

INDIA

Bihar free of Naxal presence; the fight is in the last stages in Jharkhand, says CRPF chief

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Hotbeds of left-wing extremism have been cleared in three States, says Kuldiep Singh; Operations Octopus, Double Bull, Thunderstorm and Chakarbandha led to the arrest or surrender of 592 Maoists



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Kuldiep Singh, Director-General, Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), said on Wednesday that Bihar was free of left-wing extremism now and security forces have made inroads into areas in Jharkhand that were once inaccessible due to the presence of Maoists.

Mr. Singh said the fight was in its final stages, and the number of districts affected by violence stood at 39, down from 60 in 2010. He said the number of most affected districts, accounting for 90% of the violent incidents, had reduced from 35 in 2015 to 25 in 2021. These districts are mostly in Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, Maharashtra, Telengana and Andhra Pradesh.

Mr. Singh said that considerable success was achieved in 2022 in Bihar, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh as the CRPF launched Operation Octopus, Operation Double Bull, Operation

Thunderstorm and Operation Chakarbandha in the three States. The operations led to the arrest or surrender of 592 Maoists.

"Barring stray elements or extortionists, we can say that Bihar is completely free of Naxals. In Jharkhand too, we reached the top of the Budha Pahar area for the first time on September 5. This was an area under the control of the Maoists so far, we have established a security camp there and road construction has also started," Mr. Singh said at a press conference. He said that in Chakarbandha in Bihar, an area of 8x7 km had been cleared of Maoist presence and in the Budha Pahar area, around 4x3 km had been cleared. A helicopter landed in Budha Pahar for the first time in September.

The officer said that since 2019, a unique policy has been adopted against Maoists and in the past four years, the Union Home Ministry had provided ₹4,000 crore to the CRPF to purchase the latest weapons and equipment. The CRPF was one of the largest Central armed police forces deployed in the affected States.

Mr. Singh said that in all, 20 forward operating bases or security camps have been established in Jharkhand and 11 bases had come up only in the past six months.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah tweeted, "For the first time, permanent camps of security forces have been established by successfully evacuating Maoists from the inaccessible areas of Budha Pahar, Chakrabandha and Bhimabandh." The Minister said the Ministry's "zero tolerance" to terrorism and left-wing extremism would continue, and the fight would intensify.

Mr. Singh said Maoists were using improvised grenade launchers to target security camps in Chhattisgarh. "The grenade launchers are assembled locally in a factory. The camps were attacked 28 times by the launchers this year," he said.

He said in Jharkhand, security forces recovered a U.S.-made rifle but Maoists mostly used country-made weapons or those snatched from police or security forces.

He said Maoist chief Basavaraju who has a reward of over ₹2 crore on his head was a prime target. "But arresting him is not the only responsibility of security forces, it is a mix of intelligence work too. He may be living in any area without anyone coming to know of his presence. In the past, many top leaders were unarmed when they were arrested. One of the leaders – Kanchan – was arrested from Assam," he said.

"Incidents of violence have come down from the highest level of 2,258 in 2009 to 509 in 2021. The death rate due to violence has come down by 85%. In the year 2010, the death toll was at the highest level of 1,005 which has come down to 147 in the year 2021."

Simultaneously, the area under influence of Maoists has also reduced significantly," he said.

Mr. Singh said inter-State movement of Maoists took place mostly in Telugu-dominated areas.