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Operation Green Hunt: CoBRA Forces Being Flown In

Soumitra S Bose, TNN 7 November 2009, 02:06am IST

NAGPUR: Despite home minister P Chidambaram's assertion in Hyderabad on Friday that Operation Green Hunt against the Maoists was a 'media creation,' preparations are on in the rebel-hit areas of Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh to mount such an operation.

Special forces belonging to Commnado Battalion for Resolute Action (CoBRA) are being flown in to Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra where a few companies of the CRPF are already in place. Besides, other paramilitary forces and police personnel would be there to help the elite force.

However, the big question is: where are the Maoists and how to identify them in the thick jungles of Gadchiroli? The Maoists have already discarded their traditional olive green dungarees and have mingled with the locals in making their identification all the more difficult. It seems the only way the forces can come face-to-face with the rebels is encounter. Here, too, the Maoists are known to make surprise attacks. Records show that the police have always been lured into a trap and massacred.

As far as records on Maoists is concerned, the police don't have much to flaunt: the intelligence data has only about 300-odd names. The number of photographs available is barely 30% of the data. In such a scenario, the identifying a Naxal becomes all the more difficult.

"The Maoists have several aliases. They identify themselves differently in different locations," said a cop in Gadchiroli. "Police always apply certain time-tested observations to distinguish between an innocent villager and a rebel in the jungle. A Maoist would try to hide or slip away on spotting a police team. It's a fact that they tend to cover the arms and other material under the dry leaves on the forest floor or under a bush. However a big group would have no choice but to get into a gun-fight," said an experienced cop working in the district for more than two decades.

As the hype around the operation builds up, the cops also expect the front organizations and supporters to get active.

Some cops feel that the government should learn from Sri Lanka. In its fight against the Tamil Tigers, the media was kept at a safe distance to avoid a possible sympathy wave.

Gadchiroli has witnessed more than 50 brutal deaths of cops this year. The confidence and morale among the force is at an all-time low. To make matters worse, their relationship with villagers, who are being continuously threatened by Naxals, is not good. A senior official from the district administration claimed that police need to improve their relationship with the media.

"Until villagers help the cops with information, success against Maoists is difficult in Gadchiroli," said a local resident pointing at how Operation Parakram-I and II (between February and October) failed in the district despite it being planned at a high level.

Former state Anti-Naxal Operation chief Pankaj Gupta said the government should now `counter-attack' by highlighting its schemes that have been specially designed for the tribal district.

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