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India Declared 'Naxal-Free' — End of Left Wing Extremism

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SECURITY & DEFENCE**POLITY**

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India Declared 'Naxal-Free' — End of Left Wing Extremism

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WHY IN NEWS

Home Minister Amit Shah declared India effectively “Naxal-free” on March 30, 2026, citing large-scale security operations that neutralised Maoist strongholds across 180+ districts in central and eastern India. With 4,839 surrenders, 2,218 arrests, and 706 neutralisations, the government claims the LWE threat has been decisively contained.

HISTORICAL ORIGINS: FROM NAXALBARI TO 2026

The Birth of the Naxal Movement

The Naxal movement traces its origins to the **Naxalbari uprising of 1967** in Darjeeling district, West Bengal. Led by Charu Mazumdar and Kanu Sanyal, tribal peasants seized land from local landlords, rejecting what they saw as the failure of parliamentary democracy to address agrarian exploitation.

The movement drew ideological inspiration from **Mao Zedong's** concept of “protracted people’s war” — armed struggle beginning in the countryside to encircle urban centres.

Evolution: CPI(ML) to CPI(Maoist)

PERIOD	DEVELOPMENT
1967	Naxalbari uprising; CPI(ML) formed (1969)
1970s	State crackdown; movement fragmented
1980s–90s	Revival in Andhra Pradesh, Bihar; PWG and MCC formed
2004	PWG + MCC merged to form CPI (Maoist)
2005–2010	Peak influence; “Red Corridor” across 180+ districts
2010	PM declared LWE as India’s “biggest internal security challenge”
2026	Declared effectively neutralised

THE “RED CORRIDOR” AT PEAK

At its height (2007–2010), Left Wing Extremism affected:

- **9 states:** Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal
- **180+ districts:** Stretching from Nepal border to Andhra coast
- **Mineral-rich tribal areas:** Rich in coal, iron ore, bauxite, forests — where displacement and exploitation fuelled grievances

WHY DID THE MOVEMENT DECLINE?

Security Measures

- **SAMADHAN doctrine:** Specific areas, Action plan, Motivation, Action plan for tribals, District-level interventions, Harnessing technology, Action plan for each theatre, No access to financing
- Greyhound Forces (AP/Telangana) — specialised anti-Naxal commando units
- Bastar region operations (Chhattisgarh) — sustained counter-insurgency
- Surrender-and-rehabilitation policy

Development Interventions

- **Road connectivity:** PM Gram Sadak Yojana in former Naxal areas
- **ASPIRATIONAL DISTRICTS Programme:** 112 most backward districts (many in LWE belt)
- **Aadhaar, ration cards, banking:** Extending state presence into formerly ungoverned spaces
- **Schools and health centres:** Built in areas once controlled by Maoists

Key Statistics (2026)

- 4,839 surrenders
- 2,218 arrests
- 706 neutralised in encounters
- Active districts reduced from 180+ to single digits

EXPERTS' CAUTION: IS "NAXAL-FREE" SUSTAINABLE?

Despite the security success, analysts and civil society organisations raise important concerns:

1. Root Causes Still Unaddressed

- **PESA (Panchayats Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996** — gives tribal Gram Sabhas power over natural resources — remains poorly implemented in most states
- **Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006** — grants individual and community forest rights to tribals — faces administrative resistance
- Large-scale mining in tribal areas continues to displace communities without adequate consent or compensation

2. Structural Inequality Persists

- Tribal areas remain among India's most underdeveloped despite being resource-rich
- Adivasi communities rank lowest on most human development indicators

3. Risk of Ideological Continuity

- Underground networks and sleeper cells may persist even without open armed conflict
- Urban Maoism (students, academics as sympathisers) remains a concern per security agencies

UPSC RELEVANCE

Prelims: Naxalbari origin (1967), CPI(Maoist) formed (2004), SAMADHAN doctrine, PESA Act 1996, FRA 2006, "biggest internal security challenge" (PM Manmohan Singh, 2010).

Mains (GS3 – Internal Security):

- Evaluate India's counter-LWE strategy: security vs. development vs. rights-based approach
- Why did the Red Corridor expand despite India being a democracy with welfare schemes?
- Role of PESA and FRA in addressing the root causes of tribal unrest
- Lessons for governance: state capacity, natural resource governance in Schedule V areas

West Bengal; Charu Mazumdar + Kanu Sanyal; inspiration for Maoist movement **CPI (Maoist), 2004:** Merger of PWG (People's War Group) + MCC (Maoist Communist Centre) **Red Corridor:** Stretched from Nepal border (Bihar) to Andhra coast at peak **SAMADHAN:** India's counter-LWE doctrine (Smart leadership, Aggressive strategy, Motivation, Action plan, Dashboard-based KPIs, Harnessing technology, Action plan for districts, No access to financing) **PESA Act, 1996:** Extends Gram Sabha powers to tribal areas; Schedule V; Ministry of Tribal Affairs **FRA, 2006:** Forest Rights Act; grants individual + community forest rights to tribals and forest dwellers **Schedule V areas:** Tribal-dominated areas in 10 states under special constitutional protection (Article 244) **Aspirational Districts Programme:** 112 backward districts; focuses on health, education, financial inclusion, agriculture, skill development

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