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April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.

(T.S. Eliot, The Waste Land)

April started with dairy farmer Pehlu Khan's lynching on a national highway not far from New Delhi, and ended with the killings of two alleged cow thieves by a lynch mob in Assam's Nagaon district. The two men were chased and beaten for five kilometers. Two days later police had still not made any arrests.

You could argue these are blips in a country as large as ours. But there are serious spikes in the nation's electro-cardiogram too, mainly in the Kashmir Valley and the 106 districts in ten states terrorised by rag-tag 'armies' of Maoist militants.

If you look at a map of India, the Maoist-dominated (some would say de facto ruled) districts, which are all thickly forested and rich in natural resources, are far larger in area than the Kashmir Division, which constitutes just about 16% of Jammu and Kashmir's total area, and its population is just about 0.6% of India's total. But both are serious internal-security crises that have been festering for decades, and the Narendra Modi government, which is about to celebrate three years in power, hasn't been able to get to grips with either problem. Although Modi said his shock November 2016 demonetization was aimed, besides corruption and black money, at terrorist funding (and he claimed that 700 Maoists had surrendered in November-December alone), both the Kashmiri uprising and Maoist outrages have resumed in full force this year.

The grim toll in Kashmir, where at least a dozen terrorist attacks have occurred so far in 2017, reached a grisly low point on May 1 when two Indian soldiers were killed and beheaded on the Line of Control by Pakistani infiltrators.

A week earlier in a display of home-grown barbarity, 25 Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) jawans guarding road-building crews were slaughtered in an ambush by about 300 heavily-armed Maoists in Chhattisgarh's Sukma district. This closely followed the deaths of 12 CRPF troopers on March 11 in another Sukma attack where the militants used improvised explosive devices.

The government is at pains to tell us that Left Wing Extremism (LWE) is under control. The Home Ministry's annual report, released on April 19, says there has been "unprecedented improvement in the LWE scenario" since the Modi government took office. The successes, it says are "a reflection of the efficacy of operations being conducted by the [security forces] and the capacity building measures undertaken by the MHA.

without smart development and hard intelligence

We Owe it To Our Jawans in CRPF

The report says thanks to the government's "developmental outreach" many LWE cadres are "returning to the mainstream": 1,442 Maoists surrendered in 2016, up 411% from 282 in 2013. But the MHA website also says a total of 105 Maoist attacks occurred in Chhattisgarh in the first three months of 2017, of a national total of 250. The ministry's annual report also notes matter-of-factly that because of a larger number of civilian deaths, the toll in Maoist attacks in 2016 rose to 278 from 230 in 2015.



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Chhattisgarh (395 'incidents' in 2016) and Jharkhand (323) are the worst-affected states, accounting for 68.5% of the 1,048 attacks last year. Both states are ruled by BJP.

I spoke with several security experts and asked them when, and if, things would ever turn around in Kashmir and the Maoist-affected areas. The unambiguous response was that the Army (in Kashmir) and paramilitary forces (in Maoist areas) are both 'garrison forces' that are sent in for limited spells of duty into unfamiliar territory to quell internal disturbances. One senior official who had served in Punjab, Kashmir and the North-east said nothing can replace "hard operational intelligence" that can only be provided by a properly trained, well-equipped, motivated and empowered local police force. He cited the example of Punjab, where the tide turned against the Sikh insurgency in the mid-1980s when local police forces were given strong leadership by officers like Julio Ribeiro and KPS Gill.

This is unlikely to happen any time soon in Kashmir, where leadership is in sorrowful scarcity among the cardboard-cutout politi-

cians from across the spectrum. (Not that we have towering examples astride the national stage – one was hard put to spot a credible alternative to Modi when a rather bedraggled bunch of opposition figures gathered in Delhi on May 1, the birth anniversary of socialist leader Madhu Limaye).

So is there a way out of these dark labyrinths? K. Vijay Kumar, the police officer who led the special task force that hunted down and killed the notorious forest brigand Veerappan in 2004, told me development – spearheaded by good roads – was key to fighting the Maoists.

Vijay Kumar, now an adviser to the Home Ministry, pointed to the success of the Saranda model. Saranda is a 800-sq-km forest in the West Singhbhum district of Jharkhand. In 2011, it was home to 36,500 Ho tribals in 56 villages – and to 25% of India's prospected iron ore reserves. Soon after the CRPF ejected Maoist cadres from Saranda after an 11-year campaign, the then Rural Development Minister Jairam Ramesh launched the ambitious Saranda Action Plan. In addition to quick fixes like drinking water pipes, solar lanterns, bicycles, concrete roofs for the tribals' homes, health facilities and jobs under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, the major project was the building of 11 roads, most of them concrete-topped and all-weather.

Vijay Kumar said the first roads to be built resulted in the lives of three pregnant women being saved. Jairam Ramesh said for the first time, tribals were able to use the roads to gather for protests against errand officials. Democracy and development had arrived.

Vijay Kumar said the pace of road construction in Sukma has picked up over the past 18 months (the BJP's Raman Singh has been the unchallenged chief minister of Chhattisgarh for thirteen and a half years).

But 90% of the CRPF men in Sukma are deployed for road-crew protection (the Home Ministry, in an unusually querulous statement on April 26, defended official policy in Chhattisgarh's Bastar region, noting that it had 45,000 central forces and 20,000 state police). Vijay Kumar, a former director-general of the CRPF, said he was concerned that many jawans had been posted there for far too long. "Two years is ideal, three years is unbearable, and four years is just terrible," he told me.

Even worse, the CRPF men fighting the Maoists are meant to get six weeks off every year for rest, recuperation and training, and this is not happening. Vijay Kumar had spoken to CRPF jawans in the area, and "fatigue could have been a major factor".

This has been true for the CRPF's men for decades, little changed from the jawans I met in Manipur 37 years ago. The CRPF had 313,678 personnel as of December 31, 2016 – slightly more than a third of all the country's six paramilitary forces. We owe them.



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