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Maoists lay down impractical conditions for talks with Centre

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NEW DELHI: A senior CPI(Maoist) leader on Thursday conveyed through the media the outfit's willingness to sit across the negotiating table with the government but laid down tough pre-conditions including withdrawal of central para-military forces from the counter-Naxal grid across seven states and an apology from the Centre and the state governments for 'prolonged torture' of the tribals.

Responding to home minister P Chidambaram's recent call to the Maoists to stop violence to make talks possible, West Bengal-based Maoist leader Koteswara Rao, alias, Kishenji, in a telephonic interview to a news agency, insisted that the parleys could begin only if the ceasefire "is from both the sides."

"The Centre is killing innocent people in the name of tackling Maoists and they are asking us to abjure violence, which is ridiculous," Kishenji alleged and demanded that the counter-Naxal forces deployed across Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Orissa, Maharashtra, Bihar and West Bengal be sent back to the barracks.

The government did not seem too enthusiastic about Kishenji's media offer, which comes even as the counter-Naxal forces are set to launch a major offensive to flush out Maoists from the tri-junctions across Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Orissa and Jharkhand.

"If the CPI(Maoist) seriously wants a ceasefire and talks, let its top leader, Ganapathy, himself denounce violence and reach out to the government," commented a senior home ministry official.

Kishenji, meanwhile, has also demanded that the government "treat the problems of tribals in a sympathetic way." "Both the Centre and state governments will have to apologise to the tribals for the prolonged torture meted out to them and the consequent suffering from the time of Independence," he was quoted as saying.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had in a statement on Wednesday admitted to the systematic exploitation and social, economic abuse of tribals over the years while emphasising on change of ways of dealing with them in the "battle for their hearts and minds." On whether this would suffice as an apology to tribals, Kishenji was quick to label the prime minister's balm as an 'eyewash'. "Political leaders from the time of Independence have said the same thing as the prime minister, but little has been done...we want an end to it," Kishenji insisted.

Mr Singh, even as he reached out to the tribals, was firm on dealing sternly with violence unleashed by Maoists. Speaking at the conference of chief ministers on implementation of the Forest Rights Act here, the prime minister said, "no sustained activity is possible under the shadow of the gun...The cult of violence will only bring greater misery to the common people. We have to counter this threat with determination...while violence cannot be tolerated, tribals must be the primary beneficiaries of the development process."

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