CRPF's Bastariya Battalion

What is the issue?

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- CRPF has constituted a new battalion of local recruits to deal with the Naxals.
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- While some see this as an innovative approach to address the problem, other fear that the battalion might is a refurbishment of the violent Salwa Judum.
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What is the Bastariya Battalion?

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- Bastariya Warriors is a newly formed battalion of the CRPF that consists of 549 recruits, all of whom are exclusively from the 4 districts of Bastar region.
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- Notably, several physical and educational relaxations were granted to aspirants to facilitate recruitment.
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- Following the completion of the 44-week training programme, the battalion is expected to be deployed soon.
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- According to the CRPF, the battalion will be immensely helpful in operations, as its recruits are familiar with the local terrain and language.
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- This battalion is expected to act as a bridge between the local populations in the Red Corridor and other CRPF personnel (mostly from elsewhere in India).
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- Nevertheless, this force has evoked the troubling memories of Salwa Judum.
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What is Salwa Judum?

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- Salwa Judum was an armed force that was mobilised in 2005 (informally by politicians) and deployed in parts of Chhattisgarh.
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- Local tribal people were armed to counter Maoists in Bastar, and those who supported the idea stated that it was a spontaneous uprising of tribals.
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- Hence, with tacit support of the government, Salwa Judham was initiative that turned tribal youth into a vigilant but ill trained army.
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- But as the force took ground, it established a reign of terror in the region, and was subsequently banned by the Supreme Court in 2011.
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- Notably, allegations against Judum were numerous, with attack against civilians ranging from –killings, torching of villages, sexual assaults etc…
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- Also, as the face-off between the Maoists and Judum intensified, both sides showed little sensitivity to the locals caught in cross fire.
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What are the views of detractors against the battalion?

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- Activists argue that like the Judum, the Bastariya Battalion seeks to pit tribals against tribals and could again cleave tribal society.
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- If a villager was to join the Battalion, then their families run the risk of attracting the ire of Maoists (recorded threats already aplenty).
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- Data also indicates that during and immediately after the end of Judum's activities, there was an unusual spike in Maoist recruitments.
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- This is probably a case of villagers seeking to safeguard themselves from crude government sponsored violent insurgents – a trend that could repeat itself.
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- Notably, 'District Reserve Group' (DRG) of Chhattisgarh Police is also majorly constituted of former Maoists and Judum soldiers.
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- Activists point out that DRG too has had a poor track record in human rights

and anti-naxal operations.
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What is the government’s argument for raising the battalion?

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- The government argues that the battalion will give the security forces an operational dimension, which is currently being provided by the state police.
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- CRPF officials also vouch that the major difference between the Judum and Bastariya Battalion is in the intensity and holistic nature of CRPF training.
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- The 44-week training is said to cover not just modules on jungle warfare and weapons training, but also civic responsibilities and human rights.
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- Hence, it has been argued that Bastariya recruits are regular CRPF constables like a personnel form any other battalion.
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- Officials also argue that the presence of locals will increase the sensitivity of the CRPF - especially with one-third of the recruits being women.
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- While one has to wait to know if the battalion is a success, it is important for the warriors to realise that they will be rated for human rights too.
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Source: Indian Express

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