

# Role Of Newspapers In Covering Maoist Terrorism In West Bengal (2003-2010): A Case Study

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**Abstract:** *Maoist Terrorism is undoubtedly one of the biggest threat to our country and requires a concerted response. West Bengal is one of the poor victims of this violence where it has caused havoc especially in the life of the people belong to Districts of Purulia, Bankura and West Medinipur surrounded by forest areas. All terrorist strikes aim their attack on institution of democracy, economic backbone, symbols of national pride to generate panic and fear psychosis amongst common mass, to injure sentiments of people, to gain publicity and to create a feeling of insecurity amongst civilians. The action against Maoist terrorism and ensuring security to the state is associated with the Acts like UAPA etc. Sometimes newspapers try to uphold that to ensure security these laws are misused and the innocent civilians are the worst victims. This paper has tried to investigate the accusation. It has tried to analyze the multidimensional aspect of this issue with host of observations along with newspaper coverage. The paper suggests that by and large the newspapers of the state have contributed substantially to raise public awareness in West Bengal about terrorist strikes, their masterminds and the preventive measures need to be done to bring those affected to justice and to prevent future terrorist attacks. This paper feels that in many cases the newspaper coverage of Maoist terrorist incident is not accurate, balanced and objective. The paper further comments that a detailed and careful research including content analysis is essential for reporting of a Maoist terrorist incident. Sometimes newspaper coverage exhibits lack of responsibility by fanning the fire. Sometimes they fail to ensure security to the common citizen by furthering their support through newspaper reports and features. This paper has observed that some of the coverage of Maoist terrorist incidents by newspapers has been guided by commercial interests. It has the tendency to treat Maoist terrorism like a reality show full of sensationalism. To ensure security and to save the lives of innocent people the newspapers need to publicly ridicule the terrorists as a cowardly, foolish, self-destructive human being who kills for no purpose. Then only the newspapers will do full justice with the Theory of Social Responsibility.*

**Keywords:** Role, Newspapers, Maoist Terrorism, West Bengal, Case Study.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The Former Prime Minister of India, Dr. Manmohan Singh has drawn the attention of the country stating, 'Maoist violence represents the gravest threat to India's internal security.' One of the major problems in the forest area of West Bengal is the terror and annihilation campaign unleashed by the Maoists. Former Chief Minister of West Bengal, Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee has described the problem as 'alarming and serious'. The problem has an all-India perspective. Maoists are active in seven to eight states. They

have chosen poorer and socio-economically backward areas as their terrain. This menace is mounting. The predecessors of Maoists, the Naxalites started and formed their party in West Bengal in 1969. They initiated work in 1967, separated into various groups, got regrouped and in 2004, they came together and formed this party, the Communist Party of India (Maoist) and since then the violence has grown gradually. The CPI (Maoist) was the result of the merger between People's War Group (PWG) of Andhra Pradesh and Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) of Bihar. The Maoist activists operate mainly from a few blocks bordering Jharkhand in Purulia, Bankura

and West Midnapore i.e. from Bundwan, Ranibund, Binpur and Belpahari. The government has identified the Lalgarh, Harda, Binpur, Dahijuri, Pirakata and Ramgarh gram panchayats in Binpur-I and Bhulabhera, Kantapahari, Silda and Ethela in Binpur-II as sensitive areas. Police believe that at least six Maoist squads having much 50 members each, are operating there. The Indian Maoists consider the Indian bourgeoisie as mere puppets of imperialism and underestimate their own role in causing deprivation and victimisation of the common people. If the reader glances at the list of victims reported by various newspapers he or she will see it is the poor, backward, marginalised who are bearing the burnt of Maoist atrocities. In the name of annihilating 'class enemies', they are actually killing innocent people from the lower strata of society.

## **II. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

The newspaper's coverage of Maoist terrorist activities is fast becoming critical after they have caused havoc especially in the life of the people belong to Districts of Purulia, Bankura and West Medinipur surrounded by forest areas. How much should be reported, whether reporting of terrorist strikes amounts to glorify Maoist terrorism and violence and whether it incites people, facilitates new recruitments and provides publicity to terrorists who seek to arrest attention have become the issues of debate in recent time in the State. While India is yet to frame its set of guidelines on coverage of terrorist acts, there is increasing questioning of the newspaper's role and conduct in the face of such attacks after the Maoist attacks. This paper has tried to address the multifaceted aspects of the issue by host of observations, insights and analysis.

### **MAOISTS' ATTACK: A GLANCE FROM REPORTS OF NEWSPAPERS**

- October 11, 2003: Bandwan OC Nilmadhab Das killed.  
July 9, 2005: Two CPI(M) leaders and 16 injured in a booby trap in Purulia. Bandwan zonal committee secretary Mahendra Mahato killed.  
July, 2005: Barikul O-C Probal Sengupta dies when beg left by Maoists blows up on him.  
October 2, 2005: Blast at under-construction CRPF camp at Bandwan.  
December 24, 2005: Landmine detected hours before CM's Purulia visit.  
December 31, 2005: CPI(M)'S Rabi Kar and wife killed at Bandwan. Rabi Kar's house set on fire.  
January 22, 2006: Blast at Duarsini guesthouse.  
January 23, 2006: Upcoming forest bungalow blown up at Bandwan.  
February 13, 2006: Bankura bank and Purulia police outpost attacked Rs. 1.6 lakh and 10 firearms looted, three injured.  
Febryary 26, 2006: For killed in landmine blast at Naakrachhara.  
February, 2006: Maoists blow up West Midnapore SP Ajay Nanda's convoy at Belpahari. Seven cops die, Nanda survives.
- March 4, 2006: One policeman killed on the NH 34 at Chakulia.  
March 5, 2006: CPI(M) leader Kartik Sinha shot at East Midnapore.  
March 9, 2006: Two CPI(M) cadres hacked to death at Dangardihi.  
July 2, 2006: CPI(M) local committee member shot at Lalgarh.  
September 19, 2006: CPI(M) leader and his bodyguard dragged out of a bus and killed near Joypur.  
September 21, 2006: Two police personnel killed as landmine explodes while being diffused at Lalgarh.  
November 29, 2006: Attack at a village gathering, three rifles looted.  
Januar 9, 2007: CPI(M) leader killed in Belpahari.  
May 27, 2007: Firing on the house of CPI(M) leader Upen Mahato, One Killed.  
October 26, 2007: CRPF jeep and bus blown up by landmine. Three injured.  
November 1, 2007: Bhagirath Karmakar, CPI(M) member, killed in Purulia.  
November 19, 2007: CPI(M) local committee member Sufal Mandi killed in Purulia.  
December 6, 2007: CPI(M) panchayat member Gopal Singh shot dead at Belpahari.  
October 22, 2008: A medical van was blown up by Maoists at Belpahari.  
December 23, 2008: Maoists loot police camp, kill two cops at Balarampur.  
February, 2009: Maoists fired on the funeral procession of the assassinated CPI(M) leader, Nandalal Pal, killing three.  
April, 2009: Five more CPI(M) supporters were killed in April, as were four poll staff and police personnel.  
July 17, 2010: House of CPM zilla parishad member Rambishnu Singh ransacked at Mudali village.  
July 19, 2010: Former member of Chatuhasa gram panchayat, Hrishikesh Kumar and son Kashinath shot dead.  
July 20, 2010: Ghatbera forest office at Balarampur gutted.  
July 23, 2010: CPM leader Madhusudan Mondal killed.  
July 24, 2010: Matha forest office near Balarampur destroyed.  
July 28, 2010: CPM leader Sashadhar Mahato killed.  
July 29, 2010: Trinamul leader Rajendranath Mahato killed at Ghatbera.  
August 3, 2010: Former Adivasi Mulbasi committee leader Tapan Das killed.  
August 9, 2010: Open public meeting at Ghatbera beat house, Balarampur. Stormed Urma rail Station and kidnapped for employees including station master.

## **III. ARMS AND AMMUNITIONS USED BY MAOISTS**

Maoists have specialised in jungle warfare over the years relying almost exclusively on landmines and the firearms ammunition were for a broad spectrum of insurgent outfits. They use 9 mm ball bullets, .303 ammunition, 5.56 INSAS ammunition, 7.62 mm ball bullets, Kalashnikov, automatic rifles etc. They are trained to use anti-personnel land mines.

Each mine contains 28 grams of explosive. Impact could blow away both legs of anybody who steps on one. Ammonium nitrate is not a high quality explosive like RDX but intelligent use of shrapnel, ball-bearing, packing and proper fuel mix like diesel converts it into a low-cost-high-impact explosive. Maoists also rampantly use detonators and gelatine sticks in their operations. The Maoists have used sophisticated technology to blow up a medical van at Belpahari. The explosives and the devices were sophisticated enough to use every bit of the chemical. They planted improvised explosive devices(IEDs).

#### **IV. FUND GENERATION BY MAOISTS**

Illegal opium cultivation in Nadia and Murshidabad is helping Maoists to raise funds for buying arms to support its squads operating in South Bengal. Some captured Maoists from Murshidabad's Hariharpara has revealed that the Left extremists, who for long have been raising funds from Jharkhand and Bihar, are now developing its own source of income from Bengal's opium fields. The illegal opium cultivation in Nadia and Murshidabad began around eight years back in connivance with the drug peddlers of UP, Bihar and Jharkhand. But over the last three years, Maoists are operating and controlling the business in Naoda, Balia, Domkul, Tehatta and Karimpur in Nadia and Hariharpara in Murshidabad. At present, the intelligence agency estimates that more than 10,000 acres in Murshidabad and around 12,000 acres in Nadia are used for illegal opium cultivation. Maoists are using middlemen to force landowners to part with their landholdings on a yearly lease of Rs.5,000 to Rs.20,000 depending on the scale of opium cultivation. Sources said one-third acre produces 3-4kg of gum from poppy seeds, which Maoists sell for Rs.25,000 to Rs.35,000 per kg. Maoists are also selling morphine, heroin and other narcotics produced from poppy seeds for profit. And the police believe that the money is used by Maoists to fund operations here. The police also apprehend that funds raised from illegal opium trade are smuggled to Maoists in East and West Midnapore, Bankura and Purula.

#### **V. MAOISTS' WAR AGAINST POOR**

Maoists are taking advantage on poverty, one of the key factors. The thatched roofs and mud walls, absence of electricity, not adequate sources of safe drinking water, a single crop a year, meager earnings from collecting and selling sal leaves – this is the life of most villagers in Lalgarh. "In Lalgarh, sal leaves worth Rs. 2 lakh or more is collected every week. The lure is great but the number of people to grab the opportunity is huge. When we enter the forests to collect leaves, they (Maoists) appear from nowhere and demand drinking water or food, which we are forced to give..." said a resident of Amlia village. The Maoists managed to influence rural pockets especially in the tribal belts and among the lower castes and marginalized farmers. It is a fact that leaders like Somen and Kishenji (originally from Andhra Pradesh) tried to form a base not in the ravines bordering Bengal and Jharkhand

but also on districts like Nadia. The Maoists are concentrating their activities where the tribal people live in the forest and hilly areas of West Bengal. The Maoist cadres are dedicated and trained enough to carry out sustained guerilla attacks. The poor people saw how these self-declared 'guardians of the poor' systematically disrupted all developmental work in the area denying them scope for finding work or receiving welfare benefits. The education of their children was being disrupted through targeting of the schools and the mental health of their wards being seriously affected due to the brutal killings of their school teachers right in front of their eyes especially in jangal mahal area in West Bengal. The tribal people whom they claim to be fighting for are the worst victims of such tactics. They have succeeded in creating this climate of terror in areas which they have claimed as 'liberated'. Newspaper reports of West Bengal reveal that a group of villagers in the troubled jangal mahal area have told the journalists that they could not dare to move out of their homes after sunset. "After dark, we used to urinate in pots kept in our homes as we were too afraid of going out. They used to abduct anyone whom they suspected of being police informers and take them into jungles, never to be seen again. Sometimes they used to torture such people in 'gana adalats' (People's Courts)," said one person. This picture is enough to substantiate the hallmarks of 'Maoist' cruelty. Maoists enforced a reign of terror on the people. People witnessed torture of fellow villagers in the so called people's courts. Maoists have revealed their bankrupt policies of attacking ordinary citizens in various parts of the country including tribals who refuse to accept their diktats. The poorest of the poor saw the 'Maoists' savagely kill, maim and torture fellow tribals, dalits and agricultural workers on imaginary grounds of being police informers or for being supporters of a particular political party or for not following their diktats. The brutal killings of innocent citizens also highlights the true nature of the Maoists. It gives lie to the manufactured campaign posed by the Maoists themselves and often focused by a section of mainstream newspapers that they are engaged in a struggle to defend the cause of tribal people and other oppressed sections. One of the many myths surrounding the so-called Maoists and manufactured by a section of newspapers is that they are driven by the aim and objective of liberating the most downtrodden sections of the society like tribals, dalits, agricultural workers etc. from poverty, exploitation and tyranny of the State.

#### **VI. MAOISTS' ATTACK AGAINST DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURE**

The Maoists have made the democratic political parties and their affiliated mass organizations their special targets. They are resorting to barbarous violence, killing the leaders and supporters of the democratic movements in the name of Maoism. They are destroying the offices of political parties, houses of political party leaders and supporters, panchayat offices etc. Murder, individual assassination, abduction, ransom-demands, landmine blasts, robbing the poor, molestation of women etc. are their tactics to terrorize the common people. The roads that snake through forest and

farmland southwest, southeast, north and east, have been cut literally and blocked with small, medium and massive trees. There was not a CPI(M) worker or leader to be found. They have been threatened, beaten and more than a dozen killed in May, 2009. This was Maoist Standard Operating Procedure (S.O.P.) Move in, cultivate a base, pick up gourses, threaten 'class enemies', kill a few, scare away the rest, claim territory. For months, Lalgarh had been ruled by Maoists. The police was thrown out and CPI(M) supporters attacked, humiliated, driven away or killed. The major provocation came in November, 2008. A motorcade in which Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee was travelling, along with two Union members, was targeted by Maoists in Salboni, northeast of Lalgarh. The landmines missed the target. Lalgarh exhibited banners of People's Committee Against Police Atrocities (PCAPA), a Maoist backed outfit, with slogans that urged people to stand firm in the face of "elections through the police", to evict all police from the forest areas. They have adopted their version of 'shock and awe' tactics. It involved killing, in as brutal manner as possible. In reality, their true aim and objective are to physically liquidate the police forces and the leaders of democratic political parties. By attacking the EFR camp, police camps in Shilda, they have unleashed an orgy of violence and made the indication clearly that they shall defy all joint operations by the central and state forces to restore peace and normalcy in the area. In fact, the mindless violence has gripped the area generating terror and anarchy. In some areas of forest areas of these three districts the armed groups are trying to create problems taking advantage of the difficult terrain and using Jharkhand as their rear front after police operations. The police-administration state that the Maoist leaders operating here belong to other states. They do have local contacts, but no permanent base here. They are trying to spread their influence in other districts.

## **VII. MAOIST SYMPATHIZERS AND COUNTER-MAOIST TERROR STRATEGY**

On February 9, 2010 the Union Home Minister, P. Chidambaram had convened a meeting of the Chief Ministers of West Bengal, Orissa, Jharkhand and Bihar at Kolkata to discuss joint operations that need to be launched by the respective state forces along with the central forces to combat Maoist violence. Repeatedly in the past the Prime Minister has stated both in the parliament and in public that Maoist violence constitutes the gravest threat to India's internal security. It is the high time to meet this threat squarely in the interests of the nation and the people. The situation in the Lalgarh area of course has been complicated by the fact that the Maoists have had the tacit support of mainstream political parties notably the main opposition party of the state. It is unfortunate that one or two political parties backed by some intellectuals, human rights activists, NGO workers, representatives of civil society have openly called for a halt of all operations by security forces against the Maoists so that the latter can continue to terrorize the people through their violence. The civil rights groups and intellectuals who support the Maoists by speaking not only against the police and paramilitary operations must answer the question-are they

defending the Maoists so that they carry on such killings of political opponents, ordinary citizens, poor people with impunity? It is clear that spread of terror and anarchy has posed a grave threat to peace and normalcy as well as to India's internal security cannot be allowed to succeed in the interests of our country and the future of our people.

## **VIII. FACTORS GERMINATING MAOIST TERROR GROUPS**

Maoists are taking advantage of acute poverty and underdevelopment of some areas in three districts of forest areas to grow in West Bengal. There was an acute lack of irrigation facilities in Purulia, Bankura and West Midnapore. There is ample scope to develop health care network in these areas. Proper implementation of rural electrification scheme and the national rural employment guarantee scheme (NREGS) need to intensify in an accelerating pace. Irrigation is a major problem there. Even a single crop a year is uncertain. Hordes of jobless and desperate young people with little to look forward to can easily be tempted to grab at any weapon or ideology which promises them succor. Speaking in the Assembly Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee said, "In Binpur, there is only one health centre. But it can't reach out to people without mobile vans. There is also an acute problem of education." Large tracts of land of these tribal areas are being handed over to foreign and Indian companies for mining operations. The reality reveals instead of adopting measures for the socio-economic development of such regions, the policies of the central government are harming the interests of the tribal people. The displacement of the tribal people and the loss of their livelihood and habitats are a direct result of the policy of the central government to indiscriminately throw open all these areas for mining operations, legal and illegal. This must be put a stop immediately. Look at the area where all these activities are taking place. This is one of the richest areas in terms of mineral resources in our country. The Central Government has privatised mining. And, all of us know from the news media what havoc private mines have been playing in other parts of the country. But, here, privatisation of mining activities in the areas which are predominantly inhabited by tribal people has only added to the woes of the people there. The private hands that come with the private mines and their activities, had only caused and extended further miseries to the tribal population there who already could not have the benefits of development reach them. Therefore, what is required is to re-look into the policies and try to understand the harmful effect of the privatisation of these mines. The move for privatisation is creating situations of over-exploitation and extra burden being imposed on the people there. That also accelerates the backwardness of the people there apart from the traditional backwardness of the tribal areas. And, if we really want to tackle the problem of extremism, the problem of anarchy, we will have to have a very serious re-look on the trajectory of this neo-liberal economic reforms that we are adopting because that is generating this sort of a situation where it is easy for an unemployed, in secured youth to take to arms and take to militancy.

## SECURITY PERSONNEL'S SUCCESS AGAINST MAOISTS

*February 7, 2006:* Two rebels killed, two female cadres nabbed after Belpahari gun battle.

Regarding the state's success in nabbing the terrorists, the government said that 157 rebels were arrested in 2004 and 134 in 2005. Of them, one person had been sentenced to life imprisonment, one to imprisonment for five years and cases were on against the rest.

## IX. COMBATING AGAINST MAOIST TERRORISM

The Central Government announced that the CPI(Maoist) was banned under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) The Schedule of the Act listed the two groupings that merged to form it – PWG and MCC as well as all their formations and fronts as terrorist organisations.. This outfit is already banned in a number of states. What is more important to deal the outfit with politically rather than through bans. The Centre and State government should look beyond the ban, and address the severe rural distress which creates a fertile recruiting ground for Maoist outfits. The Maoist terrorism needs to be treated both as a socio-economic problem and a law and order issue. An expanded version of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme is a weapon against Maoism. In view of the recent spate of offensives, the government plans to deploy helicopters for aerial vigil in districts where Maoists are carrying out periodic operations. The state government has decided to build three makeshift helipads in the forested, inaccessible and Maoist-infested areas of West Midnapore. Three helipads would be built at Dakai, Churimara and Keudishol in the Belpahari block. The state government has decided to bolster the police administration in three Maoist-infested districts. Nine new police stations would be set up in Maoist-hit Bankura, Purulia and West Midnapore. Earlier, the strength of the police force had been increased in Purulia, Bankura and West Midnapore to cope with a spurt in Maoist activities in the three districts, besides being equipped with modern arms. Now, the boundary walls around the police stations were being raised to prevent a sudden raid. The West Bengal is trying to organise joint police operations with the Jharkhand to counter the challenge posed by Maoist extremists in Bengal. The state's Left Front government believes that Maoists activities can be ended only by conducting joint police operations and hastening the process of socio-economic development in areas of Maoist influence. Hence, joint operations with Jharkhand are a must, specially in the jungle areas. The state government is trying to combat the Maoists in Purulia, Bankura and West Midnapore by strengthening the state police force and arming police personnel with modern equipment. The chief minister said that his government did not believe in confronting the problem by relying on arms only. "We are trying to socio-economically develop the poor people of the Maoist affected areas by forming Adivasi cooperatives and the Paschimanchal Unnayan Parishad," he said. Bhattacharjee said his government was in touch with the army and CRPF to train police forces in areas affected by the activities of the Naxalites... The state government expresses its

commitment to take the civil administration to the poorest of the poor. The 'Maoists' thought that fear was the key by means of which they would be able to destroy the defence of the rural poor. Now that these terrorists are on the run in front of the mass resistance in different states especially in West Bengal. As the people's resistance grows in the western districts of West Bengal the Maoists have started to go in for generalised armed attack on the rural population. They have also migrated to the northern hinterland of metropolitan zone in splinter groups of hardcore, professional killers especially in the central West Bengal. To battle against Maoist rebels the Combat Battalion for Resolute Action (COBRA) has been used. There are 23 police and central forces camps in Jangalmahal. Fifty companies, including those of the state armed police, is the additional force deployed since June 18, 2009.

The State Police has arrested some of the Maoist leaders. Some of the members of the action squad have been taken into custody by the central forces have retarded the pace of Maoist terror. They are now in back foot. The joint forces operation in jangal mahal areas in West Bengal and the border areas on three 'Maoist' affected Jharkhand districts of East and West Singhbhum, and Ranchi and the border on the other side yield the following features:

- ✓ The kangaroo courts are no longer in session.
- ✓ The indiscriminate general killing for purposes of spreading of terror is gone.
- ✓ The targeted killing of political activists are becoming less frequent, but does continue.
- ✓ A bulk of the majority of the 'Maoists' leadership have fled the border 'terrain'.
- ✓ The 'training camps' of Maoists have been made scarce.
- ✓ The village-level résistance grows every day, every night, every week, every month.
- ✓ The political parties have gradually started to carry on intense, wide political propaganda amongst the people residing in the area of red soil and this is the most important development to have occurred over a period of nearly a year.

After the freeing of the village from the terrorists people in West Bengal are breathing free. The common villagers air their voice in an uniform orchestration—"We all want to live peacefully. We want to resume our normal lives which have been disrupted during the last one year." The return of the people in jangal mahal area in West Bengal who had been made homeless proved that the qualitative change in the situation was assuming the form of inevitability, signaling the defeat of all attempts to the contrary of democracy and development. If we think of combating Maoism without an ideological battle for social transformation, it can never succeed. This ideological battle is as important as re-establishing the rule of civic administration in these areas. On that, there is no dispute among all of us. But it has to be combined with a political battle or political offensive against this, particularly the ideology which is undermining the foundation of modern India. The democratic political forces have to expose and oppose the Maoist attacks on its leaders, workers, supporters and common innocent people such as school teacher in the Maoist troubled states. It is essential to launch a political and ideological campaign in association with

a mass mobilization drive through meetings, rallies, demonstrations throughout the states in order to oppose the murderous politics of Maoist terrorists and expose their game plan behind it.

Maoists follow the tactical line of terror. They play the trump card of terror to create vengeance. This is politics that is being operated through terror. And it is this politics of terror that needs to be fought today. This is a threat that needs to be met squarely. Otherwise, this series of nefarious activities will continuously undermine the foundation of a modern parliamentary democracy in India. A combination of measures is required by law and order and ideological political struggle against the Maoists and Maoism itself. Unless this combination is adopted, it is tough to tackle the Maoist crisis and problem in the country. The solution needs a three tier approach i.e. the amalgamation of law and order, the political will with the political battle and to address the developmental concerns. It is imperative that the joint operations with the central forces and a coordinate action by the state governments concerned must be intensified to ensure that peace and normalcy return to these areas and the threats to internal security are squarely met.

#### **NEWSPAPER'S ROLE IN COVERING MAOIST TERRORIST INCIDENT**

The coverage of Maoist terrorist incident by various newspapers appeared as sensational and present scoops over other newspapers sidelining the most elementary sense of responsibility. If the highly armed terrorists are provided with information during an encounter it is bound to give them an advantage and make the task of the security personnel much more difficult. Unfortunately some newspapers provided detailed descriptions of the ongoing anti-terror operations. Most of the still photographers zoomed in their cameras at 'trouble spots'. Reporters, correspondents and photojournalists rushed to train and adjust their cameras accordingly the slightest movement of the Joint Forces. Such media hyperactivity could not have helped the security personnel who were risking their lives in a very complex and difficult operation against dangerous enemies. The journalists, correspondents rushed to search for byte from the exhausted and traumatized village people who are the helpless victims of the Maoist terrorism. When they badly needed restraint, respect and mental support, microphones, tape recorders have been kept in front of their faces and flood of questions have flown. Those who had suffered personal tragedy and themselves still in shock were not spared by the so called conscientious newspapers. The camera panned in on their tears and watched their agony. Is this the victory of sensationalism over the sacrifice of essential humanity? The ghastly, tragic and horrifying incident of Maoist terror and its awful personal aftermath for the victims have been treated like a reality show. The militants knew from where the security forces were zeroing in. Lalgarh is not yet a 'liberated zone', much as Maoist propaganda and some giddy media would have it. The photographs published in Bengali and English newspapers exhibited Maoists who sat with their backs to the camera, flaunting automatic rifles, who talked of killing the class enemy, of assassinating the Chief Minister. "There has to be a

consensus that you don't give that kind of platform to such terrorists," said Star Network CEO Uday Shankar.<sup>5</sup> "Terrorists want to create fear. Anything that generates fear is in their interest. The Navy Chief, Admiral Sureesh Mehta expressed exasperation and anger at the electronic media's coverage of the Media is an enabling instrument. Today it is a disenabling instrument", added Admiral Mehta.<sup>6</sup> A new terminology has arrived-'TV terrorism'. The audio-visual channel's competitiveness compelled them to stress more on airing 'exclusives' in a time of a calamity that needed balanced, moderate and dispassionate representation.

#### **REPORTING OF MAOIST TERRORISM**

The people's need to be informed has to be balanced by newspaper's responsibility to prevent unnecessary harm. By analyzing the reports, features, editorials, after-edits on Maoist terrorism published by Bengali and English newspapers during last five years, the paper has identified three aspects when newspapers provide information, news and views about Maoist terrorism in West Bengal. These are interference of newspaper in State operations against Maoist terrorism, cooperation with Maoist terrorists and selling Maoist terrorism for commercial interest of newspapers.

#### **NEWSPAPERS INTERFERING IN STATE OPERATIONS AGAINST MAOIST TERRORISM**

Journalists, newspaper correspondents, reporters, photojournalists have become targets of terrorist activity and are repeatedly threatened for expressing opinions contrary to terrorist goals. Communist Party of India (Maoist) Politburo member M. Koteswara Rao, 'Kishen-ji', has asked media to move out of the area. If media travel with security forces, Maoist operations will be hampered. And so, their safety cannot be guaranteed. Journalists may be targeted because of their views or what they have reported. How reporters and photographers should act in tense Maoist terrorist situations is one part of the equation for measuring journalistic responsibility. Another is how sub-editors, desk persons, assistant editors, leader writers overall editors decide under enormous pressure what should be print, what should be print later and what should never appear before the readers. According to many in law enforcement, the public does not need to see tactical police activity live (Shepard, 2000).<sup>7</sup> It is essential that journalists observed the bombings as these occurred rather than reporting what terrorists directed them to announce after the incident. Many questions have been raised about the impact of Maoist terrorism on newspapers published from West Bengal. When the Officer-in Charge, Sankrail, Atinndranath Dutta was kidnapped by the Maosists the newspapers became involved in the minute details. The kidnapping became the centre of attention for the entire state. The newspapers' coverage created the image of angry, violent Maoist terrorists armed with rifles. Reporters, correspondents amplify, arbitrate and create their own rhetoric about terrorist acts. According to Picard (1991), reporters can choose from four different traditions of reporting to relate terrorist events. In the information tradition, reports are expected to be factual and reliably documented. News about terrorism is notably

poorly corroborated, although it may appear to be in the information tradition. In the more sensationalist tradition, coverage includes emotions, alarm, threat, anger, and fear. When the tradition is toward feature stories, the focus is on individuals as heroes, villains, victims and perpetrators. Feature stories provoke readers with an actual person with whom to relate in emotional ways, using methods similar to the tabloid style, but they are taken more seriously. Features are expected to be reliable reporting. In the didactic tradition, the report is intended as an explanation, and the goal is purported to be educating the public. Each of these four traditions is useful in different ways and times to both journalists and terrorists.

Newspapers have sets of standards and policies on how to react to Maoist terrorist incidents in reporting the news. The demands of Maoists, their manifesto, news about their secret meetings have been published in newspapers. Critics label it as media cooperation. Critics argue that publication of their demands, portion of manifesto set a precedent that encourages Maoist terrorists to use the newspapers to promote their views.

#### **NEWSPAPER'S COOPERATION WITH MAOIST TERRORISTS**

The reports, features and editorials published in the newspapers knowingly or unknowingly cooperate with the interests of the Maoist extremists. Wilkinson (1997) asserts that it is intrinsic to the very activity of terrorization that some form of media, however crude, is utilized as an instrument to disseminate the messages of threat and intimidation.<sup>9</sup> Sloane (2000) found that media portrayals of terrorism, political violence, and threats to national security provoked anxiety in individual viewer. According to the theory of contagion, terrorism is cultivated and spread by media coverage including newspaper. The fear is raised of irresponsible reporting by misguided and manipulated journalists.

#### **SELLING MAOIST TERRORISM FOR COMMERCIAL INTEREST OF NEWSPAPERS**

The newspapers are large, profit-seeking corporations, owned and controlled by business houses, heavily dependent on advertising for revenue and interlocked with other members of the corporate system. Analyzing the content of the reports and features this paper observes that newsworthy stories have been purposely avoided, and good stories all too frequently are not pursued because of commercial and competitive pressures. Sometimes, newspapers promote the cause of terrorism and its methods. Concern is raised over restricting members of the media from having access to sources of facts to report terrorism.

#### **BUILDING IMAGE OF TERRORISTS AS MARTYRS**

From the standpoint of propaganda and manipulating public opinion, journalists appeared useful. But careless use of words, phrases by the correspondents and journalists in few cases unnecessary build the image of terrorists as martyrs. It has happened in covering the reports on exchange of bullets between Maoist terrorists and the joint forces. Unfortunately, a

few reports and features on Maoist terrorism have made Kishanji's image as larger than life. Sometimes a few stories have appeared upholding Kishenji as country's Robin hood. Naturally, Maoist leaders are taking the advantage of this coverage. They use newspapers to promote their agenda. Terrorists distrust journalists. The reports published in newspapers after the release of O.C., Sankrail, Atindranath Dutta was presented in such a fashion that readers are compelled to believe that Kishenji was a person full of kindness and sympathy. His image was glorified.

#### **GUIDELINE FOR MEDIA COVERING TERRORIST INCIDENT**

The Information & Broadcasting Ministry is set to introduce a set of specific guidelines for reporting on "emergency situations" keeping in mind the media's allegedly irresponsible coverage of the Mumbai terror. I&B Minister for State Anand Sharma is learnt to have issued directions for instituting a 'standing media consultative committee' under the I&B Secretary to frame guidelines for coverage of emergency situations like terror strikes...<sup>11</sup> The News Broadcasters Association set about doing a self-regulatory exercise in order to keep the government off its back. They appointed a News Broadcasting Standards (Disputes Redressal) Authority.

#### **TERRORISM & MEDIA**

Besides sensational sieges such as Lalgarh, Maoist attacks find little space in the mainstream media. Modern technology has provided terror groups with a critical communications instrument-the media-which willingly or unwillingly serves their specific or general propaganda and psychological warfare needs. Walter Laqueur stated, "The media are the terrorist's best friend. The terrorist's act by itself is nothing; publicity is all." The terror groups seek through the media attention, recognition and legitimacy. One television news director in Cleveland explained, "We feel that the coverage we give such incidents is partly to blame, for we are glorifying law-breakers, we are making heroes out of non-heroes. In effect we are losing control over our news departments. We are being used." Militant minorities who feel themselves driven at last to have recourse to violence in service of their cause, where the inequality of forces as between themselves and the government they seek to overthrow or constrain to different policies is such that victory for themselves in open warfare is out of the question. The range of communication has enabled terrorists to accomplish this goal as their activities and their demands are quickly and easily dispersed via international communications. Terrorists, cognizant of the power of international communications, will attempt dramatic and often vicious acts of terrorism in order to get extensive international publicity and exposure for their grievances. Terrorism has been used repeatedly to advance tyrannical agendas, justify exceptional legislation, encroach on individual rights, increase internal surveillance, enlarge the role of military forces, and put pressure on journalists to cooperate with agents of the state (Herman & O'Sullivan, 1989). In covering terrorism, the media are damned if they do

and damned if they do not exercise self-restraint (Nacos, 1994). The three primary benefits that terrorists may expect are publicity to spread their message, opportunities to provide background and interpretation for their actions, and a level of legitimacy that would otherwise be unobtainable (Becker, 1996). Targets of terror do not lose their usefulness to terrorists even when violent incidents result in negative media coverage, public outrages against brutality, and widespread sympathy for victims. A nation enraged over terrorism either encourages or inhibits governmental responses in ways that may serve terrorist aims (Nacos, 1994). In the search for a simple explanation, the idea that media are the contagion of terrorism has been widely heralded. According to the theory of contagion, terrorism is cultivated and spread by media coverage. The fear of an epidemic of violence has been repeatedly used to justify efforts to alter media coverage even though there is no significant evidence that media act as a contagion (Picard, 1991.) Because terrorism is a "creature" of the media, according to widespread public belief, the media are expected to be aware of their operative role in the terror syndrome and to cooperate with law enforcement (Onder, 1999). News about terrorism may be manufactured in several different ways. One is inflating the menace on the basis of modest, not very threatening, but real actions. Another is the false transfer of responsibility for a terrorist act to a convenient scapegoat. Terrorism is also manufactured in the private sector, sometimes in collusion with agents of the state, to incriminate organizers, resisters, activists, and political enemies (Herman & O'Sullivan, 1989). Although news of terrorist events is seldom outright fabrication, the stories may be manufactured from selected elements and assumptions, with the support of both commercial and government interests. Journalists are being asked to achieve an equilibrium between market orientation and a mission to bolster public confidence (Rosenfeld, 1996).

## THE STUDY

Role of newspapers in covering Maoist terrorism in West Bengal was taken for statistical analysis for the period of three months (01.09.10 to 30.11.10). After three months the coverage of six English national newspapers (as representative) and six Bengali newspapers (as representative) was measured. In order to test if there is any significant difference in coverage between the English national newspapers and Bengali regional newspapers the 't' test has been applied.

## X. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The measurements of newspaper coverage (in cm.) is tabulated and calculations are made as follows:

### English Newspapers (A)

Sample No. & Name	Space Devoted (cm)	Deviation from mean d	Deviation <sup>2</sup> d <sup>2</sup>
✓ Hindustan Times	872.7	9.47	89.68
✓ The Asian	912.3	49.07	2407.86

Age			
✓ The Hindu	900.2	36.97	1366.78
✓ The Times of India	890.4	27.17	738.20
✓ The Telegraph	821.5	-41.73	1741.39
✓ Indian Express	782.3	-80.93	6549.66
n <sub>A</sub> =6	$\sum x = 5179.4$		$\sum d^2 = 12893.57$

$$x_A = 5179.4 \div 6 = 863.23$$

$$S \bar{x}_A = 24.21$$

Table 1  
Bengali Newspapers (B)

Sample No. & Name	Space devoted (cm)	Deviation from mean d	Deviation <sup>2</sup> d <sup>2</sup>
✓ AnandaBazar Patrika	465.6	-139.4	19432.36
✓ Bartaman	320.2	6	36
✓ Aajkaal	300.1	26.1	681.21
✓ Sambad Pratidin	280.2	46	2116
✓ Ganashakti	365.8	-39.6	1568.16
✓ 6. Icore Ekdin	225.3	100.9	10180.81
N <sub>B</sub> =6	$\sum x = 1957.2$		$\sum d^2 = 34014.54$

$$x_B = 1957.2 \div 6 = 326.2$$

$$S \bar{x}_B = 34.33$$

$$t=12.76$$

Table 2

Comparing the calculated value of t with the value of t in the Fisher and Yates' table for distribution of t against (n<sub>A</sub> + n<sub>B</sub> - 2) i.e. (6+6-2) i.e. 10 degrees of freedom at p=0.05, it was found the latter (table value) to be 2.228. As the calculated t i.e. 12.76 is greater than table value it can be said that the difference between the samples A and B is statistically significant at 5% level. Thus, the difference between the role of English newspapers and Bengali newspapers in covering Maoist terrorism in West Bengal is statistically significant.

## FINDINGS AND OBSERVATION

Maoist terrorism in West Bengal in recent years has upheld that terrorists are making a conscious and deliberate effort to manipulate the newspapers for their desired goals. Since majority of the newspapers are driven by market-economy and are based on competition and profit, it is inevitable that they become an integral part of any terrorist act. The newspaper coverage of Maoist terrorist activities clearly indicates that by providing extensive coverage of such terrorist incident the newspapers give the impression that they sympathize with the terrorist cause, thereby creating an atmosphere favorable to further violence. The newspapers often hinder the work of Police, Administration, Security Personnel and Forces combating terrorism, thus jeopardizing successful results of counter-terror attack. Newspapers have occasionally been helpful to the authorities in tackling the incident like Maoist terrorist strike. The newspapers without

surrendering their prerogatives, should help criminal justice processes in dealing with Maoist terrorism and vice versa the administration of justice officials should take cooperation of newspapers for professional assistance in handling the incidents and in limiting their derivative societal repercussions. Analyzing the nature and complexity of Maoist terrorism, the determination of a proper role for the newspaper should not be left to their judgment alone.

## XI. CONCLUSION

It is a matter of concern that a section of newspapers has reduced news coverage into ‘infotainment’. Sensationalism, trivialization and superficiality are now the hallmarks of a business of public service. Conflicting reports on casualties, defence resources, the number of terrorists, in-accurate news and information have increased our concern and anxiety. What are the functions of the editors and the correspondents? They know very well where to draw the line, what to report, print and what to spike, and how to present a balanced report from the flood of raw data, information and statistics. Irresponsible coverage encourages censorship. It would be tragic if the free fourth estate is punished because of its unethical, irresponsible behavior. The newspaper should behave in a way that helps those who are performing their duties. We need powerful, multi-lingual, creative newspaper campaigns aimed at young people telling them the fact that the terrorists excommunicate themselves from their civilized society. The newspapers of West Bengal should objectively, accurately and credibly report about Maoist terrorist incidents minimize the public panic and anxiety and lose trust and confidence in both the press and government. Journalists need to publicly ridicule a terrorist as a cowardly, foolish, self-destructive human being who kills for no purpose.

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