

Health Freedom

Conflict and Covid-19: A double whammy

Any kind of conflict situation has adverse effects on the health care provision and delivery

Abhinav Mehrotra 21 May 2021

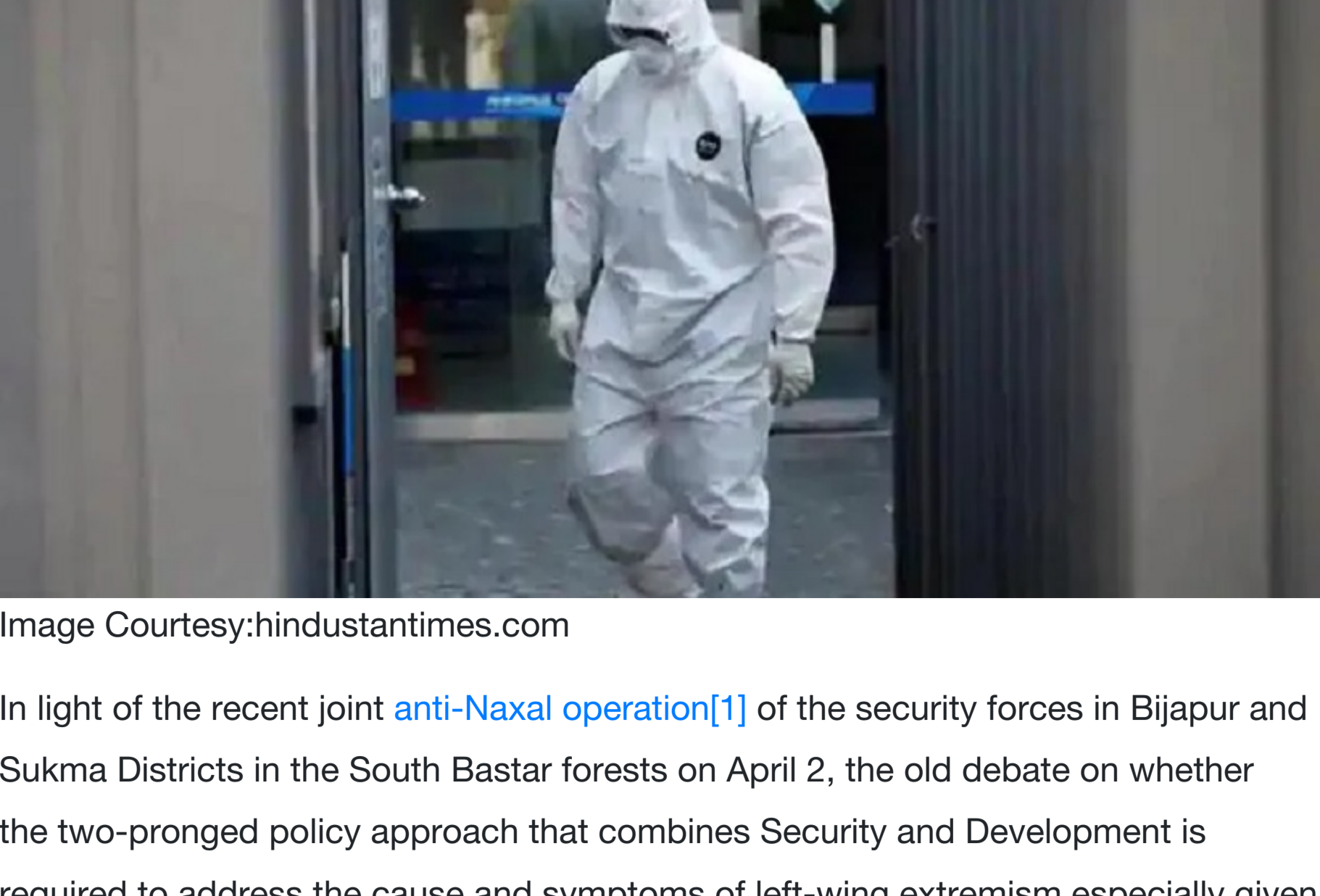


Image Courtesy:hindustantimes.com

In light of the recent joint anti-Naxal operation in Bijapur and Sukma Districts in the South Bastar forests on April 2, the old debate on whether the two-pronged policy approach that combines Security and Development is required to address the cause and symptoms of left-wing extremism especially given the current situation where people residing in such conflict prone areas are fighting a battle of life and death against Covid-19.

This view has been further strengthened by the fact that the Maoists are strengthening their preparedness by taking advantage of the ongoing pandemic by regrouping in regions like Andhra-Odisha Border region and by recruiting ground level forces in the villages spread across Jagdalpur, Dantewada and Sukma districts. There exists a possibility that the Maoist are even offering money to the jobless migrant workers who are on their way to their villages that was the case during the last year's lockdown.

Historically, the Naxalite movement originated in the late 1960s through a peasant struggle in the Naxalbari region of West Bengal that led to Naxalite-Maoist insurgency. The aim behind the insurgency is to overthrow the Indian state through armed struggle rather than democratic measures. In the past, these movements were restricted, based on characteristics like demographic composition, percentage of tribal population and geographical isolation. This sense of exclusion from the national mainstream was the reason cited for the insurgency and that helped it gain the support of the local populace.

What needs to be understood is the reasons for the resentment of the Maoist through which support is garnered. Firstly, the argument for state violence perpetrated through law enforcement agencies and the military, the other being the historical exploitation and deprivation of the tribal sections of the society.

It is also believed that certain factors have further extenuated the Maoist issues. To illustrate, the labelling of the Maoist as terrorists, whose aim is to overthrow the state for their own interests, and not the welfare of the people. Further, the lack of recognition by the state of the genuine problems of the local people such as the primary services like education, health and lack of opportunities of employment that has resulted in structural violence and has forced the people to join the armed struggle.

Overtime, this insurgency has transformed into a civil war that is clear from the attributes of what constitutes a civil war. In simple words, civil war is defined as "armed combat taking place within the boundaries of a recognised sovereign entity between parties subject to a common authority at the outset of the hostilities".

What this signifies is the challenge that the state needs to overcome between human and health security that means tackling the acts that are defined by the State and Central government as 'terrorist acts' and at the same time addressing the needs of the masses as a whole especially in the present situation when the country is caught between the inability to control the disease that has resulted in massive loss of lives as well as immense economic loss due to absence of employment opportunities.

It cannot be over-emphasised that any kind of conflict situation has adverse effects on the health care provision and delivery. In simple terms, the interaction between health and human security, could be defined as focus on addressing security of ordinary people by ensuring their well-being and welfare. This does not mean that state security does not hold significance but it needs to be complemented by taking into its ambit human rights and public health to constitute full security of the people who are not a threat to the state.

As a result, what is required is to redirect the funding from non-critical services towards critical response sectors to ensure the safety and health of the vulnerable populations living in these conflict zones. Historically, the factors that have constrained such actions by state include state's insecurity; repression; political instability; rights abuse and internal displacement of citizens.

Coming to the vulnerable population, the group of individuals that are most at risk are the women and children especially those who are either pregnant and those minors that are unaccompanied as well as the elderly and those with disabilities. This vulnerability is further exacerbated due to the decline in provision of public health due to violent conflict that damages the infrastructure of the society and results in lack of availability of health care personnel and diversion of economic resources from public health.

Despite these hurdles and challenges, inspiration can be drawn from the conduct of doctors who put their lives at risk and reach such areas to vaccinate people. One such example is of Dr. Bhuneshwar Warma who is responsible for vaccinating people in Chameli in Chhattisgarh, feels that violence has hampered the vaccination drive and as a result, majority of the people do not go to the primary health care centres for Covid-19 vaccination and it is only when the doctors go to the interior areas that it becomes possible for people to get inoculated.

In order to fulfil its commitments of ensuring the health security of the people, there is need for the State to take concrete actions and not rely on empathy through words, for which reliance can be placed on the 2008 report prepared by an Expert Group for the Planning Commission of India that is now called the Niti Aayog titled "Developmental Challenges in Extremist-Affected Areas" in which a separate chapter deals with State Response and emphasises upon the need to ensure social justice; equality; protection and local development among other things by removal of insecurities like livelihood insecurity and ensuring security against economic and social oppression for which one of the important aspects is to train the law enforcement machinery to protect and respect the fundamental rights and human rights of citizens residing in these areas.

Maybe by ensuring the development aspects like health, education, sanitation of the people reeling under conflict and Covid-19 is the way forward to ensure the security of these people by addressing their day to day needs that not only protects their lives from threats but also helps in securing their livelihoods.

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[1] https://www.deccanherald.com/national/north-and-central/chhattisgarh-naxal-attack-a-search-operation-went-wrong-970518.html
[2] https://thediplomat.com/2020/09/despite-covid-19-the-future-of-indias-maoist-insurgency-looks-like-its-past/
[3] https://idsa.in/idsacomments/covid-19-left-wing-extremism-rana-siomon-280420
[4] https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/bhopal/maoists-trying-to-recruit-jobless-migrants-back-home/articleshow/75767580.cms
[5] https://kclpure.kcl.ac.uk/portal/files/67442636/book_GrantStrategyIndia.pdf#page=11
[6] https://www.academia.edu/6449872/At_War_with_Oneself_Constructing_Naxalism_as_India_s_Biggest_Security_Threat
[7] https://www.jstor.org/stable/23616188?seq=1
[8] https://journals.lww.com/jjsg/H/Fulltext/2020/11010/The_deleterious_effects_of_war_and_conflict_on_the.13.aspx
[9] https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0033350621000019
[10] https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/doctors-continue-covid-vaccine-drive-in-violence-hit-maoist-belts/articleshow/81979578.cms
[11] https://tribal.nic.in/writereaddata/AnnualReport/DevelopmentChallengesinExtremistAffectedAreas.pdf



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How Indian governments have systematically violated the constitutional mandate, the right to health and what needs to b...



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News in Brief

- ED files money laundering case against Anil Deshmukh
Govt will re-verify NRC lists, enact a law against 'Love Jihad': Assam CM
BJP Cadres attack Manik Sarkar, others in south Tripura
Centre moves SC against K'taka HC order to increase State's oxy... quota

In Focus

- Assam: 25 hutments demolished by Sonitpur district...
Uttarakhand: Nepali citizens deprived of vaccination, HC...
No arrests in offences with up to 3 years punishment: Rajastha...
NCW seeks expedited probe in Patna Covid patient's alleged...

Theme

Milestones 2020: In the year devastated by the Covid 19 Pandemic, India witnessed apathy against some of its most marginalised people and vilification of dissenters by powerful state and non state actors. As 2020 draws to a close, and hundreds of thousands of Indian farmers continue their protest in the bitter North Indian cold. Read how Indians resisted all attempts to snatch away fundamental and constitutional freedoms.
Migrant Diaries: The 2020 COVID pandemic brought to fore the dismal lives that our migrant workers lead. Read these heartbreaking stories of how they lived before the pandemic, how the lockdown changed their lives and what they're doing now.
Hate Speech and Delhi Pogrom 2020: A spate of provocative speeches, that allowed to hate speech in law and should be prosecuted among blood letting to spill on the streets of north east Delhi in February-March 2020
Hashimpura Massacre: The Lemmings of Hashimpura

DECODING HATE: Priest Yati Narsinghanand says Muslim boy g... temple

- Editor's Choice: Expenses > Income, Modi Govt Destroys Economy?
United States: Donald Trump says it is unfair that he is being impeached
Angry JD(U) MP says party has surrendered to BJP like Pakistan to India in 1971
'Fundamentally Discriminatory': UN Human Rights Chief Expresses Concern on Citi...

CAMPAIGNS

Sunday 03 Jan 10 am onwards Remembering Savitribai Phule
Saturday 05 Dec 05 pm onwards Rise in Rage!
Thursday 26 Nov 10 am onwards Delhi Chalo

- Alternate News Network: The following statement was issued to the press by the joint platform of Central Trade Unions and sectoral Federations and Associations today 28th April 2021
Canada: Rally demanding Anand Teltumbde's release held in Surrey
Telugu community in Canada raises voice for GN Saibaba
Journalist Shushma Datt honoured for starting a campaign against racism in Canada

Videos

রাজ্যে এগিয়ে দিদি
POLITICS: Bengal Elections: Here's what people had to say
As Bengal waits for Election 2021 results, watch this SabrangIndia exclusive where people of Bengal voice their concerns and grievances, over the past few weeks.

- Interviews: India under Modi is living through a Dark Age: Professor DN Jha
The Constitution is a miracle: Sen Adv Rajeev Dhawan
Dec 15: Jamia attack anniversary
Facing a vindictive state Anand Teltumbde speaks to Teesta Setalvad

Archives

Maharashtra: How are small businesses surviving new...
Secularism: Beyond Doubt II - The Assassins of Gandhi
Freedom: Calling Smriti Irani's Bluff: Twisted Truths in Parliament
Freedom: At the Pyre of Caste Hatred: Dalit suicides and the Media
IN FACT: Unravelling Hindu Personal Law, how far has t... women?
The Reality Behind the Myths about Mus... scapegoats?
Podcasts: The forest department and Police are taking advantage of the lockdown and torturing the forest dwellers: Roma Malik