



Children of Mirgitand village in Jharkhand's East Singhbhum district shows their scars. They were the lucky ones who survived.
ARVIND KUMAR SHARMA / HT PHOTO

Hot rod horror brands children in Jharkhand

BARBARIC A collapsing health system allows a deadly fix for protruding bellies

tracking hunger

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B Vijay Murty
bmurty@hindustantimes.com

GHATSILA (JHARKHAND): A barbaric method of maiming and inadvertently killing hungry children in tribal India shows how the nation is failing its poorest and furthering the Maoist rebellion.

Children with distended bellies, characteristic of malnutrition and disease, routinely have red-hot iron rods plunged into their sides by superstitious, poverty-stricken tribal parents in the belief it will cure all stomach ailments.

Fatally injured or infected during this primitive procedure, several children die — there are no official figures — in a state

where 17 of 24 districts are simultaneously classified by its own government as “food insecure” and “highly affected” by Maoists, who bank on the collapse of governance to aid their growing influence.

This is the belief: A child with a protruding belly has worms, which can be killed by plunging a red-hot iron through the sides of the stomach.

“The more a child cries and screams during the treatment, more germs are being killed,” said Bishu Hembrom, 18, who recalled his pain when he was so treated at age three.

“We have firm faith in this method of treatment,” said Ravi Tuddu, 30, a Santhal tribesman and head of Mirgitand village, 180 km south east of Ranchi in East Singhbhum district, which, with 69 per cent literacy, is Jharkhand's most literate.

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