

## Maoists: We control 5,000 villages

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Sept. 25: The Maoists on Friday claimed they have been able to establish control in nearly 5,000 villages in and around West Midnapore, Bankura and Purulia in the ongoing battle with the security forces in West Bengal.

Speaking exclusively to this newspaper, one of the Maoist leaders wanted most by the security forces, CPI (Maoist) politburo member Kishenji, claimed that the "Maoists have established people control in areas like Lalgah, Goaltor, Shalboni, Belpahari, Balrampore, Sorega among others".

He said they now plan to "levy taxes" on any big companies operating or coming up in these areas. "Generally we levy between eight to 10 per cent taxes on the big companies operating in areas controlled by the Maoist government," Kishenji revealed on the phone. While rejecting the state government's terms to come to the negotiating table and giving up their arms, Kishenji said, "Before any talks we also want the release of all Maoist prisoners from jail." The Maoists also want those arrested in the Lalgah operation freed without delay.

Kishenji claimed that in its protracted war against the state, the Maoists have established themselves strongly in at least 50 per cent of the districts in Orissa, 60 per cent of the districts in Chhattisgarh, 25 per cent in Bihar, 10 per cent in Maharashtra and 25 per cent in Andhra Pradesh. He claimed the Maoists still have a considerable presence in north Andhra.

Though he admitted that the arrest of the other politburo member, Kobad Gandhi, "is a blow to the outfit", he, however, claimed this "will not hamper our work".

Kishenji, also a member of the CPI (Maoist) central committee, is in charge of Assam, Orissa, Jharkhand, Bihar and West Bengal. He had been instrumental in the resurgence of the Naxalite movement in West Bengal.

In Orissa, he claimed that the Maoists have established total control in Malkangiri, Korapur, Raigara, Ganjam and other adjoining areas. Speaking about the so-called "revolutionary activities" of the outfit, Kishenji claimed the organisation was getting its supply of arms mainly by looting police armouries or snatching them from security personnel. He also admitted the outfit was getting "revolutionary help" from groups like the Manipur People's Army and Ulfa in the Northeast. In fact, he said, the CPI (Maoist) and Manipur Revolutionary Front have signed a "memorandum of understanding".

He claimed that in West Bengal the Maoists were looting arms from CPI(M) activists. Kishenji maintained that in Bengal it's virtually a war between the "people (read Maoists)" and the CPI(M) cadre. "The People's Liberation Guerrilla Army have been getting 50 per cent of their arms from the CPI(M) cadre. During the encounters we take away the arms of the slain and fleeing CPI(M) men." He claimed the people of these West Bengal districts have been "providing money and food for the PLGA members fighting for their cause". He said a major chunk of Rs 5 crores recently looted from a van carrying the amount to a Tata unit in Ranchi was being pumped into Bengal.

Kishenji maintained that the Maoists, who are re-establishing themselves in Bengal, have also been in constant touch with the state's intellectuals and the media. Ridiculing Union home minister P. Chidambaram's remarks that the government "will flush out the Maoists", the Maoist leader said: "Flush us out and do what? Deport us? We are living very much among the people." He also rejected the Centre's proposed rehabilitation package. "We need no charity from the government," he said.

He refuted the government's claims that nearly 30 Naxalites were recently killed by a Cobra unit in Chhattisgarh. "It's a lie. While three of our comrades were martyred, 15 Cobra jawans [soldiers], including two assistant commanders, were killed in the encounter with our comrades," he claimed and accused the security forces of shooting tribals in Chhattisgarh and declaring them to be Maoists.

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