

Eradicating the Red Shadow: India's Multi-Dimensional Strategy Against Left Wing Extremism and the Roadmap to Naxal Mukta Bharat by 2026

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Abstract

Left-Wing Extremism (LWE), commonly known as Naxalism or Maoism, which once controlled vast stretches of India's central and eastern "Red Corridor," has undergone a dramatic and sustained decline. This report provides a comprehensive assessment of the current status of the Maoist insurgency as of early 2026. Once spanning 126 affected districts in 2013, LWE has been reduced to just 7 districts (primarily in Chhattisgarh, with limited presence in Jharkhand and Odisha), with only three classified as "most-affected." Violence incidents have fallen by approximately 89% and fatalities by 91% since their 2010 peaks.

The report analyses India's multi-pronged counter-LWE strategy under the National Policy and Action Plan (2015), which integrates targeted security operations, the 3C Model (Road, Mobile, and Financial Connectivity), large-scale developmental initiatives, and the redressal of genuine tribal grievances through accelerated implementation of the Forest Rights Act (2006), PESA, and robust surrender-cum-rehabilitation policies. Key operations such as Kagar, Prahar, and Anaconda, along with specialised forces (CoBRA, Greyhounds, DRG) and state-level models like Mission Gram Udaya (Odisha) and the Gadchiroli Three-Phase Model (Maharashtra), have dismantled Maoist networks, triggered mass surrenders (over 10,000 since 2015), and reclaimed territory.

By addressing root causes — governance deficits, land alienation, development-induced displacement, restrictive forest policies, and weak Fifth Schedule implementation — the integrated "carrot-and-stick" approach has successfully broken the vicious cycle that sustained the insurgency for decades. The report concludes that India is firmly on track to achieve the historic goal of a Naxal-Mukta Bharat by 31 March 2026, marking a major milestone in the country's internal security and tribal development journey.

Areas of Presence of Maoists (Left-Wing Extremism)

The Maoist movement in India, commonly referred to as Left-Wing Extremism (LWE) or Naxalism, began in the late 1960s in the countryside, fueled by issues such as unequal land distribution, mistreatment of tribal communities, and deep economic inequalities.

It grew to cover the so-called "Red Corridor," a large belt of densely forested and predominantly tribal territories stretching across central and eastern parts of the country. In these areas, Maoist groups set up

their own administrative systems, collected levies from locals and businesses, and carried out armed guerrilla attacks on government forces.

At its height in the late 2000s, this zone included regions in states such as Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Telangana, West Bengal, and some parts of Kerala—spanning close to 180 districts.

Thanks to consistent government actions—like targeted security campaigns, infrastructure and welfare programs in affected zones, and rehabilitation schemes encouraging militants to lay down arms—the Maoist influence has shrunk significantly. By late 2025 (with trends continuing into early 2026), the insurgency is now limited to scattered, isolated pockets, mostly in rugged, hilly, and jungle-covered areas that offer hiding spots and tactical advantages for hit-and-run tactics.

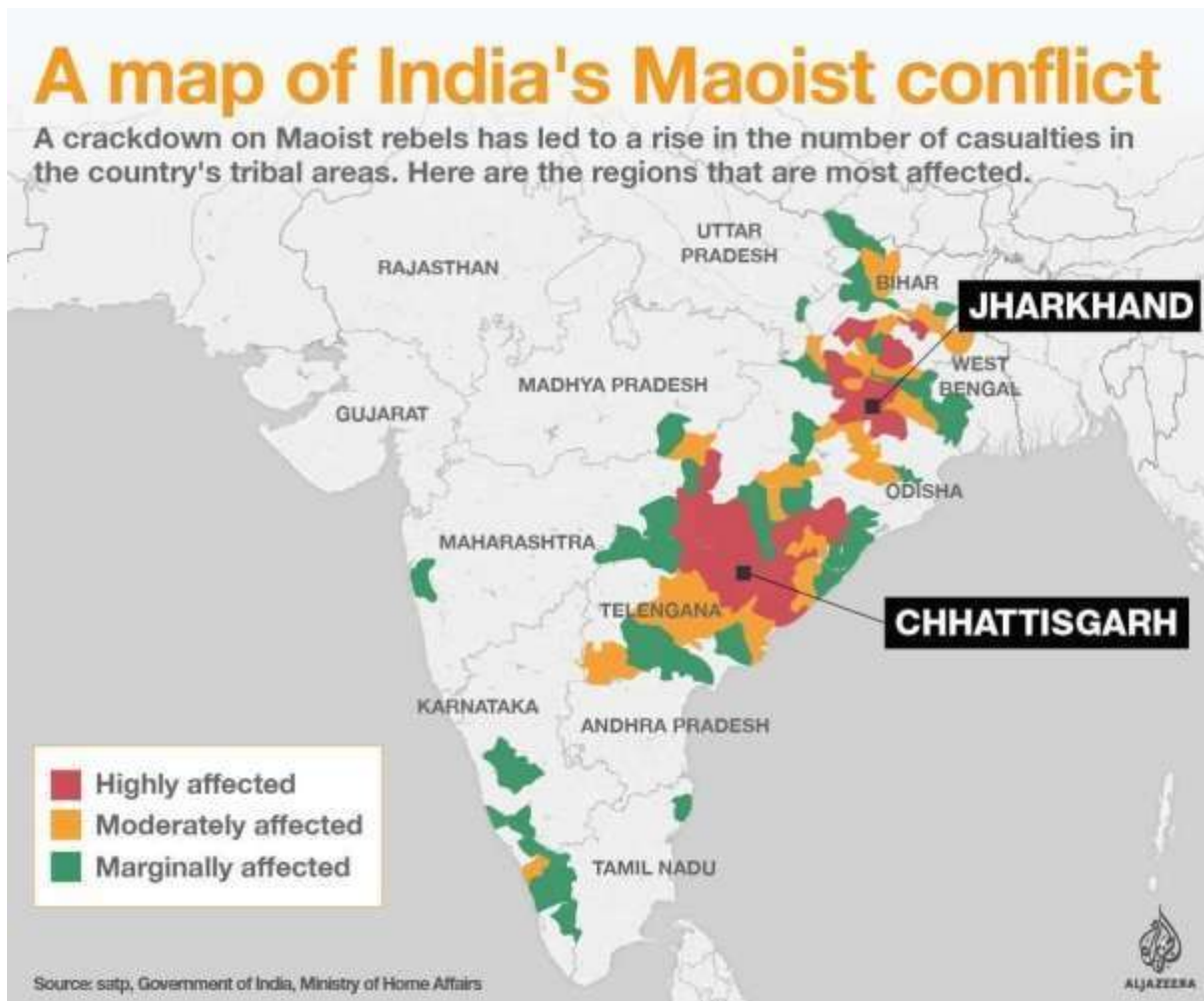
The remaining activity centers on a handful of districts, where the main group, the Communist Party of India (Maoist), continues to function but with greatly reduced capacity. Overall estimates place the number of active fighters below 5,000 today, a sharp drop from the much larger numbers seen in previous decades.

Current Areas of Presence (as of October 2025)

- **Total LWE-Affected Districts:** 11 (down from 18 in April 2025, 38 in April 2024, 70 in 2021, 90 in 2018, and 126 in 2013/2014).
- **Most-Affected Districts (3):** These are high-intensity zones with frequent encounters, Maoist strongholds, and ongoing operations. All are in Chhattisgarh:
 - Bijapur
 - Sukma
 - Narayanpur
- **Districts of Concern (4):** Areas where Maoist influence is waning but requires continued focus:
 - Kanker (Chhattisgarh)
 - West Singhbhum (Jharkhand)
 - Balaghat (Madhya Pradesh)
 - Gadchiroli (Maharashtra)
- **Other LWE-Affected Districts (4):** Residual presence with consolidation efforts:
 - Dantewada (Chhattisgarh)
 - Gariyaband (Chhattisgarh)
 - Mohla-Manpur-Ambagarh
 - Chowki (Chhattisgarh)
 - Kandhamal (Odisha)

The primary states involved are Chhattisgarh (which accounts for ~70% of remaining violence), Jharkhand, Odisha, Maharashtra, and Madhya Pradesh. Maoists operate in tribal belts, exploiting Adivasi communities for recruitment and using dense forests for ambushes and hideouts. Key operational zones include the Bastar region in Chhattisgarh (e.g., Abujmad forests) and border areas like the Andhra-Odisha-Chhattisgarh tri-junction. Presence in states like Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Bihar, West Bengal, and Kerala has been nearly eradicated, with only sporadic attempts at revival.

For visual context, here's a historical map showing Maoist-affected areas in earlier years (e.g., around 2017), highlighting the Red Corridor's extent before the recent contractions. Note that the current footprint is much smaller and limited to the districts listed above.



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Data on Reduction in LWE-Related Violence, Deaths, Affected Districts, and Districts of Concern
 India's multi-dimensional strategy against LWE, outlined in the National Policy and Action Plan of 2015, combines security operations (e.g., forward deployments, intelligence-led strikes), development (e.g., infrastructure in remote areas), financial choking (e.g., blocking extortion funds), and rehabilitation (e.g., surrender policies). This has led to a steep decline in violence metrics, with over 10,000 insurgents surrendering since 2015 and more than 5,000 killed in encounters. The government aims for a completely Naxal-Mukt Bharat by March 31, 2026, with irreversible momentum in 2025 alone seeing 317 neutralizations, 800+ arrests, and nearly 2,000 surrenders.

Key Trends in Reduction

- **Violence Incidents:** Peaked at 1,936 in 2010; reduced by 89% to 222 in 2025. Comparing decades: 53% drop from 2004–2014 to 2014–2024.
- **Deaths (Civilians + Security Forces):** Peaked at 1,005 in 2010; reduced by 91% to 95 in 2025. Security force deaths fell 73% and civilian deaths 70% from 2004–2014 to 2014–2024.
- **Affected Districts:** From 126 in 2013/2014 to 11 in October 2025.
- **Most-Affected Districts/Districts of Concern:** From 36 in 2014 to 3 most-affected in 2025, with 4 additional districts of concern.

The following tables summarize the data across key years, based on official Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) and other reports.

Table 1: Annual Violence Incidents and Deaths (Civilians + Security Forces)

Year	Violence Incidents	Deaths	% Reduction from 2010 (Incidents/Deaths)	2010	1,936	1,005
Baseline						
2014	~1,200 (est.)	~314	~38% / ~69%			
2019	501	202	~74% / ~80%			
2021	509	147	~74% / ~85%			
2024	374	150	~81% / ~85%			
2025	222 (up to Oct)	95	~89% / ~91%			

(Data sourced from MHA reports and parliamentary responses. Note: 2025 figures are partial but indicate continued decline.)

Table 2: Reduction in Affected Districts and Categories

Total Affected	Districts of Concern/Other	Year/Milestone	Most-Affected Districts	Districts
Notes				
2013/2014	126	36	Peak of Red Corridor spread	
2018 (April)	90	30	Initial policy impacts	
2021 (July)	70	25	Post-COVID consolidation	
N/A (shift in categorization)				
2024 (April)	38	-		
2025 (April)	18	6	Rapid neutralization	
2025 (October)	11	3		4 districts of concern

(Data from MHA categorizations. Police stations reporting violence also dropped from 465 in 96 districts (2010) to 171 in fewer districts (recent).)

These reductions reflect the government's success in reclaiming strongholds, such as Budha Pahar and Parasnath in Jharkhand, and integrating affected areas through roads, telecom, and welfare schemes. While challenges persist in core zones like Bastar, the trajectory supports the 2026 goal.

Drivers of Left-Wing Extremism: Governance Deficits, Legitimacy of Naxalism, and the Vicious Cycle

Left-Wing Extremism (LWE)—widely referred to as Naxalism or Maoism in the Indian context—persists primarily due to entrenched failures in governance that severely undermine the state's authority and presence in impacted areas. These failures include breakdowns in essential public services, rampant corruption, systemic exploitation, and chronic disregard for disadvantaged groups, all of which open doors for militant organizations such as the Communist Party of India (Maoist) to emerge as substitute sources of fairness, safety, and upliftment.

This pattern establishes a harmful feedback loop: administrative lapses generate widespread dissatisfaction and estrangement, prompting local populations—particularly tribal groups and Dalits—to turn to or align with Naxal elements for security and redress. In turn, the insurgents validate their use of force by framing the government as repressive, while actively sabotaging progress efforts and key

facilities. The outcome intensifies economic hardship, retards growth, and widens administrative shortfalls, ensuring the cycle endures.

The loop strengthens itself as Naxals capitalize on these absences to build shadow institutions—like informal "people's courts" (jan adalats)—impose unofficial taxes ("levies"), and deliver basic assistance. Such actions boost their grassroots credibility at the expense of official institutions, prolonging the armed struggle and obstructing durable resolutions. Ongoing conflict scares away economic opportunities, schooling, and medical access, entrenching isolation and disadvantage in these zones.

Disrupting this requires prioritizing fundamental reforms: fostering participatory administration, promoting balanced economic advancement, and rigorously upholding entitlements, instead of depending exclusively on law-enforcement tactics. The following sections detail the primary contributing elements and demonstrate their specific roles in maintaining this self-sustaining dynamic.

1. Failure of Land Distribution

India's post-independence land reform initiatives sought to transfer excess land from large holders to those without property, yet execution proved seriously deficient, especially in regions with high tribal populations. This shortfall stands out as a major factor behind the rise of Naxalism, as it sustains stark disparities and estranges rural disadvantaged groups, enabling militants to mobilize backing by highlighting injustices over land access.

- **Shortcomings in Actual Redistribution:** Measures such as ceiling legislation enacted in the 1950s–1960s were severely compromised by exemptions, graft, and pushback from influential landowners, yielding only limited transfers of land. In pivotal Naxal-affected states including Bihar, Jharkhand, and Chhattisgarh, merely a small share—roughly 2–5%—of declared surplus land reached intended recipients, leaving vast numbers without holdings. Tribal communities, accustomed to shared or customary land systems, faced particular harm from frameworks that emphasized private ownership, which often enabled transfers to non-tribals and sparked deep frustration. Insurgents capitalized on this by using coercive methods to reallocate land, establishing themselves as advocates for the marginalized.
- **Inadequate Documentation of Ownership:** A large proportion of tribals possess no official land titles (pattas) because of antiquated mapping exercises and procedural obstacles, leaving their possessions open to seizure. In designated scheduled zones, judicial interventions like the 1997 Samatha ruling sought to safeguard tribal holdings, but lax application has permitted unauthorized dealings. Such lapses destroy confidence in governmental systems, directing communities to seek Maoist intervention for settling conflicts.
- **Prioritization of Corporate and Mining Expansion:** Swift industrial growth and extraction activities in mineral-abundant tribal territories (for instance, Bastar in Chhattisgarh or parts of Jharkhand) frequently place business priorities ahead of community entitlements. Authorities invoke "public purpose" provisions to seize land, often with insufficient or no fair recompense and relocation support. This pattern intensifies destitution, provides insurgents with recruitment opportunities, and disrupts initiatives through conflict, thus reinforcing the ongoing vicious loop.

2. Displacement Caused by Infrastructure and Development Projects Major undertakings—dams, mining operations, roads, and similar ventures—have uprooted millions over decades, with tribal groups (comprising about 8% of the national population) shouldering a disproportionately large share of the impact. This pattern vividly illustrates the self-perpetuating cycle: such projects hold out prospects of

advancement but instead foster estrangement, lending credence to Maoist portrayals of governmental exploitation.

- **Findings from the Xaxa Committee (2014):** The High-Level Committee on the Socio-Economic, Health, and Educational Status of Tribal Communities (led by Virginius Xaxa) noted that tribals accounted for approximately 40% of all individuals displaced by development schemes since independence (from an overall estimate of around 60 million displaced persons). Prominent examples include the Sardar Sarovar Dam and various mining ventures in Odisha and Chhattisgarh, where affected communities frequently lost means of livelihood without meaningful rehabilitation or support.
 - **Problems with Documentation:** Deficient or missing land records compound difficulties, as many tribals struggle to establish ownership claims, resulting in reduced compensation amounts or complete exclusion from resettlement benefits. These administrative failures compel relocation to city outskirts and informal settlements, aggravating hardship and rendering insurgent ideologies more persuasive as pathways to resistance.
3. **Absence of Effective Administration** In isolated and far-flung regions, the lack of robust state mechanisms permits Naxals to occupy the void, drawing in residents and severing ties to official frameworks. This dynamic sustains the insurgency by diminishing governmental reach and solidifying militant dominance.
- **Deficient Record Management:** Inconsistent upkeep of land, revenue, and personal identification documents restricts eligibility for government programs and provokes conflicts over resources.
 - **Recruitment and Integration Tactics:** Insurgents employ a mix of pressure and ideological persuasion, promising safeguards against exploitative figures like landlords or corrupt authorities, thereby incorporating villagers into their networks.
 - **Judicial Disconnect:** Lengthy delays, remote access, and pervasive corruption in formal courts drive people to rely on Naxal-operated "courts" for rapid resolutions, thereby increasing the insurgents' perceived authority.
4. **Restrictive Forest Regulations** Policies inherited from the colonial period, combined with sluggish rollout of contemporary protections, continue to restrict tribal access to forest-dependent resources for daily needs, generating hostility and tilting support toward Naxals.
- **Limited Progress on Community Rights:** The Forest Rights Act of 2006 acknowledges Community Forest Rights (CFR), yet rollout remains weak—with only about 5–10% of potential claims resolved in earlier assessments (more recent data shows ongoing challenges, though cumulative settlements have improved somewhat). This denies communities authority over vital resources.
 - **Bureaucratic Harassment:** Forest department personnel frequently levy penalties, carry out evictions, or extract informal payments for gathering even small quantities of forest produce, cultivating bitterness and bolstering Naxal backing.
5. **Systemic Social Marginalization** The ongoing sidelining of Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) from broader societal participation heightens frustrations, with Maoists stepping in to offer a feeling of purpose and inclusion.
- **Ineffective Application of Protective Laws:** The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, suffers from poor enforcement, permitting caste-related abuses to continue unchecked.

- **Undermined Local Self-Rule:** The Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA) of 1996 devolves powers to village assemblies in tribal regions, but modifications by states and lack of proper rollout weaken grassroots decision-making.
- **Ideological Appeal of Insurgents:** Naxals furnish a sense of dignity and resistance against domination, disrupting patterns of oppression and securing enduring commitment.
- 6. **Perceived Excessive State Force** Views of heavy-handed policing and security actions alienate populations, providing justification for Naxal counter-responses and entrenching divisions.
 - **Abuses and Incidents:** Reports of extrajudicial encounters, deaths in custody, and past controversial measures (such as Salwa Judum in Chhattisgarh) have severely damaged credibility.
 - **Absence of Tailored Policing:** Without dedicated, culturally attuned units or personnel focused on tribal contexts, interactions often lack sensitivity, nudging locals toward militants.
- 7. **Deep-Rooted Economic Exploitation** Persistent vulnerabilities—including coerced labor, wage violations, and predatory practices—underpin widespread deprivation and make Naxal promises of protection attractive.
 - **Bonded Labor Practices:** Debt bondage endures in countryside settings, ensnaring families across generations.
 - **Wage Enforcement Failures:** Workers in farming and mining often receive less than legally mandated pay owing to lax oversight.
 - **Exploitative Intermediaries:** Moneylenders, contractors, and officials frequently take advantage, creating acute need; insurgents position themselves as interveners and guardians, thereby enhancing their standing.

Counter LWE Extremism: India's Broad Approach

India's strategy against Left-Wing Extremism (LWE), also known as Naxalism or Maoism, has evolved into a comprehensive, multi-pronged framework under the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA). This approach recognizes LWE not merely as a security threat but as a socio-economic and governance challenge rooted in underdevelopment, exploitation, and alienation in tribal and rural areas. The government's broad strategy emphasizes integrating security operations with developmental initiatives and community outreach to erode the insurgents' base, disrupt their operations, and reintegrate affected populations into the mainstream. By February 2026, this has led to significant progress, with LWE violence at historic lows and the insurgency confined to a handful of districts, aligning with the goal of a Naxal-Mukt Bharat by March 31, 2026. Key to this is the National Policy and Action Plan, supplemented by targeted models like the 3C framework and a dual approach balancing coercion and conciliation.

National Policy and Action Plan (2015)

The National Policy and Action Plan to Address Left-Wing Extremism, introduced by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) in 2015, serves as the foundational framework for India's comprehensive approach to combating LWE. It employs a multifaceted strategy that confronts the insurgency's ideological underpinnings, operational capabilities, and socio-economic roots, shifting from fragmented countermeasures to a unified, nationwide campaign.

The policy rests on three interconnected pillars—security, development, and redressal of valid concerns—that work together to weaken insurgent networks while restoring public confidence in government institutions.

- **Security Pillar:** This component prioritizes bolstering government capabilities to counter threats via intelligence-driven missions, skill enhancement, and seamless collaboration among agencies. Core initiatives encompass the deployment of Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) units, establishment of India Reserve battalions, aerial support via helicopters for anti-LWE missions, erection of fortified police stations (more than 656 completed since 2014), and upgrades to state police forces through allocations for weaponry, gear, and training. From 2014-15 onward, the Security Related Expenditure (SRE) scheme has disbursed ₹3,681.73 crore to cover operational requirements, personnel training, and compensatory payments to families of fallen officers. The Special Infrastructure Scheme (SIS) has allocated ₹1,761 crore to reinforce specialized state units, intelligence setups, and related facilities. A strong focus on financial disruption involves joint efforts by entities such as the National Investigation Agency (NIA), Enforcement Directorate (ED), and local police to sever revenue streams from extortion, levies, and counterfeit operations. Oversight occurs through frequent evaluations by the Union Home Minister and Home Secretary, supported by bodies like the Combating Financing of Terrorism (CFT) Cell and multi-agency task forces.
- **Development Pillar:** Designed to remedy administrative shortfalls in isolated zones, this includes major infrastructure enhancements such as road networks (exceeding 12,000 km constructed since 2014 via programs like the Road Requirement Plan-I and Road Connectivity Project for LWE Areas), installation of telecom towers (over 7,700 erected), and steps toward financial access (with 1,007 new bank branches, 937 ATMs, and 5,731 post offices added). The Special Central Assistance (SCA) scheme has channeled ₹3,953.67 crore since 2017 to address vital deficiencies in essential services and facilities. Targeted welfare efforts, including the Dharti Aaba Janjatiya Gram Utkarsh Abhiyan, aim for comprehensive coverage in more than 15,000 villages, reaching around 1.5 crore individuals with improvements in schooling, healthcare, nutrition, and vocational skills.
- **Redressal of Legitimate Grievances Pillar:** This element safeguards entitlements and protections for affected populations, especially tribal groups, by enforcing key legislation such as the Forest Rights Act (2006), Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA, 1996), and Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act (1989). It features surrender and rehabilitation initiatives that provide upfront financial aid (₹5 lakh for senior cadres, ₹2.5 lakh for others), skill-building programs with monthly stipends (₹10,000 for three years), and rewards for turning in arms. States have updated their policies for greater appeal, contributing to more than 10,000 surrenders since 2015. Additional measures like community-oriented policing, civic outreach, and efforts to shape public perceptions help neutralize insurgent messaging, build rapport, and promote societal reintegration.

Strategic Evolution and Outcomes: The approach represents a clear pivot from reactive, localized containment tactics to proactive efforts aimed at dismantling the insurgency's entire support system. This includes deliberate targeting of leadership (with numerous high-profile eliminations between 2014 and 2024), rank-and-file members (through inducements for defection, arrests, and operations— such as 2,337 surrenders and 380 neutralizations in 2023), and auxiliary networks (via disruptions of urban links, overground supporters, and funding channels, resulting in asset seizures exceeding ₹92 crore). These shifts have eroded organizational unity, exacerbated internal divisions, and hastened overall weakening.

Implementation of the policy has driven substantial reductions: violence incidents fell by 89% and fatalities by 91% from 2010 levels, while the insurgency's territorial footprint shrank from 126 districts in 2013 to just 11 by late 2025 (with further declines noted in early 2026 reviews, bringing affected districts

to around 7-8 in some assessments, and only 3-4 classified as "most affected," primarily in Chhattisgarh). Recent MHA data (as of early 2026) shows violence incidents at historic lows (e.g., 234 in 2025, an 88% drop from 2010's peak), with ongoing momentum toward the government's target of a fully Naxal-free India by March 31, 2026, supported by continued security, development saturation in cleared areas, and preventive measures in legacy zones.

3C Model: Road, Mobile, and Financial Connectivity

The 3C Model—centered on **Road Connectivity**, **Mobile Connectivity**, and **Financial Connectivity**—stands as a key element within the development pillar of India's anti-LWE strategy. Championed by Union Home Minister Amit Shah, it seeks to dismantle the isolation that has long enabled insurgents to operate freely in remote regions. By improving administrative oversight, fostering economic ties, and enabling swift information flow and intelligence gathering, the model directly undermines the logistical edge once held by Maoists in the "Red Corridor."

- **Road Connectivity:** Since 2014, more than 15,000 km of roads have been built across affected states like Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and Odisha through dedicated programs such as the Road Requirement Plan-I (RRP-I, with around 5,223 km completed out of 5,361 km targeted) and the Road Connectivity Project for LWE Affected Areas (RCPLWE, sanctioning 12,212 km of roads and 701 bridges, with roughly 9,767 km and 528 bridges finished by early 2026). These allweather links support faster security force movements, reliable supply lines, market access for locals, and delivery of services, gradually eroding Naxal dominance over hard-to-reach terrains.
- **Mobile Connectivity:** Multiple telecom initiatives—including Mobile Connectivity Phases I and II, 4G rollout in Aspirational Districts, and broader 4G saturation efforts—have led to the commissioning of over 9,000–9,233 towers in LWE zones since 2014 (compared to virtually none in the prior decade from 2004–2014). A significant portion, including around 3,551–8,527 approved or upgraded to 4G, has been completed or made operational. Enhanced coverage improves everyday communication, rapid emergency responses, access to online government services, and exposure to diverse information sources, effectively challenging Maoist efforts to control narratives and isolate communities through propaganda.
- **Financial Connectivity:** Efforts to expand banking access have included the addition of 1,804 bank branches and 1,321 ATMs in the most severely affected districts, alongside 6,025 post offices equipped with banking services and nearly 38,000 banking correspondents deployed across roughly 90 districts. This integration into the formal financial system boosts inclusion, minimizes reliance on cash-based extortion by insurgents, and weakens their informal "taxation" networks by connecting residents to mainstream economic opportunities and benefits.

Overall, the 3C Model has reshaped socio-economic conditions in formerly isolated pockets. Complementary state-level programs, such as Chhattisgarh's Niyad Nella Nar Yojana (also referred to as Niyad Nellanar Yojana), have delivered roads, electricity, schools, healthcare, and other essentials to hundreds of villages (with reports of revival in over 400 Bastar-area villages by early 2026), promoting stability, community empowerment, and a shift toward sustainable peace and development.

Dual Approach: Peace, Inclusion, and Democratic Engagement vs. No Holds Barred Strategy

India's strategy to counter Left-Wing Extremism (LWE) employs a balanced dual framework—often described as "carrot-and-stick"—that combines incentives for peace and reintegration with firm,

uncompromising security measures. This integrated method has shifted from earlier patterns of accommodation or limited responses to a more resolute push that accelerates defections, eliminates key threats, and reestablishes state authority in affected zones.

- **Peace, Inclusion, and Democratic Engagement (Carrot Approach):** The "soft" element centers on building goodwill and long-term stability through participatory governance, social welfare, and pathways out of insurgency. Rehabilitation programs offer substantial financial support, skill training, and safeguards for those laying down arms, contributing to significant numbers of surrenders (for instance, over 2,300 in 2025 alone, a sharp rise from prior years). Community-focused initiatives include civic action drives (with allocations around ₹196 crore in earlier phases), public awareness campaigns (around ₹52 crore), and operational doctrines like SAMADHAN, which integrates smart leadership, aggressive tactics, motivation, actionable intelligence, development priorities, human rights considerations, analysis, and financial denial. Strengthening democratic mechanisms involves better enforcement of laws such as PESA, support for tribal advisory bodies, and region-specific efforts like Odisha's Special Development Councils, which respect cultural heritage while expanding access to services. These steps, combined with schemes like MGNREGA enhancements, public distribution system improvements, and aspirational district programs, help rebuild confidence, isolate insurgents from their support networks, and draw communities into mainstream development.
- **No-Holds-Barred Security Strategy (Stick Approach):** The "hard" component features relentless, intelligence-based campaigns to dismantle militant networks decisively. This includes major coordinated offensives—such as Operation Kagar in Chhattisgarh's Bastar region (which neutralized dozens of insurgents in 2025 phases, including high-value targets)—along with expanded joint task forces, sustained deployments of CRPF and specialized units like CoBRA in core areas, and efforts to establish permanent security presence through new forward camps (hundreds added) and infrastructure like helipads. Prosecutions are expedited, while financial disruptions (with seizures exceeding ₹90 crore in reported actions) target extortion and funding channels. These operations have resulted in hundreds of neutralizations annually (e.g., around 300–350 in 2025, including leadership figures), alongside arrests and pressure that force cadre attrition.

The combined effect of compassion-driven rehabilitation and targeted force has proven highly effective, reclaiming vast territories, diminishing the insurgents' ideological and logistical appeal, and setting a model for successful internal security management—far surpassing earlier disjointed approaches. This synergy has driven the dramatic contraction of LWE influence, with violence incidents dropping sharply (e.g., to historic lows of around 200–250 in 2025), affected districts reduced to just 7–8 by early 2026 (mostly in Chhattisgarh, with a few in Jharkhand and Odisha), and the government's commitment to a fully Naxal-free India by March 31, 2026, remaining firmly on track per recent Ministry of Home Affairs assessments.

Case Studies in Countering Left-Wing Extremism (LWE): Key Initiatives Driving Decline and the Path to Naxal-Mukt Bharat by 2026

India's approach to countering Left-Wing Extremism (LWE) has evolved from strategies focused on containment to aggressive, targeted eradication through localized and creative models. These combine robust security actions, infrastructure and welfare development, rehabilitation incentives, and grassroots community involvement. The examples below—covering major operations, elite units, and local

initiatives—highlight how precise efforts have broken down Maoist organizations, prompted large-scale defections (exceeding 10,000 since 2015, including thousands in 2024–2025), eliminated or captured hundreds of leaders and fighters each year, severed funding and logistical networks, and reinstated effective administration. Together, these have dramatically shrunk the insurgency: from 126 affected districts in 2013 to just 7 by February 2026 (mostly in Chhattisgarh, with one each in Jharkhand and Odisha), most-affected districts down to 3 or fewer in recent classifications, and violence reduced by approximately 89–91% from 2010 highs. This has generated unstoppable progress toward the government's goal of a fully Naxal-free India by March 31, 2026.

1. **Mission Gram Udaya (Gramodaya Initiative) – Odisha** Introduced in October 2024 by the Odisha administration, this program concentrates on 583 villages impacted by LWE across 10 districts (including Kandhamal, Malkangiri, and Kalahandi). It starts with detailed household assessments to pinpoint deficiencies, then floods these areas with over 40 central and state welfare programs covering roads, power supply, clean water, healthcare, schooling, and job skills training.
 - o **Contribution to Decline:** It directly counters the governance absences that insurgents exploit, linking isolated tribal communities to essential services and undermining Maoist claims of state indifference. This has boosted access in previously controlled zones, supported intelligence gathering and defections, and aligned with Odisha's aim for zero LWE presence by 2026 (evidenced by key leader neutralizations in Kandhamal during 2025 operations).
2. **Elvad (Elwada) Panchayat Abhiyan – Chhattisgarh** Unveiled in March 2025 by Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Sharma, this rewards-based initiative motivates village councils (panchayats) to secure full Maoist surrenders from their areas. Panchayats declared "Maoism-free" gain ₹1 crore for infrastructure like buildings, mobile connectivity, electricity (or solar alternatives), and other facilities.
 - o **Contribution to Decline:** It drives grassroots-level peace by empowering local institutions to encourage exits from insurgency. This has sped up group defections in Bastar, worked alongside military efforts, and led to official Maoist-free declarations, aiding cadre reduction and territorial recovery while contributing to the 2025 drop in most-affected districts.
3. **SAMADHAN Strategy – National Operational Doctrine** Rolled out in 2017 under then-Home Minister Rajnath Singh, SAMADHAN forms a comprehensive acronym-based framework: Smart Leadership, Aggressive Strategy, Motivation & Training, Actionable Intelligence, Dashboardbased KPIs/KRAs, Harnessing Technology, Action Plan for Each Theatre, and No Access to Financing.
 - o **Contribution to Decline:** It provides the nationwide blueprint for synchronized operations, fueling intelligence-guided actions, financial disruptions (with seizures in crores), and tech adoption (drones, monitoring systems). Applied across states, it supports violence drops, leadership eliminations, and serves as the core driver for the 2026 eradication objective.
4. **Greyhounds (and SOG) – Andhra Pradesh/Telangana** Established in 1989, the Greyhounds are a premier jungle warfare force (shared between Andhra Pradesh and Telangana after 2014 division), excelling in small-unit, intel-based strikes against Maoists. The Special Operations Group (SOG) supports with precision raids.
 - o **Contribution to Decline:** Through persistent pressure, they effectively wiped out structured Maoism in the former Andhra Pradesh by the early 2010s (neutralizing over 1,700 insurgents from 1995–2016). Ongoing cross-border actions have blocked regrouping from Chhattisgarh, destroyed supply chains, and maintained near-zero violence in these states, showcasing the power of dedicated specialized units.

5. **Operation Anaconda – Jharkhand (Saranda Forest)** Conducted in multiple rounds—the initial in 2011 and follow-ups in 2012 cleared Saranda; revived in 2026 with joint forces from CRPF CoBRA, Jharkhand Jaguar, and police—resulting in over 15 Maoist neutralizations in January 2026, including Central Committee figure Patiram Manjhi alias Anal Da (with a ₹2.35 crore reward).
 - **Contribution to Decline:** It disrupts supply routes, sets up lasting camps, and paves the way for development (via the Saranda Development Plan). The 2026 phase inflicted a major setback in Jharkhand, curtailed activities in West Singhbhum, and hastened district removals from LWE lists.
6. **Operation Kagar (Black Forest) – Chhattisgarh (Multi-State)** Initiated in April 2025 by the MHA as a "final push," this prolonged campaign in Bastar and Karregutta Hills (along the Chhattisgarh-Telangana border) involved CRPF, STF, DRG, and state police. It eliminated 31+ Maoists (including women fighters) in key phases, with cumulative hundreds neutralized since 2024.
 - **Contribution to Decline:** Focused on vital strongholds, it triggered leadership breakdowns and widespread defections (e.g., Politburo member Sonu in Gadchiroli). It weakened the CPI(Maoist) cohesion, reclaimed land, and accelerated the path to 2026 eradication.
7. **Operation Prahar – Chhattisgarh (Bastar Focus)** Ramped up since 2017 (with major surges in 2024), this CRPF-Chhattisgarh Police effort deploys snipers, K-9 teams, and modern arms for precision strikes on senior commanders in Dandakaranya forests. A 2024 phase alone neutralized 29 Maoists; totals for 2024–2025 surpassed 250.
 - **Contribution to Decline:** It targets the insurgency's core decision-makers (e.g., attempts on figures like Mandvi Hidma), boosts surrenders and captures, and reclaims hideouts, leading to significantly higher Maoist losses under recent leadership.
8. **Coordinated Efforts in Balaghat – Madhya Pradesh (CRPF, State Police, Hawk Force)** Madhya Pradesh's elite Hawk Force spearheads joint missions with CRPF and local police in thick forests (e.g., Supkhar, Raunda, Dharamara). 2025 clashes eliminated multiple cadres (including women), recovered weapons, and thwarted revival bids.
 - **Contribution to Decline:** It blocks spillover from neighboring states like Chhattisgarh and Maharashtra; consistent wins (e.g., four women cadres in February 2025) have minimized violence in Balaghat, aiding Madhya Pradesh's removal from LWE-affected lists.
9. **Gadchiroli Three-Phase Model – Maharashtra** A long-term, multi-layered strategy in Maharashtra's final major LWE pocket:
 - **Phase 1: Infrastructure Build-up** — Roads, schools (including 7 Eklavya Model Residential), health facilities, telecom, and banking via Aspirational Districts Programme.
 - **Phase 2: Rehabilitation Focus** — Upgraded surrender packages, skill training, Navjeevan Colonies; resulted in 61+ defections (including Politburo member Sonu) in 2025.
 - **Phase 3: Forest and Rights Restoration** — Enforcement of Forest Rights Act, recognition of Community Forest Rights (CFR), and reforestation to revive livelihoods and challenge Maoist resource dominance.
 - **Contribution to Decline:** Converted a former "liberated" area into a success story of mainstream integration. Mass surrenders, strong voter participation (74% in 2024 elections), and absence of major violence have virtually ended LWE in Gadchiroli, demonstrating that combining development, rights enforcement, and rehab can permanently resolve insurgency.

These examples collectively showcase the effective mix: forceful security measures (Greyhounds,

Kagar, Prahar, Anaconda, Balaghat) eliminate immediate dangers; development and rehab initiatives (Gram Udaya, Elvad, Gadchiroli phases, SAMADHAN components) address voids; and local incentives build community stake. This combination has fractured Maoist ideology, depleted ranks, and contracted territory, firmly positioning India for complete eradication of Naxalism by March 31, 2026, as per ongoing Ministry of Home Affairs reviews and Union Home Minister statements.

Government Schemes Related to Left-Wing Extremism

India's schemes to combat Left-Wing Extremism (LWE), also referred to as Naxalism, form a vital part of the comprehensive National Policy and Action Plan introduced in 2015. This framework, led by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), balances security enhancements, developmental progress, and resolution of underlying grievances. The primary goals involve boosting infrastructure, improving interagency collaboration, advancing social welfare, and supporting rehabilitation across key states such as Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, Maharashtra, and Madhya Pradesh. By February 2026, these combined efforts have dramatically limited LWE influence to just 7 affected districts (down from 126 in 2013), with violence incidents dropping by about 89% and fatalities by 91% from their 2010 peaks. Recent MHA reviews (as of February 2026) confirm the insurgency is now confined to a handful of pockets—primarily five in Chhattisgarh (Bijapur, Narayanpur, Sukma, Kanker, Dantewada), one in Jharkhand (West Singhbhum), and one in Odisha (Kandhamal)—with only three classified as "most affected." The government remains firmly on track to achieve a fully Naxal-free Bharat by March 31, 2026, as reiterated by Union Home Minister Amit Shah and supported by ongoing operations, surrenders, and development saturation.

As requested, here are updated details on the first two categories: **Physical Infrastructure** and **Institutional Measures**. These target connectivity barriers and coordination gaps to weaken Maoist control.

- 1. Physical Infrastructure** These initiatives emphasize improved access and links in isolated LWE zones, countering the remoteness that militants use for recruitment, hideouts, and operations. Major investments (exceeding ₹15,000 crore since 2014) in roads, telecom, and security facilities have helped reclaim areas and enhance everyday service reach.
- **Special Central Assistance (SCA) for LWE Areas:** Rolled out in 2017 via the MHA's LWE Division, SCA offers adaptable grants to states for filling essential infrastructure shortfalls overlooked by other programs. It prioritizes comprehensive growth in cleared zones, funding education, healthcare, roads, irrigation, and skill-building projects. As of February 2026, ₹3,953.67 crore has been disbursed since launch, supporting over 10,000 initiatives in impacted districts. This has sped up advancements in places like Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand, helping integrate former conflict areas into broader development and advancing the 2026 Naxal-free objective.
- **Mobile Tower and Mobile Connectivity Project:** Managed in phases by the Department of Telecommunications through the Universal Service Obligation Fund, this addresses communication black spots in LWE regions to boost coordination, emergency responses, and intelligence. Phase-I (approved 2014) set up 2,343 towers (2G) at an estimated ₹7,330 crore. Phase-II (approved 2018, revised 2021) targets 4G at 2,542 sites (revised from earlier plans) for ₹3,214.65 crore, awarded to Reliance Jio and Bharti Airtel. In total, 10,734 towers are planned, with around 9,122 commissioned by early 2026 across states including Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Madhya

Pradesh, Odisha, and Telangana. This has brought connectivity to over 15,000 villages, curbing Maoist misinformation and supporting security efforts.

- **Road Requirement Plan-II (RRP-II) and Related Projects:** Following RRP-I (launched 2009 by the Ministry of Road Transport & Highways, targeting 5,361 km in 9 states with about 5,223 km finished by 2026), focus shifted to remaining pockets. The main follow-on is the Road Connectivity Project for LWE Affected Areas (RCPLWE, approved 2016 by the Ministry of Rural Development at ₹11,725 crore), often seen as an extension or "Phase-II." It approves 12,212 km of roads and 701 bridges in 44 severely hit districts, with roughly 9,767 km roads and 528 bridges completed by 2026. Combined RRP and RCPLWE efforts have delivered about 15,016 km, enabling quicker security deployments and economic ties.
 - **Special Infrastructure Scheme (SIS) with Fortified Police Stations:** Operating as part of the broader Modernization of Police Forces umbrella since 2017, SIS funds state special units, intelligence wings, district policing, and fortified police stations (FPS) in LWE zones. ₹1,761 crore has been approved, covering 306 FPS (256 built) under SIS plus 400 from a prior scheme (all completed). By 2026, a total of 656 FPS stand operational, strengthening territorial hold and minimizing exposure.
2. **Institutional Measures** These build stronger coordination, intelligence sharing, and specialized capabilities to break down LWE networks. Backed by ₹3,681.73 crore under the Security Related Expenditure (SRE) scheme since 2014 for training and capacity, they include cross-state setups and dedicated teams.
- **Unified Command of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and Odisha:** Set up in 2010 per central guidelines, this coordinates joint actions, intel exchange, and resource sharing in primary LWE states. Each appoints an Inspector General for anti-Naxal ops to work with CRPF, guided by exmilitary advisors. It enables border-spanning campaigns, as seen in 2025–2026 assessments extending to Telangana and Maharashtra, speeding up eliminations and supporting the 2026 goal.
 - **Multi-Agency Centre (MAC):** Established in 2001 under the Intelligence Bureau (IB), MAC acts as a central real-time hub for sharing intel on terrorism and extremism, including LWE. Upgraded in May 2025 at ₹500 crore, it now spans four zones (Jammu & Kashmir, Northeast, LWE, and Rest of India), linking 28 agencies. Subsidiary MACs (SMACs) at state levels feed local data, aiding operations like Bastar strikes and funding disruptions.
 - **Special Forces:** Focused anti-LWE units handle jungle combat and precision actions. Centrally, CoBRA (10 battalions under CRPF) leads counterinsurgency. State-level include Andhra Pradesh/Telangana's Greyhounds (since 1989), Odisha's Special Operations Group (SOG), Chhattisgarh's District Reserve Guard (DRG, with tribal recruits), Jharkhand's Jaguar, and Maharashtra's Hawk Force. These have achieved over 5,000 neutralizations since 2014, funded partly through SIS (₹1,761 crore) for equipment and training.

Actions of Various Stakeholders in Countering Left-Wing Extremism in India

India's comprehensive strategy to combat Left-Wing Extremism (LWE), commonly known as Naxalism, relies on synchronized contributions from various stakeholders to tackle security challenges, administrative weaknesses, and socio-economic issues. Coordinated under the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) and state governments, this joint effort has achieved major reductions: violence incidents have declined by about 89% and fatalities by 91% since 2010 peaks, while the insurgency's reach has shrunk dramatically. By early 2026, LWE is confined to just 7 districts (down from 126 in 2013 and 8 in late 2025), primarily in Chhattisgarh (Bijapur, Narayanpur, Sukma, Kanker, Dantewada), with one each in

Jharkhand (West Singhbhum) and Odisha (Kandhamal). This progress, including only 3 "most-affected" districts in recent classifications, supports the government's firm commitment to a fully Naxal-free India by March 31, 2026, as consistently affirmed by Union Home Minister Amit Shah and backed by ongoing operations, surrenders, and development initiatives.

Key stakeholders—security personnel, administrative entities, government officials, local governance bodies, and civil society—fulfill complementary functions in weakening Maoist frameworks, promoting progress, and restoring public confidence. Below is an overview of their respective contributions.

- **Security Forces** Security personnel serve as the primary line of defense against LWE, integrating direct action, community outreach, and developmental aid. Guided by the 2015 National Policy and Action Plan, they have eliminated over 5,000 insurgents since 2014. In 2025 alone, figures included around 364 neutralizations, 1,022 arrests, and 2,337 surrenders—reflecting strengthened capabilities, intelligence-focused missions, and a growing emphasis on gaining local trust.
- **Specialized Units:** Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF), including CoBRA (Commando Battalion for Resolute Action) and CRPF battalions, handle jungle operations and territorial control in core zones. State units like Andhra Pradesh/Telangana's Greyhounds, Odisha's Special Operations Group (SOG), and Chhattisgarh's District Reserve Guard (DRG) lead precision strikes (e.g., in Operations Kagar and Prahar), targeting high-profile figures and supply chains. MHA backing via Security Related Expenditure (SRE, ₹3,681 crore since 2014) covers gear, training, and fortified stations (656 constructed), supplemented by India Reserve Battalions and helicopters for quick deployment. Agencies like the National Investigation Agency (NIA) aid in disrupting finances.
- **Building Community Trust:** To offset Maoist claims of state oppression, forces run Civic Action Programmes (CAP) under police modernization funding (e.g., ₹196 crore allocated in phases) for health camps, sports events, and education in villages. Community policing, aligned with SAMADHAN principles (motivation, training, human rights), has boosted defections and eased tensions, especially among tribal groups.
- **Linking Security to Development:** Forward camps often serve as multi-purpose centers, delivering roads, telecom, and banking per the 3C model. Past operations like Octopus and Double Bull (2022) merged eliminations with outreach, enabling schemes such as MGNREGA and PDS improvements. This integrated role addresses core drivers like poverty and remoteness, diminishing insurgent sway.
- **Administrative Institutions** These entities manage policy execution, prioritizing rights-oriented governance in LWE zones to combat exploitation and enhance credibility. The MHA's LWE Division (established 2006) oversees coordination, situation monitoring, and advisories, with a strong focus on tribal protections to mitigate root grievances.
- **Forest Rights Oversight:** The Forest Rights Act (FRA, 2006) grants tribals access to forest resources, rectifying past wrongs that fueled Naxalism. High-level panels from the Ministry of Tribal Affairs track rollout in affected districts, tackling high rejection rates (e.g., through 2014-focused reviews in Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh). These ensure claim resolution, habitat rights for Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs), and linkage to programs like Dharti Aaba Janjatiya Gram Utkarsh Abhiyan, helping recover Maoist-held forest areas.
- **Cultural and Rights Sensitivity:** Training programs educate officials on tribal traditions, FRA/PESA entitlements, and human rights. MHA's review processes, including Union Home Minister-led sessions, enforce accountability, involve communities in decisions, and curb resource misuse, thereby reducing alienation.

- **Government Personnel** Officials operating in LWE regions encounter distinct difficulties, but reforms improve performance and community ties.
- **Addressing "Punishment Posting" Issues:** Remote assignments are often seen as penalties due to infrastructure gaps and risks, causing low morale and turnover. States counter this with hardship allowances, support for martyrs' families, and SRE-funded training (₹1,643 crore from 2020–2025), fostering longer-term commitment to service provision.
- **Local Hiring Practices:** Incorporating residents into police and admin roles builds bridges, leveraging their knowledge of terrain, languages, and customs. Examples include Chhattisgarh's DRG (tribal-focused) and Jharkhand's Jaguar, enhancing intel and reducing coercion. Over 2,000 tribal recruits in recent years, aided by interior CAPF camps, have strengthened these efforts.
- **Local Bodies** Decentralized governance empowers residents and challenges Maoist alternatives.
- **PESA Implementation:** The Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (1996) extends Panchayati Raj to scheduled zones, granting Gram Sabhas authority over resources, disputes, and development. In LWE settings, it curbs land grabs and displacement—core insurgent issues. MHA pushes enforcement for self-rule, involving locals in beneficiary choices and minor forest produce handling. Odisha's Special Development Councils blend PESA with welfare to promote stability.
- **Civil Society** NGOs, community organizations, and forums serve as intermediaries and overseers, addressing ideological and informational challenges.
- **Facilitating Connections:** These groups mediate state-community interactions, support dialogue, fact-finding, and dispute resolution. They deliver welfare, monitor rights (e.g., FRA), and advocate non-violent paths, as in tribal peace forums. This fosters assurance, curbs escalation, and amplifies marginalized perspectives.
- **Combating Disinformation:** Civil society counters "urban Naxalism"—alleged urban backing of Maoists via propaganda—through fact-checking, anti-misinformation campaigns, and debunking false narratives. Efforts promote media awareness and defend democratic values, disrupting Maoist outreach and urban networks.

When these stakeholder roles align effectively, they disrupt the self-reinforcing loop of governance failures and insurgency, laying the foundation for enduring peace and inclusive growth in formerly affected regions.

Salwa Judum: A Controversial Vigilante Movement

Salwa Judum, meaning "peace march" in Gondi, emerged in 2005 as a state-backed vigilante movement in Chhattisgarh to counter Maoist insurgency. It mobilized tribal civilians, often forcibly, into anti-Naxal operations, creating armed groups that operated alongside security forces. While intended to rally local support, it devolved into a cycle of violence, with reports of major deaths, massacres, village burnings, rapes, and forced displacements affecting thousands of tribals between 2005 and 2011. This exacerbated the conflict, leading to widespread human rights abuses and deepening tribal alienation.

In the landmark Supreme Court case *Nandini Sundar & Ors. vs. State of Chhattisgarh* (2011), the court declared Salwa Judum unconstitutional. The ruling highlighted excessive delegation of powers under the Chhattisgarh Auxiliary Police Act, 2007, which allowed the state to arm untrained civilians without adequate oversight, violating constitutional norms.

A key issue was the role of Special Police Officers (SPOs)—tribal youths appointed under Section 9 of the Act for temporary duties. The court found their deployment in combat roles against Maoists violated

Articles 14 (right to equality) and 21 (right to life and liberty), as SPOs lacked proper training, pay, and accountability compared to regular forces, exposing them and civilians to undue risks and enabling abuses. The judgment ordered disbanding SPOs in such roles and emphasized state responsibility for protecting citizens without vigilante proxies.

Despite the ruling, allegations of similar groups persisting underscore ongoing challenges in balancing security and rights.

Women in Red Corridors

In India's Left-Wing Extremism (LWE)-affected "Red Corridors," women play a prominent role in Maoist groups, often driven by socioeconomic grievances but facing compounded challenges. Estimates indicate that women constitute around 60% of Maoist cadres, particularly in lower ranks, where they serve in combat, logistics, and recruitment. This high participation stems from promises of gender equality and resistance to patriarchal oppression.

The Krantikari Adivasi Mahila Sanghatan (KAMS), a women's wing of the CPI(Maoist) formed in the 1980s, has nearly 90,000 members and focuses on mobilizing tribal women against exploitation, forced marriages, domestic violence, and state atrocities. It provides ideological training and serves as a recruitment front, enhancing Maoist legitimacy among tribals.

Women in these areas endure structural violence—systemic poverty, displacement, caste discrimination, and sexual exploitation—which pushes them toward insurgency but often replicates within Maoist ranks through abuse, forced abortions, and health neglect. This creates a dual burden: navigating patriarchal societal norms alongside insurgent demands, including combat roles while facing violence from both Maoists and security forces.

To address this, security responses need reworking toward gender-sensitive approaches, incorporating equality measures like psychological counseling, vocational training, and inclusive policies to reduce recruitment and facilitate surrenders, treating gender inequality as a counterterrorism tool.

Interplay Between Left-Wing Extremism and the Fifth Schedule of the Indian Constitution

The Fifth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, under Article 244(1), provides a framework for the administration and governance of Scheduled Areas in states other than Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram. It aims to protect tribal interests through special provisions like the Governor's discretionary powers, Tribes Advisory Councils (TACs), regulation of laws, and periodic reports to the President. However, the non-implementation or weak enforcement of these provisions has created governance vacuums in tribal-dominated regions, exacerbating socioeconomic grievances such as land alienation, displacement, and exploitation. This has directly contributed to the growth of Left Wing Extremism (LWE), or Naxalism, by alienating tribals and providing Maoists with fertile ground for recruitment and ideology propagation. As noted in various reports, including the Mungekar Committee (2009) on Standards of Administration and Governance in Scheduled Areas and the Xaxa Committee (2014) on Socio-Economic, Health, and Educational Status of Tribal Communities, these failures perpetuate a cycle of underdevelopment and conflict, with LWE thriving in areas where state presence is tokenistic or absent. Below, key aspects of this interplay are examined.

1. Role of the Governor and Lacking Capacity

The Fifth Schedule empowers the Governor with discretionary authority (Para 5) to regulate the application of laws in Scheduled Areas, prohibit money-lending, and ensure peace and good governance.

This includes the power to adapt or withhold central/state laws to suit tribal needs, preventing exploitation. However, Governors have rarely exercised these powers effectively, often due to lacking institutional capacity, political interference, or bureaucratic inertia. In LWE-affected states like Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand, this has led to unchecked land transfers to non-tribals and corporate interests, fueling grievances. The Mungekar Committee criticized this as a "constitutional unrealized expectation," noting that Governors treat their role as ceremonial, failing to intervene in issues like mining-induced displacement, which drives tribals toward Maoist groups for protection. The Xaxa Committee echoed this, highlighting how governance deficits in Scheduled Areas contribute to extremism by eroding trust in the state.

2. Tribes Advisory Councils and Tokenistic Meetings

Para 4 of the Fifth Schedule mandates the establishment of TACs in states with Scheduled Areas to advise on tribal welfare matters. Comprising up to 20 members (three-fourths elected tribals), TACs are intended to ensure participatory governance. In practice, however, they hold only tokenistic meetings, often limited to routine approvals without substantive deliberation on critical issues like land rights or development projects. In LWE hotspots, this marginalizes tribal voices, allowing Maoists to position themselves as alternative protectors. The Mungekar Committee described TACs as "dysfunctional," with infrequent sessions and dominance by non-tribal officials, leading to policies that ignore local needs and perpetuate alienation. The Xaxa Committee further noted that weak TACs exacerbate conflicts by failing to address health, education, and displacement concerns, indirectly bolstering LWE recruitment.

3. Laws: Routine Applications and Inconsistent State Laws

The Fifth Schedule allows the Governor to modify laws for Scheduled Areas, but applications are often routine, without adaptations to tribal contexts. This results in inconsistent state laws, where protective measures like the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA), 1996, are diluted or poorly enforced. In LWE regions, this enables illegal land acquisitions for mining and industries, displacing tribals without consent. The Mungekar Committee pointed out that laws are applied mechanically, ignoring Para 5's intent, leading to exploitation and conflict. The Xaxa Committee reported that tribals constitute 40% of development-induced displacees, with inconsistent laws exacerbating poverty and pushing communities toward extremism.

4. Reports to the President: Casual and Irregular

Para 3 requires Governors to submit annual reports (or as directed) to the President on the administration of Scheduled Areas, enabling central oversight. However, these reports are often casual, irregular, and lacking depth, focusing on superficial data rather than systemic issues. This hinders timely interventions, allowing problems like forest rights violations to fester in LWE areas. The Mungekar Committee lambasted these as "perfunctory," recommending mandatory, detailed submissions to revive accountability. The Xaxa Committee linked irregular reporting to unchecked displacement and health/education gaps, fostering conditions for LWE.

5. Directions by the Center: Not Given Adequately

Para 3 also empowers the Union Government to issue directions to states for effective administration. Yet, such directives are rarely issued, leading to inconsistent implementation across states. In LWE contexts, this absence allows state-level dilutions of tribal protections, such as in mining regulations, intensifying conflicts. The Mungekar Committee urged proactive central interventions to enforce standards, while the Xaxa Committee recommended stronger oversight to address root causes like land records deficits, which contribute to extremism.

Overall, the interplay underscores how Fifth Schedule lapses create structural vulnerabilities exploited by LWE. Revitalizing these provisions, as recommended by the Mungekar and Xaxa Committees, is essential for sustainable peace and development.

Forest Policies and Their Impact on Left-Wing Extremism

India's forest policies have long disadvantaged tribal populations by severely limiting their traditional access to forest resources vital for daily sustenance and livelihoods. This systemic exclusion has generated profound alienation, involuntary displacements, and entrenched socio-economic hardships, serving as a major catalyst for the emergence and endurance of Left-Wing Extremism (LWE), or Naxalism, especially across forested tribal landscapes. Maoist outfits have skillfully capitalized on these injustices, framing themselves as protectors and advocates to draw in recruits and solidify control. At the same time, progressive reforms—centered on formal rights acknowledgment and more robust enforcement—present viable solutions to mitigate these core grievances, foster renewed institutional trust, and speed up the insurgency's erosion, directly supporting the national objective of a Naxal-free Bharat by March 31, 2026. With security efforts ramping up, accelerated implementation of the Forest Rights Act (FRA) can bridge administrative absences, diminish recruitment incentives, and enable inclusive advancement in the limited remaining hotspots.

- **Historical Injustices** Colonial and initial post-independence forest regimes concentrated authority over woodlands in the state, prioritizing revenue generation over communal stewardship. This approach systematically stripped tribals of ancestral entitlements, laying groundwork for radical backlash.
- **British Colonial Framework (1865–1894):** The Indian Forest Act of 1865 launched state control, dividing forests into reserved, protected, and village classes while banning customary tribal practices such as shifting cultivation (jhum) and collection of minor produce. The 1878 revisions escalated enforcement, and by 1894, integration with the Land Acquisition Act supported extensive commercial use for timber and rail networks, often displacing communities without compensation. These measures instilled deep-seated resentment in zones like Bastar and Jharkhand, where Maoists subsequently portrayed their movement as an extension of anti-colonial resistance.
- **Indian Forest Act (1927):** Consolidating prior colonial statutes, this Act vested forest officials with broad quasi-judicial authority to levy fines, evict, and arrest for alleged violations. It disregarded indigenous customary practices, causing pervasive harassment and loss of land control. In Naxal-impacted territories, this exacerbated poverty by severing access to nontimber forest produce (NTFP), compelling many to seek recourse from insurgents offering promises of equitable resource sharing.
- **Forest Conservation Act (1980):** Aimed at halting deforestation, the FCA introduced mandatory central clearance for non-forest land diversion but routinely favored industrial pursuits (e.g., mining) over community priorities. This triggered widespread evictions without meaningful resettlement, notably in Chhattisgarh's mining corridors, heightening frustrations and enhancing LWE's recruitment pull. Overall, these policies reflect entrenched structural inequities: government dominion over nearly 23% of India's territory marginalized roughly 8.6% of its people (tribals), establishing ideal conditions for Maoist narratives.
- **Reforms and Corrective Steps** In recognition of past inequities, later initiatives have worked to redistribute authority to communities, potentially weakening LWE by granting empowerment and alleviating alienation.

- **B.K. Roy Burman Committee (2002):** Tasked by the Ministry of Rural Development, this expert panel advocated explicit recognition of tribal forest rights as an anti-extremism strategy. It emphasized how restricted access perpetuated Naxalism and recommended community-oriented management, laying groundwork for ensuing legislation.
- **Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006:** Crafted to remedy colonial legacies, the FRA acknowledges individual and community entitlements to forest land for Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (OTFDs). It provides household titles up to 4 hectares, NTFP usage rights, and Community Forest Rights (CFR) for stewardship. Through devolution of control, FRA seeks to embed tribals in governance processes, ease land scarcity pressures, and erode insurgent leverage. Thorough enforcement could convert Maoist strongholds into development-oriented areas, aligning with the 2026 Naxal-free target.
- **Persistent Challenges in FRA Implementation** Despite its transformative promise, the Act grapples with policy vagueness, uneven rollout, and enforcement lapses that prolong grievances and sustain LWE appeal. Tackling these—via refined clarifications, faster processing, and rigorous compliance—could empower Gram Sabhas and secure essential rights (ownership titles, NTFP use, consensual development, and community management), thereby accelerating the insurgency's decline.
- **Policy Ambiguities:** Unclear elements, such as undefined "bona fide livelihood needs" (Section 2(b)), permit inconsistent rulings and exclusions. Tensions with the FCA (1980) arise, as FRA permits community facilities without central clearance, yet bureaucratic conflicts cause delays and breed skepticism. These shortcomings enable Maoists to depict the state as neglectful or antagonistic.
- **Implementation Shortfalls:** Advancement varies widely. Per Ministry of Tribal Affairs data as of December 31, 2025, a cumulative total of around 44.34 lakh claims (85.40% of received) had been settled (decisions taken), including roughly 42.57 lakh individual and 1.77 lakh community claims. Titles distributed stood at approximately 25–26 lakh (with individual titles dominating), though earlier mid-2025 figures showed around 2.51 lakh titles overall. Rejections reached about 36.41% (around 18.90 lakh claims), often on questionable grounds like inadequate proof (despite FRA's acceptance of oral/community evidence) and opposition from forest departments, sustaining distrust in LWE-affected regions.
- **Enforcement Violations:** CFR progress remains limited (with community titles around 1.23 lakh cumulatively by late 2025, covering only a small share of potential areas). This withholds management authority from communities. Premature evictions prior to claim resolution contravene Section 4(5), generating resentment and insurgent sympathy. Gram Sabhas—designated under Section 2(g) for claim verification and resource oversight—are frequently overridden by centralized approaches, undermining participatory democracy.

Intensifying FRA through digital tools for mapping, community education campaigns, and binding timelines could undermine LWE foundations by 2026, as demonstrated in recovering areas like Gadchiroli, where improved rights enforcement has aided defections and local development.

Conclusion: Towards a Naxal-Mukt Bharat by 2026

India's comprehensive, multi-faceted strategy against Left-Wing Extremism (LWE), or Naxalism, has proven highly effective in tackling the core drivers of the insurgency—administrative shortcomings, economic disparities, and longstanding injustices—while simultaneously dismantling militant networks through a combination of security operations, developmental initiatives, and rights-focused measures.

What was once a sprawling "Red Corridor" encompassing over 126 districts in 2013 has now been reduced to just 7 affected districts as of early 2026 (primarily five in Chhattisgarh—Bijapur, Dantewada, Gariyaband, Kanker, Narayanpur, Sukma—along with one each in Jharkhand's West Singhbhum and Odisha's Kandhamal), with only three classified as "most affected." Violence has fallen sharply, with incidents down by approximately 88–89% (to around 234 in 2025 from a 2010 peak of 1,936) and deaths reduced by about 90% (to roughly 100 in 2025 from 1,005 in 2010). This marks a historic shift, driven by the 2015 National Policy and Action Plan, the 3C Model for connectivity (roads, mobile, financial), and high-impact operations such as Kagar, Prahar, and Anaconda, which have neutralized thousands of insurgents and prompted over 10,000 surrenders since 2014 (including 2,337 in 2025 alone, alongside hundreds of neutralizations and arrests).

Localized successes—from Odisha's Mission Gram Udaya saturating welfare in hundreds of villages to Maharashtra's Gadchiroli three-phase model blending infrastructure, rehabilitation, and forest rights—demonstrate the power of integrated approaches. These are reinforced by schemes like the PM Janjatiya Unnat Gram Yojana (targeting tribal-majority villages with comprehensive interventions), stronger Forest Rights Act (FRA) enforcement, and attractive surrender policies offering financial aid, training, and security.

Historical elements, including colonial-era forest controls and incomplete implementation of the Fifth Schedule's tribal protections, combined with contemporary issues like land dispossession and genderbased structural violence, explain the insurgency's longevity. However, reforms recommended by bodies such as the Mungekar and Xaxa Committees, along with gender-aware strategies, have helped address these roots and foster lasting stability. Diverse stakeholders—security forces engaging communities to win trust, administrative bodies enforcing rights, officials overcoming posting challenges through incentives, local governance under PESA empowering villages, and civil society bridging gaps while countering disinformation—have collectively undermined Maoist credibility and support.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah has emphasized this resolve, stating that the government is building a strong, secure, and prosperous Bharat through a ruthless stance on Naxalism paired with comprehensive development. Recent milestones as of early 2026 include declarations of Naxal-free status in districts like Odisha's Koraput and Malkangiri following major surrenders (including senior figures under operations like Kagar), and indications of internal Maoist collapse, with remnants seeking extensions or facing intensified pressure. With hundreds neutralized in 2025 (around 300–364 reported across phases) and momentum building through relentless security-development synergy, the path is clear.

By March 31, 2026, India is poised to achieve a Naxal-Mukt Bharat, eradicating the lingering "Red Shadow" and converting former conflict zones into centers of inclusive prosperity, opportunity, and constitutional equity. This milestone reflects India's unwavering commitment to internal security through a balanced blend of decisive action and compassionate outreach.