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India Becomes Effectively Free from Left-Wing Extremism After Six Decades Through an Integrated Security, Development and Welfare Strategy

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Recent Developments:

- **India** became effectively free from **Left-Wing Extremism (LWE)/Naxalism** on **31 March 2026**, marking a major milestone in India's internal security after nearly six decades of insurgency.
- The achievement followed a **Whole-of-Government** approach based on the three pillars of **Vishwaas, Nirman and Jan Kalyan**, integrating security operations with development and welfare interventions.
- The **Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)** subsequently informed Parliament that **no district remained affected by Naxalism**, reflecting the sharp decline in violence and extremist influence.

About Left-Wing Extremism (LWE):

Meaning:

- **Left-Wing Extremism (LWE)** refers to the use of **violence and armed revolution**, inspired primarily by **Maoist ideology**, to overthrow the constitutional democratic system.
- **Naxalism** derives its name from the **Naxalbari uprising (1967)** in **Darjeeling district, West Bengal**, which marked the beginning of the movement in India.
- In **2004**, major Maoist groups merged to form the **Communist Party of India (Maoist)**, making LWE India's most significant internal security challenge for several decades.

Why LWE Expanded?

- **Poor governance, weak administrative presence and difficult terrain** created spaces where extremist groups established influence.
- **Limited road connectivity, inadequate public services, tribal deprivation, livelihood challenges and low state outreach** weakened public confidence in government institutions.
- **Weak inter-state coordination and fragmented security responses** enabled extremist networks to survive for long periods.

Evolution of India's Counter-LWE Strategy:

Earlier Approach:

- The response remained **incident-driven**, with individual States largely addressing the challenge independently.
- Lack of a **nationally coordinated strategy** reduced operational effectiveness.
- In **2009**, the Union Government officially recognised **LWE as India's gravest internal security challenge**, extending across a wider geographical area than many other insurgencies.

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Policy Shift (2015):

- The **National Policy and Action Plan for LWE** replaced fragmented responses with a **structured national framework**.
- The policy integrated **security operations, development initiatives, governance reforms, intelligence sharing and welfare delivery** under one coordinated strategy.
- The framework adopted the principles of **Dialogue, Security and Coordination**, while ensuring continuous review by the **Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)**.

Integrated Strategy: Vishwaas – Nirman – Jan Kalyan

Vishwaas, Restoring Public Trust:

- **Strengthened security operations** expanded the permanent presence of the State in remote regions.
- **Improved coordination** among Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs), State Police and intelligence agencies enhanced operational efficiency.
- **Structured surrender and rehabilitation policies** encouraged extremists to return to mainstream society.
- **Continuous community engagement** rebuilt confidence between tribal communities and government institutions.
- Restoration of security enabled governance institutions to function effectively in previously inaccessible regions.

Nirman, Building Infrastructure and Governance:

- Focus shifted from merely controlling violence to **creating long-term development opportunities**.
- Expansion of **road networks, digital infrastructure, banking services, schools, healthcare and skill development** integrated remote tribal regions into the national economy.
- Improved connectivity enhanced the delivery of government schemes and strengthened administrative reach.

Jan Kalyan, Welfare with Dignity:

- Welfare delivery prioritised **tribal inclusion, livelihood generation, education, healthcare and housing**.
- Surrendered cadres received **financial assistance, skill training, self-employment support and housing benefits**, facilitating social reintegration.
- Democratic institutions such as **Gram Panchayats** were strengthened through development incentives in villages freed from extremist influence.

Key Security Measures:

Technology-Enabled Counter-Insurgency:

- **UAVs, drones, satellite imagery, Artificial Intelligence (AI), mobile-data analytics and GIS-based mapping** improved surveillance and operational planning.
- **Call-detail analysis, communication monitoring and intelligence fusion** enhanced the precision of counter-insurgency operations.

Trace, Target and Neutralise Doctrine:

- Intelligence-led operations replaced conventional area domination strategies.
- Major operations such as **Operation Black Forest, Operation Octopus, Operation Double Bull, Operation Thunderstorm, Operation Bhimbarg and Operation Chakrabandha** dismantled long-standing Maoist strongholds.
- Sustained operations significantly reduced extremist leadership, weapons and territorial influence.

Disrupting Financial Networks:

- **National Investigation Agency (NIA)** established dedicated mechanisms to dismantle Maoist financing.
- Coordinated action by **NIA, Enforcement Directorate (ED) and State agencies** targeted funding channels, assets and logistics supporting extremist organisations.
- Stronger investigation and prosecution increased legal deterrence against extremist support networks.

Surrender and Rehabilitation Policy:

Key Features:

- Immediate financial assistance for surrendered cadres.
- Monthly livelihood support during rehabilitation.
- Incentives for surrendering with weapons.
- Additional incentives for group surrenders.
- Skill development, housing assistance and self-employment support.
- Free education up to **Class XII** for children of surrendered cadres.

Significance:

- Reduced recruitment by weakening organisational morale.
- Facilitated peaceful reintegration into democratic society.
- Improved cooperation between local communities and security agencies.

Development Initiatives under Nirman:

Road Connectivity:

- More than **12,000 km** of roads were constructed in LWE-affected areas after 2014.
- Improved transport enhanced access to **markets, schools, hospitals and government services**.

Digital Connectivity:

- Installation of **over 9,600 mobile towers** substantially reduced the digital divide.
- Mobile connectivity reached nearly **96%** of villages in the most affected regions.

Financial Inclusion:

- Expansion of **bank branches, ATMs, post offices and Banking Correspondents (BCs)** strengthened last-mile financial services.
- Improved access to **Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT)** and formal banking.

Education and Skill Development:

- Expansion of **Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS)** improved educational access for tribal children.
- New **Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs)** and **Skill Development Centres** enhanced employability among tribal youth.

Community Outreach:

- **Civic Action Programmes** promoted healthcare, community welfare and public participation.
- **Tribal Youth Exchange Programmes** strengthened national integration and awareness.

Case Study: Bastar Transformation (Chhattisgarh):

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Integrated Development Model:

- Combined **security operations, infrastructure development, welfare delivery and tribal participation.**
- **Bastariya Battalion** recruited local tribal youth, improving intelligence gathering and community trust.
- Expansion of **roads and mobile connectivity** improved access to public services.
- **Shaheed Veer Gunda Dhur Seva Dera** converted selected CAPF camps into citizen service centres.
- Initiatives such as **Bastar Pandum** and **Bastar Olympics** promoted tribal identity, cultural participation and youth engagement.

Impact of the Integrated Strategy:

Security Outcomes:

- LWE-affected districts declined dramatically from earlier levels to **zero affected districts by March 2026**, according to the MHA.
- Naxal incidents and fatalities declined sharply compared with the peak years.
- Large-scale arrests, surrenders and disruption of leadership weakened extremist capabilities.

Governance Outcomes:

- Government institutions regained presence in previously inaccessible regions.
- Public confidence in democratic institutions improved.
- Delivery of welfare schemes became faster and more effective.

Socio-Economic Outcomes:

- Better connectivity expanded opportunities in education, healthcare, banking and employment.
- Tribal communities experienced greater social inclusion and participation in democratic governance.
- Development reduced the conditions that had earlier enabled extremist influence.

Challenges Ahead:

Remaining Priorities:

- Prevent ideological resurgence through continuous community engagement.
- Ensure sustainable livelihood opportunities for tribal youth.
- Strengthen implementation of **Forest Rights Act, 2006, PESA Act, 1996** and other tribal welfare legislations.
- Continue improving governance, justice delivery and public infrastructure in former LWE areas.
- Prevent extremist financing through stronger cyber and financial intelligence.

UPSC Mains Linkages:

Essay Themes:

- **Security and Development are Complementary.**
- **Inclusive Governance as the Foundation of Internal Security.**
- **Winning People's Trust Beyond Military Success.**

Value Addition for UPSC:

Important Constitutional Provisions:

- **Article 21** – Protection of Life and Personal Liberty.

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- **Article 244** – Administration of Scheduled Areas.
- **Fifth Schedule** – Administration and control of Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes.
- **Article 46** – Promotion of educational and economic interests of Scheduled Tribes.

Important Legislations:

- **Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA).**
- **Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006.**
- **Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 (UAPA).**
- **National Investigation Agency Act, 2008.**

Committee / Institutional References:

- **D. Bandyopadhyay Committee (2006)** emphasised that **development deficits, governance gaps and tribal alienation** should be addressed alongside security measures.
- **Ministry of Home Affairs** follows the **SAMADHAN Doctrine**, which includes **Smart Leadership, Aggressive Strategy, Motivation and Training, Actionable Intelligence, Dashboard-Based KPIs, Harnessing Technology, Action Plan and No Access to Financing**, as the broader counter-LWE operational framework