

Govt. ignores brighter side of panel advice

JANUARY 31, 1992

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

KAKINADA - 'Sakti', a voluntary organisation, here says the draft report of the Cabinet sub-committee on left wing extremism in 1990, of which the Chief Minister was also a member, discussed in detail the strategies to deal with the issue. The panel concluded that extremism was a law and order problem.

To quote from its report: "There is a strong feeling that left wing extremism is basically a law and order problem and has to be treated as such. Effective police measures were recommended to neutralise the channels of supply of arms, ammunition, finances, and publicity to the extremists along with formation of special crack forces, strengthening of police set-up, improving intelligence collection on extremists, stringent laws and stringent action on violence of the extremists, surveillance of suspects, encouraging police personnel with courage and initiative in anti-extremist operations, deployment of large forces of policemen in the affected areas etc."

It was felt that there has been no instance in the world in which extremism/terrorism, whatever be its name, has ever been successfully dealt with by a response of the government other than sustained law and order measures. Hence

vigorous police operations were recommended.

Extremists' success: The report identified that the Naxalite movement is run on new strategies - "Strength of left wing extremism is not so much on its ideology but the well-knit secret organisational structure, heavy arsenal and guerilla tactics. Preoccupied by self-preservation and militarisation, the PWG, unmindful of the various distortions, ideological dilution and tactical deviations that have afflicted it, has geared itself up to browbeat and unnervise the State apparatus. Consequently 'ambush' 'abduction' and 'land-mine' have become natural corollaries as evidenced by the series of incidents after the 1987 Guirbedu episode of taking administrative officers as hostages for getting its arrested cadres released."

The government in this report has asked for four additional battalions of APSP in view of the inadequacy of the present strength of eight battalions. There is need for increase of assistant commandants in each battalion so that the force can

be headed by senior officers.

The district armed reserve should also be strengthened by an additional recruitment of 50 platoons.

City armed reserve should also be strengthened by adding three more companies.

Positive side: While getting these demands fulfilled by Delhi, the

Naxal issue

State government has conveniently ignored the positive suggestions of the report.

To quote some of them: "Stopping indiscriminate arrests and harassment of villagers on the ground of harbouring Naxalites by virtue of their unenviable circumstances which forced them to acquiesce in the activities of Naxalites and promoting courage and confidence among villagers to counter extremist activities."

"All actions should be according to law. No excesses shall be tolerated. Widest publicity should be given to this policy so that the general public and everyone in police are clear that the government

does not want the police to do anything beyond the law and any police officer committing any excess will be punished ruthlessly.

"In case of deaths in police custody all concerned including the station house officer should face judicial enquiry. In the case of deaths of extremists in encounters with the police also, a judicial enquiry should be conducted. The above enquiries should be conducted by the district judge concerned. He shall enquire into custodial as well as encounter deaths suo motu and complete the enquiry expeditiously. Thus a predictable, accessible and credible system should be established to inspire confidence among the public as well as the law-enforcing agencies.

"The director of prosecutions should be brought under the control of DGP and IG of police for improved and speedy prosecution of the cases. He may be given the status of ex-officio secretary, Home.

"Police investigation must rely on scientific and psychological methods and not on brute force. Police stations should not symbolise tyranny

and torture. There should be no delay in carrying out investigation, which also leads to prolonged detention of suspects and accountability shall be fixed at various levels."

None of these suggestions were put into action by the government. When questioned, the government points out the outrageous behaviour of Naxalites. When known journalists like Mr. Rasool are killed as unidentified Naxals, needless to say that there is no safety for the people as long as the brutalisation of police force is allowed without any checks and balances, the agency suggested.

It is just like this. Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao pleaded at the Commonwealth summit that the underdeveloped nations need more of development than human rights. He stressed that aid should not be linked with the state of human rights situation in them.

The State Government is just putting into practice what the Prime Minister wanted in dealing with extremists forgetting its earlier sermons. Has the Third World syndrome taken over our politicians and bureaucrats?