces in Gadchiroli have systematically harassed, assaulted and killed adivasis by unleashing a chain of terror⁵¹. Instead of addressing these issues, the government has proposed the introduction of a law that criminalises the distribution of any literature that exposes the misdeeds of the police. Moreover, Lloyd Steel Ltd. intends to bring at least 4,000 personal guards to safeguard the mines over and above the security forces deployed in the region⁵². In India, the concept of development is deeply tied to the upper class Hindu culture of kow-towing to the state. Capitalists and their agents are disinclined to resolve the issues of the people it intends to exploit. An environment of fear and insecurity serves the industrialist, who is looking to make inroads into an area to exploit it, by playing off the fears of people. By rendering the land waste, the adivasi is ultimately displaced; building a sense of insecurity and instability that destroys democratic community ownership of land and property. It replaces it with hierarchical social and economic structures of

⁴⁹ *Inter Relationship between FRA and PESA with Reference to MFP - Clarification*

<https://tribal.nic.in/FRA/declarationsClarifications/13InterrelationshipbetweenFRAandPESAwithreferencetoMFPdated13Feb2015.pdf> February 13th 2015 Deputy Secretary to the GOI, Ministry of Tribal Affairs

⁵⁰ *Land Ready for Lloyds sponge iron unit in Gadchiroli*

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/nagpur/land-ready-for-lloyds-sponge-iron-unit-in-gadchiroli/articleshow/62686852.cms> January 29th 2018 Shishir Arya

⁵¹ *The Dream that the State Sells – Analysis*

<https://www.eurasiareview.com/20092016-the-dream-that-the-state-sells-analysis/#> September 20th 2016

Bibhu Prasad Routray

⁵² *Maharashtra tribals up against Mining Companies*

<http://www.tehelka.com/2016/10/maharashtra-tribals-up-against-mining-companies/> October 7th 2016

Prateek Goyal

dependence that brings feudal and patriarchal tendencies along with dominant upper class Hindu Brahmanism. It is clear that anti-Naxalism is an excuse to clear the land for mining companies and establish industry at any cost. It is hard to shut one's eyes to the parasitism ingrained in this policy for development. Today, even those who talk of reform of legal mechanisms, over-hauling of methods of implementation and lobbyists of trickledown economics are hard pressed to find excuses for the brutality of state policy. While the lives, livelihoods, culture and histories of adivasis are seen as worthless, the greed of the market is called 'growth'. On the one hand these projects, it is claimed, will improve the lives of the people by increasing the per capita income in a state known for its 'backwardness', on the other, the government drags its feet when it comes to implementing the existing laws of the land. Instead, in an effort to evade accountability, the Maharashtra government tried to push through a draconian law that would turn it into a police state. The MPISA or the Maharashtra Protection of Internal Security Act (MPISA) 2016 was sought to control 'subversive acts', a phrase defined as per the discretion of any Maharashtra police officer, and build Special Security Zone (SSZ) where the power of the police would remain unquestioned⁵³. After strong opposition from all quarters, the bill was withdrawn.

The people have a long memory. Having lived in these forests for millennia, grown with histories deeply knitted with the landscape, the people of Gadchiroli are the true inheritors of the land. Any model of development that fails to acknowledge this will be rejected by the people. The effort to disinherit adivasis from their cultural life and the threat to destroy their sacred site has deep set consequences. The semi-feudal, semi-colonial policies of the state wherein the adivasis are handed out doles and essential services that the state is expected to provide its citizens are termed as 'development initiatives' instead of being recognised as the rights of the people. Furthermore, the people are expected to be grateful for these developmental programmes while the responsibility of the state remains outside the purview of inquiry. The Indian State has proven itself as the true heir of feudal and colonial power. And, as an instrument of exploitation, it has further intensified inequity and trampled on people's rights while calling it development. Here, for those of us still haunted by the monochromatic definition of civilization, it may be useful to ask, at what cost?

"...the more civilization advances, the more it is compelled to cover the ills it necessarily creates with the cloak of love, to embellish them, or to deny their existence; in short, to introduce conventional hypocrisy - unknown both in previous forms of society and even in the earliest stages of civilization - that culminates in the declaration: The exploiting class exploits the oppressed class solely and exclusively in the interest of the exploited class itself; and if the latter fails to appreciate this, and even becomes

⁵³ *Maharashtra's Proposed New Security Law would end up Creating a Police State*
<https://thewire.in/law/maharashtra-internal-security-act-mpisa> 30th August 2016 Sarim Naved

rebellious, it thereby shows the basest ingratitude to its benefactors, the exploiters.” – Frederick Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, 1884.