

“We Shall Certainly Defeat the Government”

The supreme commander of CPI (Maoist) talks to *Open* magazine on October 17, 2009 in his first-ever interview.



At first sight, Mupalla Laxman Rao, who is about to turn 60, looks like a school teacher. In fact, he was one in the early 1970s in Andhra Pradesh’s Karimnagar district. In 2009, however, the bespectacled, soft-spoken figure is India’s Most Wanted Man. He runs one of the world’s largest Left insurgencies—a man known in Home Ministry dossiers as Ganapathi; a man whose writ runs large through 15 states. The supreme commander of CPI (Maoist) is a science graduate and holds a B Ed degree as well. He still conducts classes, but now they are on guerilla warfare for other senior Maoists. He replaced the founder of the People’s War Group, Kondapalli Seetharamiah, as the party’s general-secretary in 1991. Ganapathi is known to change his location frequently, and intelligence reports say he has been spotted in cities like Hyderabad, Kolkata and Kochi.

After months of attempts, Ganapathi agreed to give his first-ever interview. Somewhere in the impregnable jungles of Dandakaranya, he spoke to RAHUL PANDITA on issues ranging from the Government’s proposed anti-Naxal offensive to Islamist Jihadist movements.

Q *Lalgarh has been described as the New Naxalbari by the CPI (Maoist). How has it become so significant for you?*

A The Lalgarh mass uprising has, no doubt, raised new hopes among the oppressed people and the entire revolutionary camp in West Bengal. It has great positive impact not only on the people of West Bengal but also on the people all over the country. It has emerged as a new model of mass movement in the country. We had seen similar types of movements earlier in Manipur, directed against Army atrocities and Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), in Kashmir, in Dandakaranya and to some extent in Orissa, after the Kalinganagar massacre perpetrated by the Naveen Patnaik government.

Then there have been mass movements in Singur and Nandigram but there the role of a section of the ruling classes is also significant. These movements were utilised by the ruling class parties for their own electoral interests. But Lalgarh is a more widespread and more sustained mass political movement that has spurned the leadership of all the parliamentary political parties, thereby rendering them completely irrelevant. The people of Lalgarh had even boycotted the recent Lok Sabha polls, thereby unequivocally demonstrating their anger and frustration with all the reactionary ruling class parties. Lalgarh also has some distinctive features such as a high degree of participation of women, a genuinely democratic character and a wider mobilisation of Adivasis. No wonder, it has become a rallying point for the revolutionary-democratic forces in West Bengal.

Q *If it is a people's movement, how did Maoists get involved in Lalgarh?*

A As far as our party's role is concerned, we have been working in Paschim Midnapur, Bankura and Purulia, in what is popularly known as Jangalmahal since the 1980s. We fought against the local feudal forces, against the exploitation and oppression by the forest officials, contractors, unscrupulous usurers and the *goondaism* of both the CPM and Trinamool Congress. The ruling CPM, in particular, has become the chief exploiter and oppressor of the Adivasis of the region, and it has unleashed its notorious vigilante gangs called Harmad Vahini on whoever questions its authority. With the State authority in its hands, and with the aid of the police, it is playing a role worse than that of the cruel landlords in other regions of the country.

Given this background, anyone who dares to fight against oppression and exploitation by the CPM can win the respect and confidence of the people. Since our party has been fighting uncompromisingly against the atrocities of the CPM goons, it naturally gained the confidence and respect of the people of the region.

The police atrocities in the wake of the landmine blast on 2 November [in 2008, from which West Bengal Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee had a narrow escape] acted as the trigger that brought the pent-up anger of the masses into the open. This assumed the form of a long-drawn mass movement, and our party played the role of a catalyst.

Q *But not so long ago, the CPM was your friend. You even took arms and ammunition from it to fight the Trinamool Congress. This has been confirmed by a Politburo member of CPI (Maoist) in certain interviews. And now you are fighting the CPM with the help of the Trinamool. How did a friend turn into a foe and vice-versa?*

A This is only partially true. We came to know earlier that some ammunition was taken by our local cadre from the CPM unit in the area. There was, however, no understanding with the leadership of the CPM in this regard. Our approach was to unite all sections of the oppressed masses at the lower levels against the *goondaism* and oppression of Trinamool goons in the area

at that time. And since a section of the oppressed masses were in the fold of the CPM at that time, we fought together with them against Trinamool. Still, taking into consideration the overall situation in West Bengal, it was not a wise step to take arms and ammunition from the CPM even at the local level when the contradiction was basically between two sections of the reactionary ruling classes.

Our central committee discussed this, criticised the comrade responsible for taking such a decision, and directed the concerned comrades to stop this immediately. As regards taking ammunition from the Trinamool Congress, I remember that we had actually purchased it not directly from the Trinamool but from someone who had links with the Trinamool. There will never be any conditions or agreements with those selling us arms. That has been our understanding all along. As regards the said interview by our Politburo member, we will verify what he had actually said.

Q What are your tactics now in Lalgarh after the massive offensive by the Central and state forces?

A First of all, I wish to make it crystal clear that our party will spearhead and stand firmly by the side of the people of Lalgarh and entire Jangalmahal, and draw up tactics in accordance with the people's interests and mandate. We shall spread the struggle against the State everywhere and strive to win over the broad masses to the side of the people's cause. We shall fight the State offensive by mobilising the masses more militantly against the police, Harnad Vahini and CPM goons. The course of the development of the movement, of course, will depend on the level of consciousness and preparedness of the people of the region. The party will take this into consideration while formulating its tactics. The initiative of the masses will be released fully.

Q The Government has termed Lalgarh a 'laboratory' for anti-Naxal operations. Has your party also learnt any lessons from Lalgarh?

A Yes, our party too has a lot to learn from the masses of Lalgarh. Their upsurge was beyond our expectations. In fact, it was the common people, with the assistance of advanced elements influenced by revolutionary politics, who played a crucial role in the formulation of tactics. They formed their own organisation, put forth their charter of demands, worked out various novel forms of struggle, and stood steadfast in the struggle despite the brutal attacks by the police and the social-fascist Harnad gangs. The Lalgarh movement has the support of revolutionary and democratic forces not only in West Bengal but in the entire country. We are appealing to all revolutionary and democratic forces in the country to unite to fight back the fascist offensive by the Buddhadeb government in West Bengal and the UPA Government at the Centre. By building the broadest fighting front, and by adopting appropriate tactics of combining the militant mass political movement with armed resistance of the people and our PLGA (People's Liberation Guerilla Army), we will defeat the massive offensive by the Central-state forces. I cannot say more than this at the present juncture.

Q The Centre has declared an all-out war against Maoists by branding the CPI (Maoist) a terrorist organisation and imposing an all-India ban on the party. How has it affected your party?

A Our party has already been banned in several states of India. By imposing the ban throughout the country, the Government now wants to curb all our open activities in West Bengal and a few

other states where legal opportunities exist to some extent. The Government wants to use this draconian UAPA [Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act] to harass whoever dares to raise a voice against fake encounters, rapes and other police atrocities on the people residing in Maoist-dominated regions. Anyone questioning the State's brutalities will now be branded a terrorist.

The real terrorists and biggest threats to the country's security are none other than Manmohan Singh, Chidambaram, Buddhadeb, other ruling class leaders and feudal forces who terrorise the people on a daily basis.

The UPA Government had declared, as soon as it assumed power for the second time, that it would crush the Maoist 'menace' and began pouring in huge funds to the states for this purpose. The immediate reason behind this move is the pressure exerted by the comprador bureaucratic bourgeoisie and the imperialists, particularly US imperialists, who want to plunder the resources of our country without any hindrance. These sharks aspire to swallow the rich abundant mineral and forest wealth in the vast contiguous region stretching from Jangalmahal to north Andhra. This region is the wealthiest as well as the most underdeveloped part of our country. These sharks want to loot the wealth and drive the Adivasi people of the region to further impoverishment.

Another major reason for the current offensive by the ruling classes is the fear of the rapid growth of the Maoist movement and its increasing influence over a significant proportion of the Indian population. The Janatana Sarkars in Dandakaranya and the revolutionary people's committees in Jharkhand, Orissa and parts of some other states have become new models of genuine people's democracy and development. The rulers want to crush these new models of development and genuine democracy, as these are emerging as the real alternative before the people of the country at large.

Q The Home Ministry has made preparations for launching a long-term battle against Maoists. A huge force will be soon trying to wrest away areas from your control. How do you plan to confront this offensive?

A Successive governments in various states and the Centre have been hatching schemes over the years. But they could not achieve any significant success through their cruel offensive in spite of murdering hundreds of our leaders and cadres. Our party and our movement continued to consolidate and expand to new regions. From two or three states, the movement has now spread to over 15 states, giving jitters to the ruling classes. Particularly after the merger of the erstwhile MCCI and People's War in September 2004 [the merger between these groups led to the formation of the CPI (Maoist)], the UPA Government has unleashed the most cruel all-round offensive against the Maoist movement. Yet our party continued to grow despite suffering some severe losses. In the past three years, in particular, our PLGA has achieved several significant victories.

We have been confronting the continuous offensive of the enemy with the support and active involvement of the masses. We shall confront the new offensive of the enemy by stepping up such heroic resistance and preparing the entire party, PLGA, the various revolutionary parties and organisations and the entire people. Although the enemy may achieve a few successes in the initial phase, we shall certainly overcome and defeat the Government offensive with the active mobilisation of the vast masses and the support of all the revolutionary and democratic forces in

the country. No fascist regime or military dictator in history could succeed in suppressing forever the just and democratic struggles of the people through brute force, but were, on the contrary, swept away by the high tide of people's resistance. People, who are the makers of history, will rise up like a tornado under our party's leadership to wipe out the reactionary blood-sucking vampires ruling our country.

Q *Why do you think the CPI (Maoist) suffered a serious setback in Andhra Pradesh?*

A It was due to several mistakes on our part that we suffered a serious setback in most of Andhra Pradesh by 2006. At the same time, we should also look at the setback from another angle. In any protracted people's war, there will be advances and retreats. If we look at the situation in Andhra Pradesh from this perspective, you will understand that what we did there is a kind of retreat. Confronted with a superior force, we chose to temporarily retreat our forces from some regions of Andhra Pradesh, extend and develop our bases in the surrounding regions and then hit back at the enemy.

Now even though we received a setback, it should be borne in mind that this setback is a temporary one. The objective conditions in which our revolution began in Andhra Pradesh have not undergone any basic change. This very fact continues to serve as the basis for the growth and intensification of our movement. Moreover, we now have a more consolidated mass base, a relatively better-trained people's guerilla army and an all-India party with deep roots among the basic classes who comprise the backbone of our revolution. This is the reason why the reactionary rulers are unable to suppress our revolutionary war, which is now raging in several states in the country.

We had taken appropriate lessons from the setback suffered by our party in Andhra Pradesh and, based on these lessons, drew up tactics in other states. Hence we are able to fight back the cruel all-round offensive of the enemy effectively, inflict significant losses on the enemy, preserve our subjective forces, consolidate our party, develop a people's liberation guerilla army, establish embryonic forms of new democratic people's governments in some pockets, and take the people's war to a higher stage. Hence we have an advantageous situation, overall, for reviving the movement in Andhra Pradesh. Our revolution advances wave-like and periods of ebb yield place to periods of high tide.

Q *What are the reasons for the setback suffered by the LTTE in Sri Lanka?*

A There is no doubt that the movement for a separate sovereign Tamil Eelam has suffered a severe setback with the defeat and considerable decimation of the LTTE. The Tamil people and the national liberation forces are now leaderless. However, the Tamil people at large continue to cherish nationalist aspirations for a separate Tamil homeland. The conditions that gave rise to the movement for Tamil Eelam, in the first place, prevail to this day. The Sinhala-chauvinist Sri Lankan ruling classes can never change their policy of discrimination against the Tamil nation, its culture, language, etcetera. The jingoistic rallies and celebrations organised by the government and Sinhala chauvinist parties all over Sri Lanka in the wake of Prabhakaran's death and the defeat of the LTTE show the national hatred for Tamils nurtured by Sinhala organisations and the extent to which the minds of ordinary Sinhalese are poisoned with such chauvinist frenzy.

The conspiracy of the Sinhala ruling classes in occupying Tamil territories is similar to that of the Zionist rulers of Israel. The land-starved Sinhala people will now be settled in Tamil areas. The entire demography of the region is going to change. The ground remains fertile for the resurgence of the Tamil liberation struggle.

Even if it takes time, the war for a separate Tamil Eelam is certain to revive, taking lessons from the defeat of the LTTE. By adopting a proletarian outlook and ideology, adopting new tactics and building the broadest united front of all nationalist and democratic forces, it is possible to achieve the liberation of the oppressed Tamil nation [in Sri Lanka]. Maoist forces have to grow strong enough to provide leadership and give a correct direction and anti-imperialist orientation to this struggle to achieve a sovereign People's Democratic Republic of Tamil Eelam. This alone can achieve the genuine liberation of the Tamil nation in Sri Lanka.

Q Is it true that you received military training from the LTTE initially?

A No. It is not a fact. We had clarified this several times in the past.

Q But, one of your senior commanders has told me that some senior cadre of the erstwhile PWG did receive arms training and other support from the LTTE.

A Let me reiterate, there is no relation at all between our party and the LTTE. We tried several times to establish relations with the LTTE but its leadership was reluctant to have a relationship with Maoists in India. Hence, there is no question of the LTTE giving training to us. In spite of it, we continued our support to the struggle for Tamil Eelam. However, a few persons who had separated from the LTTE came into our contact and we took their help in receiving initial training in the last quarter of the 1980s.

Q Does your party have links with Lashkar-e-Toiba or other Islamic militant groups having links with Pakistan?

A No. Not at all. This is only mischievous, calculated propaganda by the police officials, bureaucrats and leaders of the reactionary political parties to defame us and thereby justify their cruel offensive against the Maoist movement. By propagating the lie that our party has links with groups linked to Pakistan's ISI, the reactionary rulers of our country want to prove that we too are terrorists and gain legitimacy for their brutal terror campaign against Maoists and the people in the areas of armed agrarian struggle. Trying to prove the involvement of a foreign hand in every just and democratic struggle, branding those fighting for the liberation of the oppressed as traitors to the country, is part of the psychological-war of the reactionary rulers.

Q What is your party's stand regarding Islamist jihadist movements?

A Islamic jihadist movements of today are a product of imperialist—particularly US imperialist—aggression, intervention, bullying, exploitation and suppression of the oil-rich Islamic and Arab countries of West Asia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia, etcetera, and the persecution of the entire Muslim religious community. As part of their designs for global hegemony, the imperialists, particularly US imperialists, have encouraged and endorsed every war of brazen aggression and brutal attacks by their surrogate state of Israel.

Our party unequivocally opposes every attack on Arab and Muslim countries and the Muslim community at large in the name of ‘war on global terror’. In fact, Muslim religious fundamentalism is encouraged and fostered by imperialists as long as it serves their interests—such as in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries, and Kuwait, Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan.

Q But what about attacks perpetrated by the so-called ‘Jihadis’ on innocent people like it happened on 26/11?

A See, Islamic jihadist movements have two aspects: one is their anti-imperialist aspect, and the other their reactionary aspect in social and cultural matters. Our party supports the struggle of Muslim countries and people against imperialism, while criticising and struggling against the reactionary ideology and social outlook of Muslim fundamentalism. It is only Maoist leadership that can provide correct anti-imperialist orientation and achieve class unity among Muslims as well as people of other religious persuasions. The influence of Muslim fundamentalist ideology and leadership will diminish as communist revolutionaries and other democratic-secular forces increase their ideological influence over the Muslim masses. As communist revolutionaries, we always strive to reduce the influence of the obscurantist reactionary ideology and outlook of the mullahs and maulvis on the Muslim masses, while uniting with all those fighting against the common enemy of the world people—that is, imperialism, particularly American imperialism.

Q How do you look at the changes in US policy after Barack Obama took over from George Bush?

A Firstly, one would be living in a fool’s paradise if one imagines that there is going to be any qualitative change in American policy—whether internal or external—after Barack Obama took over from George Bush. In fact, the policies on national security and foreign affairs pursued by Obama over the past eight months have shown the essential continuity with those of his predecessor. The ideological and political justification for these regressive policies at home and aggressive policies abroad is the same trash put forth by the Bush administration—the so-called ‘global war on terror’, based on outright lies and slander. Worse still, the policies have become even more aggressive under Obama with his planned expansion of the US-led war of aggression in Afghanistan into the territory of Pakistan. The hands of this new killer-in-chief of the pack of imperialist wolves are already stained with the blood of hundreds of women and children who are cruelly murdered in relentless missile attacks from Predator drones in Afghanistan and Pakistan. And, within the US itself, bail-outs for the tiny corporate elite and attacks on democratic and human rights of US citizens continue without any change.

The oppressed people and nations of the world are now confronting an even more formidable and dangerous enemy in the form of an African-American president of the most powerful military machine and world gendarme. The world people should unite to wage a more relentless, more militant and more consistent struggle against the American marauders led by Barack Obama and pledge to defeat them to usher in a world of peace, stability and genuine democracy.

Q How do you look at the current developments in Nepal?

A As soon as the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) [CPN(M)] came to power in alliance with the comprador-feudal parties through the parliamentary route in Nepal, we had pointed out the grave danger of imperialist and Indian expansionist intervention in Nepal and how they would leave no stone unturned to overthrow the government led by CPN(M). As long as Prachanda did

not defy the directives of the Indian Government, it was allowed to continue, but when it began to go against Indian hegemony, it was immediately pulled down. CPN-UML withdrew support to the Prachanda-led government upon the advice of American imperialists and Indian expansionists. We disagreed with the line of peaceful transition pursued by the UCPN(M) in the name of tactics. We decided to send an open letter to the UCPN(M). It was released in July 2009.

We made our party's stand clear in the letter. We pointed out that the UCPN(M) chose to reform the existing State through an elected constituent assembly and a bourgeois democratic republic instead of adhering to the Marxist-Leninist understanding on the imperative to smash the old State and establish a proletarian State. This would have been the first step towards the goal of achieving socialism through the radical transformation of society and all oppressive class relations. It is indeed a great tragedy that the UCPN(M) has chosen to abandon the path of protracted people's war and pursue a parliamentary path in spite of having *de facto* power in most of the countryside.

It is heartening to hear that a section of the leadership of the UCPN(M) has begun to struggle against the revisionist positions taken by Comrade Prachanda and others. Given the great revolutionary traditions of the UCPN(M), we hope that the inner-party struggle will repudiate the right opportunist line pursued by its leadership, give up revisionist stands and practices, and apply minds creatively to the concrete conditions of Nepal.

Q Of late, the party has suffered serious losses of party leadership at the central and state level. Besides, it is widely believed that some of the senior-most Maoist leaders, including you, have become quite old and suffer from serious illnesses, which is also cited as one of the reasons for the surrenders. What is the effect of the losses and surrenders on the movement? How are you dealing with problems arising out of old age and illnesses?

A (Smiles...) This type of propaganda is being carried out continuously, particularly by the Special Intelligence Branch (SIB) of Andhra Pradesh. It is a part of the psychological war waged by intelligence officials and top police brass aimed at confusing and demoralising supporters of the Maoist movement. It is a fact that some of the party leaders at the central and state level could be described as senior citizens according to criteria used by the government, that is, those who have crossed the threshold of 60 years. You can start calling me too a senior citizen in a few months (smiles). But old age and ill-health have never been a serious problem in our party until now. You can see the 'senior citizens' in our party working for 16-18 hours a day and covering long distances on foot. As for surrenders, it is a big lie to say that old age and ill-health have been a reason for some of the surrenders.

When Lanka Papi Reddy, a former member of our central committee, surrendered in the beginning of last year, the media propagated that more surrenders of our party leaders will follow due to ill-health. The fact is that Papi Reddy surrendered due to his loss of political conviction and his petty-bourgeois false prestige and ego. Hence he was not prepared to face the party after he was demoted by the central committee for his anarchic behaviour with a woman comrade.

Some senior leaders of our party, like comrades Sushil Roy and Narayan Sanyal, had become a nightmare for the ruling classes even when they were in their mid 60s. Hence they were arrested, tortured and imprisoned despite their old age and ill-health. The Government is doing everything possible to prevent them from getting bail. Even if someone in our party is old, he/she continues

to serve the revolution by doing whatever work possible. For instance, Comrade Niranjana Bose, who died recently at the age of 92, had been carrying out revolutionary propaganda until his martyrdom. The social fascist rulers were so scared of this nonagenarian Maoist revolutionary that they had even arrested him four years back. Such is the spirit of Maoist revolutionaries—and power of the ideology of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism which they hold high. When there are serious illnesses, or physical and mental limitations to perform normal work, such comrades are given suitable work.

Q But what about the arrests and elimination of some of your senior leadership? How do you intend to fill up such losses?

A Well, it is a fact that we lost some senior leaders at the state and central level in the past four or five years. Some leaders were secretly arrested and murdered in the most cowardly manner. Many other and state leaders were arrested and placed behind bars in the recent past in Jharkhand, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Orissa, West Bengal, Maharashtra, Haryana and other states. The loss of leadership will have a grave impact on the party and Indian revolution as a whole. We are reviewing the reasons for the losses regularly and devising ways and means to prevent further losses. By adopting strictly secret methods of functioning and foolproof underground mechanisms, by enhancing our mass base, vigilance and local intelligence, smashing enemy intelligence networks and studying their plans and tactics, we hope to check further losses. At the same time, we are training and developing new revolutionary leadership at all levels to fill up the losses.

Q How do you sum up the present stage of war between your forces and those of the Indian State?

A Our war is in the stage of strategic defence. In some regions, we have an upper hand, while in others the enemy has the upper hand. Overall, our forces have been quite successful in carrying out a series of tactical counter-offensive operations against the enemy in our guerilla zones in the past few years.

It is true that our party has suffered some serious leadership losses, but we are able to inflict serious losses on the enemy too. In fact, in the past three years, the enemy forces suffered more casualties than we did. The enemy has been trying all means at their disposal to weaken, disrupt and crush our party and movement. They have tried covert agents and informers, poured in huge amounts of money to buy off weak elements in the revolutionary camp, and announced a series of rehabilitation packages and other material incentives to lure away people from the revolutionary camp. Thousands of crores of rupees have been sanctioned for police modernisation, training and for raising additional commando forces; for increasing Central forces; for training Central and state forces in counter-insurgency warfare; and for building roads, communication networks and other infrastructure for the rapid movement of their troops in our guerilla zones. The Indian State has set up armed vigilante groups and provided total support to the indescribable atrocities committed by these armed gangs on the people. Psychological warfare against Maoists was taken to unheard of levels.

Nevertheless, we continued to make greater advances, consolidated the party and the revolutionary people's committees at various levels, strengthened the PLGA qualitatively and quantitatively, smashed the enemy's intelligence network in several areas, effectively countered

the dirty psychological-war waged by the enemy, and foiled the enemy's all-out attempts to disrupt and smash our movement. The successes we had achieved in several tactical counter-offensive operations carried out across the country in recent days, the militant mass movements in several states, particularly against displacement and other burning issues of the people, initiatives taken by our revolutionary people's governments in various spheres—all these have had a great impact on the people, while demoralising enemy forces. There are reports of desertions and disobedience of orders by the jawans posted in Maoist-dominated areas. Quite a few have refused to undertake training in jungle warfare or take postings in our areas, and had to face suspension. This trend will grow with the further advance of our people's war. Overall, our party's influence has grown stronger and it has now come to be recognised as the only genuine alternative before the people.

Q How long will this stage of strategic defence last, with the Centre ready to go for the jugular?

A The present stage of strategic defence will last for some more time. It is difficult to predict how long it will take to pass this stage and go to the stage of strategic equilibrium or strategic stalemate. It depends on the transformation of our guerilla zones into base areas, creation of more guerilla zones and red resistance areas across the country, the development of our PLGA. With the ever-intensifying crisis in all spheres due to the anti-people policies of pro-imperialist, pro-feudal governments, the growing frustration and anger of the masses resulting from the most rapacious policies of loot and plunder pursued by the reactionary ruling classes, we are confident that the vast masses of the country will join the ranks of revolutionaries and take the Indian revolution to the next stage.

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