Gadchiroli Maoist Attack - C-60 Wing

Why in news?

A recent Maoist attack in Gadchiroli in Maharashtra left 15 police commandos of the C-60 wing dead.

What happened?

- Maoists torched 25 vehicles at a road construction site in Kurkheda of Gadchiroli early in the morning.
- A team of the Quick Response Team of the Gadchiroli police was on way to inspect this.
- While on road in a private vehicle, these fifteen policemen and their driver were killed by a powerful explosion set off by Maoists.
- An improvised explosive device (IED) blast was set off.
- The slain fighters were members of the elite C-60 wing.
- This is the fourth Maoist attack, since the national election began in April, 2019, in Gadchiroli which borders Chattisgarh.

What is the C-60 wing?

- Naxalite activity first expanded into Maharashtra from then-Andhra Pradesh in the 1980's.
- The Gadchiroli district, carved out of Chandrapur district in 1982, was the most affected, with series of violence.
- Veteran police officer KP Raghuvanshi was given the charge of creating an elite commando force of the state police in 1990.
- The C-60 was thus created as a batch of 60 commandos to counter Maoist violence in Gadchiroli.
- As Naxal activities heightened in the coming years, a second branch was also created in 1994.
- They are similar to the Greyhound forces in Telangana and the SOG (Special Operation Group) units in Andhra Pradesh.

How has C-60 wing's role been?

- The contribution of C-60 has been a notable one, and they have been

alternatively referred to as ‘crack commandos’.

- The commandos were recruited from the same regions where the Naxals enlisted their own fighters.
- Having the same roots, the C-60 had operational advantages compared to other units of the state police.
- These include faster maneuvering, and the greater ability to converse with the local population.
- The C-60 is qualified for combat in difficult battlegrounds, such as dense forests and over hilly terrain.
- Apart from actual combat, the C-60’s task also includes facilitating Maoists to surrender and join the mainstream.
- For this, members of the unit meet the families of Maoists to apprise them of government schemes made for ex-Maoists.

What does the recent attack imply?

- The death of security personnel in the landmine attack in Gadchiroli is another reminder of India's continued failure to crush naxalism.
- This attack has occurred despite the deployment of -
    i. 30 companies of the Central Reserve Police Force (a company comprises 135 personnel)
    ii. 13 companies of the State Reserve Police Force
    iii. 5,500 personnel of the local police in Gadchiroli and neighbouring Chandrapur district
- This exposes the lack of preparedness of the security forces on the one hand, and the boldness of the perpetrators on the other.
- The ease with which the extremists torched so many vehicles and how the response team went there without proper planning are alarming.
- In the process, standard operating procedures, including letting a road-opening team lead the way, seem to have been ignored.

What is the way forward?

- It is some comfort that the polling percentages in both Gadchiroli and Chandrapur districts have risen, compared to the 2014 elections.
- But the path of the voter to the polling booth in the naxal-dominated districts is still not an assuring one.
- The security forces deployed in the region too have not been able to instil in them a greater level of confidence.
- Notably, most of the police personnel who were killed in the latest attack seem to have been local citizens.
- India cannot afford to take the challenges of internal security lightly and

needs concerted measures at tackling naxalism.

Source: Indian Express, The Hindu

