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Operation Megaburu – Anti-Maoist Strike in Saranda and the LWE Endgame

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SUBJECTS COVERED**SECURITY & DEFENCE****POLITY****CURATED & WRITTEN BY****Bharat Choudhary**

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Operation Megaburu — Anti-Maoist Strike in Saranda and the LWE Endgame

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WHY IN NEWS

Security forces launched Operation Megaburu in the Saranda forest of West Singhbhum district, Jharkhand, neutralising 16–17 CPI(Maoist) cadres including top regional commander Patiram Manjhi alias Anal Da (who carried a bounty of ₹2.35 crore). The operation marks one of the highest single-encounter casualty counts in Jharkhand’s anti-Naxal history and brings India closer to its March 2026 target of eliminating Left Wing Extremism.

SARANDA — THE LAST STRONGHOLD

The **Saranda forest** of West Singhbhum district in Jharkhand is one of Asia’s largest **sal (Shorea robusta) forests**, covering approximately 820 square kilometres. For decades, its dense canopy, hilly terrain, and proximity to the tri-junction of Jharkhand, Odisha, and Chhattisgarh made it a virtually impenetrable Maoist stronghold — a region from which CPI(Maoist) commanders directed operations across three states.

Operation Megaburu represents the latest — and potentially one of the last — major operations in this theatre.

THE OPERATION

Operation Megaburu was mounted by **CoBRA (Commando Battalion for Resolute Action)** units of the **Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF)** in coordination with the **Jharkhand Police**.

Key outcome:

16–17 CPI(Maoist) cadres neutralised

Among them: **Patiram Manjhi alias Anal Da** — one of the most wanted Maoist commanders in the Jharkhand-Odisha-Chhattisgarh region, with a bounty of **₹2.35 crore** on his head

The operation’s casualty count is among the highest in a single anti-Naxal encounter in Jharkhand’s history

CoBRA — India’s Elite Anti-Naxal Force: Raised in 2008–09, **CoBRA (Commando Battalion for Resolute Action)** is the specialised jungle warfare unit of the CRPF. Operating in **10 battalions**, CoBRA personnel are trained in:

Deep forest penetration and guerrilla counter-tactics

- Intelligence-based operations (IBO)
- Explosive ordnance disposal (IED neutralisation)
- Community relations in tribal areas

CoBRA units have been at the forefront of virtually every major anti-Naxal operation in the Bastar region of Chhattisgarh, Saranda in Jharkhand, and other LWE-affected areas.

LEFT WING EXTREMISM IN INDIA — THE TRAJECTORY

Origins and Ideology

Left Wing Extremism (LWE) in India — commonly called Naxalism — traces its origins to the **Naxalbari peasant uprising of 1967** in West Bengal, when a section of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) under leaders like **Charu Mazumdar** and **Kanu Sanyal** launched a violent agrarian uprising. The term “Naxal” derives from this village.

CPI(Maoist): The present primary LWE organisation, CPI(Maoist), was formed in **2004** through the merger of the **CPI(ML) People’s War** and the **Maoist Communist Centre of India (MCCI)**. It is designated a **terrorist organisation under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA)**.

The Red Corridor

At its peak (around 2009–2010), LWE affected **106 districts** across 10 states — a vast arc from Andhra Pradesh in the south to Bihar and West Bengal in the north, sometimes called the “**Red Corridor**.” The most affected states were Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, Maharashtra (Gadchiroli), Bihar, and parts of West Bengal.

The Decline

A combination of factors has driven a sustained reduction in LWE violence since 2010:

Security operations: CoBRA-led intelligence-based operations; use of UAVs for surveillance; theatre command integration

Development outreach: Aspirational Districts Programme; road connectivity in forest areas; banking and telecom extension

Surrender and rehabilitation: State-level surrender policies offering rehabilitation packages including employment, education for children, and housing

Political isolation: CPI(Maoist) has been unable to expand its political base beyond certain tribal areas

Key data:

LWE-affected districts: 106 (2018) → reduced significantly by 2026

LWE-related violence incidents: declined sharply year-on-year since 2011

Government target: **Eliminate LWE by March 2026**

Key Operations History

Major anti-Naxal operations in recent years have systematically degraded the CPI(Maoist) command structure:

Multiple top commanders neutralised in Chhattisgarh's Bastar region

Operation Megaburu (January 2026): Saranda commander Patiram Manjhi

Naxal surrender camps set up in multiple states

DEVELOPMENT AS COUNTERINSURGENCY — SARANDA ACTION PLAN

Alongside security operations, the government launched the **Saranda Action Plan in 2011** — a ₹73 crore special development package targeting the Saranda region specifically:

Road connectivity to isolated tribal villages

Schools and Anganwadi centres

Health sub-centres

Electricity and drinking water

Livelihood programmes for tribal communities

The logic: address the grievances — land rights, forest rights, minimum wages, tribal land alienation — that Maoists exploit for recruitment.

UPSC RELEVANCE

Naxalbari uprising 1967 (West Bengal; Charu Mazumdar, Kanu Sanyal); CPI(Maoist) formed 2004 (CPI(ML) PW + MCCI merger); UAPA — terrorist organisation designation; CoBRA = Commando Battalion for Resolute Action (CRPF; 10 battalions; raised 2008–09); Red Corridor; Saranda forest = largest sal forest in Asia, West Singhbhum, Jharkhand; Saranda Action Plan 2011 (₹73 crore); March 2026 LWE elimination target.

Internal security — Naxalism: causes, spread, decline; security vs development approach; role of tribal land rights and forest rights in LWE; effectiveness of rehabilitation policies; UAPA and civil liberties debate.

★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGE PEDIA

OPERATION MEGABURU — KEY DATA:

Location: Saranda forest, West Singhbhum district, Jharkhand

Forces: CoBRA (CRPF) + Jharkhand Police

Outcome: 16–17 CPI(Maoist) cadres neutralised

Top commander killed: Patiram Manjhi alias Anal Da (bounty: ₹2.35 crore)

Significance: Among highest single-encounter Naxal casualties in Jharkhand

SARANDA FOREST:

Location: West Singhbhum district, Jharkhand

Forest type: Largest **sal (Shorea robusta)** forest in Asia

Area: ~820 sq km

Strategic: Tri-junction of Jharkhand-Odisha-Chhattisgarh

LWE — KEY FACTS:

Naxalbari uprising: 1967, West Bengal (Charu Mazumdar + Kanu Sanyal)

CPI(Maoist) formed: 2004 (CPI-ML People's War + MCCI)

Declared terrorist organisation under: UAPA (Unlawful Activities Prevention Act)

Red Corridor peak: 106 districts in 10 states (around 2010)

Most affected states: Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, Maharashtra (Gadchiroli)

Government LWE elimination target: March 2026

COBRA:

Full form: Commando Battalion for Resolute Action

Part of: CRPF (Central Reserve Police Force)

Raised: 2008–09

Strength: 10 battalions

Specialisation: Jungle warfare, intelligence-based operations (IBO), IED disposal

SARANDA ACTION PLAN:

Launched: 2011

Budget: ₹73 crore

Focus: Roads, schools, health, electrification, livelihood for Saranda tribal communities

OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006: Recognises tribal land rights in forest areas; denial of FRA rights cited as Naxal grievance

PESA Act, 1996: Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act — local self-governance for Scheduled V areas

Aspirational Districts Programme: Covers many LWE-affected districts for focused development

SAMADHAN strategy (MHA): Smart leadership, Aggressive strategy, Motivation and training, Actionable intelligence, Dashboard-based KPIs, Harnessing technology, Action plan for each theatre, No access to financing

Gadchiroli (Maharashtra): Major Naxal-affected district; Maharashtra Police has conducted successful operations there

Sources: The Hindu, Indian Express, PIB

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