

BSF in Naxal-Affected areas of Chhattisgarh and Orissa

Unabated Naxal violence poses a serious threat to the country's internal security. In 2010, as compared to the previous year, there was a small decrease in the number of Naxal incidents, but the number of deaths of civilians went up. 718 civilians died in 2212 Naxal incidents in 2010 as compared to 591 civilians in 2258 incidents in 2009. Naxals also carried out 365 attacks on economic infrastructure during 2010.

The Government has adopted a two-pronged strategy of development and calibrated police action to deal with the Naxal menace. It is also assisting the State Governments in every possible manner. The Government of India has provided Central Para-Military Forces to the States for assisting them in anti-Naxal operations.

Border Security Force (BSF) was deployed in the Naxal-affected district of Kanker in Chhattisgarh in December 2009, January 2010, and in Koraput and Malkangiri districts of Orissa in April 2010. Having carefully assessed and analysed the problem and drawing upon its vast experience of successfully fighting terrorism and insurgency, BSF has adopted a combat and non-combat strategy in consonance with the Government's policy of security and development.

During the early stages of deployment, BSF met with stiff resistance and skirmishes between BSF and Naxalites were more frequent. Naxalites used IEDs to inflict maximum casualties on the force personnel with the aim of demoralizing and gaining upper hand in the area. After a detailed planning and meticulous execution, effective domination of the area was achieved. To avoid collateral damage, BSF carried out surgical anti-Naxal operations by developing precise intelligence. It was able to detect 54 unexploded IEDs in 2010, neutralize 4 and apprehend 229 Naxals and recover 182 arms. There is now willing cooperation and flow of information from villagers.

Another area of focus for BSF consequent to its deployment was to inculcate a sense of security among the people and fulfil their aspirations for development. A series of meetings were held with the public in remote and inaccessible areas. Despite initial reluctance and threatening calls given by Naxalites to the people forbidding them from taking part in the BSF meetings, people came forward. The public along with the Force identified education, health, connectivity,

development and social awakening as some of the issues which needed immediate attention. BSF has been organizing many civic action programmes to reach the poor in remote Naxal-affected areas. These programmes include conduct of medical camps, sports activities, distribution of books to school children and of Radio Transistors, TV sets, clothing items and certain essential commodities to the local population. Since induction, BSF has conducted about 60 Civic Action Camps in Chhattisgarh and about 70 in Orissa including medical camps. In these camps, over 6000 patients were treated and provided medicines.

Activities being pursued by the BSF with the assistance of the public are: Education: Due to the fear of Naxalites, some schools had stopped functioning. Attendance in some schools had declined. At some places, for example, in the Middle School at Badejharkatta and Pratappur in Kanker district, BSF personnel went to the extent of teaching important subjects due to the absence of teachers. The attendance has since increased. BSF has also facilitated completion of the construction of some incomplete hostels for boys and girls so that students from far-flung areas could stay and study.

Health: Medical facilities have been one of the casualties in the Naxal-affected areas. Poor hygienic conditions, impure water, and prevalence of insects have been major causes of diseases. For want of communication and medical facilities, many people either suffered at home or died quietly. The medical officers available with BSF units are a blessing to the public. BSF has begun to regularly organize medical camps in the villages and educate people about the value of health and hygiene. Men, women and children have been provided treatment free of cost. BSF officers even met local medical officers and motivated them to resume work. As a result, some of the medical dispensaries have restarted functioning. For example, the Ayurvedic dispensary of Village Kodapakha in Chhattisgarh had been out of function for the last few years. BSF discussed the problems being faced by the doctor in running the dispensary and assured the doctor of all possible help to make the dispensary functional. As a result, the dispensary has been re-started and is functional now.

Connectivity: Naxalites had targeted the road

communication, making it difficult for the public and security forces to commute. They had planted IEDs to make it difficult for the administration and police to operate. Public transport had ceased operating in these areas. Roads, bridges and culverts were in a very bad shape. Since induction in these areas, BSF has embarked on a mission to make the roads safe to travel. A large number of IEDs have been detected and neutralized. Encouraged by the area domination of BSF, some of the bridges and roads have been repaired by the administration while others are under repairs. Survey work for some roads has also begun. The density of traffic has increased.

Public Distribution System: Due to the fear of Naxalites, the public distribution system at many places had stopped functioning. Officers of the BSF met the concerned district officials, village representatives and transport managers and motivated them to resume the suspended system. PDS has since begun functioning. For example, villagers of Kodapakha reported to BSF that PDS ration for their village was being distributed from the Durgkondal centre instead of their village for the last few years due to pressure of Naxals. The Company Commander discussed the matter with the local distributor and assured him of all possible help/security to unload the ration at Kodapakha. As a result, the first truck of PDS ration reached Kodapakha in March, 2010 for distribution from the local centre.

Social Activity and Local Governance: Towards village empowerment and quick delivery of justice, BSF encouraged village panchayats and community participation. People in villages are now actively participating in the day to day decision-making and a vibrant village life has been restored. To further encourage this development, BSF has facilitated construction of Panchayat Bhawans and community centres. In the Naxal-affected areas, people had stopped celebrating their favourite festivals and offering prayers on auspicious occasions. With the help of BSF, people mustered courage to celebrate some of the festivals and observe rituals after a gap of as long as 15 years. For example, the Annual Danteshwari fair was held after many years. On the eve of Dussehra festival, villagers took out a procession from Danteshwari temple, Partapur and surrounding areas of the village in Chhattisgarh.