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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

# After Somanna – What the Maoist Decline Tells Us About India's Counter-LWE Strategy



30 March 2026

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# After Somanna — What the Maoist Decline Tells Us About India's Counter-LWE Strategy

 The Indian Express

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## INTERVIEW ANGLE

*"The Red Corridor has shrunk from 106 to fewer than 38 districts — is this primarily due to military success, development-led de-radicalisation, or simply the ideological exhaustion of Maoism as a political project?"*

## WHY IN NEWS

Senior CPI (Maoist) commander **Chelluru Narayana Rao** (alias Somanna) surrendered before Andhra Pradesh Police in Vijayawada on March 30, 2026, marking yet another significant capitulation in what has been a decade-long erosion of the Maoist movement in India's former Red Corridor.

## THE LONG RETREAT

The story of Left Wing Extremism (LWE) in India is, increasingly, a story of retreat. At its peak in 2010, CPI (Maoist) and allied formations operated in **106 districts across 10 states**, controlling large swathes of forested terrain in Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, and Maharashtra. The killing of police officers and CRPF personnel numbered in the hundreds annually.

Today, in 2026, the Red Corridor has shrunk to **fewer than 38 districts**. Major LWE violence incidents — bombings, attacks on security forces, mass mobilisations — have declined dramatically. The Home Ministry's annual reports show that violence casualties from LWE fell by over 70% between 2010 and 2025.

Somanna's surrender is not an isolated event. It is the latest in a long series of surrenders, eliminations, and defections of senior Maoist leadership. The pattern reveals structural weakness: the movement has lost its replenishment capacity. Young tribal men and women — the foot soldiers of Maoist formations — are no longer joining in the numbers needed to sustain guerrilla forces.

## THREE EXPLANATIONS, ONE COMPLEX REALITY

Why has the Maoist movement shrunk? There are three competing explanations, and the truth involves all three.

### 1. Military-Security Success

The CRPF's **COBRA (Commando Battalion for Resolute Action)** battalions, specialised anti-Maoist units trained for jungle warfare, have degraded Maoist operational capacity in several key zones. Intelligence improvements — better informant networks, technology-enabled surveillance, aerial drones for forest monitoring — have made the Maoist forest hideout less impenetrable.

The state police forces of Chhattisgarh (DRG — District Reserve Guard), Jharkhand (JAGUAR), and Andhra Pradesh have also professionalised. The willingness of state governments to deploy security forces assertively — and the political consensus across parties on treating LWE as a security problem — removed the ambiguity that Maoists once exploited.

### 2. Development-Led De-Radicalisation

The **Aspirational Districts Programme (ADP)**, launched in 2018, targeted 112 of India's most underdeveloped districts — many of which overlapped with the former Red Corridor. Convergent delivery of health, education, nutrition, financial inclusion, and road connectivity in these districts eroded the Maoist narrative of state abandonment.

Road construction — particularly the **Road Connectivity Project for LWE Areas** — fundamentally changed the geography of Maoist operations. Dense forests with zero road connectivity were sanctuaries; as roads penetrated, so did markets, government officials, and mobile connectivity. The economic integration of previously isolated tribal communities reduced the appeal of the Maoist alternative political economy.

### 3. Ideological Exhaustion

This is perhaps the most underappreciated factor. Maoism as an international political project has been intellectually discredited since the 1990s. The Chinese Communist Party — the ideological source — is now a global capitalist power. The Naxalite movement that began in 1967 as a peasant revolution against feudal exploitation in Bengal now struggles to explain its continued relevance when the landlord class has changed form and the state has become a significant welfare provider.

Young tribals in Bastar or Saranda today have mobile phones, MGNREGS job cards, and aspirations for government jobs — not for proletarian revolution. The Maoist movement's inability to articulate a coherent alternative development vision has made recruitment structurally harder.

## THE REHABILITATION QUESTION

Surrenders like Somanna's reveal the importance of India's **surrender and rehabilitation policy** — which the government should take more seriously as a counter-LWE tool.

The current central scheme offers:

- Rs 50,000 on surrender
- Priority in MGNREGS employment
- Vocational training for three years
- Rs 25,000 for information about arms caches

States like Andhra Pradesh offer enhanced packages. But the fundamental challenge of rehabilitation is **social reintegration** — a surrendered Maoist cadre faces suspicion from their community, police monitoring, and limited economic opportunities in areas with thin labour markets.

The SAMADHAN strategy's "M" — Motivation and training of surrendered cadres — remains the weakest link. A more robust rehabilitation pipeline, including skill certification, housing assistance, and community mediation, would convert surrenders from a security gain into a sustainable social outcome.

## WHAT REMAINS

The decline of LWE is real and significant. But it would be premature to declare victory. The **Bastar region** of Chhattisgarh and the **Saranda forests** of Jharkhand remain areas with active Maoist presence. The movement has evolved from mass mobilisation to targeted strikes — fewer, more precision attacks on security forces and officials.

More importantly, the structural conditions that gave rise to LWE — tribal dispossession from forest land, displacement by mining and industrial projects, inadequate implementation of the Forest Rights Act, 2006 — have not been fully resolved. The **Pesa Act (Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas)** remains poorly implemented in most states. The **Forest Rights Act** recognises Community Forest Resource rights that many states have not acted on.

If the government mistakes security success for development success, LWE could find new recruits in the next generation of dispossessed tribals — even if the current Maoist organisation has been militarily contained.

## CONCLUSION

Somanna's surrender is good news for Indian internal security. But the appropriate response is not triumphalism — it is to ask: have we addressed the conditions that made Maoism attractive? Security success without structural justice is temporary. India's challenge is to ensure that the tribal communities of the former Red Corridor become stakeholders in India's growth story — not future recruits for its next disruption.

**UPSC RELEVANCE**

CPI(Maoist) formed 2004; banned under UAPA; COBRA; Red Corridor (106 → <38 districts); SAMADHAN strategy; Aspirational Districts Programme.

**MAINS GS-3 (INTERNAL SECURITY):**

Causes and spread of LWE; counter-insurgency strategy; SAMADHAN; development approach vs. security approach.

**MAINS GS-2 (GOVERNANCE):**

Tribal rights; Forest Rights Act; PESA Act; rehabilitation policies.

## ★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGEPEDIA

### LWE DECLINE — KEY DATA:

CPI(Maoist) formation: 2004 (merger of CPI(ML)(PW) + MCCI)

UAPA designation: Terrorist organisation

Red Corridor peak: 106 districts, 10 states (circa 2010)

Red Corridor (2025): <38 districts

LWE violence decline: >70% from 2010 to 2025

COBRA: Commando Battalion for Resolute Action (CRPF specialised unit)

DRG: District Reserve Guard (Chhattisgarh state force — most effective state anti-LWE unit)

### SAMADHAN COMPONENTS:

S: Smart leadership

A: Aggressive strategy, A: Action plan, A: Action on finances

M: Motivation and training of security forces and surrendered cadres

D: Dashboard-based KPIs

H: Harnessing technology

N: No complacency

### OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

Forest Rights Act, 2006: Recognises tribal land and forest rights — poor implementation is a root cause of LWE alienation

PESA Act, 1996: Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas — tribal self-governance rights

Aspirational Districts Programme (2018): 112 districts (many former LWE-affected); convergent delivery of 49 indicators

Surrender rehabilitation: Rs 50,000 + vocational training (3 years) + MGNREGS priority + Rs 25,000 for arms info

Sources: [Indian Express](#), [Ministry of Home Affairs](#)

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