
Tackling Left Wing Extremism: Current Trends and Road Map for Conflict Resolution

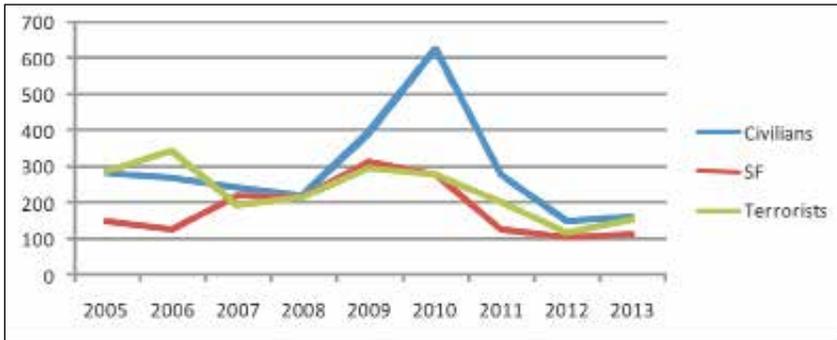
Dhruv C Katoch

An analysis of Left Wing Extremism (LWE) related incidents shows a welcome declining trend over the last three years. The year 2008 witnessed 1,591 incidents of Naxal violence, which rose to over 2,200 in both 2009 and 2010. Since then, there has been a dip to 1,760, 1,415 and 1,129 incidents across the country for the years 2011, 2012 and 2013 respectively.¹ The fatalities due to Naxal violence have also registered a sharp decline over the last three years (see Fig 1).² The trends indicate improved capability of the state governments and their security forces to deal with attacks by Maoists, especially on police posts. However, they do not indicate any appreciable degradation in the strength of the armed wing of the Maoist groups, most notably the People's Liberation Guerrilla Army (PLGA) of the Communist Party of India (Maoist), [CPM(M)] which does not appear to have been weakened in any appreciable manner. The Maoists retain the ability to carry out spectacular strikes against the security forces as witnessed in the recent ambush of a Central Reserve

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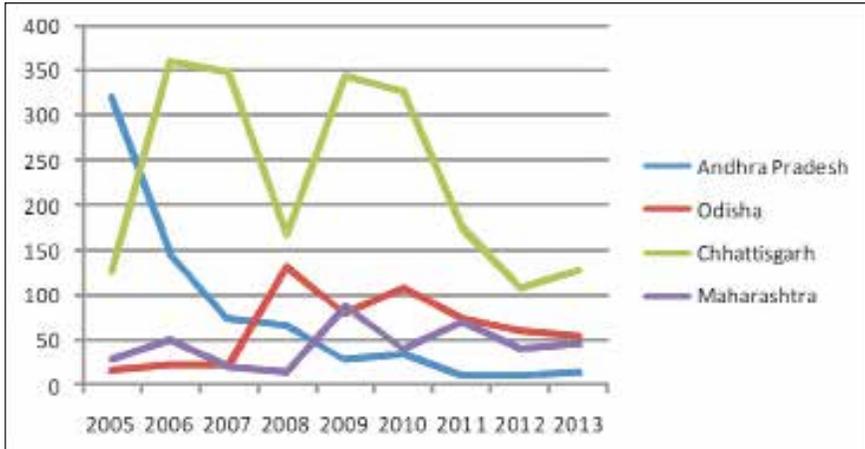
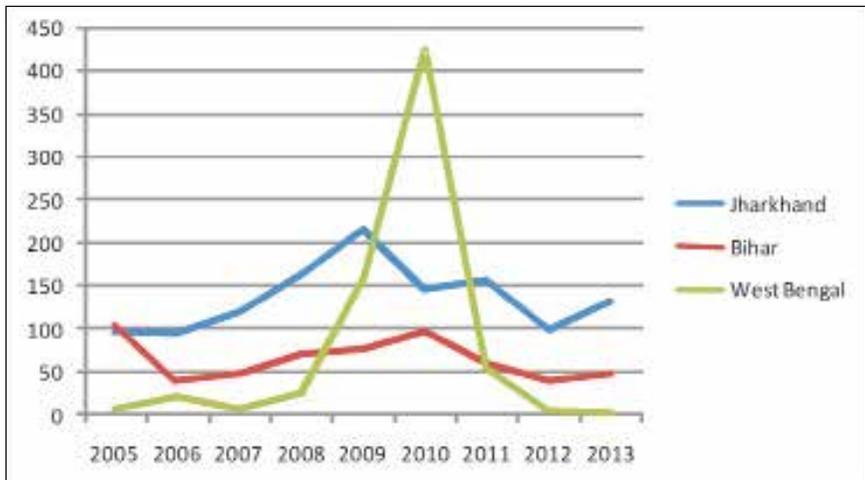
Police Force (CRPF) patrol in the Bastar division of Chhattisgarh on March 11, 2014.³ This remains a source of concern.

Fig 1: Fatalities in LWE: 2004-13



The years 2009 and 2010 saw a spike in civilian fatalities, but this spike was for the most part due to a large number of civilian deaths that took place in West Bengal, largely due to the political environment prevailing at that time. In other states, trends indicate only a marginal decrease in violence against civilians. A disconcerting factor about civilian fatalities is that over 40 percent of such casualties are of those civilians whom the Maoists believe are police informers.⁴ This largely hampers police operations, as the public is unlikely to willingly extend support to the security forces unless they have reasonable assurance of protection. More disconcerting is the fact that in most states, the security forces are suffering fatalities at par with the Maoists, on a ratio of 1:1. This compares unfavourably with the ratios achieved in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), which stand at six terrorists killed for every Security Force (SF) martyr.

The declining trends are also not uniform across the various affected states. Figs 2 and 3 give a state-wise analysis of fatalities for the period January 2005–December 2013.⁵

Fig 2: State-Wise Fatality Figures: 2005-13**Fig 3 : State-Wise Fatality Figures: 2005-13**

The success achieved by Andhra Pradesh (as in Fig2) and West Bengal (as in Fig 3) in curbing Maoist violence is apparent. In the case of Andhra Pradesh, the empowerment of the local police, along with a good intelligence network, contributed largely to a decline in Maoist activities from the very high levels obtaining in 2005. The drop from over 300

fatalities in 2005 to about ten fatalities for each of the years 2011, 2012, and 2013 is significant and indicates holistic and continuous measures adopted by the state to wean away the population from the grip of the Maoists, along with effective security force operations. Violence levels in West Bengal had been low throughout from 2005 onwards except for a two-year period (2009-10), when violence levels shot up dramatically. The upward surge had political manifestations. With appropriate political initiatives, the state has been free of Maoist violence for the last three years.

Chhattisgarh saw a surge in Maoist violence from 2005 onwards. This surge can be linked to the decline in violence levels in Andhra Pradesh, where successful security forces operations carried out by the Greyhounds pushed the Maoists out of Andhra Pradesh, forcing them to relocate in the tribal belt of the Bastar division in Chhattisgarh. The last three years have seen a dramatic reduction in fatalities in the state, to less than half the levels existing in the period 2006-10. However, despite the fall, the state still has the highest number of incidents and fatalities amongst all the states affected by Maoist violence (See Fig 2). Jharkhand, Bihar, Odisha and Maharashtra have seen no significant improvement in the security situation. However, the situation has not deteriorated either, implying maintenance of the status quo in the security situation. The worrying factor in these states, however, is the high rate of attrition of security forces personnel in operations against the Maoists (see Figs 4 and 5).

Fig 4 : Chhattisgarh Fatalities: SF vs Maoists

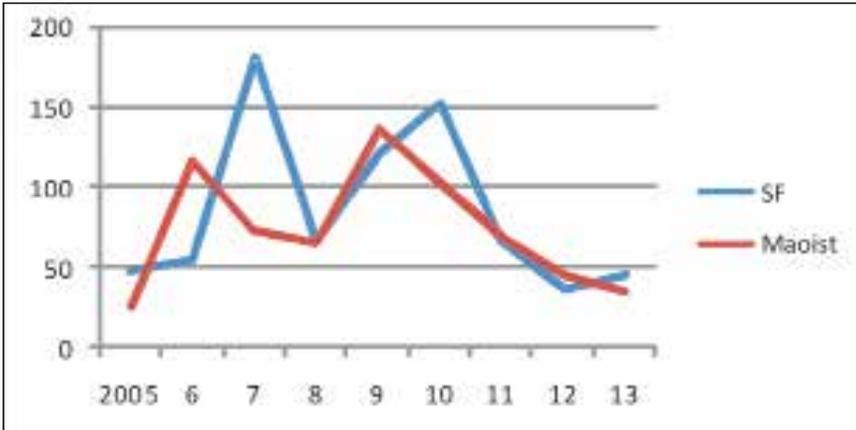
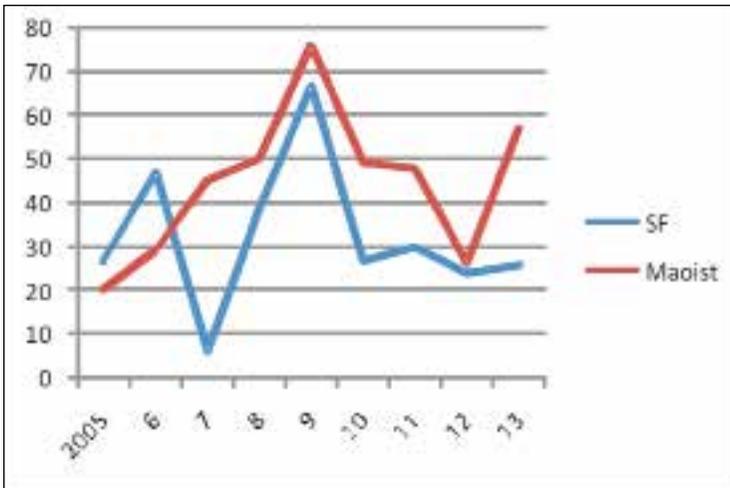


Fig 5 : Jharkhand Fatalities: SF vs Maoists



These ratios from the two worst affected states suggest serious deficiencies in the conduct of operations by police personnel and suggest the requirement of immediate corrective measures at the tactical and leadership levels in the police forces.

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Response by the State

To tackle LWE, the Centre established a Naxal Management Division in the Ministry of Home Affairs on October 19, 2006, to address extremism in a holistic manner. The division looks into matters relating to the deployment of the CAPF (Central Armed Police Forces), provision of funds, assistance in infrastructure development, perception management, etc. and also coordinates the implementation of schemes by various central ministries such as the Integrated Action Plan

and also various developmental schemes in the affected states.⁶

The government's approach is three-pronged, with a focus on development, security and rights of the local people. Improved governance and perception management form part of the holistic approach to conflict resolution. Review and monitoring mechanisms have also been set up by the Centre to coordinate measures on the political, security and development fronts. The Union Home Secretary chairs a coordination centre to review and coordinate the efforts of the state governments, in which the Chief Secretaries of the states along with the Director General of Police are present. In addition, the Special Secretary (Internal Security) heads a task force with officers from the intelligence agencies, CAPF and state police to coordinate inter-state issues, and the Member Secretary, Planning Commission, heads an empowered group to oversee development schemes in the affected areas. A unified command has also been set up in the three most affected states of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Odisha.⁷ In addition, there is a Standing Committee of Chief Ministers, chaired by the Home Minister, a Review Group headed by the Cabinet Secretary and a Consultative Committee of Parliament, which meets occasionally to discuss the Maoist threat.

The institutional mechanisms set up to coordinate action between the Centre and the state governments are adequate, yet difficulties remain in achieving consensus due to political considerations and exigencies. The union government continues to treat the problem as one of ‘law and order’ and assumes an advisory rather than a proactive role, possibly due to the deficiencies and constraints of the constitutional mandate.⁸ The affected state governments too have not displayed a pan-Indian sensitivity in addressing the problem.

On the issue of rights, stress is being laid to effectively implement the provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996, (PESA) on priority. The Act categorically assigns rights over minor forest produce to the Gram Sabhas. Provisions of the Forest (Conservation) Act 1980 have been relaxed for the LWE affected districts. In addition, under the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, legal recognition has been granted to the rights of traditional forest dwelling communities, partially correcting the injustice caused by the Indian Forest Act, 1927, India’s main forest law, created to serve the British need for timber.

Development of the LWE affected districts remains an area of prime focus. Some of the important development schemes are:⁹

- Security Related Expenditure Scheme to meet the recurring expenditure relating to the training and operational needs of the police forces and rehabilitation of surrendered extremists.
- Special Infrastructure Scheme to cater to critical infrastructure gaps, which cannot be covered under the existing schemes.
- Integrated Action Plan (IAP) covering 82 districts, each district being allotted Rs 30 crore yearly for providing public infrastructure and services.¹⁰
- Improving road connectivity in 34 extremely LWE affected districts.¹¹
- Fortification of police stations.

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As a concept, the measures undertaken by the state are unexceptionable. However, implementation mechanisms remain weak. In a large part of the Red Corridor, concerns are not so much about an absence of development, but its quantum and pace. In most areas, arterial roads have been improved, but challenges remain in connecting interior areas.

Improvement in roads and other development work has unnerved the Maoists who fear an erosion of their support base and, therefore, target such activities. They also extort money from contractors, many of whom find it difficult to pay the 10 to 20 per cent of the contract amount demanded. Due to Maoist terror, a nexus among contractors, district officials and the Maoists (jungle sarkar) has emerged in the implementation of many government schemes, which also serves to fill the Maoist coffers. About 30 percent of the Panchayats in the Bastar division of Chhattisgarh lack road connectivity, this being as high as 70 percent in Narayanpur district. Lack of communications seriously affects the lives of the rural population in LWE areas as it restricts economic activities. There are fault lines at multiple levels. Inaccessibility of villages makes it difficult to assign and monitor work for schemes such as MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Generation Act); there is an absence of trained staff to prepare muster rolls and process payments and, finally, an absence of a banking network to deliver the money to the workers' accounts. While funds are now available for development work, there is a severe shortage of manpower to utilise these funds. Repeated Maoist threats backed by terrorist action have severely retarded development efforts, which indicates deficits in defanging the armed cadres of the Maoists.

The Security Challenge

Conceptually and organisationally, structures are in place to address

developmental issues. There is also adequacy of funding. However, without a favourable security environment, development efforts will remain stymied. The Centre has responded to the security challenge by raising a large number of additional CRPF battalions and deploying an increasing component of the force in the affected states to sanitise the area. Other initiatives include raising of CoBRA battalions

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(Commando Battalions for Resolute Action), protection of police posts, establishing training schools for training personnel in jungle warfare, improving the weapon and equipment profile, and the like. However, the Maoists still appear to get the better of the police forces in one-on-one encounters, which indicates that much more needs to be done to enable them to effectively take on the Maoists. This must encompass aspects related to technology, training and leadership.

The Technology Trap

The area of operations is vast and is for the most part underdeveloped, comprising a mix of jungle, rural and semi-urban areas. The pattern of operations and methodologies of execution will perforce be dependent on the geography and population dynamics of the area. Technology is a useful tool in Counter-Insurgency (CI) operations but it is not an end by itself. Some myths that need dispelling relate to the need for mine protected vehicles and drones in CI operations.

It is relatively easy to counter a mine-protected vehicle as it is designed to withstand only a certain amount of explosive content. Such vehicles have to be contracted for, and the lead-time for purchase runs into a couple of years. As the quantum of explosive the vehicle can withstand is known, the Maoists simply have to increase the amount of explosive they place in an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) to negate any advantage

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such vehicles may confer on the security forces. This lesson was driven home in ‘Op Pawan’ in Sri Lanka, where even armoured personal carriers were blown up sky high by the Tamil militants. Such vehicles serve a limited purpose when used to protect personnel from small arms fire, but as mine-protected vehicles, they are simply a death trap. The Maoists, in the belief that the occupants are high value targets, will always target such vehicles.

The use of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), generically referred to as drones, is also touted as being essential for the conduct of operations against the Maoists. This too flies against the face of facts. What a UAV does is obtain ground imagery from the sky, which is transmitted via satellites, to a controlling base. Thereafter, data has to be analysed and then passed to the security forces that have been tasked to take action. Overall, it is a very complex operation, requiring huge resources and exceptionally well-trained personnel. In the context of operations by US forces in Afghanistan, UAVs are being extensively used against high value targets. That situation does not exist in India where operating philosophies are different. The US carries out firepower and technology intensive operations whereas India aims to limit collateral damage to the minimum and focusses on manpower intensive operations with minimum use of force. In the Indian context, even if data is obtained from a UAV indicating the presence of Maoists, the time lag in information reaching the police personnel who have to act would make that information unusable for tactical level operations. Keeping large areas under surveillance is also not possible as only a narrow strip of area can be covered by the UAV cameras. Search areas would have to

be focussed and would need to be intelligence-based on the likely routes of movement of the Maoists. Jungle terrain adds further challenges to the effectiveness of UAVs due to the screening effect of foliage. There will be further challenges at the operating base level in identifying and

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separating the routine movement of villagers from that of the Maoists.¹² For tactical level operations, mini UAVs may be more useful. These must be lightweight, hand operated and held at the company level to be of use to the armed police forces operating against the Maoists.

Technology is required, but it should be lower end technology, which can add value to the security force personnel combatting the Maoists. Good quality maps, navigation tools, night vision devices, improved communication systems, and the like will enhance force effectiveness many times more than reliance on upper end technology tools such as mine protected vehicles and UAVs. High expenditure is wrongly presumed to give equally high payoffs. More often than not, in the words of US Army Col David Hackworth, it is putting “the toys before boys”, meaning thereby that there is no need to buy and operate high cost, high complexity weapons at the expense of weapons that work for the troops at the ground level.¹³ Greater pragmatism is, therefore, required when equipping our forces. We need to enable the CAPF on the frontline, rather than making high-end purchases that have only a minimal impact on ground level operations.

Training and Leadership

Training remains an essential component to enable the CAPF to undertake offensive operations against the Maoists. The area of operations is vast and consists of jungle, rural and semi-urban terrain. Domination of the area would require establishing posts to form a counter-insurgency grid, effective patrolling of roads and tracks, and area domination by both day

and night. Essential components of training would encompass patrolling, field craft, weapon training and expertise in section and platoon level tactics. The CAPF would have to be trained to operate off the road, on foot, even in those areas where road communications exist. Intelligence collection will form a major part of CAPF operations in their respective areas. While inputs would, from time to time, be available from the higher headquarters, it is incumbent on the part of the CAPF to have systems in place to generate intelligence at the local level. Finally, the CAPF must be trained to the extent that they can operate in small sub-units. While a number of training institutes have been established, a lot more needs to be done. It is important that pre-induction training be imparted to the CRPF, prior to their deployment in their respective areas of operations. Preferably, the complete battalion with its full complement of officers must be trained together. During such training, stress must be laid on area domination, night operations and developing group cohesiveness and *esprit de corps* to achieve success against the Maoists.

Leadership is the most vital component in operations against the Maoists but here too, serious deficits remain. There is a serious dearth of junior level leadership, which affects tactical level operations. As deployment of the CRPF is done piece-meal in company groups, the commanding officers are never with their units. This needs to change. It is important that CRPF units be deployed in battalion groups under their own commanding officer. Leadership above battalion level must also be based in the areas of operation rather than being located in the state capital or in the cities. This will infuse a greater sense of purpose, promote *esprit de corps* and create a unit ethos akin to that prevailing in infantry units of the Army.

Too often, when the CAPF suffer serious casualties in encounters with the Maoists, debates in the media attribute the failure to lack of intelligence and deficiencies in equipment holding with the CAPF. The root causes, which remain lack of leadership and training, are brushed

under the carpet and, therefore, are unlikely to get resolved. For example, in the ambush of CRPF personnel on March 11, 2014, there was great anguish in the media on the lack of intelligence and shortage of bulletproof jackets, helmets and jungle shoes with the CRPF. Much was also made of the lack of housing and the poor living conditions of the troops. All this may be true, but a more critical

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analysis would have questioned why a well-armed force was ambushed in the first place, just a couple of kilometres from its operating base, and why it was unable to break the ambush. This would have brought focus on basic issues such as lack of area domination by night, deficits in movement drills, poor section and platoon level tactics, poor anti-ambush drills, poor leadership, and the like. No one denies the need and necessity to ensure that the forces operating against the Maoists are adequately equipped and that hygiene factors are appropriately addressed. However, without seriously looking into issues relating to training and leadership, the war against Maoist terror will continue for a long time to come.

Conclusion

Overall, the thrust areas of the central and state governments involved in combatting Maoist terror are unquestionable. Implementation mechanisms, however, need to be invigorated. To halt and thereafter permanently resolve the conflict in the Red Corridor, law-makers must ensure that constitutional provisions are strictly enforced and adhered to. Implementation of Article 244 of the Constitution¹⁴, along with executing the provisions contained in PESA will by itself go a long way in reducing angst among the local population and wean them away from the clutches of the Maoists. Administrators must set long-term development goals, say in terms of a five-to-ten-year development plan, rather than

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looking at issues on a year-to-year basis. Long-term perspective plans, monitored by the Chief Minister and the Chief Secretary of the state on a monthly basis, with built-in accountability, will perhaps produce more visible results on the ground. As far as the security forces are concerned, much greater focus is required on the basic issues of training and leadership.

The battle against Maoist terror has bled India for more than five decades and cannot be allowed to become a perpetual sore in the body politic of the nation. While the conflict has ideological overtones, it has to be confronted on multiple levels to bring peace to a region that vitally affects the country's economic and security interests. The problem has to be confronted and dealt with cutting, across party lines, if an early end to the conflict has to take place. It is for the law-makers, administrators and security forces personnel to rise to the occasion.

Notes

1. Figures have been obtained from the Government of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, Naxal Management Division, available at http://www.mha.nic.in/naxal_new
2. The charts have been interpolated from data obtained from the South Asia Terrorism portal, available at http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/maoist/data_sheets/fatalitiesnaxal05-11.htm
3. For details of the incident in which 16 people were killed, "Ambush at Tongpal: History Repeats Itself," CLAWS web article available at <http://www.claws.in/Ambush-at-Tongpal-History-Repeats-Itself-Dhruv-Katoch.html>
4. Some 301 civilians were killed in Naxal violence in 2012 of whom 134 were police informers; in 2013, of the 279 civilian fatalities, 134 were police informers, http://www.mha.nic.in/naxal_new
5. Details at http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/maoist/data_sheets/fatalitiesnaxal05-11.htm
6. n. 1, at http://www.mha.nic.in/naxal_new
7. Ibid.

8. As per the Constitution of India, law and order is a state subject and for the Centre to intervene, it must be brought on the Concurrent List.
9. n. 1.
10. A vast number of projects can be undertaken under the IAP such as construction of school buildings, anganwadi centres, drinking water facilities, rural roads, minor irrigation works, electric lighting, health centres etc. A total of 87,534 projects had been completed till December 31, 2013.
11. A length of 2,750 km had been built at an expenditure of Rs 3,479 crore till December 31, 2013.
12. A more detailed analysis is available at <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/mha-uav-mission-anti-naxal-operations-impossible-ntro-crpf/1/257165.html>
13. Franklin C Spinney, "Defense Spending: Putting Toys Before Boys," available at <https://blu179.mail.live.com/default.aspx?id=64855#n=687033657&fid=&st=mallinkdada%40gmail.com&mid=af2b4e54-acd6-11e3-a5d3-002264c248f2>
14. Article 244 relates to the Administration of Scheduled Areas and Tribal Areas. It states that the provisions of the Fifth Schedule shall apply to the administration and control of the Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes in any state other than the states of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram which are covered under the Sixth Schedule. Part A of the Fifth Schedule states that the Governor of the state having Scheduled Areas shall annually, or whenever so required by the President, make a report to the President regarding the administration of the Scheduled Areas in the state and the executive powers of the union shall extend to the giving of directions by the state as to the administration of the said areas. Part B of the Schedule mandates the establishment of a Tribes Advisory Council consisting of not more than twenty members, of whom three-fourth shall be the representatives of the Scheduled Tribes in the Legislative Assembly of the state. These seats are to be filled in by the other members of the tribe if an adequate number of representatives is not available in the Assembly. The Governor has the power to notify that any particular Act of the state shall not apply to the Scheduled Areas. The Governor may make regulations for these areas and may repeal or amend any Act of Parliament or of the Legislature of the State. No regulation shall be made without consultation with the Advisory Council.