The rise of Naxals brooks no complacency

Answering a question asked by a press reporter recently on the developing Naxal storm and the threat it posed to the national security, India's National Security Advisor, M K Narayanan dismissed the question by averring that it had little common with the elements of insurgency.

Rejecting the Red Corridor reports, he said that it was confined to certain pockets and would be successfully tackled before long. I'm afraid it is this unwarranted complacency on the part of the administration that has brought the country to the present pass vis a vis the Naxal problem. Nepal has been in deep trouble because of the Naxals. For sometime now, they have been tightening the noose on neighbouring UP, Uttranchal, Bihar and Jharkhand. Ask the Jehanabad (Bihar) jail staff or the villagers and they will tell you what it is. The humiliation that the administration suffered will go down as a shameful chapter in independent India's administrative history. Go to Jharkhand. Here railway stations and trains have been railjacked and police convoys attacked innumerable times. They have many more horrible stories to tell. Visit Chattisgarh. Naxals roam about the length and breadth of Bastar division freely, killing, maiming, kidnapping, attacking police stations and police convoys and railjacking trains as if they have no fear of any authority. Or, enter the neighbouring states of Orissa and Andhra. There the sufferers have their own heartrending tales of suffering to tell. Some recent cases are hard to ignore. A Naxal strike on April 16 on a police outpost in Bijapur district of Bastar Division killed 11 policemen. The Naxals looted arms and ammunition. On April 18, 2500 armed Naxals laid siege to a village in Bijapur trapping 2000 villagers. The police was at its wits' end not knowing what to do with such large numbers. On April 19, the Naxals triggered a landmine in Phulbondi forest area in Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra blasting off a police van carrying a police patrol party. One constable was killed and 17 injured in the blast. On April 20, a group of 200 Naxals blew up the ancestral residence of Kamlesh Kumar Singh, Jharkhand's Minister for Water Resources in Palamu District. Fortunately the Minister was not at home.

While the governments at the Centre and in the states spend their time in wringing their hands or making brave statements and not gone beyond holding discussions and meetings at by now famous "the highest level" and blaming each other for real and imagined reasons, the Naxals have gone about acquiring more and more lethal weapons and recruiting and training thousands of volunteers. What is further disconcerting is the fact that the number of their sympathizers has been increasing and less and less people of the affected states are coming forward to put up resistance or giving intelligence, another pointer to plummeting morale. From now on, unless the affected state governments and the Union government work hard to instill confidence in the people, the situation may deteriorate further. The next step for the Naxals is to consolidate their hold on the areas of their operations and establish parallel governments.

Will the Union and the state governments countenance such a situation? Complacency should have its limits. Desperate Chattisgarh recently hired redoubtable KPS Gill to deal with the menace. They are pinning high hopes on him. They are expecting a miracle. Gill is a tough policeman whose contribution to ending the Punjab militancy is significant. The Chattisgarh government, however, should not lose sight of the fact that Gill will be new to the state; he is past 70 and lacks experience in dealing with Naxals. In these circumstances, Gill's presence alone will, perhaps, not suffice. Naxalism is not a mere police or military problem. It is a revolt of the deprived and the dispossessed.

People want education, health care, sanitation, water, power, agriculture that can afford them an honourable livelihood, jobs, housing, better roads and bridges, end to their exploitation and good governance. Unfortunately the state governments have lost their credibility. The National Security Advisor is a wise man with a wealth of experience at his command. He hardly needs to be told about this.