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Premium

Why have Maoists killed again — and why do they repeatedly attack in Chhattisgarh?

The period preceding the monsoon is a time of heightened military activity and more attacks by Maoists on security forces. Chhattisgarh has been slow to raise a local anti-Maoist force, which is considered key in the fight against left-wing extremism.

Written by [Deeptiman Tiwary](#) [Follow](#)

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Wrecked remains of a vehicle after a blast carried out by Maoists killed 10 police personnel and their driver in Chhattisgarh's Dantewada district, on April 26, 2023. (PTI Photo)

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Ten personnel of the Chhattisgarh Police's District Reserve Guard (DRG) and the civilian driver of their vehicle were reported **killed in an IED attack by Maoists in the state's Dantewada district** on Wednesday (April 26).

The attack took place more than two years after the April 2021 ambush by Maoists in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district, in which 22 security forces personnel were killed.

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Why have the Maoists carried out this attack in Chhattisgarh now?

The timing of the attack fits with the Maoist strategy of heightened military activity and more attacks on security forces every summer. **The CPI(Maoist) carries out**

Tactical Counter Offensive Campaigns (TCOCs) between February and June every year, in which the focus of its military wing is to inflict casualties on security forces.

This period is chosen because with the onset of the monsoon in July, it becomes difficult to conduct offensive operations in the jungles. “There are overflowing nullahs that can’t be crossed. There is tall grass and shrubs everywhere, which reduce visibility. With the onset of the monsoon, both the Maoists and the security forces return to their camps,” a security establishment officer said.

Almost all major attacks by Maoists on security forces, including the 2010 Chintalnar massacre of 76 CRPF personnel, have taken place during the TCOC period.

The TCOC period this year has been characterised by increasing IED attacks. Until April 15 this year, Maoists had carried out 34 IED attacks in Bastar, sources said. This figure was 28 for 2022 and 21 for 2021.

What is the current LWE situation in the country?

The influence of Maoists and associated violence has been falling consistently in the country because of multiple factors, including a stronger push by security forces in Maoist strongholds, roads and civic amenities reaching the interiors to a greater extent than earlier, and a general disenchantment with the Maoist ideology among the youth, which has deprived the insurgent movement of new leadership.

According to the government, Maoist violence in the country has gone down by 77% since 2010. The number of resultant deaths (security forces + civilians) has come down by 90 % from the all-time high of 1,005 in 2010 to 98 in 2022, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has said.

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The government has cut the number of districts declared to be Naxal-affected from over 200 in the early 2000s to just 90 now, and claims that the geographical spread of violence is actually restricted to just 45 districts. The presence of Naxals is said to

be minimal to zero in Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Odisha, Jharkhand, and Bihar, which were at one time their strongholds.

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According to the MHA, “the arc of violence has been considerably restricted with just 25 districts accounting for 90% of the LWE violence.”

At a press conference last year, Union Home Minister Amit Shah had said that Budha Pahad, a 55 sq km forested area between Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand, considered to be the last bastion of Maoists in Jharkhand, had been freed of the insurgents. Shah has vowed to rid the country of the Maoist problem by 2024.

And what is the situation in Chhattisgarh?

It is the only state in the country where Maoists continue to have a significant presence and retain the capability to mount big attacks.

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According to government data provided to Parliament, in the last five years (2018-22), 1,132 “violent incidents [were] perpetrated by Left Wing Extremists”, in which 168 security forces personnel and 335 civilians lost their lives. Chhattisgarh accounted for more than a third of all Maoist-related violence in this period — worryingly, however, it had a share of 70%-90% of deaths.

The violence graph in the state for this period has been up and down. Maoists mounted 275 attacks in 2018; the number fell to 182 in 2019, but rose to 241 in 2020. It then declined to 188 in 2021, but rose to 246 in 2022. Until the end of February,

Maoists had killed 17 people in the state this year, including seven security force personnel, in 37 attacks.

The numbers of deaths of security forces personnel too have risen and fallen in this period — 55 personnel were killed in 2018; 22 in 2019; 36 in 2020; 45 in 2021; and just 10 in 2022.

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Over this same period, security forces killed 328 Maoist cadres in more than 400 planned operations.

So why does Chhattisgarh continue to remain troubled?

It is a widely accepted principle in counter-Maoist strategy that the war against Left Wing Extremism can only be won by the state police and not central forces. This is because the state police have local knowledge, understand the language, and have local networks that are essential for the generation of intelligence.

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It was through the active involvement of local police in the leading role that states such as Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Odisha and Jharkhand were able to end their Maoist problem. All these states formed special units of their police forces with personnel and officers drawn from the state, gave them special training, and won the battle with concerted security and development efforts.

This process, security establishment sources say, started late in Chhattisgarh. By this time, police of neighbouring states had pushed Maoists from their states to Chhattisgarh, making it a concentrated zone of Maoist influence.

The special unit of the Chhattisgarh Police, the DRG, was raised from the local tribal population and trained to fight Maoists only a few years ago, and has become active relatively recently.

“It is a measure of their activity that in all recent attacks, it is the DRG personnel who have been targeted by the Maoists. We are consistently pushing into Maoist strongholds and conducting intelligence-based operations,” a Chhattisgarh Police officer said.

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The absence of roads in the interiors of Bastar has stymied the operations of security forces. Minimal presence of the administration in the interiors of South Bastar has ensured that Maoists continue to have influence in the region and enjoy local support through a mix of fear and goodwill.

How has the Centre responded?

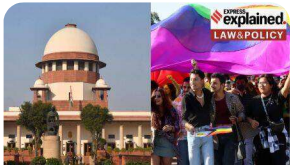
Apart from supporting LWE states through Security Related Expenditure (SRE), which focuses on equipping security forces to fight Maoists; the Special Infrastructure Scheme (SIS), which aims to strengthen local police and intelligence set ups; and Special Central Assistance for building infrastructure such as roads in LWE districts, the Centre has maintained a massive presence of the CRPF in the affected states for almost two decades.

In Chhattisgarh, the CRPF has been consistently enlarging its footprint by opening new camps deeper in the jungles of South Bastar. Over the past one year alone, close to 20 forward operating bases have been set up in Bastar, sources said.

Two years ago, the CRPF raised a Bastariya Battalion the recruits for which were taken from the local population, who knew the language and terrain, and could generate intelligence. This unit now has 400 recruits and regularly conducts operations in Chhattisgarh.

Centre is pushing for the erection of mobile towers in the interiors, which would help the local people connect with the mainstream, and also generate technical intelligence. Since 2014, as many as 2,343 mobile towers have been erected in LWE zones.

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The Centre has also unleashed the counter-terrorism National Investigation Agency (NIA) and the Enforcement Directorate on CPI(Maoist) cadres, leaders, and sympathisers with the aim to choke their funding. Both central agencies have registered multiple cases, conducted hundreds of raids, and confiscated property worth several hundred crores of rupees so far.

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