

within the political establishment.

The sectoral allocations proposed in the Seventh Plan appear to fully confirm these ominous trends. But the result of this will not be, as is fondly hoped, a return to the peasant paradise such as Charan Singh hopes for when he tilts against investment

in industry, but ruthless neo-colonial exploitation of the Indian economy and people. Only a thin upper stratum of the population will share a small part of the loot in this dispensation in the name of modernisation and rushing towards the 21st century.

ANDHRA PRADESH

Over to the Police

New Spate of 'Encounter' Killings

K B

THE sky is hot, the wind is hot, and the brown barren earth is baked hot; only the *babul* with its black bark and jade green crown stands out against the white heat of May. The dust road meanders through the deserted villages of Vemulawada whose mud walls implore you to 'Vote for Y Kasipati, CPI-ML candidate, on the Spade symbol'. But the houses and streets are so palpably empty that you would be justified in thinking that the ghosts have written the graffiti, if you did not know that the elections were over in March and this was May.

No, not all the people have been driven away by the police. Some have, but the others have a more natural reason for being away. This is summer, and summer is the season for travel. For the landed and the propertied it is the time between the second crop and the next season, and so the time for visiting gods and kinsfolk; it is the season of marriages too, by the almanac of an agrarian society. For the poor and the labouring, it is the time to go out in search of work, for they have saved nothing from the kharif and rabi seasons and if they don't find work elsewhere then they will starve. Some of them have moved to neighbouring villages to deepen the wells of the landed classes for the summer crop; some have gone farther to the sites of projects and canals; some, the younger, and more enthusiastic among them, have gone all the way to Bombay to work on the powerlooms of Bhiwandi or in the mills of the city, for there is a steady emigration from Karimnagar to the city of Shiv Sena. The more reckless among them will travel by the 'semi-luxury' bus run daily between Jagtial and Bombay by the State Road Transport Corporation; and the more prudent of the lot you will find queuing up at Kazipet railway junction buying tickets by the Minar Express to Kalyan or Dadar. you will recognise them easily for they travel in unkempt droves and buy their tickets with soiled wads of notes. Of these youthful emigres, the more outrageously ambitious have a further design. They have begged and borrowed a few thousand rupees and they hope that from Bombay they will bribe and buy their way to the Promised

Land of Indigent Indians, referred to with varying degrees of inaccuracy as the Arab countries, the Gulf countries, the Oil countries, or just 'Muscat-Dubai' as in Karimnagar. They hope to go there and stay for a couple of years and earn not only their keep but enough extra to buy those three acres of land that will make all the difference between a hand-to-mouth existence and passable comfort. In many cases, the brokers—most of them local landlords—will swindle them of all their money before they leave the shores of Bombay; even if they manage to reach the magic land of Oil, in most cases they will come back with just enough money to settle the high-interest debt contracted for the purpose, the only extra being some outlandish memento like a vacuum-cleaner which the bemused mother or wife back home will preserve as a precious *Object d'Art*. And the few who do manage to come back with substantial surpluses will discover that the landlords—who are the only ones with land to sell—have inflated the price of land, and the effort has not been worth the candle.

Tadu Rajaiah and Vuppala Lakshmirajam were two such 'ambitious' youth, of Venkatraopet in Vemulawada taluka, Rajaiah was the son of a peasant with two and a half acres of land and Lakshmirajam's was a landless family that cultivated one and a half acres on lease. The two of them had borrowed money in bits and pieces of a hundred or two from each of a large number of creditors, and had by this means accumulated quite handsome amounts. Lakshmirajam had collected Rs 12,000 and Rajaiah Rs 25,000. That poor peasants could raise such amounts is an indication of how profitable the business of lending money to Muscat-Dubai ventures is. But it is one thing to get money and quite another to get a job and a passport. For this, they had been hanging around their brokers in Bombay for the last three years and had perhaps spent much of their money.

At the beginning of this summer they got letters from home asking them to come back and help in harvesting the crop. Rajaiah came back on the March 10, and Lakshmirajam

on the April 6. They were both killed by the police on the night of April 10, along with three others.

The police describe the killing as an 'encounter'. According to Shareif, CI of Police of Vemulawada (and please listen) on the night of April 10 he came to know of the presence of an armed squad of extremists camping at the boundary of Venkatraopet and Kondapur. He went there with a party of policemen including SI of police Francis of Vemulawada and SI of police Veeraswamy of Gambhirraopet. As they approached, the extremists got up and threw bombs at them. The policemen identified themselves and asked them to please stop throwing bombs. They, however, continued to throw bombs. The policemen again repeated their courteous admonitions. This time the brazen lot threw grenades at them and fired with rifles. Unable to tolerate this impudence any further the policemen took position and fired at the extremists. They went on firing till they felt sure that the threat to their lives was overcome and then stopped firing and went over to the spot where the extremists had assaulted them from; and to and behold! All the five naxalites were stone dead. Such marksmanship at 2 am of a moonless night must excite the admiration of the worst critics of the Indian police.

What really happened was much less heroic. That night Rajaiah and Lakshmirajam went to the fields to guard their half harvested crop. In the fields they met three activists, Raghupathi, Sathaiah and Gangaiah. The five of them—and an unidentified sixth person—sat and talked till late in the night. Perhaps they talked of the way the police had ravaged these villages during the last two elections to prevent people from voting for the CPI-ML candidate; perhaps they talked of Sathamma of Samudralingapuram who was raped on the night of January 13 by the policemen of Mustabad and Gambhirraopet police stations; or perhaps—as is most likely—they talked of the swindling brokers who are making piles of money from the Gulf emigration business.

They slept at an open spot on the ridge-like elevation separating Venkatraopet from Kondapur. They were awakened by policemen prodding them on the chest with rifle-butts. The policemen tied their hands behind their backs. They then held a brief consultation and decided to finish them off. They fired at them with sten guns. Lakshmirajam and the unknown sixth person managed to break out and run away. Lakshmirajam was chased and gunned down by the police but the sixth person escaped in a severely wounded condition. It was when he met some reporters of *Indian Express*, *Andhra Prabha* and *Udayam* and revealed the facts to them that the truth came out. It was published widely in the Press, and caused widespread revulsion in the public. But predictably, not only did the police feel no sense of shame,

they even had the gumption to summon the editors of these newspapers to present themselves before the CI of Sirsilla (the officer who issued the summons) and give information about the escaped 'extremist'. The remarkable aspect of the entire episode is that the Chief Minister did not even make face-saving noises—as one would normally expect him to do—at any point of this scandalous affair. Instead he has maintained a stubborn silence and his Home Minister dismissed it casually as a 'routine affair' unworthy of the fuss the Press was making.

THE BEGINNING

This sensational killing was only the most widely publicised of the 'encounters' committed at the behest of N T Rama Rao's government this year. It was neither the first nor the last. The first took place on January 21 at Pochampalli (under Pambatla gram panchayat) in Jagtial taluka of Karimnagar district. The victim was 35 year old Khairi Gangaram, a person described by the police as a 'terror'. However, there is no record that he was a terror to anybody other than the notorious Velama landlords of Jagtial. Nobody (excepting the police) as yet knows exactly how Gangaram was killed. The police version (as usual) is that he died in a shoot-out, and notwithstanding his reputation as a terror', no damage of consequence was done to the police officer who 'encountered' him. The closest one can get to the truth is that he was talking to some people in a house in the village that day at about 11 am, when news came that the police had come to the village scenting his presence. The persons he was talking to left in a hurry, and he bolted himself inside the house. The police officer came to the house and asked him to open the door and come out. He refused, saying that he feared he would be killed. The Inspector is then believed to have climbed on to the roof, pulled off a couple of tiles, and shot down Gangaram. Whether Gangaram returned fire at the roof, and if so with what material effect, is not known. Those who believe that a police officer would be incapable of such feats may be told that the police of Karimnagar have long-standing expertise in the matter. Over the last couple of years, they must have pulled down the roofs—to the last tile and the last bit of thatching—of at least 200 houses.

The second killing took place on March 28. The locale this time was a tribal (Koya) hamlet of 40 huts by name Veerabhadram in Bhadrachalam taluka of Khammam district. Bhadrachalam is a temple town located on the northern banks of the Godavari. Northwards from the town the road goes into a wide expanse of deforested plains populated by forcibly peasantised Koyas and caste-Hindu landholders who have made a lucrative business of growing tobacco. The law, of course, says that the non-tribal landholders should not be there, but they are

there nevertheless, indeed, Bhadrachalam, a very holy place for the Telugu people; should actually not be in existence if the law reflected reality. Every inch of the town (including the temple and the God) is owned by non-tribals, though they may have no papers to show for it. As with the ancient Dharmasutras so with the modern law of this country, the dictates reflect more the hopes of the law-makers than any substantial reality; and they are meant to be chanted, not practised.

Arsepalli Venkateswara Rao alias Chandranna was the activist who was killed in this 'encounter'. He appears to have been quite popular with the tribals and the youth of this area. Indeed, after his killing it was the CPI youth (who normally have little love for the naxalites) who insisted on covering his body with a red flag—but the police would not allow it. Anyway, he was not well for some days before his killing. On March 28 he reached Veerabhadram at about noon, and went to the house of a Koya by name Matta Lakshmaiah. This 'house', properly described, consists of one big hut and one small hut, neither of them possessing even mud walls. Chandranna lay himself down in the smaller of the two huts. He had an appointment there with an excise contractor. The police—acting upon information provided by the contractor—came into the village. They apparently divided into two or more groups and fanned out in search of Chandranna. One group came to Lakshmaiah's house. Seeing them, Chandranna got up and ran. Lakshmaiah's wife Chinnakka says that he had a bag with him but did not take out any weapon from it. The police chased him and fired at him from behind but missed; but about 200 yards from the house another group of policemen coming from the front fired directly at him and killed him instantly. He had one bullet wound in the chest and one in the forehead. Unlike in some other cases, the police did not even claim that any policeman was even injured in this 'encounter'. They merely called in a doctor from Bhadrachalam to do the post-mortem at the spot of killing (the post-mortem is always done at the spot of killing, and never in a properly equipped hospital), then they themselves cremated the dead body (which is again their routine practice), and finally set UP an armed police camp in the hamlet to seal it off from the outside world.

MAY DAY

The third was the Venkatrapet killing that we described in the beginning. One would have thought that the shame of it would have stayed the hands of any civilised government; but no. The fourth one took place within twenty days, on the first of May, this time in Nizamabad district. The village is Baswapur, Domakonda taluka, located on the Seventh National Highway, 20 kms short of the taluk town of Kamareddy as one goes

from Hyderabad. The village is to the right of the Highway and the spot of killing in the fields to the left, beyond the metre-gauge railway line that joins Hyderabad to Nizamabad and onwards to Parbhani and Manmad in Maharashtra. Four activists were sitting under a mango tree, and the fifth, a young lad by name Babu of Muthyampet village, had gone to a nearby well to fetch water. Babu had joined the activists only *one* day before, and was by no means a 'wanted extremist' as claimed by the police. The police (an anti-naxalite squad) came to the spot. The time must have been around 2 o'clock in the afternoon. The police are said to have received information either from the toddy contractor of the village or the Sarpanch (who is also the Tendu contractor); these persons had, at any rate, adequate reason for informing the police, since the struggle in the village had been for the reduction of the price of toddy from one rupee per bottle to 50 paise; and increase in the wages paid for picking Tendu leaf from 11 paise to 20 paise per bundle of 100 leaves. In any case, the police did come, and a shepherd boy who saw them first called out to the activists to save themselves. Babu lifted his head, saw the police, and ran towards the mango tree. The police fired, hit him in the back, and he fell down near the mango tree. The other activists ran away, but the police chased them and fired at them. One activist, Rajanarsu, fell down. The others turned back, fired at the police, injured a constable in the shoulder, and saved themselves by running away. This, incidentally, is the only 'encounter' where a policeman was at least injured.

What happened subsequently is quite macabre. It is not known whether Rajanarsu died immediately, but Babu certainly did *not*. He was injured in the back but was alive and fully conscious. The police tied his hands behind the back with his own clothes, and called out to two peasants in nearby fields, who were watching the drama. One of them was Siddaramulu, who was getting the motor of his irrigation well repaired, a hundred metres away; and the other was Pundarikam, who was closer by and had a detailed view of the entire affair—Upon order from the police, Siddaramulu brought water and gave it to Babu, who drank it and started answering the policemen's questions. The policemen then asked Siddaramulu to go and see whether the other injured person, Rajanarsu, was alive or dead. He refused, and was told to make himself scarce, Pundarikam was kept with the police until the inquest, the post-mortem and the cremation were over by the next evening. Only he, when he decides to open up (he refuses to talk to anyone at present) knows how Babu died: Did he slowly bleed to death, or did the police kill him deliberately after interrogating him?

On the night of May 6 there took place,

again in Karimnagar district, an 'encounter' comparable in its brazenness with the Venktraopet killing. The village was Bommireddypalli, in Sultanabad taluk, about 40 kms towards the Godavari river from Karimnagar town. The victims were Siddaiah, a naxalite activist, and Panuganti Rajalingu, a 30-year old peasant with three acres of land. Rajalingu was neither a naxalite; nor even an active associate of the naxalites. The event that entangled him in the state's wide-spread net is typical of the medieval way in which Karimnagar has modernised itself during the last decade.

It is not often realised that in feudal societies, thriving—as much as whoring—is an important activity organised by the landlord class. The feudals of Idengana, as fate as the 1940s, were famous for organising gangs of thieves to go around looting villages. It served, as far as one can see on the face of it, two purposes; one, to augment the landlords' loot; and two, to keep their private thugs in money and out of mischief when their services were not needed by the master. It is obviously a remnant of the time when feudatories maintained armies which fought for the king when he needed, and otherwise kept themselves in money by looting the people. With the beginning of the modernisation of Karimnagar, the landlords have started organising a modern version of this activity. They encourage gangs and private thieves to steal the vital parts of agricultural machinery—irrigation motors, tractors, diesel, etc—and sell the loot in shady spare parts shops in Karimnagar or Jagtial town. One major activity of the peasant movement of Karimnagar has been to prevent and expose this organised theiving. Thus it happened that when somebody stole the belt of Rajalingu's irrigation motor, he reported the matter, not to the police but to the party' as they say; 'the Party' apparently managed to discover that it had been stolen by somebody from a village by name Pathipaka Narsingapuram; they recovered the belt and Siddaiah went to Bommireddypalli on June 6 to return it to Rajalingu. The latter, out of sheer gratitude, asked Siddaiah to have food with him and sleep in his house. They had food, but it was not clear whether Siddaiah slept in Rajalingu's house or went out and slept somewhere else in the village. According to Chandramma, Rajalingu's wife, who has however been properly terrorised by the police, Siddaiah went out to sleep somewhere else, while she slept in front of the house and her husband by the side of the house. At night the police, led by SI Khaja Mohiuddin of Dhannaram police station, came to the village. They stepped over the sleeping Chandramma and arrested her husband and took him away. They will keep him till they find Siddaiah' she says—she told herself, for every peasant in Karimnagar who has ever given food to a naxalite activist knows that he may be picked up any day and

kept hostage (and tortured, of course) until the activist is found. But she did not reckon with the possibility that he may be killed, either with or without the aid of Rajalingu the police located Siddaiah within a short time. Chandramma pretends that she was fast asleep and therefore ('since a sleeping person is like a dead person', she repeats woodenly) did not know what happened, but at the same time bursts out to say that the police tied both men to a tamarind tree and killed them. And she even points to the tree, which is just about 50 yards behind her house. The next morning, at 8 a.m., the police came and told Chandramma that her husband had died; after the inquest was over, and the post-mortem was done at the spot of the killing, the police handed over Rajalingu's body to Chandramma (a very rare gesture, apparently prompted by some sedimentary residue of human feeling) and themselves cremated Siddaiah's body near the tamarind tree which was witness to the killing.

Exactly a week later, and this time in Adilabad, there was the next 'encounter'. The day was May 13 and the village Lodvelli in Sirpur taluka. The papers of May 15 carried confused reports of an armed confrontation between the police and naxalites in which one police officer said two and another said three extremists were killed. The SP of the

district clarified a couple of days later that it was only two.

There was cause enough for the confusion. Late in the evening of 13th a large number of activists entered the village; they went to a hut near a dried up rivulet outside the village. Near the hut there is a *kallam*, the collection spot for Tendu leaf, where the people bring the Tendu leaf and the contractor's man (the *kalledar*) collects it. Since the Tendu season was as yet not over, there were some villagers at the *kallam*. Of the activists, three sat inside the hut, and the rest stood outside, talking to the people. The time must have been about 9 p.m. A police party came and shone their torchlight; the activists outside the hut asked them to put it off, upon which the police identified themselves and asked the activists to put up their hands. Those who were standing outside the hut then ran away. The police first shot blindly with sten guns into the hut, injuring two of the three sitting inside—Puli Madhunaiah and Ankoli Ramesh. They then fruitlessly chased those who had run away, and came back. To be on the 'safe side' they again fired into the hut. The third person inside the hut suddenly emerged and ran out. The police fired at him as he ran, and were not very sure whether they hit him or not. That was the reason why they were not sure whether they had killed two or three.

APPOINTMENTS

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Director
IUG

There is a tail-piece to the story. Releasing their story to the press, the police said that in addition to the impressive haul of dangerous-looking weapons which they always claim to And with dead naxalites (though the naxalites appear to be singularly incapable of using the arms they have accumulated), this time they also found Rs 75,000 in cash. It was learnt later that the activists actually had Rs 2.5 lakh of their Party funds with them. The police, apparently, decided to disclose only Rs 75,000 and keep the rest. This, once again, is not an exceptional gain, for the police—especially in Karimnagar—have made handsome profits out of this business of 'suppressing extremists'. Excise contractors make regular monthly payments to them, and landlords as and when need arises. Another method of making money is to get hold of dozens of poor peasants, put them in lock-up, and demand money for their release. Most of the police inspectors of Karimnagar have made lakhs of rupees in this manner.

RASH OF 'ENCOUNTERS'

In the last week of May there was a sudden rash of encounters. One on the 26th, one on the night of 27th, and one on 28th. The first was at Chinakkalpet under Dharmapuri police station limits in Jagtial taluka. The victim was G Narayana. The only details known are that Narayana and another activist were conducting an arbitration in the village at about 1 p m of that day. A police party came, and the people as well as the activists ran away. The police chased them; the other activist ran away but Narayana got killed.

More details have become public regarding the next killing, at Narsapur in Warangal district. Indeed, the police would perhaps wish that so many were not known, for the event has led to a lot of unsavoury publicity for them. The police story is that on the evening of May 27 they came to know that a group of 'underground extremists' were having a meeting at the outskirts of Narsapur. A police party led by the SI of Mulug is said to have gone there and had the usual Exchange of fire' with the extremists, as a consequence of which two of the latter, Pingli Bhupati Reddy and Kavatham Saraiah, died. The due story is quite different. Firstly, Saraiah was by no means an 'underground extremist' as claimed by the police—he was regularly attending court in the few cases in which he was accused. On the morning of May 27 he came to Warangal town, to the house of his advocate P Prabhakara Roddy. The advocate handed him the keys to his house; and went with his wife to Hyderabad by a mid-day train. Saraiah was alone at the advocate's house till 10 p m in the night. At that time Bhupati Reddy came there. He told two or three persons he met on the way that he was going to his advocate's house, and his younger brother Raghupati Reddy accompanied him upto the house. He and Saraiah cooked food for themselves, but before they could eat, the police came (at about 10.30 pm) and arrested them. They

were taken in a jeep 54 kms to Narsapur, then taken one km further from the village to a spot that could look like a jungle in a smudged photograph, and gunned down. The only reason for the choice of Narsapur appears to be that it is the closest place from Mulug police station (the station that made the catch) which looks somewhat like a forest. The police, for some reason of psychology or propaganda, always choose a spot that can be described as a forest when they decide to kill a naxalite after arresting him. Perhaps it gives them a feeling of having been heroic.

The next day they brought a doctor from Mulug to perform the post-mortem on the spot, and after putting the bodies on the funeral pyre, allowed the father of Bhupati Reddy and the wife of Saraiah to have a look at the faces of the dead men before cremating them. Typically, they paid a measly amount to the cremators and the bodies lay there half-burnt for long afterwards.

May 28 saw an 'encounter' at Jagtial that contains the essence of all that is lawless about these killings. The newspapers carried two stories, both supposedly released by the police. According to one version, there was a 'suspicious person' in a house on the outskirts of Jagtial town. The police went there and asked him to come out; whereupon he dashed out and got onto a motor cycle and rode away. But even as he rode he turned back and fired upon the police (in the manner of some Puntnic heroes who could shoot arrows backwards), and the police, to save their lives, fired at him and killed him. In the second version there is no motor cycle but he merely ran and fired back. The police identified the victim as Pavan Kumar, and even claimed that they found upon him a service revolver allegedly stolen from an Inspector by the naxalites last year at a village by name Gattubuthkur. A couple of days later it transpired that there was some confusion regarding his identity, and exactly a week later the District Magistrate and Collector of Karimnagar announced that there would be a magisterial enquiry into the death at Jagtial of an 'unknown naxalite'. It does not seem to have struck anybody as quaint that the victim should be identified as a naxalite even before he could be identified by name. (But stranger things have happened in this state that has lent the term 'encounter' to the lexicon of state terrorism; in year 1981 there was the death in an 'encounter' in Nalgonda district of a person described as "an unknown naxalite belonging to the Re-Organising Committee of CPI-ML, which is surely a more uncanny performance.)

What really happened that day at Jagtial was this: the victim's name was Oovinda Reddy, and he belonged to Nizamabad. Indeed, he was originally of Chitradurga district in Karnataka and after working and resigning from the Indian Air Force, and later working as a hotel manager at Nizamabad and resigning from that post too, he joined the naxalites. The police would find it terribly embarrassing to connect him with

the revolver-snatching incident at Oattubuthkur. He was staying at a house at one end of Jagtial town that morning, and had sent a boy to fetch him cigarettes. The police got suspicious of the boy buying cigarettes and went with him to the house, where they found Oovinda Reddy. They caught him, took him out on to the Dharmapuri road, and killed him. It was after killing him that they tried to give him a name, and perhaps by some facial resemblance decided that he must be Pavan Kumar. The Oattubuthkur revolver was added on to lend a touch of 'investigation', which has later turned out to be embarrassing.

CONCLUSION

Somebody is bound to ask why all this is happening. The shortest answer is that N T Rama Rao wants it to happen. It is no accident at all that barring the first of these killings all the rest took place after his resounding victory in the recent Assembly elections. The victory, against the odds set by Bhaskara Rao's defection and the split in his party, has given him the kind of confidence he needs to indulge in such killings. Indeed, not only the killing of naxalite activists and their sympathisers, but much worse is apparently in store. The papers of June 11 carried a news item that the state government would use the Central government's Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act, and further (with due regard for democratisation of Centre-State relations) would enact its own Terrorist Act to be used alongside the Central Act. Terrorism is to be defined, as in the Central Act, as an act of violence perpetrated with the intention of terrorising the public or threatening or overawing the state or any public servant, but with the novel definition of 'public servant' to include anybody who aids the police, that is to say the professional informers and stock witnesses whom the police employ the world over in the execution of their duties. In addition, the Act would designate certain organisations as 'front organisations of naxalites' (this provision is apparently aimed at civil liberties organisations): and it would give the police the power to declare (as and when occasion arises) certain areas in the state as 'prohibited zones' where the designated organisations would not be allowed to enter. The motivation for this peculiar provision is obvious: the police will kill somebody in an 'encounter' and then declare that the area is a prohibited zone for civil liberties organisations, so that nobody can know what really happened in the Encounter'.

On the same day that this news item appeared in the papers, a civil liberties delegation led by George Fernandes, General Secretary of Janata Party, met NTR and asked him about the report. He put on the best histrionic performance of his career, and denied all knowledge of the Bill. But a few days later he told pressmen that he intended to introduce it. One has to wait till the monsoon session of the Assembly to know whether and what shape the Bill will take.