

Bastar: Villagers seek solace in 'IDs'

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At 58, Nara Kerketta is facing an identity crisis. The indigent farmer from Dantewada, in the heart of the Maoist bastion of Bastar in Chhattisgarh, knows he is not a Maoist sympathiser. But he also knows the security forces won't believe him when they enter his village in search of the red army.

His tribal hamlet could be set ablaze as a 'Maoist hideout'. Worse, he and his family could end up on the list of 'Maoist casualties' under Operation Green Hunt, the nationwide crackdown on Maoist forces.

"What am I supposed to do? Nobody from the administration is telling us if the fight has already begun. However, I am worried about my family's safety, and I won't take any chances," he says.

So, Kerketta has got 'photo identification cards' made for himself and his family.

He says the cards show they are not Maoists, and believes they will protect the family when the police and paramilitary come calling.

He is not alone. Thousands of hapless tribals caught in the crossfire and desperate to save their lives are running helter-skelter to get themselves such IDs. They are travelling several kilometres to stand in long queues that have formed outside photo studios, as no one here wants to be mistaken for a Maoist.

The trouble is – these IDs are not official. The government is not issuing them, and the police say they carry no value whatsoever.

The election commission had approved about 15 different identity proofs, including voter IDs, ration cards, driving licences and NREGA job cards, for Chhattisgarh voters during last year's assembly polls.

However, many tribals don't have any of them, says Himanshu Kumar, a social activist based in Dantewada.

More recently, as village [panchayats](#) began warning the tribals of the impending anti-Maoist drive, tribals started living in fear for their lives. In this dark atmosphere, the talk of photo IDs as the only safeguards has spread like wildfire.

But the state's director general of police Vishwaranjan says the police have not issued an order for such IDs.

"We will find out how this practice has been adopted by villagers," he adds.

In fact, the police are now moving to dissuade the villagers from getting these IDs.

Kanker's superintendent of police Ajay Yadav suspects the whole thing is a racket. And Bastar's inspector general of police T.J. Longkumer has asked officers in his range to tell villagers not to get carried away by hearsay.

A tribal leader and former CPI legislator from south Bastar also says the IDs are of little use as they won't stop security forces from killing innocent villagers. "I know people are travelling several kilometres to get these cards. But we are urging them not to panic," says Kunja, who is also the president of the All-India Adivasi Mahasabha.

But Kusumi Maro, of Chintagufa village, says the residents of her village were persuaded by [panchayat](#) members themselves to get these IDs as they could save lives. And Guda Mukhi from Errabore village

claims, "We are not with the rebels, but we cannot trust the security forces as well." Many in the administration believe the panchayats are exploiting the fear among the poor tribals to fleece them.

But irrespective of who is doing it, the con of fake identity cards is proof that in the clash between the State and Maoists, the ill- fated tribals always end up the losers.

<http://newsbuzz.com/world/bastar-villagers-seek-solace-in-ids.html>