



Naxal-Mukt Bharat: A Strategic Turnaround

The story of Naxal-Mukt Bharat is not simply one of military or policing successes. It is a story of coordinated statecraft. It reflects how political will, institutional coordination, professional security operations, and developmental commitment can together confront and reverse a long-standing insurgency.

The vision of a Naxal-Mukt Bharat or Naxal-free India represents far more than a security objective. It reflects the commitment of the Government of India towards restoring governance, expanding development and protecting democratic institutions in Left Wing Extremism (LWE) affected areas. Naxalism posed one of India's gravest internal security challenges for decades. It affected large parts of central and eastern India by disrupting development, targeting security personnel and exploiting socio-economic vulnerabilities. However, a significant shift has emerged in recent years. Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has made substantial progress towards neutralising the Naxal threat through sustained security operations, strong central-state coordination, focused development initiatives, and strategic leadership. India has made substantial progress towards neutralising the Naxal threat.

At the core of this transformation has been the recognition that the Naxal challenge cannot be addressed solely through force. It required a whole-of-government approach, integrating security operations with governance, infrastructure, and welfare delivery. While state police forces have rightly remained at the forefront of Naxal operations, given that the law and order is constitutionally a state subject, the MHA has played the critical role of strategist, coordinator, and force multiplier. The distinction is important: the fight may have been led operationally by states, but it has

been driven structurally and strategically by the MHA, Government of India.

MHA designed a multipronged, zero-tolerance strategy aimed at ending LWE by March 2026 through the SAMADHAN doctrine (Smart Leadership, Aggressive Strategy, Motivation and Training, Actionable Intelligence, Dashboard-based Key Result Areas and Key Performance Indicators, Harnessing Technology, Action Plan for Each Theatre & No access to Financing). By March 2026, security forces neutralised almost all CPI (Maoist) leadership through enhanced intelligence, forward operating bases and intensive development in "red corridors", shifting focus towards "growth corridors".

Key Turnaround Strategies and Tactics (2014-2026)

Leadership and Policy Shift

A zero-tolerance approach under the Ministry of Home Affairs emphasised proactive operations rather than reactive measures aimed at eliminating the ideological, financial and logistical support of LWE. Ministry of Home Affairs' LWE division implemented a "National Policy and Action Plan (2015)" that prioritises the "Trace, Target, Neutralise" approach and "Development, security synergy" as outcome.

Forward Operating Bases (FOB's)

One of the defining features of recent success against Naxalism has been the enhanced role of Central

The author is an IPS officer (Retd.), served as ADG and SDG – Central Zone in the CRPF and led several anti-Naxal operations across Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal during 2017–2021. He is presently serving as the Security Advisor to the Government of Manipur. Email: advisorsec.manipur@gmail.com

Armed Police Forces (CAPF's) – primarily the CRPF (Central Reserve Police Force) (including CoBRA - Commando Battalion for Resolute Action units) BSF (Border Security Force), ITBP (Indo-Tibetan Border Police) and SSB (Sashastra Seema Bal), who acted as the backbone of anti-Naxal operations, providing fire power, intelligence and support to the state Police. As the lead CAPF in counter-LWE operations, the CRPF has played a pivotal role in reclaiming territory, disrupting insurgent strongholds and conducting targeted operations (through its specialised units – CoBRA) in difficult forested terrain where Maoist groups traditionally enjoyed tactical advantage.

Over 350 security camps were set up within extremist strongholds to create a security vacuum for Naxals. These camps comprise CAPFs and State Police specialised units like District Reserve Guards (DRG) of Chhattisgarh, C-60 Commandos of Maharashtra, Special Operations Group (SOG) of Odisha and Jaguars of Jharkhand. The contribution of such joint camps extends beyond combat. They enable area domination, secure roads and critical infrastructure, protect polling stations during elections and facilitate the return of civil administration in previously inaccessible areas. It has created the necessary conditions for schools to reopen, roads to be built, health services to reach the remote population and the benefit of Government schemes to reach the needy.

The geographical spread of Left-Wing Extremism (LWE) has reduced from 126 affected districts in 2014

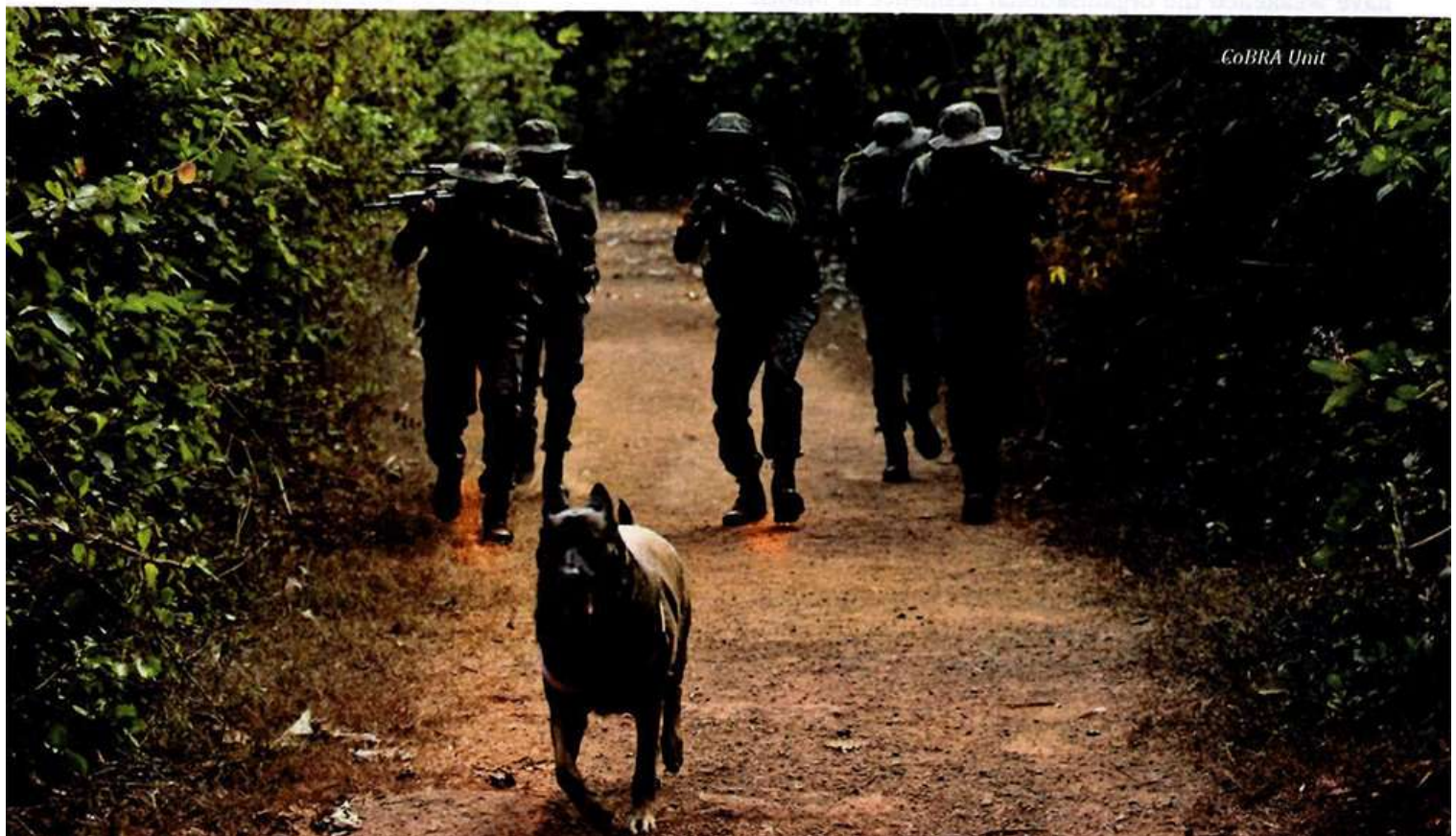
to just 11 in 2025, and most affected districts dropped from 36 to 6 in the same period.

Key Operational Shift

The strategy has shifted from passive containment to aggressive, proactive operation. With the establishment of joint operating bases (Over 350 of them), high-impact operations, including 'Operation Octopus', 'Operation Double-bull', and 'Operation Bura Pahad', successfully targeted the Naxalite leadership and command structure, with over 300 Naxals neutralised and over 200 arrested in 2025. The entire top leadership of the CPI (Maoist) has been dismantled, with 12 neutralised, 07 surrendered, and 01 arrested out of 21 top leaders. Only one leader is still at large.

The leadership role of the MHA has been critical in maintaining sustained political and administrative focus. Counterinsurgency efforts often falter when attention becomes episodic or fragmented. In contrast, the anti-Naxal strategy has benefitted from continuity, regular monitoring with clearly defined objectives. This sustained institutional drive has ensured that gains made through security operations are consolidated through governance and developmental interventions.

Effective operational coordination has been achieved through a multi-disciplinary 'whole-of-government' approach, reducing the security vacuum in remote areas. The Multi-Agency Centre (MAC) is empowered to provide real-time intelligence to all security forces. In all, 15 new Joint Task Forces have been established to synchronise operations between



OPERATION DOUBLE BULL

A DECISIVE STRIKE AGAINST NAXALISM

Joint operation by Jharkhand Police & Paramilitary Forces

LAUNCH DATE	OUTCOME	ARRESTS	STRATEGIC SUCCESS
8 FEBRUARY 2022 Operation launched in Bulbul forests, Lohardaga, Jharkhand.	12 DAYS OF INTENSE OPERATIONS 10 encounters with insurgents	9 MAOISTS ARRESTED Including Zonal Commander Balram Oraon and other key commanders.	- Cleared IEDs and disrupted Maoist infrastructure - Severely hit the logistics and support network - Reduced Maoist footprint in the region

CAPFs and state police forces. Two Multidisciplinary Groups (MDGs) have also been established in the Ministry of Home Affairs (since 2016) to choke the financial resources of the Maoists, which has already led to seizure of Rs 40 Crores (approx).

Another Key element in the push towards a Naxal-Mukt Bharat has been the strategy of targeting the insurgency's support structures rather than focusing only on armed cadres. Efforts to disrupt recruitment, logistics, extortion networks and propaganda machinery have weakened the organisational resilience of Maoist groups. Simultaneously, surrender and rehabilitation policies have encouraged many cadres to rejoin mainstream society, further eroding insurgent strength.

Capacity Building of States

The MHA's strategic direction has been visible through the implementation of a multi-pronged national approach combining security, development, rights & entitlements and public outreach. This has included financial assistance to states for modernisation of police forces, infrastructure development in affected districts and support for capacity building. Central schemes targeting roads, telecommunications, skill development, education and banking access in LWE-affected areas have directly undercut the conditions that insurgents sought to exploit.

Security Related Expenditure (SRE) was increased by 155% with Rs 3,371 Crore released over the

past 11 years for operational needs, training and rehabilitation of surrendered cadres. Similarly, in the Special Infrastructure Scheme (SIS), Rs 371 Crore was approved for strengthening specialised state forces and intelligence branches. Rs 620 crores were approved for the construction of 246 Fortified Police Stations (FPS). Apart from the above, huge funds have been spent on mobility, night landing helipads, surveillance, drone tracking, AI-based data analytics, GIS mapping, upgradation of intelligence gathering mechanisms, etc.

The decisive factor has been unprecedented centre-state coordination, which has moved from episodic cooperation to institutional partnership. The MHA has been in control of this transformation. Through regular security reviews, joint operational planning, intelligence sharing mechanisms and targeted support to affected states, the MHA has ensured unity of purpose across jurisdictions.

Through these efforts, the government aims to end the red corridor era, replacing it with development projects like roads, schools and Eklavya Model Residential School (EMRS) to permanently remove the influence of Naxalism.

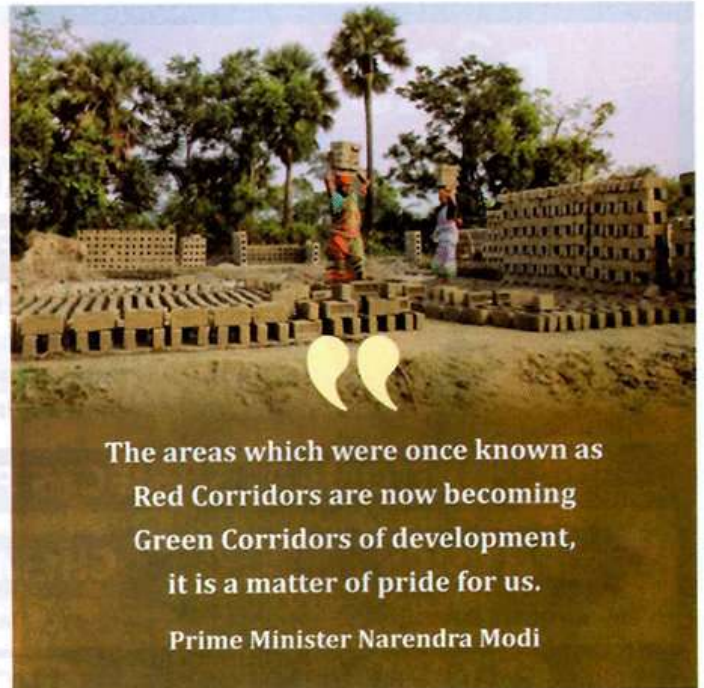
Importantly, the state's approach has increasingly emphasised winning the trust of local communities. This is crucial because the battle against Naxalism is not only about eliminating armed violence but also

about restoring citizen confidence in the state. Security forces and civil administration have, in many areas, worked to build stronger engagement with tribal communities and marginalised populations. Civic action programmes, welfare outreach, and responsive governance have helped counter the alienation that insurgents once leveraged.

The decline in Naxal violence across many previously affected districts is evidence that this approach has yielded results. Areas once considered insurgent strongholds have witnessed restoration of governance, improved connectivity, increased economic activity, and greater citizen participation in democratic processes. Elections conducted peacefully in previously volatile regions are a powerful symbol of this transformation.

With the achievement of a Naxal-free *Bharat*, India has reached a historical milestone. Yet residual pockets of insurgency remain, particularly in difficult terrain where extremist groups attempt to regroup. Sustained vigilance, therefore, remains essential. Counter-insurgency successes can only endure if accompanied by continued development, responsive governance, and institutional resilience.

Going forward, the lessons from the anti-Naxal campaign offer a broader model for addressing internal security challenges. First, security



responses are most effective when integrated with development and governance. Second, strong Centre-State coordination is indispensable in dealing with complex, cross-jurisdictional threats. Third, central leadership, particularly through institutions such as the MHA, can provide the strategic coherence needed for long-term success, even when operational responsibility lies primarily with states. And fourth, professional, adaptive security forces like the CRPF and other CAPFs remain vital pillars of national internal security.

The story of Naxal-Mukt *Bharat* is, therefore, not simply one of military or policing successes. It is a story of coordinated statecraft. It reflects how political will, institutional coordination, professional security operations, and developmental commitment can together confront and reverse a long-standing insurgency. In this effort, state police have led from the front, CAPFs - especially the CRPF - have acted as a powerful operational backbone, and the Ministry of Home Affairs has provided the strategic direction that has held the entire framework together.

As India moves closer to realising the goal of a Naxal-free Nation, this achievement stands as a testament to the strength of cooperative federalism, the professionalism of its security forces, and the enduring capacity of the Indian state to restore peace, order, and development even in the most challenging environments. Naxal-Mukt *Bharat* is thus not merely a security milestone; it is a reaffirmation of national resolve and democratic resilience. □

