

Through the Eyes of the Police

Naxalites in Calcutta in the 1970s

The Calcutta Police Gazette, a unique tool of internal communication circulated among police personnel during the 1970s, helps us understand the measures taken by the police to suppress the Naxalite movement in Calcutta. It provides the historian of the Naxalite movement with invaluable information about the everyday tactics that the police adopted at the ground level to face the enemy. It also lends another dimension to the history of this movement by offering an alternative version from the viewpoint of its antagonist.

ASHOKE KUMAR MUKHOPADHYAY

Activities of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist), popularly known as the Naxalite movement, in Calcutta during the 1970s have, among others, inspired social scientists, creative writers, historians, journalists to produce a number of research-based essays, poems, novels and plays on the subject. A few retired police personnel have also written memoirs. But we have not yet come across any study on the evolution of the control mechanism of the Calcutta Police against the Naxalites of that period, based on police documents. In this respect, the Calcutta Police Gazette (CPG) gives an interesting glimpse of the city police's responses and reactions to Naxalite actions in Calcutta during the 1970s. It provides researchers with invaluable information.

Published daily, the CPG is a unique tool of internal communication among the police personnel. It is circulated far and wide, reaches all the city police stations and is meant for police cadres at all levels. According to Police Regulations Calcutta, 1968, the CPG

is intended for official use only and is published daily excepting holidays and is circulated to all superior officers, departments, thanas, police posts and courts...All Police officers are expected to acquaint themselves with all matters concerning them that may appear in the issues of the Gazette. Every officer who receives a copy of the Gazette should therefore be careful to communicate to such of his subordinates as are unable to read it, those matters that concern them; and inspecting officers shall test their subordinates in their knowledge of such matter...Each department/unit/thana shall preserve the Gazette in bound volumes. Each volume shall contain Gazettes for six consecutive months. These records will be classified as permanent.

In other words, the CPG does not fall into the category of a "secret" document – like a government home (political) file, which might have tracked and recorded various aspects of the Naxalite movement in the city and related individuals in a more insightful manner. Nevertheless, extracts from the gazette from 1967 to 1975 reveals various contours of the police policy, ranging from an initially defensive mindset to a subsequent flurry of activities in building up a team to cope with the crisis faced by them in the most tumultuous period of the city's history.

Notifications regarding the forfeiture and proscriptions of various publications, as circulated through the gazette, also provide an insight into the attitude of the then government towards political literature. There are quite a few proscription notices against *Deshabrati*, the Bengali weekly a mouthpiece of CPI(ML);

Liberation, the monthly English organ of the party, as well as books coming from China and a number of pro-Naxalite publications from Andhra Pradesh, Punjab, Rajasthan and Bihar. For instance, the gazette (from now on described as CPG) dated September 18, 1969, informs us that a number of issues of *Liberation*, the "monthly organ" of the all-India coordination committee of communist revolutionaries, printed at Kathamala Press, 590A Bechu Chatterjee Street, Calcutta, published by Nimai Ghose, were proscribed on July 23, 1969 for publication of seditious articles and that "every copy of the said articles and every document containing the said articles to be forfeited to the government". It added, "The deputy commissioner of police, special branch, Calcutta, should be informed of any seizure made". Interestingly, not only Naxalite literature, but also a number of other Left publications came under the censorious eyes of the police in the 1970s, particularly, during the Emergency. An issue of *Ganashakti*, the then evening daily of the parliamentary Communist Party of India (Marxist), October 24, 1975 also attracted a notice of forfeiture for not complying with a government order advising scrutiny of the manuscript by an authorised censor officer before its publication, a rule which came in vogue following the proclamation of Emergency in the country by the president of India on June 26, 1975 (CPG, November 21, 1975). On October 24, 1975, a similar forfeiture notice was slapped against the 'Special Autumn' issue of *Darpan*, a pro-left Bengali weekly from Calcutta (CPG, December 11, 1975). *Frontier*, an English weekly edited and published by the poet Samar Sen, was proscribed for publishing an editorial 'Making on the Roundabouts', which was found by the police to be attempting "to bring into hatred and contempt and...excite disaffection towards the government established by law in India" (CPG, August 5, 1975).

'Unusual' Times

The Naxalite movement, as acknowledged in numerous CPG circulars, created an "unusual situation" in the city. To understand the unusual situation and comprehend the Calcutta Police reactions, as chronicled in the gazette, an overview of CPI(ML) activities in Calcutta might be of help. After a series of political debates among Communist revolutionaries and peasant struggles that followed the Naxalbari uprising in 1967, the CPI(ML) was set up on April 22, 1969, and its formation was officially announced next month at the May Day rally in the Calcutta Maidan.

The political resolution adopted by the party laid down that the primary task was to organise the peasantry and seize area-wise power through armed guerrilla warfare. Its leader Charu Mazumdar in August that year gave a special call to the youth and students, where he introduced a new concept that was radically different from the hitherto followed conventional pattern of student and youth movements which were marked by demonstrations, processions, etc. He urged the youth to “repudiate the path of capitulation to the bourgeois education system” and integrate themselves with the workers, and the landless peasants. Responding to his call, many students left Calcutta and went to the villages. The party’s first congress was held in Calcutta on May 15 and 16 in 1970, where Mazumdar laid stress on the theory of “annihilation of class enemies”, according to which landlords in the villages had to be killed and revolutionaries filled with class-hatred were required to “move up to the enemy and with bare arms snatch away their rifles”.

This created a new situation in Calcutta. Although its primary stress remained on agrarian revolution, the CPI(ML) also now turned its attention to acts in the urban areas as complementary to rural guerrilla warfare. The CPI(ML) urban movement had a threefold agenda, aimed at (i) attacking “bourgeois” institutions and symbols of culture (e.g., colleges and statues of eminent personalities); (ii) annihilation of police personnel, informers and political rivals; and (iii) building up of an arsenal by large-scale snatching of arms and ammunition. As a result, the student cadres of the CPI (ML) in Calcutta launched a massive onslaught against educational institutions resulting in cancellation of examinations,

destruction of furniture and laboratories. Disfiguring of statues of national leaders and social reformers, also marked the cultural onslaught. Soon after this, the killing of policemen became a common phenomenon in the streets of Calcutta. The main targets were traffic constables, policemen in plainclothes, police officers and personnel of the paramilitary forces. The combined impact of annihilation of police personnel, throwing of bombs on police vans, murder of informers, left the Calcutta Police stunned and totally on the defensive in the initial stages.

Following the murder of Ranjit Kumar Roy, a police constable near Doctor’s Lane at Taltala in central Calcutta on June 15, 1970, P K Sen, the then commissioner of Calcutta Police admitted to a section of journalists that these attacks “might affect the morale of the police force”. He regretted that even after the incident, which happened in broad daylight, none from the locality had come forward “to assist the police in detecting the murderers”. Stung by such events, the Calcutta Police, in a bid to motivate the ranks, started rewarding those policemen who had done a bit of “good work” in containing “miscreants” in the city. Their names along with efforts were highlighted in bold prints in the CPG, July 18, 1970.

R K Gupta, a veteran police officer from the Indian Police Service, took over the charge as commissioner of police, Calcutta, in the afternoon of the July 10, 1970, from P K Sen. Along with motivational exercises, primarily aimed at ranks, the new city police chief tried to inculcate a sense of alertness in the force. Considering the “present disturbed condition of the city”, the Calcutta Police commissioner ordered his colleagues down the

Fluid Bonds: Views on Gender and Water

Edited by Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt

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Fluid Bonds makes gender visible in the various ways water is dealt with, and questions how these ways affect gender and how gender affects the views on water. This rich offering of case studies locate the multiple, multifaceted, and changing relationships between gender and water, and provide a powerful critique of the current ways water is envisaged and managed. The streams of hydrofeminisms converging in **Fluid Bonds** create a common terrain for the scholars and experts from the North and the South representing a wide range of methodological approaches, backgrounds and understandings. This ground is one from which to reappraise water as a gendered substance, and to ponder how contestations over it pave the ways for multiple expressions of women’s agency. Collectively, the contributors consider the problematic fluidity and indefinite categories of gender and water, tracing the bonds as well as drawing out some differences, focusing on the gendered nature of water in life, of which women and men, at all times, constitute a part. **Fluid Bonds** is of immediate interest to academics and educators, activists and water experts, development planners and administrators.

Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt is with the Resource Management in Asia Pacific Program, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, at The Australian National University. She researches water resources and community issues, and on mining and development. Kuntala is the joint editor (with Martha Macintyre, University of Melbourne) of **Women miners in developing countries: Pit women and others** published from Ashgate in 2006.

Authors

Margreet Zwarteveen and Rutgerd Boelens, Julie Davidson and Elaine Stratford, Richard Howitt and Sandra Suchet-Pearson, Deb Foskey, Diana James, Franz and Keebet von Benda-Beckmann, Jane Dowling, Michelle Moffatt and Umesh Pandey, Anil C. Shah, Lesley Head and Pat Muir, Fiona Miller, Barbara Earth and Tran Tuan Anh, Margaret Alston, Bhawana Upadhyay, Priyodorshi Banerjee and S. Chandrasekhar, Heather Goodall, Namika Raby, Robin Tennant-Wood, Barbara van Koppen, Tshupo Khumbane, Mama de Lange and Ndileka Mohap, Annie Bolitho and Farhana Sultana

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line to be more alert than ever before. According to an order issued by him,

...Very often it is found that officers and men on duty, though equipped with firearms, gas guns, steel helmets, etc, they stand or sit in such a way that the behaviour of the force betrays lack of alertness. In the morning it is a common sight that picket force sits on the ledge of the premises or on the footpath reading newspapers and books. Everyone should appreciate that the evil, which the police is to fight very quickly, understand that the force is in alert...By this time everyone must have noticed that when the army mobile patrols move, two persons keep standing on the vehicle with pointed guns. The idea is not to kill anybody but to lend an atmosphere of alertness around the deployed patrols. In pickets they also keep one man as a sentry who remains alert even when others are allowed to relax.

Today in the city when surreptitious attacks by bombs, acid bulbs and other missiles have been common, the necessity of extra alertness of the police force is most essential (CPG, July 30, 1970).

Despite this, by the end of October 1970, 25 police employees had been killed and 350 injured in these urban actions of the CPI(ML). In the beginning of 1971, the city police strived hard to strengthen its defence mechanism. In his communication to "all members of the force", a worried Calcutta Police commissioner held, "It is very unfortunate that in the last few months some of our co-workers in the Calcutta Police Force, have lost their lives either while on duty or mostly while off-duty. From time to time I have brought to the notice of my officers and men the necessity of taking precautions, of avoiding avoidable conditions of life and also increasing their mental and physical alertness against likely attack by a class of people who call themselves as Naxalites and also by anti-social elements and criminals associated with them." He added: "It should be known to all the policemen in the Calcutta Police Force that extermination of men – a very brutal political way, by this people, calling their targets as class enemies, is their avowed policy."

In the same order, the commissioner laid down an 11-point agenda of "concrete proposals" (read instructions) meant to be practised by all in the force. The instructions throw light on the sense of panic that gripped the police chief and his subordinates. Some of the suggestions are quite revealing:

...While off-duty, everyone should carry some sort of an implement, at least a 'lathi' or a dagger if they are out of home. To carry such implement for self-defence in no offence. ...In the home, our officers and men should keep weapons ready at hand so that if attacked, they can also counter attack the attackers. In this matter the complacency that the house of a police officer is safe should be shunned. ...If they go out for marketing and the like, they should not go alone and they should not go bare-handed. Effort should be made to take a friend, a colleague and if none is available, his grown-up son. They should know that four eyes or more see more things than two eyes. ...Going to cinemas, theatres or in such functions where officers and men are to stay for a considerable period of time, should be avoided. In this regard even if the family members are insistent, they should be dissuaded from such simple desires of theirs under the present peculiar circumstances. This self restriction should be enforced for the next few weeks. ...Their family members particularly the children should not talk anything about their fathers' profession. They are not connected with the profession of the policeman and they should be taught now to behave that way. Otherwise, quite inadvertently they will invite danger for the father or brother and husband as the case may be.

The order ended on a significant note:

Our officers and men shall not forget that the loss of life of any

individual officer or man, is not only a very big loss to himself, to his family and the co-workers they leave behind, but also a very great loss in many ways to the police force as such.

Let us all remain cautious, careful, cool, unexcited and calculating and cunning. We shall have to deal with the anti-socials and Naxalites not only to defend ourselves, but (also) to protect million others whom we are pledged to protect. These are unusual instructions. But I want all to realise that we are facing an unusual situation and unusual and bold steps are required. Meanwhile let everyone realise that we are from the armed police, DD, SB and thanas and traffic constantly attacking the enemy. This attack will increase in intensity. (In all units the officer-in-charge will please read out and explain the instructions to officers and men in roll calls for the next seven days) (CPG, January 2, 1971).

The above note of caution was reproduced over and over again in a number of subsequent issues of the gazette, particularly after February 25, 1974 when a traffic constable Prem Chand Rabidas was killed and his service revolver was snatched away while he was on duty at a spot in north Calcutta. The annihilation programme thus unleashed by the CPI(ML) sent shivers down the spine of the city police. In fact, all the seven signs of alarm – surprise, insufficient information, escalating events, loss of control, increased outside scrutiny, siege mentality and panic – that appear in a crisis situation could be found in the behaviour of the city police organisation in the middle of 1970. Perhaps it was due to the threat perception, that the panic-stricken city police had to keep "rehearsals regarding the March Past for Annual Police Sports" in "abeyance until further orders" in early 1971 (CPG, February 5, 1971).

Close on the heels of the annihilation campaign came "actions" of rifle snatching. City walls wore slogans like 'pulish maro astro karo' (kill the police, capture their weapons). Sudden attacks on police outposts, army patrols, traffic police and capture of revolvers and rifles were quite common in those days. To prevent snatching of arms, the police personnel on duty with arms were directed to tie their rifles/revolvers to "the web or leather belt on the right side" (CPG, March 15, 1971). This was the first time in the history of the Calcutta Police that the police personnel were asked to attach their rifles and muskets to their waist through web slings. However, with the support from the paramilitary and military forces lent by the central government, the city police started consolidating its combat strength from the last quarter of 1970. A number of repressive laws were either revived or enacted to provide the police with legal licence for ruthless repression of the Naxalite movement.

Provisions of a colonial legislation, Bengal Suppression of Terrorist Outrages Act of 1936, were revived on September 10, 1970 to be made applicable against the Naxalites. In November that year, the president of India gave assent to a new bill, the West Bengal Prevention of Violent Activities Bill, which gave wide powers, including arrest without warrant, to the police. Presumably to avoid staff agitation at a time when the force was readying for a massive onslaught against Naxalites, police ranks were also discouraged to join or form associations. By a notification issued by the state government October 22, 1970, the Police Forces (Restriction of Rights) Act 1966 was brought into force with effect from November 1, 1970. According to this act,

no member of the police force can be a member of any association or organisation unless (a) the said association or organisation has been recognised by the central government as part of the police force of which he is a member and (b) he has obtained express sanction of the central government to be a member of that association

or organisation...even an existing recognised association or organisation of the police force will be required to obtain recognition from the central government...(CPG, October 23, 1970).

Besides draconian laws, the unchained police force was adequately encouraged to liquidate Naxalites through "encounters". The sole motive was to kill the enemy by any means. The legal procedures were given a go by. On getting the green signal from the top, a section of the police force happily turned Calcutta and its suburbs into their hunting ground. An alleged "encounter and torture specialist" at the Calcutta Police headquarters, Ranajit (Runu) Guha Niyogi, then a sub-inspector, would later receive the president's award (police medal) for his "gallant conduct" shown in those days. According to the "statement of services" for which the decoration was awarded, "On the September 9, 1971, Ranajit Guha Niyogi arranged a predawn raid on the hideout of extremists of Muraripukur in eastern Calcutta. As the police party surrounded the 'bastee' (slum), the extremists opened fire on the police. In disregard of the firing by the extremists Niyogi crawled and reached near the bastee. He then opened fire and hit two of the extremists and killed one of them. He also captured some arms and ammunition" (CPG, November 29, 1973). Straight out of a Hollywood action movie, as it sounds, Guha Niyogi's said "services" might have few takers. Those who had been accustomed to his style of functioning tell a different story today. According to eyewitnesses, the armed police in those days used to raid Naxalite hideouts in north Calcutta or east Calcutta, select some young boys (who were suspected to be Naxalites), make them stand in a single file and then riddle them

with bullets. This scene was enacted in the city over and over again in 1970-71. No doubt, these acts of the police further alienated them from the common people of the city.

Apparently, R K Gupta, the Calcutta Police commissioner, could diagnose the ailment of alienation and perhaps that was why he strongly recommended to his ranks selected excerpts from the book on communist insurgency by Robert Thompson as a must to be read. They were reprinted in the CPG for wide circulation. Robert headed the British advisory mission in Vietnam from 1961 to 1965. Interestingly, the excerpts begin with a saintly note, "The government must function in accordance with law" (CPG, December 3, 1970). On the same date, i.e., December 3, 1970, the commissioner of Calcutta Police asked "all ranks to devote themselves to chase and pursuit of the Naxalites and anti-socials and break up their organisation without delay. In fulfilling this task they will move with the people and with the help of the people. The support of the people is essential." The commissioner also wanted that his orders "should be read over and explained to all". This was the first time since the Naxalite upsurge in the city that the police force was directed by its supreme to enlist people's support in "anti-insurgency activities" undertaken by the police.

But despite police atrocities, the CPI(ML) revolutionaries scaled up their operations. Policemen were being killed, arms and ammunition seized, and local gangsters executed by communist guerillas. In a brazen show of their strength a CPI(ML) guerrilla squad on February 21, 1971, attacked a police camp at the Behala Airstrip and captured nine rifles and 300 rounds of ammunition.

On the very next day, in a “shoot and scoot” operation, two rifles were seized from another police outpost.

However, dissensions within the CPI(ML), infiltration of the lumpen-proletariat in the party and a series of clashes between the ranks of the CPI(ML) and CPI(M) were increasingly weakening the Naxalite movement in the city. Armed with superior weapons, the Calcutta Police was quick to take advantage of these weak spots of the party. In fact, from the beginning of 1971 the city police started gaining grip on the situation and earned admiration from the director general, Border Security Force, Rustamji, who, in a note to the Calcutta Police commissioner, said, “I certainly have a good deal of admiration for the manner in which you and your officers and men have reacted to the situation in Calcutta. I can well imagine the difficulties that all of you have faced, and the serious problems that have confronted you at every step. I hope you are now feeling the satisfaction of having turned the situation in your favour after a good deal of work and sacrifice. Please accept my humble tribute to all those in Calcutta who have laid down their lives in the course of duty, and have faced serious hardships.” This letter was read out to all ranks in the city police to boost their morale (CPG, January 14, 1971). In a further effort to re-activate the police, after having distributed a “large number of revolvers” to its “officers and men”, the Calcutta Police authorities took steps to educate them on “safety precautions” and “Dos and Don’ts” regarding the arms. Accordingly, the additional commissioner of the police issued a communication containing eight-point safety precaution measures and six-point dos and don’ts in January 1971. Around the same time, the commissioner of Calcutta Police warned his ranks, “Any loss of weapon and ammunition will be most severely punished”. In other words, an effort was still on to further improve the efficiency of the city police force (CPG, January 19, 1971).

Meanwhile, the approaching mid-term poll scheduled on March 10, 1971 posed a new challenge to the city police. As in 1969, this time also the CPI(ML) gave a call to the people to boycott the election. The party cadres in the city started terrorising the voters and the candidates, so that the election could not be held. Such activities alienated the party from the urban middle class, who earlier used to have some soft corner for the urban guerrillas, whom they regarded as a generation of honest youth ready to sacrifice for a revolutionary change. The police on the other hand took up the challenge of conducting the election as “a matter of prestige”. Thanks to the support from the Indian Army and the Central Reserve Police, the city police was successful in meeting the challenge. Immediately after the election both the state and city police earned accolades from the office of the governor for making it possible “to hold the elections peacefully and successfully”. The city police, in its turn, profusely thanked the army and the Central Reserve Police for “all their aid and assistance – always on a massive scale and ungrudgingly – for the maintenance of law and order in this most turbulent city of the country” (CPG, March 15, 1971). The results of the 1971 elections indicated a reversal of political trends amongst the middle class population in the city. The Left – both the CPI and the CPI(M), lost ground in Calcutta.

The CPI(ML) movement in the meantime was marked by a new development. Jailbreaks by Naxalite prisoners became a regular feature. Between December 1970 and September 1971, the party guerrillas conducted a series of successful “actions” leading to jailbreaks and escape of prisoners from the district jails in Darjeeling, Siliguri, Purulia and Dum Dum Central Jail

in Calcutta. Following the escape of 24 “Naxalite detainees” and “under trial prisoners” from the Dum Dum Central Jail on May 14, 1971, the deputy commissioner of Calcutta Police, detective department, directed all his ranks “to be on the look-out for the accused persons” (CPG, May 31, 1971). In a rather unusual move, the Calcutta Police under its “notices regarding persons wanted” column of the CPG published a photograph and description of one “Biswanath Das alias Sukanta Roy, son of Gurupada Das, a hard core Naxalite”, who had “escaped from Purulia Jail on the September 11, 1971 at about 12-20 hours”. The notice advised section officers “to maintain a sharp look-out for the said accused” (CPG, November 3, 1971).

Following the 1971 elections, particularly in the second half of the year, the Calcutta Police, in collaboration with the Central Reserve Police, increased its offensive against the Naxalites. Regular combing of suspected areas, predawn raid on houses, extermination of sympathisers/supporters of the CPI(ML) by the police became a part of the city life. According to police sources, between March 1970 and August 1971, 1,783 CPI(ML) supporters/members were killed in Calcutta and its suburbs. Later investigators claimed the figure was at least double. Between May and December 1971, the police opened fire on Naxalite prisoners in at least six jails in West Bengal. The newly elected Congress government of West Bengal also fuelled the counter-revolutionary activities to a great extent.

In response, Charu Mazumdar called upon his followers to avenge every murder of his comrades. In an amazing show of fearlessness, they struggled to put their leader’s theory into practice. But the unequal battle between a better armed police force and ill-equipped Naxalites in the city did not last for long. By the second quarter of 1972, the movement unleashed by the urban guerrillas in the city had suffered a setback. The number of city shelters for the communist guerrillas dwindled in the face of the police raids; the sympathiser-base eroded as the movement degenerated into a swirl of senseless killings, and the much touted annihilation programme began to wane without yielding any significant result. As reported in various issues of the CPG, the number of CPI(ML) actions in the city went down in 1972-73.

At a time when the city was under intense police surveillance, Charu Mazumdar was arrested from a “shelter” at Entally in east Calcutta on July 16, 1972. Incapable of unleashing any massive protest movement as in the past, Naxalites could now retaliate only by killing two policemen a few days later. Mazumdar lived only 12 days following his arrest. He was reported to have “died” in the police custody at 4-50 am on July 28, 1972. Neither the news of the arrest nor that of his death found a place in the CPG. There was, however, a note of caution from the Calcutta Police commissioner. In an order issued five days after the death of Mazumdar, the city police chief said, “I noticed armed constables in different parts of the city moving about carelessly and sometimes singly, and they may be easily overpowered and arms snatched away by any determined persons. The deputy commissioners of divisions and armed battalions and other deputy commissioners are hereby instructed to see that armed men are alert and they are not less than three in number moving about together in a compact body and their weapons are secured to their persons by iron chains. They shall not also get mixed up in a crowd as far as practicable, shall not sit down and relax keeping their rifles by their side and shall be in a position all the time to repulse an attack. Any violation of these orders shall be taken serious notice of. These orders will also apply to pickets, men on transports,

static guards and all other detailments (sic) of armed force including the traffic points security men” (CPG, August 2, 1972).

Return to ‘Normalcy’

As we reach the beginning of 1973, we find that the city police was feeling more secure and had started to regard the situation in Calcutta as normal. This found reflection in the CPG. “All members of the Calcutta Police force” earned ‘Sabash’ from the then commissioner of police, S C Chaudhuri for their “excellent performance” of duties “in connection with the procession of the Congress president, the AICC sessions, visits of the prime minister, and last of all, the test cricket match” held in Calcutta between December 25, 1972 and January 4, 1973 (CPG, January 4, 1973). The police, however, could not afford to let its guard down and it continued to maintain its anti-Naxalite campaign so that the movement could not stage a comeback.

But there seemed to be a slight shift in stress during this period – which could be described as a reprieve of sorts. The police authorities felt the need for refurbishing the image of their men, who had acquired the reputation of a notoriously ruthless force without any accountability during the anti-Naxalite operations in the city. As mentioned earlier, a large number of firearms were distributed amongst the city police who were encouraged to use them indiscriminately in the name of suppressing Naxalites. A lot of innocent people were killed in the course of such counter-insurgency operations. But almost all the police excesses during the period were condoned. However, with the collapse of the Naxalite movement in the city, the police authorities could now afford to relax a bit and see to it that their men did not get out of total control and offend middle class public opinion by exceeding the usual limits that were laid down by the law. The Calcutta Police commissioner through a communication meant for all in the force tried to enforce discipline. According to the preamble of his order,

Following the outbreak of serious violence in the city and frequent attacks on the police in particular by some militant extremist elements in early 1970, a section of the Calcutta Police Force had to be either issued with or permitted to carry firearms for their self-defence as well as the protection of lives and properties of others. The steps thus taken had proved quite helpful in effectively dealing with the grave situation and thereby restoring normalcy in the city. But with the dispersal of firearms to a large number of officers

and men, it is considered necessary to impress upon all carrying firearms, particularly small firearms, and remind all members of the Calcutta Police Force, of their powers and responsibilities in the matter of general use of firearms.

Meant for “information and guidance of all concerned”, the seven-point order reminded the force of police regulations – “Police may, in exercise of the right of private defence, resort to firing only as a last resort and under unavoidable circumstances” (CPG, January 9, 1973). The order was subsequently reproduced in a number of issues of CPG in 1974.

While the city police was in a reorientation mode, the CPI(ML) was fragmented into various splinter groups. There were about 10 different pro-Naxalbari, Maoist groups operational in various parts of the country. These groups had differing point of views on the content and form of the struggle. The political changes in China (fall of Lin Piao and his subsequent death) influenced these groups’ international outlook. Followers of Charu Mazumder belonging to these groups were also divided into two factions – pro-Lin Piao and anti-Lin Piao. The pro-Lin Piao faction of Charu Mazumder’s followers, under the leadership of Mahadev Mukharji (MM) of Burdwan, reorganised themselves in a few districts of West Bengal. This faction of the CPI(ML) established links with like-minded comrades across the country, convened and organised the second party congress at Kamalpur in the district of Burdwan, West Bengal on December 2, 1973. The party congress adhered to the Mazumder line of action and started implementing the same in district towns including Hooghly, Chandernagore, Asansol, Burdwan and Nadia. The reorganised party tried to make its presence felt in Calcutta by sudden display of posters, hoisting of red flags at important places, organising armed procession of sympathisers (who would melt into the crowd following a brief appearance on the city streets). As part of the renewed annihilation campaign, they also killed a few Calcutta Police personnel and captured arms. For a brief period though, those “actions” shook the Calcutta police once again.

Following a Naxalite attack on policemen in the city, the Calcutta Police commissioner, in his order, recorded, “On the February 25, 1974 at about 07-30 hours two traffic constables just taking up duty at the crossing of B T Road and Raja Manindra Road were attacked by some extremist miscreants. One of them succumbed to the injuries on the spot while the other has been admitted to the Calcutta Police Hospital with not very serious injuries. The service revolvers they were carrying have been snatched away.” An angry city police chief then added, “This

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Hitkari House, 6th Floor, 284, Shahid Bhagatsingh Road, Mumbai 400 001.

email: circulation@epw.org.in

incident should be an eye-opener to all members of the force. It shows that even though there has been a remarkable improvement in the law and order situation, there is no scope for complacency and we must always remain on guard and alert to combat sneak attacks of the nature that took place on February 25, 1974. It is a pity that even though both the constables were armed they could not use their revolvers and over-power either one or all the miscreants.” “We have been providing arms to the members of the force going out on duty. They are meant to use them whenever necessary. Elaborate orders and instructions were issued from time to time in this regard but unfortunately it appears that these orders and instructions are not being strictly adhered to...The deputy commissioners of police and the assistant commissioners of police should be responsible to improve alertness in these respects of the force placed under each of them” (CPG, February 26, 1974).

However, it did not take too long for a better prepared city police this time to smother this second spark of the Naxalite “revolution” in Calcutta. Unlike in the early years of the 1970s, when the CPG was daily filled up with reports of Naxalite activities, during the 1974-75 period barring a few sporadic “actions”, no noteworthy Naxalite activity found place in the CPG.

Following the proclamation of the Emergency in end June 1975, the central government of India, by an order number SO 305 (E) dated July 3, 1975, banned all the 10 pro-Naxalbari, Maoist groups in the country. The CPG reproduced the order which read:

whereas the central government is satisfied with respect to the organisations specified ... below that they are organisations which are, and whose members and the persons in control whereof are indulging in activities prejudicial to the internal security, the public safety and the maintenance of public order; Now, therefore, in exercise of the powers conferred by sub-rule (1) of Rule 33 of the Defence and Internal Security of India Rules, 1971, the central government hereby directs that the said rule shall apply to the organisations specified ... below:

- (1) Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist) (Charu Mazumdar Group-pro-Lin-Piao faction)
 - (2) Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist) (Charu Mazumdar Group-anti-Lin-Piao faction)
 - (3) United Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist) (S N Singh-Chandra Pulla Reddy Group)
 - (4) The Andhra Pradesh Communist Committee (Revolutionaries) (T Nagi Reddy Group)
 - (5) Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist) (Suniti Ghosh-Sharma faction)
 - (6) Eastern India Zonal Consolidation Committee of the Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist)
 - (7) The Maoist Communist Centre
 - (8) The Mukti Yudha Group
 - (9) Unity Centre of Communist Revolutionaries of India (Marxist-Leninist)
 - (10) Centre of Indian Communists.
- (CPG, November 1, 1975).

Incidentally, the central government did not perceive any threat from the other two communist parties – the CPI and the CPI(M). Accordingly, these two parties were not banned during the period.

Concluding Remarks

The issues of the CPG in the 1970s help us understand how the police handled the internal communication system and conducted the day-to-day management during a crisis situation that lasted for nearly a decade. The goals of any crisis

management, according to experts, are: (a) terminate the crisis quickly; (b) limit the damage; and (c) restore credibility.

It is evident from CPGs, that the city police achieved these goals in its dealing with the Naxalite challenge.

Crisis experts often adopt the following five strategies in communicating to their targets: (1) straightforward position; (2) involve top management; (3) activate third party support; (4) keep the crisis in perspective; and (5) do not ignore employees.

While going through CPGs, one can identify the stance/position taken by the police at any given point of time during the 1967-75 period. The top management’s involvement in the internal communication programme vis-a-vis Naxalite movement could be traced from 1970 onwards. It is also apparent from at least one communication of the city police chief that he directed the force to garner third party (public) support for the “cause” they were fighting (Re: CPG, December 3, 1970).

Along with the straightforward position of face-to-face combat with the enemy outside, within its organisation the city police authorities were also keeping a close tab on its employees and paying attention to their needs. It is significant, that at no point of time during the crisis, did the police management ignore its ranks. Besides issuing a series of “We care for you” communications on various occasions, the city police authorities, “in addition to other benefits admissible under the rules”, provided the family of “killed” police personnel with “ex-gratia payment” (financial assistance) on the fast-track basis. And the “magnanimity” of the management was duly recorded in the Gazette (CPG, May 11, 1970, June 10, 1970). Just before the pujas (annual autumn festival held in September-October), the Calcutta Police commissioner would remind all his colleagues of the police personnel who were killed by Naxalites in 1970-72 and urge upon them to send gifts to the families of the deceased through the Calcutta Police Family Welfare Centre. Very similar to the communist tradition of remembering martyrs, the practice was followed by the Calcutta Police from 1973 to 1975 (CPG, September 29, 1973, October 14, 1974 and October 6, 1975). The authorities also closely monitored the progress of investigations and court battles in defence of their ranks. The CPGs during this period recorded “Particulars of the cases” at regular intervals. In February 1972 alone, there were as many as 33 police-murder cases under investigation (CPG, February 18, 1972).

Monitoring the contents of the issues of the CPG of 1970 is like the interception of signals by the military intelligence at the time of wars. It provides the historian of the Naxalite movement with invaluable information about the everyday tactics that the police adopted at the ground level to face the enemy. It also lends another dimension to the history of the Naxalite movement by offering an alternative version from the viewpoint of its antagonist.

These communications through CPGs created a positive impact, projected a good image of the organisation on the police ranks and finally helped the management to consolidate the force at a crisis situation. And as the internal communications tool there lies the strength of the Calcutta Police Gazette, which is sure to be a pretty good source material for those who intend to research on anything from the social to the police history of Calcutta. **[PWN]**

Email: ashoke10@myway.com