

40 Maoists still active in State: CM

HANS NEWS SERVICE
BHUBANESWAR

WITH the deadline for the complete eradication of Left-Wing Extremism (LWE) approaching, Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi said on Monday that as many as 40 Maoists are currently active in various parts of the State. The Chief Minister told the State Assembly while answering a query asked by the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) MLA Dhruva Charan Sahoo.

The Chief Minister said that at present, around 40 active Maoists are operating in small groups in certain areas of Kalahandi, Rayagada, Kandhamal, Boudh, Bolangir, and Bargarh districts. In his reply, Majhi also added that due to concerted effort by the security forces, there has been a gradual improvement in the situation arising out of the Maoist problem in the State.

He said that as per the current status under the Union government's Security Related Expenditure Scheme, only Kandhamal district has been placed under the category of "Other LWE Affected District", areas experiencing moderate to low levels of Maoist violence, while



the remaining eight districts -- Malkangiri, Koraput, Nuapada, Nabarangpur, Kalahandi, Rayagada, Boudh, and Bolangir -- have been categorised under "Legacy and Thrust" districts.

The districts categorised as "Legacy districts" are no longer significantly affected by the LWE violence, while "Thrust districts" are those where there is a possibility of expansion of Maoist activities. The Chief Minister not-

ed that the State government is working towards resolving the Maoist problem in Odisha by the deadline of March 31, 2026, set by the Union government. He also highlighted various steps being taken by the State government to completely eradicate LWE in India.

According to the Chief Minister's reply, 71 companies of the Central Armed Police Forces, 44 Special Operations Group (SOG)

teams, about 839 personnel of the District Voluntary Force (DVF), 40 platoons of the India Reserve Battalion, 29 platoons of the Special Security Battalion, and more than 92 platoons of Odisha Special Striking Force (comprising ex-servicemen) have been deployed in the affected areas.

The Odisha Police is also regularly carrying out intelligence-based operations and preventive area domination

operations in the nine Maoist-affected areas. Drones, interceptors, modern weapons, and advanced communication equipment are being used in anti-Maoist operations. Two Maoists have been neutralised in Kandhamal district on February 22.

Following neutralisation of the Maoists, the security forces are carrying out massive combing operations in Nandabadi jungle in the Kandhamal district.



Speaker holds all-party meet amid Oppn protest

HANS NEWS SERVICE
BHUBANESWAR

THE Odisha Assembly continued to witness massive disruptions on Monday as the members of the Opposition Biju Janata Dal (BJD) and Indian National Congress (INC) staged protests over chaos at mandis and Epstein file issues. As the Question Hour began at 10.30 am on Monday, members of the BJD rushed to the Well of the House, holding posters and raising anti-government slogans near the Speaker's dais, alleging massive paddy procurement mismanagement at the mandis across the State.

They alleged that the BJP-led State government betrayed the farmers, who are under severe distress due to the non-lifting of paddy and the non-payment of MSP. The Congress members also created a ruckus in the House, demanding discussions on the Epstein files. The Congress members demanded the resignation of Union minister Hardeep Singh Puri over his name appearing in the Epstein files. The Opposi-

tion members also criticised Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the Epstein files.

Meanwhile, BJP MLAs protested the criticism of PM Modi and the Union minister, saying that they are not members of the House. Speaker Surama Padhy repeatedly appealed to Opposition members to return to their seats and allow the House to function. However, the members paid no heed, and the protest continued. The ruckus forced the Speaker to adjourn the House multiple times before finally suspending proceedings until 4 pm.

The Speaker also convened an all-party meeting to end the logjam in the Assembly, which had continued since the start of the Budget session on February 17.

Speaking to mediapersons outside the House, senior BJD leader Dibya Shankar Mishra strongly criticised the State government over the stalemate in the Odisha Assembly. He announced that the BJD will intensify its agitation and stage a major protest in Bhubaneswar

on Tuesday over farmers' issues. "I am ashamed to see the current state of affairs. In a democracy, governance is meant for the welfare of the poorest of the poor, farmers, Backward Classes, and deprived communities. Unfortunately, this government has failed to understand the true meaning of welfare," he said. Mishra accused the government of neglecting the farming community despite rising input costs.

He alleged that the promise of 100 units of free electricity for farmers had not been fulfilled and claimed that, although the government had spoken about increasing the Minimum Support Price (MSP), farmers were not receiving the declared benefits. He further pointed out that the cost of seeds, fertilisers, and other agricultural inputs had risen significantly, yet adequate support for cultivators was still lacking. He further demanded loan waivers for farmers, the lifting of procurement caps, and the assurance of procurement of surplus paddy.

IRS officer accused of sexual assault

HANS NEWS SERVICE
BHUBANESWAR

A day after the disturbing incident of gang-rape of a minor student by her teachers at a private school in Kendrapara district came to light, fresh reports emerged on Sunday regarding a complaint filed by a woman alleging sexual abuse by a senior Indian Revenue Service (IRS) officer in Bhubaneswar.

Acting on the complaint lodged on February 19, the Commissionerate Police has launched an investigation into the allegations by registering a case in this regard on February 20. The victim woman, who hails from Kujanga in Jagatsinghpur district, alleged in her complaint that she, along with the accused's cousin sister, had gone to the IRS officer's official quarters at Satsang Vihar under Saheed Nagar police station area on January 15.

Meanwhile, the young woman was left alone in the quarters as the IRS officer's wife and cousin reportedly went out for some work. Taking advantage of the situation, the accused IRS officer allegedly showed some ob-



jectionable contents on his laptop and insisted that she keep sexual relations with him. The victim lady later claimed that upon her denial, the accused raped her after locking the door. She initially did not divulge anything fearing social stigma.

She also claimed that the accused clicked some objectionable photos of her and used those to blackmail her into keeping a relationship with him. The victim, however, claimed that after the accused made viral her objectionable photos, she was forced to file a complaint with the police in this regard.

Answering to queries on the incident, Police Commissioner S Dev Datta Singh on Sunday told mediapersons that the allegations would be thoroughly investigated, and that anyone found guilty would face consequences, while no one would be punished merely on the basis of accusations.

Zapolsky gets KIIT Lifetime Achievement Award

HANS NEWS SERVICE
BHUBANESWAR

KIIT University conferred its prestigious Lifetime Achievement Award on David A Zapolsky, Chief Global Affairs and Legal Officer, Amazon, during a special ceremony on Friday. The event was attended by Achyuta Samanta, Founder of KIIT and KISS, along with senior officials from Amazon India.

In a candid conversation with KIIT Vice Chancellor Saranjit Singh, Zapolsky highlighted Amazon's deepening engagement with India, the transformative potential of Artificial Intelligence, and offered advice to students preparing for a rapidly evolving world. Highlighting India's growing importance in Amazon's global strategy, Zapolsky noted that the company has invested nearly USD 40 billion in the country, including major investments in data infrastructure and cloud computing. Amazon operates data centres in Mumbai and Hyderabad and last year alone committed an additional USD 35 billion to strengthen its India footprint.

"India is a leader in shap-



ing the global conversation around AI," he said, praising the clarity of vision articulated by the country. "No nation has expressed as clearly as India what it wants to achieve with AI. Our role will be to provide the infrastructure to support that ambition," Zapolsky said.

He announced Amazon's partnership with the government of India to expand AI and STEM education to reach 40 million schoolchildren across the country. The initiative focuses on skilling the next generation to become AI-capable workers. He emphasised that corporations must align CSR with their core competencies, noting that Amazon leverages its technological and logistical strengths for community im-

provement, particularly in disaster relief. On AI governance, Zapolsky made significant reference to regulation. He noted that while it is still early to understand how AI will be implemented fully, thoughtful regulation—backed by strong compliance frameworks—will be essential to ensure technology is deployed ethically and responsibly.

Addressing students, Zapolsky recounted his own unconventional career journey, from aspiring scientist and musician to prosecutor in Brooklyn and later Amazon executive. He urged the youngsters not to chase prestige or salary. "Listen to your gut. Do what makes you happy. When you pursue your passion, opportunities follow," he said.

73 Bangla infiltrators deported

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BHUBANESWAR

THE Odisha government has deported 73 of the 77 Bangladeshi infiltrators residing illegally in various districts of the State, Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi informed the Assembly on Monday. In a written reply to a question by BJP MLA Padma Lochan Panda, Majhi said action was initiated following directions from the Union Home Ministry.

"As per the instructions issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs on May 2, 2025, all superintendents of police were directed to expedite the process of identifying Bangladeshi infiltrators residing illegally in different districts, he said. The Chief Minister said so far the identities of 2,261 Bangladeshi suspects have been verified. Of them, 2,184 were found to be Indian citizens and subsequently released.

"The remaining 77 people were identified as illegal Bangladeshi immigrants, of whom 73 have been deported," Majhi said. Among those deported, 24 were from Bhubaneswar Urban Police District, 21 from Jagatsinghpur, 15 from Cuttack Urban Police District, six from Berhampur Police District, three from Kandhamal, one from Koraput and three from Kendrapara, he informed the House.

Majhi said one infiltrator each from Ganjam and Kandhamal has been booked and is being tried in court for allegedly obtaining Indian passports using forged documents.

The deportation process of two Bangladeshi infiltrators identified from Bhubaneswar Urban Police District is currently underway, he added.

2,994 rape cases reported in Odisha

HANS NEWS SERVICE
BHUBANESWAR

ODISHA Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Monday informed the Assembly that 2,994 rape and 7,382 molestation cases were reported in the State last year. A total of 33,021 cases of crimes against women were registered in different police stations across Odisha in 2025, Majhi said in reply to a written question from BJD legislator Prasanna Acharya.

The Chief Minister said 1,183 cases of sexual harassment, 115 attempt to rape cases, 1,448 public disrobing of women, 7,378 abduction of women, 127 voyeurism, 4,361 dowry torture and 5,419 non-dowry torture cases were reported in the State last year. Similarly, 757 eve-teasing cases, 702 cases under Section 69 of BNS (sexual relationship with false promise of marriage), two under Section 68 of BNS (sexual relationship by a person in authority), 485 stalking, one attempt to acid attack case, 111 trafficking of women, 145 dowry homicide and 77 dowry-related suicide cases were also registered in 2025, Majhi said.

The Chief Minister said several steps have been taken to prevent crimes against women, including rapes, in the State. Bhubaneswar-based Crime Against Women & Children Wing (CAW&CW) has been monitoring the investigation of important and sensitive cases of crimes against women, classifying those as 'red-flag' cases. The wing appoints an investigating officer for regular monitoring of the sensitive cases and developments in the court of law, he stated.

THROUGH CRICKET, ITAO FOSTERS SOCIAL DUTY

HANS NEWS SERVICE
BHUBANESWAR

THE IT Premier League 2026, a two-day cricket tournament, was held at PJ Ground, Kesura, here on Saturday and Sunday. The IT Association of Odisha (ITAO) hosted the event to promote social responsibility through sports. The tournament featured nine teams competing in 16 matches. The final match culminated in a thrilling encounter between N Computing Team and Star Light Team on Sunday.

Batting first, N Computing Team was bowled out for 139 runs in the allotted 10 overs, setting Star Light



Team a target of 140 runs. Star Light struggled early with the bat. Although they tried to build momentum, the team was bowled out for 107 runs. N Computing Team clinched

the championship title. Initiated by ITAO president Avinash Pattnaik, the tournament was organised through the collective efforts of the association and its supporters. According to

the organisers, the tournament aimed to foster camaraderie, provide stress relief and boost workplace efficiency.

ITAO secretary Debashish Tripathy said the cricket tournament was dedicated to the community, with plans to enhance inclusivity for future events. As the IT Premier League enters its 16th year, efforts are underway to expand participation and actively promote cricketing talent from rural areas and colleges. Computer companies, distributors, and dealers from across Odisha participated in the tournament. Cricket enthusiasts from leading IT companies also showcased their talent in the League.

Where healthcare falters, superstition fills the void

C B SINGH
RAYAGADA

IN a small settlement in Rayagada's Baising gram panchayat, Mariguda is gripped by a supernatural fear. Villagers believe malevolent spirits have invaded their community, citing a cluster of sudden deaths, erratic behaviour and smoke rising from trees.

Doors remain shut even during day. Instead of seeking clinical care, many residents utilise traditional healers, incantations and rituals akin to exorcism. Funds are being raised to banish the unseen

force through elaborate ceremonies.

Science rarely views such episodes as mysterious. Communities facing sudden illness clusters often grapple with infectious diseases, environmental contamination, or untreated chronic conditions. Symptoms interpreted as possession delirium, seizures, hallucinations, or sudden weakness can arise from malaria, encephalitis, toxic exposure, or severe dehydration. Visible vapours rising from trees often stem from natural processes, such as trapped moisture vapourising in the

heat or fungal decay.

Psychology also offers insight. Collective anxiety can spread rapidly in close knit populations, especially where access to education and healthcare is limited. When uncertainty meets grief -- as with five deaths within months -- the human mind instinctively seeks patterns and agency. Known as mass psychogenic illness, this phenomenon causes genuine physical distress without any organic or supernatural cause.

Locals blame the crisis on construction near the Nagavali river, claiming it disrupt-



ed ancestral, protective rites. While respecting cultural memory is important, assertions of causality require rigorous testing. Environmental assessments, medical screening, and transparent communication are far more reliable tools than costly rituals that burden vulnerable families.

The situation in Mariguda illustrates a broader challenge of the present era: scientific knowledge has advanced dramatically, yet its benefits remain unevenly distributed. Where healthcare access is fragile and trust in institutions is thin, superstition

fills the vacuum. Instead of ridicule, the solution lies in active engagement: mobile health camps, localised disease surveillance, community education in local languages, and partnership with trusted leaders.

Science does not dismiss fear. It investigates it. By replacing speculation with evidence, communities can protect both dignity and life. Mariguda's story, then, is not a ghost tale, but a plea to bridge the gap between knowledge and belief in a world where reason is not yet a universal language.