

O HERALDO

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Only force can't solve the Maoist problem

In a remote stretch of Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district, a gunfight unfolded inside the Indravati National Park, a region long associated with violence, despair, and the unresolved battle between Maoists and the state. The encounter, which resulted in the deaths of 31 Maoists, may be seen by many as a significant victory for the security forces. Yet, it also highlights the protracted and complex nature of the conflict that has plagued the state for decades. The battle, which has claimed countless lives on both sides, is far from over.

This latest operation is part of a broader, intensifying campaign by the government to eliminate Left-Wing Extremism (LWE) from India's heartlands, especially in regions like Bastar, where the Maoists - often referred to as Naxalites - have long found safe havens. Union Home Minister Amit Shah's resolve to end Maoist insurgency by 2026 echoes a political commitment that has propelled security forces into action. However, while such military victories are celebrated, they also underscore the enduring human cost of a conflict that has dragged on for years, leaving communities caught in the crossfire.

The security forces' recent operation has not come without its own toll. Two personnel were killed in the encounter, a reminder that the lives of those fighting on the front lines are also at risk. The battle for Chhattisgarh's forests has always been fraught with danger, with security forces facing adverse conditions - dense terrain, challenging weather, and the ever-present threat of ambush. For the men and women of the security forces, this war is as much about survival as it is about enforcing the will of the state.

But it is the civilians of Chhattisgarh, the ordinary men, women, and children who bear the brunt of the ongoing conflict. Living in villages scattered across the Bastar region, many have endured a life marked by fear, displacement, and economic hardship. The violence perpetrated by Maoists, who impose their own brutal form of control over the area, has made daily life a constant struggle. At the same time, government operations to quell the insurgency often disrupt local life, leading to deaths, injuries, and displacement. In a conflict that is supposed to be about restoring order, it is the people who suffer the most.

For the Maoists, the lines between revolutionary rhetoric and armed conflict have become increasingly blurred. The group's tactics have involved not only ambushes and attacks on security personnel but also attacks on civilians, and their demand for a "class war" has often translated into ruthless violence. The Maoists' stronghold in areas like Abujmahad - an unsurveyed, vast forested region - is a symbol of their resilience, but also a testament to the failures of both the state and insurgents to resolve the issues that have given rise to this conflict.

For years, the region has been a battleground of ideology and power, with both the state and the Maoists attempting to assert dominance. The recent increase in anti-Maoist operations and the consequent rise in casualties on the Maoist side indicate the government's growing resolve to put an end to the insurgency. According to Chhattisgarh Police, 49 Maoists have already been killed this year alone. Last year, the toll was even higher, with 219 Maoists killed in encounters across the state. This represents the highest number of Maoist casualties in the history of Chhattisgarh since its formation. Yet, these numbers, while seemingly indicative of a successful crackdown, should not obscure the human and moral cost of the ongoing violence.

In addition to casualties, the conflict has led to numerous arrests and surrenders. Last year, 800 Maoists were arrested, and over 800 others laid down their arms. These figures point to a realization, at least among some, that the battle may no longer be worth fighting. As the government expands its network of forward base camps and provides basic services to villagers living in Maoist-controlled areas, there is hope that the cycle of violence might one day come to an end. The Niyad Nellanar scheme, designed to offer developmental benefits to local communities, is a step in the right direction, signaling that the state is looking beyond the barrel of a gun to address the root causes of insurgency.

However, such initiatives cannot fully address the deep-seated issues at the heart of this conflict. Economic disparity, lack of education, poor infrastructure, and social exclusion continue to fuel the anger and disillusionment that the Maoists prey upon. These systemic issues require sustained attention from the state, and cannot be solved by force alone. The state's long-term strategy must not only focus on dismantling armed resistance but also on creating conditions where the grievances of marginalised communities are heard and addressed.

comment



ROBIN ROY

Will Kejri 'Seek resort' in Punjab?

February 8 turned out to be the doomsday for AAP and especially for the party bigwigs like Arvind Kejriwal, Manish Sisodia and Saurabh Bhardwaj all of whom faced humiliating defeats.

Such results are only seen in a political Waterloo. Giant killers galore ruled the roost on Saturday.

And the corridors of power are agog with rumours on the fate of Arvind Kejriwal following the massive tremor following the public mandate.

It may be recalled that before the Delhi polls, Kejriwal, whose party rose from strength to strength in Delhi for the first time in 2013 on an anti-corruption plank, was facing corruption charges! And Kejriwal had spent six months in jail in 2024 in connection with an alleged excise policy scam.

The minimum jail term in the money laundering case is seven years if convicted and if Kejriwal had won from the New Delhi seat and later found guilty, he would have been disqualified under the Representation of the People Act, 1951.

Now, to make things worse for him, not only will he be treated like a commoner and face the legal wrangles, to further compound his trouble, an FIR has been lodged against him in Kurukshetra few days back over his remarks on the alleged "poisoning" of the Yamuna river water by the Haryana government.

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THE PUNJAB FACTOR

Also, the loss has been so massive for AAP which will certainly have a ripple effect in Punjab.

The AAP's humiliating defeat will put Punjab and its Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann in the spotlight and the AAP will find it difficult to keep its flock intact and the AAP is already wary of the situation and that is why AAP national convener

Arvind Kejriwal is set to meet Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann, State ministers, and party MLAs in Delhi on Tuesday.

The meeting comes in the wake of AAP's rout in the Delhi Assembly elections and growing speculation about internal dissent in the party's Punjab unit.

However, AAP MP Malvinder Singh Kang downplayed the reports of dissent, and termed Tuesday's meeting a "routine strategy session".

"A party is a continuous process. Feedback from all units are taken to shape its future strategies. Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann along with AAP MLAs will meet Arvind Kejriwal to discuss the way forward," he said.

It may be recalled that AAP has big-ticket projects in Punjab like free power and mohala clinics. And since Kejriwal's popularity in Delhi had created a similar effect in Punjab, the electorate had voted for the AAP in Punjab in the 2022 Assembly elections and it is very obvious that the Delhi verdict would have an impact on Punjab.

According to party sources, the discussions will focus on analysing the Delhi election results and strategising for the Punjab polls scheduled in 2027.

AAP secured a landslide victory in Punjab in 2022, winning 92 of the 117 seats. However, recent developments have led to questions about internal cohesion, with some suggesting that the party's leadership in Delhi continues to exert significant influence over Punjab's governance.

There are also speculations that Kejriwal could consider a more direct role in Punjab politics now.

With Ludhiana's assembly seat currently vacant, political observers are also discussing the possibility of Kejriwal contesting from there and becoming a part of the Punjab government and thereby seeking political immunity.

Punjab being the only State where the AAP is in power now, the outcome of Tuesday's meeting could be crucial for the party's future course of action.

Political analysts are saying that after the defeat and decimation of Congress yet again to zero will spell doom for the future of the India Bloc.

Also, an editorial in the Sena

(UBT) mouthpiece 'Saamna' raised questions over the need for opposition alliances if their constituents continue to fight against each other instead of the BJP. The BJP swept Delhi by winning 48 of the 70 seats in the just-concluded Delhi Assembly polls. The AAP secured only 22 seats.

For AAP's boss Kejriwal, the Delhi Assembly election was not just a political but a personal battle. This is the first time Kejriwal has lost the elections from New Delhi after his first win against the then Delhi CM Sheila Dikshit of the Congress in 2013.

Kejriwal and AAP since its inception has always gone from strength to strength and in 2022 it may be noticed that the party was capable of winning in another State taking its tally to two and among other regional parties, the AAP stood tallest as it had also acquired the status of a national party on terms of its vote share.

Following the Congress's hat-trick of zeroes, the Saamna editorial goes on to say, "In Delhi, both AAP and Congress fought to destroy each other, making things easier for Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah. If this continues, why even form alliances? Just fight to your heart's content!" the editorial in 'Saamana' quipped. A similar disunity among opposition parties already led to setbacks in Maharashtra (during the 2024 assembly polls which the BJP-led coalition won), it said.

The AAP's status post results have also dented and mauled Brand Kejriwal who used to harp on "clean politics" especially after he was caught in allegations regarding his "Sheesh Mahal" controversy.

'AAM AADMI' MATTERS
Finally, it was the 'aam aadmi', or the public, that brought the AAP to power in Delhi thrice. But the same voters also led to its defeat as the party deviated from what it promised to be. Kejriwal said he won't take up a house or a big car, but moved from a Wagon R to an MG Gloster and spent nearly Rs 35 crore to renovate the house that he occupied as chief minister.

So, political parties should not take the public for a ride.

(Writer is senior journalist and former senior associate editor, O Herald, Goa)

people's edit

WORLD DAY OF THE SICK: COMPASSION AND SOLIDARITY

ALVARINHO LUIS

World Day of the Sick is an annual observance introduced by John Paul II as a way for believers of the Catholic faith to offer prayers to those currently suffering from illness and to provide physical, emotional, and spiritual support to individuals facing health challenges, especially those who are vulnerable and marginalised.

This date holds special significance as it coincides with the liturgical feast of Our Lady of Lourdes on February 11, a day associated with healing and devotion to the Virgin Mary. This day creates awareness about the importance of providing care and support to individuals who are ill, particularly those facing chronic or severe health challenges. It also acknowledges the vital role of healthcare workers and caregivers in delivering compassionate care to patients.

Pope John Paul II established World Day of the Sick in 1992, inspired by his own Parkinson's diagnosis in 1991, to encourage prayers for the sick and their caregivers.

God remains close to the suffering through encounter, gift, and sharing. When Jesus sent the seventy-two disciples (Lk 10:1-9), he urged them to proclaim: The kingdom of God has come near to you. Illness reveals our frailty but also invites us to encounter the Lord. In suffering, we experience God's compassion, as Jesus himself shared in human pain. He never abandons us and often grants unexpected strength, reminding us that even in hardship, we are not alone but upheld by His presence and love.

Sickness, then, becomes an occasion for a transformative encounter, the discovery of a solid rock to which we can hold fast amid the tempests of life, an experience that, even at great cost, makes us all the stronger because it teaches us that we are not alone. Suffering always brings with it a mysterious promise of salvation, for it makes us experience the closeness and reality of God's consoling presence. In this way, we come to know the fullness of the Gospel with all its promise and life.

God is close to the suffering as a gift, revealing that true hope comes from Him. Suffering invites us to trust in His faithfulness, knowing that only through Christ's resurrection do we find our place in eternity. In Jesus' paschal mystery, we are assured that nothing can separate us from God's love (Rom 8:38-39). This hope guides us through life's trials.

Places of suffering often become spaces of sharing and growth. At the bedside of the sick, we learn hope, faith, and love, realising we are all angels of hope—patients, caregivers, and loved ones alike—whether at home, in hospitals, or care centres.

World Day of the Sick reminds us of our capacity for compassion and care in the face of illness. It calls on individuals, communities, and institutions to support those in need through service, prayer, and reflection. This day emphasises the dignity of every person and the importance of solidarity in healing.

Let us unite in recognising the struggles of the sick and reaffirm our commitment to offering them the love, care, and support they deserve.

Recycle water in swimming pools

It must be said that water scarcity has remained an ongoing issue in Goa despite surplus monsoon recorded each year.

The government has admitted that Goa does not have a 24x7 water supply, but assured that each household across the State will receive a minimum four hours of water supply daily before the end of 2026.

There are several reasons for the water shortage the State is facing. Frequent bursting of pipelines, non-implementation of water harvesting and increase in construction activities are some of the contributing factors.

Most new constructions now have swimming pools. At times even each apartment has a private swimming pool. Swimming pools are water guzzlers and can lead to depletion of groundwater. It must be said that swimming pools and lavish gardens are driving water shortages. Periodically draining and refilling the pool can help manage water quality, but it's important to minimize this practice to conserve water. Recycling swimming pool water can be an environmentally friendly way to manage water usage and maintain pool hygiene.

Swimming pools must have a filtration system that circulates the water through filters to remove debris, dirt, and contaminants. Chemicals like chlorine or bromine are added to sanitise the water, killing bacteria and preventing algae growth. While giving permission for constructing swimming pools the licencing authority needs to check how water for

swimming pools will be managed so that it will not affect the water supply to the locals in the vicinity.

Adelmo Fernandes, Vasco

Curb drinking in public places

In a bid to curb the nuisance of public drinking, the Calangute Police have reportedly launched a drive and have even booked cases against individuals found drinking in public places.

This move comes after numerous instances of tourists throwing alcohol bottles on the beach, leading to injuries from broken glass and even drowning cases after consuming alcohol. Sounds like a good move.

Well, it has indeed become a trend, if not a fashion not just amongst the domestic tourists, but even amongst our own Goan youth to sit on beaches, at isolated places in villages and to openly consume alcohol 24 x 7 due to the free availability of alcohol in every nook and corner of Goa.

Well, if the government really wants to curb the nuisance of public drinking in future then it should henceforth stop decorating the State with wholesale liquor outlets everywhere, especially in villages, on beaches, near educational institutions, places of worship, etc and impose hefty fines on those consuming alcohol at isolated places in villages/public places and on those driving their two/four wheelers under the influence of alcohol rather

letterstotheeditor

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than sending the cops to carry on with their temporary drives for time-pass and fooling our gullible susegad Goans in Goa.

Jerry Fernandes, Saligao

The game of life

Chess has plenty of similarities with the way we lead our daily life. A checkerboard in black and white, 32 pieces and two players - this is all it involves to play chess.

Yet, this brilliant indoor game teaches us some of the most profound life lessons. In every move and thought process there is a careful analysis preceding the game. It is exactly the same way that life works! A careful, measured step is what leads us to success; but a mistake and we need to retract! Another important life lesson that we can learn from chess is that 'pawns rock'. Pawns may seem insignificant. But in chess so many games are won in the end due to a pawn promotion. So, we need to pay attention to the little things in our life, since they add up to great big things in the end. If only we know how to play the game of life the chess-way, we can walk our way to success.

Ranganathan Sivakumar, Chennai

Soaring coconut prices

The price of raw coconuts has soared to an all-time high. As coconut is a key ingredient in traditional Goan cuisine. This price hike is primarily driven by a sharp decline in coconut production. The price hike in coco-

nuts has had a knock-on effect on coconut-based products.

Because of the increase in prices of coconuts, coconut delicacies have gone off the menu in many middle-class households. The cascading effect increases prices of tender coconut too. Everyone prefers tender coconut over soft drinks, keeping in mind the health benefits. But if prices surge, naturally people will prefer soft drinks. The government should take measures to control the price surge.

K G Vilop, Chorao

AAP down, not out

With the AAP defeated in Delhi, and its key leaders losing, it's time for the party to look for a second level of leadership to take things forward.

This is an ideal time to do this. Arvind Kejriwal should ideally take a backseat, recharge his batteries and look to take his unique party, conceived entirely anew from the drawing board, to other States.

Slow and steady wins the race. Atishi, who was interim minister and presumably kept the seat for Kejriwal, should lead the opposition in the Delhi Assembly.

It would be a travesty if the AAP didn't introspect transparently, and started afresh and brought in new blood as well. The AAP has a lot to offer Delhi, and even if it is only seen as Delhi-centric, it must look to establish footholds in other States, even Goa which has a muted Opposition.

For other parties like the Congress, it should introspect on why it didn't consider allying with AAP which may have helped defeat the BJP.

Brian D Souza, Margao

Women participation in STEM is low

Women and girls lag behind their male counterparts in research in terms of participation and contribution. But in terms of research quality in science, women are second to none. Though engineering, manufacturing, mathematics and natural science have important statistics to boast about the involvement of women, they have to catch-up with men in a big way.

Studies on the STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) reveal that girls are underrepresented. A little less than 30 per cent of the technology researchers are women. The aptitude is there; but the sustainment seems to be missing.

Are the technological fields biased towards men? One is afraid the recruitment policies and working conditions are not very favourable and flexible towards women. The sustainable development goals of the United Nations stand threatened when women-participation in STEM is low.

Limited access to technical tools for progress also act as obstacles for women. The STEM subjects can be a distant dream for many young girls in Indian villages though village girls are increasingly finding themselves going urban in search of jobs in STEM.

Ganapathi Bhat, Akola