

## Is India's Maoist insurgency finally over?

What remains of the CPI (Maoist) after recent setbacks? How did security operations weaken the Maoist movement so sharply? What internal divisions and ideological shifts weakened the organisation? Is there any chance of a Maoist revival in the future?



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On May 21, 2025, Nambala Keshava Rao alias Basavraj, then general secretary of the banned CPI (Maoist), was killed in an encounter in Chhattisgarh's Abujmarh area. The operation was led by the District Reserve Guard and the CRPF's CoBRA unit. His successor, Thippiri Tirupati alias Devji, surrendered by February 2026 along with cadres and weapons. With most Central Committee leaders killed or arrested, the organisation is now largely leaderless. With these developments, can the five decade old Maoist movement be considered "finished," as Home Minister Amit Shah has claimed, in line with his March 31 deadline to end the insurgency?

### Is the Maoist movement over?

Recent developments suggest that the banned Left Wing Extremist (LWE) movement has been effectively wiped out. Since the launch of Operation Kagar (Black Forest) in 2024, coordinated operations across LWE affected States have led to approximately 3,840 surrenders, 2,220

arrests, and 600 deaths. Among these were seven Central Committee or Politburo members who were arrested or surrendered, and 12 who were killed.

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Yet, the Maoists cannot be written off entirely. They have shown remarkable resilience before. In 1991, when they were known as the People's War Group (PWG), they were reduced to a single dalam. By 2000, they had bounced back, establishing a "Red Corridor" spanning nearly 12 States — from Kerala to the Nepal border. When the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) joined

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hands with the PWG to form CPI (Maoist) in 2004, they set up a "Janatana Sarkar" (people's government) across large parts of Chhattisgarh.

Information within the organisation has always been tightly controlled. For instance, Madvi Hidma's induction into the Central Committee was not publicly known until around 2020. Despite the recent losses, the party's internal structure was never openly discussed.

What can be said with certainty is that their dominance in armed conflict has nearly ended. In 2013, they controlled about 180 districts. Today, their armed presence is largely confined to just two districts in Chhattisgarh — Bijapur and Sukma.

### **Why did the movement start, and how did it grow?**

The movement traces its roots to the peasant uprising led by Charu Majumdar in 1967 in north Bengal. It began in Naxalbari, in Darjeeling district — hence the term "Naxalite".

Majumdar propagated MarxismLeninism wrapped around Mao Zedong's principle that revolution should be driven by rural, landless peasants through protracted armed struggle, rather than by urban industrial workers. He advocated Mao's idea that "political power grows out of the barrel of the gun." Feudal landlords and authorities supporting them were termed "class enemies."

The Naxalbari movement was quickly crushed, but not before Majumdar broke away to form the All India Coordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries. The movement spread to Srikakulam in Andhra Pradesh, where leaders such as Vempatapu Satyanarayana and Adibhatla Kailasam led an uprising between

1967 and 1970, seeking to implement "land to the tiller".

By 1972, leaders, including Majumdar, had been killed, and the movement subsided — until Kondapalli Seetharamaiah and Dr. Kolluri Chiranjeevi revived it by forming the People's War Group in the Telangana region, which was then part of the whole Andhra Pradesh.

Kondapalli took the party to new heights by recruiting young minds from colleges, universities, and NITs.

With the formation of CPI (Maoist) under Muppala Lakshmana Rao alias Ganapathi, the movement became what then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh called “the single biggest internal security threat.” The Maoists created wings including the PLGA under Central Military Commission, transforming into a fullforce guerrilla army trained with modern weapons. Trained by the LTTE, they became experts with IEDs and wreaked havoc until about 2018, killing hundreds of security personnel and branding tribals as police informers.

### **What led to their downfall?**

From Majumdar's days, the Naxalites have faced internal strife — one reason for their splintering into about 40 groups. The rift centred on ideological issues: one faction favoured violent individual annihilation, while another emphasised mass mobilisation. These tensions also led to leadership changes, with leaders such as Kondapalli eventually being sidelined by younger leadership.

Once they committed to militarisation, they achieved some brutal successes. From 2005 to 2013, the Maoists reigned in Chhattisgarh, with 700 to 1,000 casualties annually. However, the narrative gradually changed. By 2004, the Maoists had already been pushed out of Andhra Pradesh by the elite Greyhounds force. Every LWE affected State then formed similar special forces. Operation Kagar delivered the final blow, decimating their strongholds.

The Maoists also faced a “tribal vs nontribal” conflict. Though tribals from Chhattisgarh comprised the main fighting force, the leadership remained largely nontribal. This created a rift, leading to Madvi Hidma's promotion as a tribal representative.

Another factor was their outdated ideology. With government welfare schemes reaching tribal heartlands, the concept of “class enemy” lost relevance.

A document by Ganapathi acknowledged these problems, urging cadres to reconnect with intellectuals and identify new issues. Some leaders had even advocated dialogue with the government as early as 2010. Senior leader Cherukuri Rajkumar alias Azad was reportedly seeking peace talks when he was killed in an encounter in 2010. Reports also suggest they approached then Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel to negotiate entry into mainstream politics. However, declining recruitment, sustained security pressure, and the relative success of democratic protests undermined the case for armed struggle.

## **Is a revival possible?**

A revival of armed insurgency seems difficult. However, a prominent Hindi daily in Chhattisgarh reported that many surrendered to focus on rebuilding their base overground. Surrendered leaders such as Mallojula Venugopal alias Sonu and Devji remain under constant surveillance. Much depends on the rehabilitation process.

Legal challenges also persist. Many surrendered cadres face multiple serious charges, including murder. Families of slain security personnel or other victims could file protest petitions against the withdrawal of prosecution. The courts must be convinced before prosecution can be withdrawn — and aggrieved parties always have superior rights.