

## **FOREWORD**

We, at Team Vedhik is happy to introduce a new initiative - "Daily Current Affairs\_The Hindu" compilations to help you with UPSC Civil Services Examination preparation. We believe this initiative - "Daily Current Affairs\_The Hindu" would help students, especially beginners save time and streamline their preparations with regard to Current Affairs. A content page and an Appendix has been added segregating and mapping the content to the syllabus.

It is an appreciable efforts by Vedhik IAS Academy helping aspirants of UPSC Civil Services Examinations. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Babu Sebastian, former VC - MG University in extending all support to this endeavour. Finally I also extend my thanks to thank Ms. Shilpa Sasidharan and Mr. Shahul Hameed for their assistance in the preparing the compilations.

We welcome your valuable comments so that further improvement may be made in the forthcoming material. We look forward to feedback, comments and suggestions on how to improve and add value for students. Every care has been taken to avoid typing errors and if any reader comes across any such error, the authors shall feel obliged if they are informed at their Email ID.

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# The status of the Smart Cities Mission

What is the Climate Smart Cities Assessment Framework? How far has the Smart Cities Mission progressed?

## THE GIST

■ The Centre used a competitive process to select 100 cities for upgradation with significant investments through the Smart Cities Mission (SCM) launched on June 25, 2015. Yet, many plans under the SCM, remain incomplete due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In response, the SCM has extended the implementation date and given cities until June 2023 to complete the work.

■ The Urban Affairs Ministry says that as of November 12, 2021, a total of 6,452 projects at a cost of ₹1,84,998 crore had been tendered. In terms of work progress, 5,809 projects worth ₹1,56,571 crore were under implementation or had been completed.

■ Smart city plans have been criticised as being distanced from elected democratic institutions and wide public discussion. There also have been critics regarding its poor execution. The SCM project to upgrade the Chennai Pondy Bazaar shopping area and build an elevated skywalk to the local bus stand came in for criticism during November 2021, as flooding in several adjacent localities was attributed to poor drainage planning in the project.

G. ANANTHAKRISHNAN

**The story so far:** The Centre used a competitive process to select 100 cities for upgradation with significant investments through the Smart Cities Mission (SCM) launched on June 25, 2015. These cities were identified through a "challenge" to which State governments and local bodies responded with plans that covered showpiece projects for a specific area, as well citywide plans. These included integrated data, use of technology platforms for service delivery to citizens, and mainstreaming of urban development concepts to encourage other cities to adopt best practice.

In September 2020, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) expanded the emphasis on climate-friendly infrastructure in smart cities through the Climate Smart Cities Assessment Framework 2.0 and a "Streets for People" plan that would put pedestrians and non-motorised road users at the centre of urban planning.

Yet, many plans under the SCM, which is funded partly by the Centre, remain

**The key features of smart cities, according to the Ministry, are liveability, economic ability and sustainability**

incomplete due to the COVID-19 pandemic that stalled activities for most of 2020. In response, the Smart Cities Mission has extended the implementation date and given cities until June 2023 to complete the work.

**How far have smart cities progressed?** The Urban Affairs Ministry says that as of November 12, 2021, a total of 6,452 projects at a cost of ₹1,84,998 crore had been tendered. In terms of work progress, 5,809 projects worth ₹1,56,571 crore were under implementation or had been completed, it says, although it is not clear how many were completed.

Under the Ministry's original framework for the 100 cities, 5,151 projects were proposed involving an estimated outlay of ₹2,05,018 crore, as per MoHUA. Although the Mission goal encompasses 100 cities, 66 cities were chosen in different rounds of the "challenge" method only between 2016 and 2018.

India's most urbanised State, Tamil Nadu



proposed 11 Smart Cities with 618 projects worth ₹15,307 crore. Its experience showed the difficulties in achieving the Mission objectives. The SCM project to upgrade the Chennai Pondy Bazaar shopping area and build an elevated skywalk to the local bus stand came in for criticism during November 2021, as flooding in several adjacent localities was attributed to poor drainage planning in the project.

In terms of execution, the Centre has said that Smart City Special Purpose Vehicles (SPVs), which were constituted to implement, operate and monitor the projects, are empowered to take decisions on Mission projects under the overall guidance of the State High Powered Steering Committees, and are not required to submit projects for approval to the Ministry. This effectively puts the onus on these entities to complete the work according to the deadlines, and the Centre does not bear responsibility for delays.

**What challenges are faced by smart city plans?**

The key features of smart cities, according to the Ministry, are liveability, economic ability and sustainability. These broad ideas have a universal character and incorporate access to clean water, safe streets and public spaces, good public transport, facilities for health and education and places for recreation. They also seek to expand economic opportunity for all and address environmental stresses — rising temperatures, extreme weather events, bad air quality, flood and drought, and lost urban biodiversity.

In practice, smart city plans have been criticised as being distanced from elected democratic institutions and wide public discussion, reflected in project finalisation that involves mainly State governments, the bureaucracy and independent experts. This is in spite of processes that have been incorporated to tap public sentiment using

online tools and platforms.

A core factor of liveability and inclusivity, such as affordable rental housing, determines the usability of other features of a smart city.

Some centres, such as Ahmedabad, Bhopal, Bhubaneswar, Indore, and Thane have pencilled in housing developments of various models, ranging from slum improvement to free sale of houses, into their smart city projects, a few involving over ₹1,000 crore; others have smaller levels of outlays for housing.

Onting smart city plans also face the pressure of designing for climate change. The Climate Smart Assessment Framework would need to put in compulsory features to align all investments with national commitments towards obligations under the Paris Agreement of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

**Towards a 'smart' future:** Angamwadi centre being inaugurated at Edappanattu, Vellore under the smart city project in 2020.

VENKATAPALANATHY C

# India votes against UN draft resolution on climate change

It opposes move seeking to shift talks from UNFCCC to Security Council

SRIRAM LAKSHMAN

India on Monday voted against a draft resolution at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) linking climate to security, saying it was an attempt to shift climate talks from the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to the Security Council and a "step backward" for collective action on the issue.

The resolution was sponsored by Ireland and Niger, and it did not pass, with 12 UNSC members voting for it, India and Russia voting against it and China abstaining.

Niger, which holds the UNSC presidency for December, organised a debate on December 9 titled 'Maintenance of international peace and security: the context of terrorism and climate change.'

One of the objectives of the debate was to examine how terrorism and security risks could be linked to climate change, as per a concept note circulated by Niger.



**Voicing dissent:** Russian Ambassador raising his hand to veto the UN Security Council resolution on Monday. • AP

"What is it that we can collectively do under this draft resolution that we cannot achieve under the UNFCCC process?" India's Permanent Representative and Ambassador to the U.N. T.S. Tirumurti said, positing that the reason countries were attempting to bring climate talks to the Security Council was that decisions could be taken without consensus or the involvement of most developing countries.

A video of Mr. Tirumurti explaining India's vote was posted by official Indian handles on Twitter.

"If the Security Council indeed takes over the responsibility on this issue, a few

states will then have a free hand in deciding on all climate-related issues. This is clearly neither desirable nor acceptable," he said.

**Undermining progress**

The draft resolution, as per the ambassador, would undermine progress made at Glasgow, where the latest round of talks under the UNFCCC, the 26th Conference of the Parties (COP26), concluded in November.

Developing and 'least developed' countries had worked, over the last two decades, to make "common but differentiated" responsibilities a fundamental tenet of climate action, Mr. Tiru-

murti noted.

"Today's attempt to link climate with security really seeks to obfuscate lack of progress on critical issues under the UNFCCC process," Mr. Tirumurti said, adding that many of the UNSC members were the primary contributors to climate change.

He said developed countries had not met their promises with regard to climate action and called for these countries to provide \$1 trillion in climate finance "at the earliest."

Mr. Tirumurti said the attempt to discuss climate action and climate justice issues at the UNSC was "motivated by a desire to evade responsibility in the appropriate forum."

He said that climate change may have exacerbated conflicts in the Sahel region and across Africa, and India remained committed to peace and development in those regions, but "viewing conflicts through the prism of climate change" was "misleading" and an oversimplification that could worsen conflicts rather than resolving them.

# Going back to the foundation of the Republic

The most important contribution of the Constitution to civic nationalism is of representation centred on individuals



SHASHI THAROOR

The recent speech by Congress leader Rahul Gandhi in Jaipur, drawing a distinction between Hinduism and Hindutva, echoes arguments that have become familiar in recent years, as Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) rule has given broad currency to the idea of India as a Hindu nation and in turn provoked a backlash from secularists. But in fact the issue raises a debate that goes back to the very foundation of the Republic, and to the heart of the questions our Constitution sought to answer.

## A new understanding

The most important contribution of the Constitution to Indian civic nationalism was that of representation centred on individuals. As the legal scholar, Madhav Khosla, explains in his impressive book of legal history, *India's Founding Moment*, the political apparatus of establishing a constitutional democracy in postcolonial India – a land that was poor and illiterate, divided by caste, creed, geography and language, and burdened by centuries of tradition – involved asking Indians to have a new understanding of authority. They would be liberated from British imperial despotism through submission to a new idea of Indianness that saw them as equal agents.

The founders of the republic chose – as the chairman of the Constitution's Drafting Committee, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, recognised – to impose a liberal Constitution upon a society which was not liberal, hidebound as it was by traditional customs and entrenched prejudices relating to caste, religion, and social hierarchies. They saw the principles of liberal constitutionalism – the centrality of the state, non-communal political representation, and so on – as essential to Indian democracy. In keeping with con-

temporary liberal thought, they committed India to a common language of the rule of law, constructed a centralised state, but instituted a model of representation whose units were individuals rather than groups. This was an attempt to free Indians from their prevailing understanding of their place in society and to place citizens in a realm of individual agency and deliberation that was appropriate to self-rule.

That was never going to be easy. Constitutions are, as Ambedkar pointed out, tools to control and restrain state power. The challenge lies in reconciling restrictions on state power with popular rule – to prevent temporary majorities (since in a democracy, a majority is temporary, though some people forget that) from completely undoing what the Constitution has provided. The founders of the Indian republic held a conception of democracy that went beyond majority rule. They subordinated politics to law. As Ambedkar put it, the rights of Indian citizens could not 'be taken away by any legislature merely because it happens to have a majority'.

## Basis of representation

It is particularly striking, in today's context, that the Constitution makers explicitly rejected the notion of religion playing any role in citizenship, arguing that each individual voter exercised agency in the democratic project and should not be reduced to the pre-existing loyalties of religious affiliation. This was far removed from the assumptions that have animated the BJP's Citizenship (Amendment) Act and their threat to introduce a National Register of Citizens. The Constitution granted representation not to one's predetermined religious identity but to one's individual expression of political agency. That was why the individual vote was so important. Democratic politics could not be reduced to the advocacy of pre-set interests.

At the same time, the Constitution acknowledged group rights, such as the right of religious denominations to establish and maintain institutions for religious



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and charitable purposes (Article 26(a)), or the right of a 'section of the citizens' to conserve a distinct language, script or culture (Article 29(1)). There were also provisions to protect the interests of Scheduled Tribes (Article 19(5)) and a specific provision in Article 25 stating that a 'heavy responsibility' would be cast on the majority to see that minorities feel secure. But though the Constitution recognised groups as bearing constitutional rights, Justice Dhananjaya Y. Chandrachud of the Supreme Court of India has argued (in his Justice P.D. Desai Memorial Lecture last year) that this 'was nested in the understanding that membership of groups had a unique role of crafting and determining individual identity... In elevating groups as distinct rights holders as well as empowering state intervention to address historical injustice and inequality perpetrated by group membership, the framers located liberalism within the pluralist reality of India and *conceptualized every individual as located at an intersection between liberal individualism and plural belonging...* At the time of its birth, the nation was conceptualized as incorporating its vast diversity and not eliminating it.' [emphasis added].

## Privileging the individual

This ability to recognise groups and yet adjudicate the rights of their individual members, and the adaptability of the Constitution to the ever-changing realities of national life, have effectively made it a vehicle of social change. But the leitmotiv, from the start, remained privileging the individual citizen above the group.

It is striking, for instance, that the Constituent Assembly rejected

separate electorates, weighted representation, and reservations on the basis of religion. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, in his capacity as Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Minorities and Fundamental Rights, wrote to the President of the Assembly, Rajendra Prasad, to explain that differentiated citizenship on the basis of religion had already been tried in the colonial era and had led to Partition. The answer lay in moving away from a representative framework that recognised identities that were regarded as stable and fixed, and towards a model of citizenship centred on the political participation of individuals. Such a model would allow the categories of majority and minority to be constantly defined and redefined within the fluid domain of politics and it would thereby offer the greatest form of security to all citizens.

## Key debate

The key intellectual division among the Constitution-makers, therefore, was not between those who wanted a united territorial India and those who did not; that issue was settled by Partition, which occurred soon after the Assembly began its work. The key debate in the Constituent Assembly was between those who wanted to assert a conception of individual citizenship in India that went beyond immutable identities (like religion or caste) and those who insisted on Indian nationhood being defined as a confederation of such inescapable identities. Many nationalists who argued passionately outside the Constituent Assembly for a united India nonetheless thought that India was indeed a collection of distinct communities, who could flourish together in amicable coexistence. But the Constituent Assembly, led by Nehru and Ambedkar, went in the opposite direction, consciously opting for individual citizenship as the root of nationhood, transcending the limitations that India's communities imposed on their members.

Ambedkar made this clear: 'I do not believe there is any place in this country for any particular cul-

ture, whether it is a Hindu culture, or a Muhammadan culture or a Kanarese culture or a Gujarati culture. There are things we cannot deny, but they are not to be cultivated as advantages, they are to be treated as disadvantages, as something which divides our loyalty and takes away from us our common goal,' he argued. 'That common goal is the building up of the feeling that we are all Indians. I do not like what some people say, that we are Indians first and Hindus afterwards or Muslims afterwards. I am not satisfied with that... I do not want that our loyalty as Indians should be in the slightest way affected by any competitive loyalty, whether that loyalty arises out of our religion, out of our culture or out of our language. I want all people to be Indians first, Indians last and nothing else but Indians...'

## Divided between two ideas

This fundamental difference of opinion – whether people are Hindus or Muslims first, or Indians first – continues to haunt our politics today. The nationalist movement was divided between two ideas; that held by those who saw religious identity as the determinant of their nationhood, and those who believed in an inclusive India for everyone, irrespective of faith, where rights were guaranteed to individuals rather than to religious communities. The former became the Idea of Pakistan, the latter the Idea of India. Pakistan was created as a state with a dominant religion, a state that discriminates against its minorities and denies them equal rights. But India never accepted the logic that had partitioned the country: our freedom struggle was for all, and the newly independent India would also be for all. Reducing India to a Hindu Rashtra would be a repudiation of that essential conception of India, the India that our founding fathers fought to free.

Shashi Tharoor is a third-term Member of Parliament (Congress) representing Thiruvananthapuram and an award-winning author of 23 books, including most recently, *Pride, Prejudice and Punditry*

EXPLAINER

# Making a case for decriminalisation

Should the NDPS Act be amended with a focus on public health?

SHAILIJA VERMA  
SAHIL RAVEEN

**The story so far:** In the backdrop of several high-profile cases under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act (NDPS Act), the Central Government recently convened an inter-departmental meeting to re-evaluate it. As per reports emerging from the meeting, the Central Government, based on the recommendations of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, is considering amending the NDPS Act to decriminalise the possession and consumption of small quantities of drugs.

State policy of controlling drug trade and usage has traditionally been punitive in nature since the usage of drugs is treated as a criminal law issue. This approach traces its roots back to the U.S.'s stance of pursuing a global 'war on drugs', first declared in the 1970s by President Richard Nixon. India, under the influence of Nixon's policy and in recognition of its international obligations to deter drug trade and usage, enacted the NDPS Act in 1985.

**What does the Act stipulate?**



The NDPS Act is an umbrella legislation dealing with the control and regulation of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. If the law is amended to decriminalise small drug offences, it will depart from the approach of regarding drug usage to be a criminal activity and focus on tackling it as a public health concern. Therefore, as the Government actively considers decriminalisation under the NDPS Act, it is important to understand the benefits of promoting alternative strategies to reduce demand, such as de-addiction and rehabilitation or criminalisation.

At present, under the NDPS, any person who consumes or possesses a narcotic drug or psychotropic substance

can be sentenced to imprisonment and be slapped with monetary penalties. The NDPS Act provides a limited avenue to courts of law to exempt an 'addict' from facing imprisonment in case they volunteer for treatment at a de-addiction centre. No such exemptions are provided to first-time or recreational users. Moreover, despite over 35 years of the NDPS Act being in force, its enforcement mechanisms have only been able to exercise limited control over the drug market in India. In fact, the number of people dependent on drugs has exponentially increased over the past few years. According to a report published by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment titled 'Magnitude of Substance Use in India', as of 2019, there were about 6 crore drug users in India (from an earlier estimated 1.1 crore users in 2004). Of them, about 1.7 crore persons required professional help to reduce their dependence on drugs. In the same report, the Ministry notes that criminalisation of drug usage by the NDPS Act has only enhanced societal stigma, isolation, and hindered access to treatment.

Despite the fact that tackling the supply side of drugs to curb access will

likely have a greater impact in controlling the drug menace, prosecution agencies have in the past continued to target persons possessing drugs for personal use or consumption. According to statistics released by the National Crime Records Bureau, over 60% of the total cases registered under the NDPS Act between 2018 and 2020 were for possession of drugs for personal use or consumption. These numbers highlight the ineffectiveness of a criminal deterrence policy, envisaged under the NDPS Act, to tackle drug use.

**What can India learn from Portugal?**

As the Union Government now looks to take a positive step of moving away from a punitive framework and consider the decriminalisation of possession or consumption of small quantities of drugs, it could borrow from Portugal's experiences in the field. In 2001, Portugal, after suffering from one of the worst drug epidemics in Europe, was the first country to shift to a policy of decriminalisation, eliminating criminal charges for possession and consumption of drugs for personal usage. This shift was in recognition of the inefficacy of criminal penalties to deter substance abuse. As per the Portuguese legislation, persons caught with less than a 10-day supply of any drug are not subject to the criminal justice system. Instead, they are required to appear before a panel, comprising a doctor, psychologist, and social worker, which determines suitable sanctions, ranging from fines to

community service. The panel also has the power to determine whether an individual needs to be sent to a de-addiction centre for rehabilitation.

The ripple effects of the Portuguese model of decriminalisation have been significant. For instance, the number of persons who were admitted for treatment for substance abuse increased by 63% between 1998 and 2008. This is because access to de-addiction facilities became easier, due to reduced fear of criminal sanction. The drug-induced death rate in Portugal, which was earlier higher than the European Union average, also plummeted to a level five times lower than the EU average. In recognition of the success of the Portuguese model, the UN and the WHO have advocated for nations to repeal punitive laws relating to the use and possession of drugs for personal use.

**What are the advantages?**

Decriminalisation has multiple advantages, including promoting better access to treatment facilities, as well as providing a breather to the Indian criminal justice system, currently clogged with cases involving small quantities of drugs. As a corollary, this will allow the State to focus its resources on the prosecution of persons involved in large-scale trafficking and manufacture of drugs, as well as control clandestine profits associated with illegal drug trade - the *raison d'être* behind the historic war on drugs.

*Sahil Raveen and Shailija Verma are lawyers based in New Delhi*

## THE GIST

- The Central Government recently convened an inter-departmental meeting to re-evaluate the NDPS Act. Based on the recommendations of the MSJE, the Centre may amend the NDPS Act to decriminalise the possession and consumption of small quantities of drugs.
- Under the NDPS, any person who consumes or possesses a narcotic substance can be sentenced to imprisonment and the imposition of fines. Despite over 35 years of the Act being in force, the number of people dependent on drugs has exponentially increased over the past few years.
- If the law is amended, substance use will be tackled as a public health concern. This will promote alternative strategies such as de-addiction and rehabilitation.

# RS nod for longer stints for ED, CBI directors

## It will check corruption, says Minister

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI**

The Rajya Sabha on Tuesday passed the Delhi Special Police Establishment (Amendment) Bill, 2021 which seeks to amend the Delhi Special Police Establishment Act, 1946, and the Central Vigilance Commission (Amendment) Bill, 2021.

Both the Bills were passed amid a walkout by the Opposition over the suspension of their 12 members.

The Central Vigilance Commission (Amendment) Bill, 2021, passed in the Lok Sabha on December 9 seeks to extend the tenure of the Enforcement Directorate Director to a maximum of five years.

Minister of State for Personnel, Public Grievances

and Pension Jitendra Singh moved the Delhi Special Police Establishment (Amendment) Bill, 2021 for consideration in the Rajya Sabha on Tuesday and said the Bill, which extends the tenure of the Director of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to a maximum of five years from the present two years, is a move by the Central Government to check corruption and to ensure and enhance transparency.

In recent years, he said, the nation is faced with the triple menace of corruption, black money and international crime that is linked to drug trafficking, terrorism and criminal offences and all these are a threat to the security and financial structure of the country.

# Losing the art of critical thinking

The CBSE's recent apology for an exam question is worrying



AVIJIT PATHAK

We in India are destroying the spirit of education – the spark of engaged pedagogy, critical thinking and humanistic sensibilities. Possibly, the dominant political culture – often celebrated by sections of the media in this ‘post-truth’ age – is not in tune with the art of debate and dialogue. Furthermore, as the ‘will to power’ often characterises our leaders, it becomes difficult to acknowledge solid facts and truth that might unsettle their images as the ultimate saviours of the nation. It is no wonder that the escape from truth becomes the new normal. And this pathology seems to have crippled the educational sensibilities of our academic bureaucrats.

## Poverty of imagination

Is it, therefore, surprising that the CBSE issued an apology for the “inappropriate” question on the Gujarat riots asked in the Class XII Sociology board exam paper? The question read: “The unprecedented scale and spread of anti-Muslim violence in Gujarat in 2002 took place under which government?” Why is this inappropriate? Students of the social sciences ought to reflect on the dynamics of culture, politics and society. They ought to learn, unlearn and think critically of the complex trajectory of sociopolitical ideals like secularism, cultural pluralism and religious nationalism. What is the point of studying sociology if they do not become aware of, say, the violence implicit in caste hierarchy or the tyranny of majoritarianism?

However, our academic bureaucrats are not spirited teachers or pedagogues. See the poverty of imagination in their justification for the apology. We are told that this “inappropriate” question is in violation of the CBSE guidelines. A question, we are told, should be purely “academic oriented”, “class and religion neutral”, and not touch upon domains that could “harm sentiments of people based on social and political choices”. If we go by this strange logic, our children should not be told about, or encouraged to debate on, the historical/political episodes which affected the trajectory of the postcolonial Indian state – the propagation of the ‘two-nation theory’ by V.D. Savarkar and Muhammad Ali Jinnah; the brutalisation of human consciousness in the Partition violence as depicted with immense sensitivity by a literary figure like Saadat Hasan Manto; the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi by a Hindu fanatic; the horror of Emergency; the

anti-Sikh riots in Delhi in 1984; the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992; or the rise of feminist/Dalit/working class/environmental/civil society movements in the country. It is possible that the techno-managers of the CBSE might argue that all these episodes are “political” and therefore not “academic”. Furthermore, they would argue that debates on these would hurt some group or other. They might say don’t refer to anti-Sikh riots because it would hurt the sentiments of Hindus or don’t talk about Gandhi’s assassination because it might hurt the sentiments of many Hindu nationalists. Hence, children, as the CBSE logic seems to suggest, should grow up with the notion that no one demolished the mosque in 1992; no riot took place in Gujarat in 2002; and no COVID-19-related deaths due to the scarcity of oxygen cylinders took place during the pandemic.

## The potential of critical pedagogy

Imagine the likes of Paulo Freire and Bell Hooks responding to the CBSE’s logic. They would possibly make three points. First, they would demythologise the notion of value-neutral academics. They would argue that in the name of value-neutrality, we often end up legitimising the status quo. In fact, the spirit of critical pedagogy awakens young minds and makes them capable of reflecting on the discourse of power. Hence, a young student should not merely memorise the Preamble of the Constitution as a fact; instead, they should be inspired by teachers to see the harsh reality and wonder why our secular, socialist republic is characterised by gross inequality and caste/gender violence. Education is about asking difficult questions and striving for a just social order.

Second, they would stress on the creative agency of a young learner. The idea is neither to memorise facts like a parrot nor to master the strategy of cracking the multiple-choice questions pattern of standardised tests. In our classrooms, they must find their voice, their argumentative spirit, and their urge to walk with teachers as co-travellers and critical thinkers. There is no harm if in our classrooms they ask: Does the cult of narcissism negate the ethos of democracy?

And third, they would remind us of the art of building the bridge between the ‘self’ and the ‘world’, or ‘personal’ and ‘political’. When you are introduced to the ideas of Gandhi, B.R. Ambedkar and Savitribai Phule, you undergo a process of inner churning; you begin to strive for a new world.

Our political masters seek to negate this liberating potential of critical pedagogy. And ironically, our academic bureaucrats abhor the spirit of emancipatory education.

*Avijit Pathak is Professor of Sociology at JNU, New Delhi*

# Pain from prices

More fuel tax cuts are needed to prevent inflation from hurting the recovery

The latest inflation data, both retail and wholesale, point to accelerating price gains that could potentially undermine the fragile economic recovery by pushing up costs and depleting consumers’ purchasing power. November’s Consumer Price Index (CPI) shows year-on-year inflation at the retail level quickened to a three-month high of 4.91%, from 4.48% in October. Even on a sequential basis, last month’s CPI reveals prices are estimated to have risen 0.73% from October with as many as 10 of the 12 constituents of the food and beverages category witnessing month-on-month inflation. Food was in fact a major driver of the quickening in price gains on an annual basis. Vegetable prices surged from October, logging 7.4% month-on-month inflation. Also, the Union government’s belated and marginal reduction in excise duty on petrol and diesel, which was followed by cuts in local value added taxes by many States, barely slowed the pace of inflation in the transport and communication category: the rate eased 88 basis points from 10.90% in October, to 10.02% in November. Clothing and footwear, housing, health, education and recreation were among the other key product and service categories that contributed to the sequential trend in price gains underlining the fact that inflation excluding food and fuel, otherwise known as core inflation, remains disconcertingly sticky and elevated at around 6%.

Nor does the data on wholesale prices provide any reason for cheer, with provisional inflation based on the wholesale price index racing to a record 14.2% in November, from October’s 12.5%. The fuel and power sub index surged 39.8% year-on-year, and all three major groups comprising the WPI posted sequential accelerations as well. Persistently high and climbing wholesale prices of basic metals, chemicals and chemical products, and textiles among manufactured products have the potential to feed through down-the-line to retail prices and add to inflationary pressure for consumers. While manufacturers in some sectors may opt to absorb rising input costs, at least in the short term till demand gets more entrenched, the signs including from automobile makers are far from reassuring. The tariff increases announced by telecom service providers last month are also expected to feed through into retail inflation in December and international semiconductor shortages and logistics bottlenecks are roiling the outlook for prices of electronics and other products reliant on global supply chains. With the rupee continuing to weaken against the U.S. dollar, policymakers also face the challenge of contending with imported inflation including the landed cost of crude oil shipments. The onus is clearly on the Centre to deepen the fuel tax cuts and address other supply-side issues to prevent inflation from hurting the recovery.

# The NMP is hardly the panacea for growth in India

As the Government has also shown, there are out-of-the-box policy initiatives to revamp public sector businesses



MILIND KUMAR SHARMA

The National Monetisation Pipeline (NMP) envisages an aggregate monetisation potential of ₹ 6-lakh crore through the leasing of core assets of the Central government in sectors such as roads, railways, power, oil and gas pipelines, telecom, civil aviation, shipping ports and waterways, mining, food and public distribution, coal, housing and urban affairs, and stadiums and sports complexes, to name some sectors, over a four-year period (FY2022 to FY2025). But the point is that it only underscores the need for policy makers to investigate the key reasons and processes which led to once profit-making public sector assets becoming inefficient and sick businesses.

## To unlock value

Eight core industrial sectors that support infrastructure such as coal, crude oil, natural gas, refinery products, fertilizers, steel, cement, and electricity have a total weight of nearly 40% in the Index of Industrial Production (IIP). According to NITI Aayog, the strategic objective of the asset monetisation programme is to unlock the value of investments in public sector assets by tapping private sector

capital and efficiencies. The NMP policy advocates unlocking idle capital from non-strategic/underperforming government owned assets and reinvesting the funds, thus received, into new infrastructure projects and augmentation of assets such as greenfield infrastructure creation.

This reportedly first-of-its-kind initiative claims that it will boost the economy, generate better employment opportunities, and drive the competitiveness of the Indian economy.

Notwithstanding the merit of this decision by the government of the day, it becomes imperative for policy makers to introspect the decline of profit-making government assets in the backdrop of the Government contemplating reinvesting the funds received to create fresh assets, post the NMP exercise. It is quite likely that the nation may find itself in a vicious cycle of creating new assets and then monetising the same when they become liabilities for the Government at a later stage.

Going by the annual report (2020-2021) of the Department of Public Enterprises, Government of India, there are 256 operational-run central public sector undertakings (CPSUs), employing about one million people; they posted a net profit of ₹93,294 crore (FY 2019-20). Out of these, 96 have been conferred the Ratna status (72, 14, and 10 are Miniratnas, Navratnas, and Maharatna companies, respectively).

As India needs to invest about



GETTY IMAGES/STOCKPHOTO

\$1.5 trillion on infrastructure development in order to aspire to become \$5 trillion economy by the year 2024-25, according to the Economic Survey 2019-20, public enterprises should be in focus.

## Some reasons for PSU decline

The primary reasons for the failure of public sector enterprises is no secret. Cost overruns, *inter alia*, is one of the major reasons. In some cases, project completion time is exceeded, leading to elevated project cost so much so that either the project itself becomes unviable at the time of its launching or delays its break even point. Besides, optimum input-output ratio is seldom observed in a majority of government infrastructural projects leading to their overcapitalisation. A reluctance to implement labour reforms, a lack of inter-ministerial/departmental coordination, poor decision-making, ineffective governance and excessive government control are other reasons for the failure of public infrastructural assets.

Recently, the "Pradhan Mantri

Gati Shakti National Master Plan" for multi-modal connectivity was launched by the Prime Minister with an aim 'to synchronise the operations of different departments of 16 Ministries including railways and roadways for seamless planning and coordinated execution of infrastructure projects in a timely manner'. It is essentially a digital platform for information sharing among different Ministries and departments at the Union and State levels. It also entails analytical decision-making tools to disseminate project-related information and prioritise key infrastructure projects. Besides, it fosters a periodical review and monitoring of the progress of cross-sectorial infrastructure projects through the GIS platform in order to intervene if there is a need.

## Essential steps

In addition to it, as enunciated in the Economic Survey 2020-21, an important step for the Government to take to strengthen public sector businesses would be to completely revamp their corporate governance structure in order to enhance operational autonomy augmented with strong governance practices including listing on stock exchange for greater transparency and accountability.

The Department of Public Enterprises has reportedly initiated revamping of the performance monitoring system of central public sector enterprises to make them more transparent, objective

and forward looking, based on sectoral indices/benchmarks.

The Economic Survey also highlights the Government's initiatives as part of the Atmanirbhar Abhiyaan (campaign for self-reliance) in order to boost domestic production in the steel sector, viz. inclusion of "speciality steel", recommending four different types of steel for incentives under the production linked incentive (PLI) scheme; selling steel to Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), affiliated to Engineering Export Promotion Council of India at export parity price under the duty drawback scheme of the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT); measures to provide preference to domestically produced iron and steel in government procurement, where aggregate estimate of iron and steel products exceeds ₹25 crore; protecting industry from unfair trade through appropriate remedial measures including imposition of anti-dumping duty and countervailing duty on the products on which unfair trade practices were adopted by the other countries.

More such out-of-the-box policy initiatives are needed to rule out public asset monetisation schemes such as the NMP in future.

Milind Kumar Sharma teaches in the Department of Production and Industrial Engineering, M.B.M. Engineering College, Faculty of Engineering and Architecture, Jai Narain Vyas University, Jodhpur, erstwhile University of Jodhpur. The views expressed are personal

## ADB pares India's 2021-22 growth to 9.7%

This was evident, it pointed out, in a double-digit contraction in motor vehicle sales in October and in GST e-way bills generated in November.

"In India, a strong 20.1% growth rebound in Q1 of fiscal year 2021 was followed in Q2 by growth moderation to 8.4%, marginally below expectations," the bank said in its Asian Development Outlook Supplement released on Tuesday.

In April, the ADB had projected an 11% growth for India in 2021-22.

The bank has retained its forecast for 2022-23, when it expects growth to moderate to 7.5% 'as domestic demand normalises'.

It expects inflation to rise

in India from an average of 5.5% for the full year estimated earlier, to 5.6%. While inflation in the first seven months of 2021-22 averaged 5.2%, some pressure is expected to build as chip shortages drive up semiconductor prices, it said.

"The projection for the whole year is increased marginally to 5.6%," the bank's economists said in Tuesday's supplement. The Reserve Bank of India has estimated retail inflation to be 5.3% over the year.

South Asia's GDP forecast has been lowered to 8.6% from 8.8% in September, due to the moderation in India's growth estimate and the slower than anticipated growth in manufacturing.

## RBI ushers in corrective action scheme to better control NBFCs

Aim is to enable intervention, help entities apply timely remedy, says regulator

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank of India on Tuesday announced a Prompt Corrective Action (PCA) Framework for Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs), to strengthen applicable supervisory tools.

This is in line with the PCA framework for banks, whose aim was to help improve their financial condition and governance issues.

The framework will apply to all deposit-taking NBFCs, all non-deposit taking NBFCs in the middle, upper and top layers, including investment and credit firms, core invest-



Securing the system: The PCA was earlier set out for banks, to help improve their financials and governance. \*AFP

ment firms, infrastructure debt funds, infrastructure finance firms and micro-finance institutions. It has excluded NBFCs not accepting

or not intending to accept public funds, primary dealers and housing finance firms, along with government-owned ones. This will

take effect October 1, 2022, the RBI said in a circular.

The objective of the framework is to enable supervisory intervention at the appropriate time and require the supervised entity to initiate and implement remedial measures in a timely manner, so as to restore its financial health, the RBI said.

Among large NBFCs (assets exceeding ₹25,000 crore), rating agency ICRA noted that three entities were in breach of the net NPA criterion as of September. However, all the entities have established parentage. (With PTI inputs)

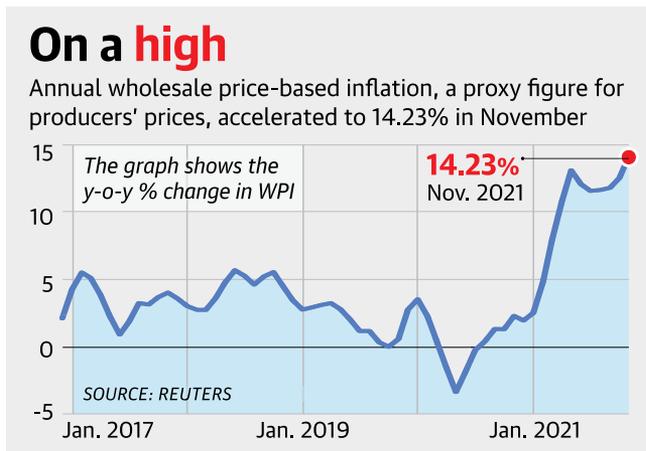
# Wholesale price inflation spikes to a record as food, fuel surge

## Primary food inflation hits a 13-month high

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI

India's wholesale inflation accelerated to a new high of 14.2% in November from 12.5% in October, led by a surge in primary food inflation that hit a 13-month high and a continued uptick in mineral, fuel and power, as well as oil and gas prices.

Economists termed November's record wholesale inflation numbers – the eighth month in a row that India has seen double-digit inflation – a negative surprise. Expectations that the tax cuts on fuel announced last month by the Union Government could provide



some relief to producers grappling with high commodity and freight costs were largely belied.

Fuel and power inflation, in fact, surged to a record level of almost 40% in November, rising sharply over two months from the revised level of 29.5% recorded in Sep-

tember. A marked uptick was also visible across most categories beyond fuel. Manufactured products recorded a marginal reduction month-on-month, with inflation dipping to 11.92% from 12.04% in October.

**CONTINUED ON** ▶ PAGE 12

# Wholesale price inflation spikes to a record

But food inflation measured by the wholesale food index more than doubled from 3.06% to 6.7% in November. Inflation in primary articles also virtually doubled to 10.34% from 5.2% in October.

The Wholesale Price Index (WPI) climbed 2.73% on a month-on-month basis, the Government said, attributing the “high rate of inflation” primarily to the rise in prices of mineral oils, basic metals, crude petroleum and natural gas, chemicals and chemical products and food products.

The record inflation of 14.2% in November 2021 has come as a shock, said ICRA

chief economist Aditi Nayar, as most non-core categories displayed an inflation rate that was much steeper than expected. Inflation, measured by the WPI, had risen 2.29% in November 2020.

Within food articles, inflation in eggs, meat and fish jumped from 1.98% in October to 9.66% in November, fruits recorded 15.5% inflation compared to 8.2% a month earlier. Wheat prices saw an inflation of 10.14% from 8.14% in October.

Vegetable price trends turned around after at least five months of negative inflation, having last recorded -18.5%, to clock an inflation of 3.91% in November.

# SC approves widening of three Char Dham highways

They will facilitate quick movement of troops: Govt.

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL  
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday upheld the Government's mandate to broaden three Himalayan highways, considered crucial by the Ministry of Defence (MoD) for quick troop build-up along the India-China border.

The three National Highways – Rishikesh to Mana, Rishikesh to Gangotri and Tanakpur to Pithoragarh – act as feeder roads to the northern border with China. They are part of the Char Dham Highway project. The highways will now be developed in accordance with the double lane with paved shoulder (DLPS) system.



**More space:** The highways will be developed as per the double lane with paved shoulder system. ■V.V. KRISHNAN

“This court in judicial review cannot second-guess the infrastructural needs of the armed forces,” a Bench led by Justice D.Y. Chandrachud said in a judgment.

The verdict is based on an application filed by the MoD to modify the court's September 8, 2020 order, which directed that mountain roads for the Char Dham project should be 5.5 metre in width in compliance with a 2018 circular of the Minis-

try of Road Transport and Highways. The Ministry had gone on to amend its circular in December last, saying that “for roads in hilly and mountainous terrain which act as feeder roads to the Indo-China border [and] are of strategic importance for national security, the carriage-way width should be 7 m with 1.5 m paved shoulder on either side”.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12

# Panel backs Brazil's plaint on India's sugar subsidies

## India to appeal ruling, retain subsidy

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

A World Trade Organisation dispute resolution panel has ruled against India's sugar subsidies, and in favour of complainants Brazil, Guatemala and Australia.

The Commerce Ministry refuted the findings of the panel, which were circulated on Tuesday, as “completely unacceptable to India”. Stating that it had initiated all measures necessary to protect its interests and to file an appeal, the Ministry said current subsidy policies would continue as “India believes they are consistent with its WTO obligations”.

The dispute dates back to



2019, when the three major sugar-exporting nations challenged some of India's policies for the sugar sector at the WTO.

The complainants alleged that the domestic support given by India to cane farmers exceeded the limit set by the WTO, and that India also provided prohibited export subsidies to mills.

# A fortnight's emerging evidence on the Omicron variant

Rapid spread is likely to test the ability of public health systems to react efficiently; it's best to vaccinate, pull up masks, get more fresh air into rooms and avoid crowds

VINOD SCARIA  
BANI JOLLY

The earliest genome for what is now designated as the Omicron variant was sequenced from a viral isolate collected from Gauteng, South Africa in early November 2021 and was made publicly available by the National Institute for Communicable Diseases, South Africa through GISAID, a database for sharing genomes of viruses. Since its designation, owing to added genomic surveillance and deposits of genomic data from across the world, over 2,700 sequences of the Omicron variant are presently available in GISAID.

The transmission rate, immune evasion and the proportions of patients developing severe disease and death are the useful parameters which would enable broad assessments on how the variant would impact the population.

## Immune evasion

The immune system has two arms. The first arm is mediated by antibodies – proteins which can recognise and

bind proteins on the surface of microorganisms thereby neutralising them. The second type is mediated by T-cells which can recognise and kill cells infected with viruses. The corpus of evidence at hand for Omicron is largely based on antibodies and neutralisation.

The Omicron variant has about 32 mutations in the spike protein, many of which have been associated with binding sites of antibodies, indicating that it would escape antibodies from previous infections, vaccines, and many monoclonal antibodies used in the treatment.

## Six studies

A total of six studies are now available in the public domain from across the world.

While the ranges of neutralisation compared with the ancestral lineages as well as Delta provide a wide range, it is unequivocal that the neutralisation of Omicron is significantly less than that of the ancestral lineage (B.1.20-40-fold lower) or Delta (about five-fold lower).

The only silver lining is that antibodies from individuals with boosters, or individuals with infection prior to vaccination (hybrid immunity) seem to neutralise the virus to some extent.

Early evidence on vaccine efficiency has also emerged from the United Kingdom Health Security Agency, which evaluated efficiency for vaccines against symptomatic infection, that also corroborated quite well with the observations in the laboratory.

Two doses of AstraZeneca (ChAdOx1) vaccine seemingly provides practically no protection against symptomatic infection, while an adjuvanted booster with mRNA vaccine seemingly provides much better protection against symptomatic infection.

The estimates for protection against severe disease and death would be estimated much later as these are delayed events.

From the perspective of public health, this would mean a significant number of people with pre-existing immunity from COVID-19 infections or from two doses of



Tracking the virus: SARS-CoV-2 samples being prepared for the RNA sequencing process. ■ REUTERS

vaccines could still have symptomatic re-infections and vaccine breakthrough infections.

One of the useful estimates for assessing the rate of transmission is the doubling time. Early assessments suggest the doubling time for the Omicron variant is approximately 2.5 to three days, which is much shorter than the Delta variant. This significant advantage of Omicron over Delta means that in regions where ongoing and

high transmission of the Delta variant is occurring, including in the U.K., Omicron would emerge as the dominant lineage in a very short period of three to four weeks. This would have implications in the ability of healthcare systems to test as well as offer adequate care to the needy.

## Disease severity

Early and preliminary estimates from South Africa suggest that the proportion of

patients requiring hospitalisation for the Omicron variant in Gauteng province is much lower than in the previous waves. Similar trends have been observed for oxygen requirements as well as Intensive Care Unit admissions.

While this indeed is a silver lining, a sufficiently high rate of transmission could quickly saturate existing healthcare capacity.

## EXPLAINER

It is reassuring that early evidence suggests that individuals who have attained hybrid immunity (infection as well as vaccination) are likely to be better protected at least against severe disease and deaths.

Another redeeming aspect is that a significant population in India has already gone through infection as suggested by serosurveys, and at least 50% and more of the adult population has accessed both doses of vaccine.

The early evidence from South Africa suggests that the proportion of patients in-

ferred requiring hospitalisation is lower than the previous waves. While this does not necessarily mean that the variant is "milder" than other variants, it does imply that populations similar to South Africa – young and with high prior infections – may be less affected this time.

Evidence at hand also suggests that vaccines indeed protect against severe disease and death, and therefore the immediate need is to cover as many eligible people, especially in the high risk groups, with two doses of vaccines.

With a rapid rate of transmission, even a lower proportion of patients requiring hospitalisation can put enormous strain on existing resources – both for testing as well as for provision of care.

## Time-tested measures

The current scenario also mandates placing a lot of emphasis on time-tested public health measures.

The growing corpus of evidence indicates the effectiveness of non-pharmaceutical interventions, including

masks and ventilation, both of which have not been well-appreciated.

Similarly, the importance of ventilation and social distancing cannot be emphasised more, especially in a scenario where a large number of people are likely to congregate over the festive and marriage season.

## Too little comfort

In summary, the emerging evidence on the Omicron variant offers too little to comfort.

The rapid spread of the Omicron variant is likely to test public health systems and their ability to plan and implement strategies well in advance, and also their ability to react efficiently and in a timely manner.

For the common man, it is possibly the best time to take pending doses of vaccine, pull up masks, let a lot more fresh air into rooms, and avoid crowds. It is always better to be safe than sorry.

(Vinod Scaria and Bani Jolly are researchers at the CSIR-Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology, New Delhi)

# COVID-19 pill is near 90% effective: Pfizer

Separate laboratory testing shows the drug retains effectiveness against the Omicron variant

REUTERS  
NEW YORK

Pfizer Inc on Tuesday said final analysis of its antiviral COVID-19 pill still showed near 90% efficacy in preventing hospitalisations and deaths in high-risk patients, and recent lab data suggests the drug retains its effectiveness against the fast spreading Omicron variant of the coronavirus.

The U.S. drugmaker last month said the oral medicine was around 89% effective in preventing hospitalisations or deaths when compared to placebo, based on interim results in around 1,200 people. The data disclosed on Tuesday includes an additional 1,000 people.

Nobody in the trial who received the Pfizer treatment died, compared with 12 deaths among placebo recipients.

The Pfizer pills are taken with the older antiviral ritonavir every 12 hours for five days beginning shortly after



Major boost: Pfizer says Paxlovid is effective in preventing hospitalisations and deaths in high-risk patients. ■ REUTERS

onset of symptoms. If authorised, the treatment will be sold as Paxlovid.

"It's a stunning outcome," Pfizer Chief Scientific Officer Mikael Dolsten said.

"We're talking about a staggering number of lives saved and hospitalizations prevented. And of course, if you deploy this quickly after infection, we are likely to reduce transmission dramati-

cally," Mr. Dolsten said.

## Second clinical trial

Pfizer also released early data from a second clinical trial suggesting that the treatment reduced hospitalisations by around 70% in a smaller trial of standard-risk adults, including some higher-risk vaccinated people. The results were not statistically significant, but Pfizer

said they showed a "positive data trend for reduction in risk."

The trial did not show that the drug alleviated symptoms of COVID-19 in the same population. The results in standard-risk individuals are from interim analyses at 60% and 80% of enrollment of the now fully-enrolled trial of over 1,100 people. Pfizer will continue the trial and release more data.

Pfizer submitted data to the U.S. FDA last month, asking for emergency use authorisation of the drug.

The FDA's decision could come within a matter of weeks, if not days, said Zarina Saidova, an analyst at Moscow-based Finam Holdings, as the new data confirms what the company previously disclosed and submitted to the regulator.

There are currently no oral antiviral treatments for COVID-9 authorised in the United States.

Rival Merck & Co has

asked for emergency use authorisation of its antiviral pill molnupiravir. But that drug only reduced hospitalizations and deaths in its clinical trial of high-risk patients by around 30%.

Mr. Dolsten said recent laboratory testing showed that activity against the prototype of the Omicron variant is as "good as basically any SARS-COV-2 variant of concern."

## Omicron rampant: WHO

Meanwhile, the World Health Organisation (WHO) Director-General, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, noted that 77 countries had now reported cases of Omicron, "and the reality is that Omicron is probably in most countries, even if it hasn't been detected yet."

"Omicron is spreading at a rate we have not seen with any previous variant," he said. The WHO was concerned that people were dismissing Omicron as mild.

# Needed: repeal of AFSPA, not regret

There have been scores of civilian killings in the Northeast since the AFSPA came into force



UDAYON MISRA

The demand for the repeal of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act of 1958 (AFSPA) is gathering momentum throughout the Northeast. Massive rallies are being held against the law in Nagaland. The Chief Minister and his Cabinet have backed the demand and Meghalaya's Chief Minister has also joined in. In Assam, large rallies are being held by student organisations against the Act.

The Centre has tried to convey the impression that the Mon incident of December 4, which claimed the lives of 14 civilians, was a "mistake" because of intelligence failure. But the Union Home Minister tried to justify the Army's action by saying that the firing was resorted to only when the vehicle under question refused to stop at a signal and tried to flee.

The people of the Tiru and Oting villages of Tizit subdivision of Mon district are used to checks carried out by the security forces. One of the survivors of the shooting has said that the Army personnel began firing without any signal whatsoever, in daylight. The FIR filed by the Nagaland Police against the 21 Para Special Forces involved in the firing states that the security forces did not "make requisition to police station to provide police guide for the operation" and that they "blankly opened fire at the vehicle without any provocation". The Army's statement that its operation had been carried out on the basis of "credible intelligence of the likely movement of insurgents" only shows once again how vulnerable the civilian population is in areas under the AFSPA.

## Pattern of civilian killings

The Mon incident cannot be seen as an exception or a mistake because it fits into a general pattern of civilian killings that have been taking place ever since the AFSPA was first invoked in the then Naga Hills district of Assam in 1958. This particular incident came to light only because of the quick intervention of the villagers. Moreover, it took place when the



A demonstration demanding the repeal of AFSPA, in Guwahati. •PTI

situation in Nagaland was largely peaceful and the State was celebrating the annual Hornbill Festival. It would perhaps have been a different picture had these killings taken place while an Army operation was in progress in the area.

Nagaland has seen numerous cases of civilian killings by the security forces which have gone unpunished because of the AFSPA. In his book *Nagaland and India: The Blood and the Tears*, Kaka Iralu documents the extra-judicial killings and the suffering of the common people under the draconian provisions of the AFSPA which gives total immunity to the security forces for their actions.

There have been scores of civilian killings in the region over the last several decades since the AFSPA came into force. In the long list of the roll call of the dead, some incidents stand out in memory. In 1995, nine innocent civilians were killed by Central Reserve Police Force personnel in front of the RIMS hospital in Imphal. In 2000, 10 civilians were gunned down by the 8th Assam Rifles at Malom Leikai following a blast at Imphal's Tulihal Airport. It was this incident that triggered the famous 16-year fast by Irom Sharmila for the repeal of the AFSPA. The Manipur High Court later declared those killed as innocent and announced compensation for their families. One also cannot forget how in 2004, a group of women launched a nude protest in front of the Assam Ri-

gles Headquarters at Kangla Fort, Imphal, after Thangjam Manorama was allegedly tortured, raped and brutally killed by security personnel. This was followed by several months of continuous protest by the people of Manipur eventually forcing then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to visit Imphal and assure the people that he "sympathised with the legitimate aspirations of the people regarding the Act" and would replace it with a "more humane law" which would "take into account" the legitimate aspirations of the people and national security concerns. Herein lay the catch. Though Dr. Singh's assurance was followed by the setting up of the Justice Jeevan Reddy Committee, which recommended the repeal of the AFSPA, finally, national security concerns made the Commission's recommendations infructuous and the AFSPA continued as it was.

In 2016, a two-judge Bench of the Supreme Court of Justices Madan B. Lokur and U.U. Lalit passed a historic judgment on a plea by hundreds of families in Manipur for a probe by a Special Investigation Team into 1,528 cases of alleged fake encounters involving the Army and the police between 1979 and 2012. The Court held that "there is no concept of absolute immunity from trial by a criminal court."

Assam, which has been under the AFSPA since November 1990, has had its own share of killings by the security forces since the days the Unit-

ed Liberation Front of Asom insurgency began in the early 1990s. Gunning down young men in "encounters" became so common that Army dispatches on these incidents appeared to be carbon copies of one another. Such killings have been documented by organisations such as the Manav Adhikar Suraksha Samiti.

## The many who go scot-free

However, at least in one case, because of the dogged perseverance of former legislator and present Assam Jatiya Parishad leader Jagadish Bhuyan and some activists of the All Assam Students' Union, the security personnel involved in the cold-blooded murder in February 1994 of five young men of the Talap area of Tinsukia district were finally court-martialled. In that incident, nine youths were picked up by the Army on the suspicion that they were involved in the killing of the general manager of the Assam Frontier Tea Limited, Rameshwar Singh, at his Talap office. Following a habeas corpus petition at the Gauhati High Court, the Army handed over five bodies to the Dhola police while freeing the other four. As usual, the deaths were attributed to an encounter, while the police claimed them as killings. Finally, after the Gauhati High Court ordered a Central Bureau of Investigation inquiry, which indicted the Army personnel of murder of the five youths, the Army was forced to order a court martial in July 2018. Seven Army personnel, including a Major General, were dismissed and sentenced to life imprisonment. This is just one case where the protective cover given by the AFSPA wasn't enough to hide the murders committed by the security forces. However, hundreds of extra-judicial killings under the AFSPA have gone unpunished throughout the State.

For decades now, the people of the Northeast have been living under the shadow of a draconian law which makes a travesty of the rights of the citizen guaranteed by the Constitution. The Centre has expressed its regret over a botched operation. A mere regret is not enough. What is needed is an immediate repeal of the AFSPA.

Udayon Misra is a writer, professor and former National Fellow of Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla

General Studies Paper I	
A	History of Indian culture will cover the salient aspects of art forms, literature and architecture from ancient to modern times;
B	Modern Indian history from about the middle of the eighteenth century until the present-significant events, personalities, issues;
C	Freedom struggle-its various stages and important contributors / contributions from different parts of the country;
D	Post-independence consolidation and reorganization within the country;
E	History of the world will include events from 18 <sup>th</sup> century such as industrial revolution, world wars, re-drawing of national boundaries, colonization, decolonization,
F	Political philosophies like communism, capitalism, socialism etc.-their forms and effect on the society
G	Salient features of Indian Society, Diversity of India;
H	Effects of globalization on Indian society;
I	Role of women and women's organization;
J	Social empowerment, communalism, regionalism & secularism
K	Salient features of world's physical geography;
L	Geographical features and their location- changes in critical geographical features (including water bodies and ice-caps) and in flora and fauna and the effects of such changes;
M	Important Geophysical phenomena such as earthquakes, Tsunami, Volcanic activity, cyclone etc.
N	Distribution of key natural resources across the world (including South Asia and the Indian subcontinent);
O	Factors responsible for the location of primary, secondary, and tertiary sector industries in various parts of the world (including India);
P	Population and associated issues;
Q	Urbanization, their problems and their remedies
General Studies Paper II	
A	India and its neighbourhood- relations;
B	Important International institutions, agencies and fora- their structure, mandate;
C	Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests;
D	Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.
E	Indian Constitution, historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure;
F	Comparison of the Indian Constitutional scheme with other countries;
G	Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States, issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure, devolution of powers and finances up to local levels and challenges therein; Inclusive growth and issues arising from it;
H	Parliament and State Legislatures - structure, functioning, conduct of business, powers & privileges and issues arising out of these;
I	Structure, organization and functioning of the executive and the judiciary, Ministries and Departments;

J	Separation of powers between various organs dispute redressal mechanisms and institutions;
K	Appointment to various Constitutional posts, powers, functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional bodies;
L	Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies;
M	Mechanisms, laws, institutions and bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections;
N	Salient features of the Representation of People's Act;
O	Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability, e-governance- applications, models, successes, limitations, and potential;
P	Citizens charters, transparency & accountability and institutional and other measures;
Q	Issues relating to poverty and hunger,
R	Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States, Performance of these schemes;
S	Issues relating to development and management of social sector / services relating to education and human resources;
T	Issues relating to development and management of social sector / services relating to health
General Studies Paper III	
A	Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment;
B	Effects of liberalization on the economy, changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth;
C	Inclusive growth and issues arising from it;
D	Infrastructure Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc. Government budgeting;
E	Land reforms in India
F	Major crops, cropping patterns in various parts of the country, different types of irrigation and irrigation systems;
G	Storage, transport and marketing of agricultural produce and issues and related constraints;
H	e-technology in the aid of farmers; Technology Missions; Economics of Animal-Rearing.
I	Issues of buffer stocks and food security, Public Distribution System- objectives, functioning, limitations, revamping;
J	Food processing and related industries in India – scope and significance, location, upstream and downstream requirements, supply chain management;
K	Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and minimum support prices
L	Awareness in the fields of IT, Space, Computers, robotics, nano-technology, bio-technology;
M	Indigenization of technology and developing new technology;
N	Developments and their applications and effects in everyday life;
O	Issues relating to intellectual property rights
P	Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment
Q	Disaster and disaster management
R	Challenges to internal security through communication networks, role of media and social networking sites in internal security challenges, basics of cyber security;
S	Money-laundering and its prevention;

T	Various forces and their mandate;
U	Security challenges and their management in border areas;
V	Linkages of organized crime with terrorism;
W	Role of external state and non-state actors in creating challenges to internal security;
X	Linkages between development and spread of extremism.
<b>General Studies Paper IV</b>	
A	Ethics and Human Interface: Essence, determinants and consequences of Ethics in human actions;
B	Dimensions of ethics;
C	Ethics in private and public relationships. Human Values - lessons from the lives and teachings of great leaders, reformers and administrators;
D	Role of family, society and educational institutions in inculcating values.
E	Attitude: Content, structure, function; its influence and relation with thought and behaviour;
F	Moral and political attitudes;
G	Social influence and persuasion.
H	Aptitude and foundational values for Civil Service , integrity, impartiality and non-partisanship, objectivity, dedication to public service, empathy, tolerance and compassion towards the weaker sections.
I	Emotional intelligence-concepts, and their utilities and application in administration and governance.
J	Contributions of moral thinkers and philosophers from India and world.
K	Public/Civil service values and Ethics in Public administration: Status and problems;
L	Ethical concerns and dilemmas in government and private institutions;
M	Laws, rules, regulations and conscience as
N	sources of ethical guidance;
O	Accountability and ethical governance; strengthening of ethical and moral values in governance; ethical issues in international relations and funding;
P	Corporate governance.
Q	Probity in Governance: Concept of public service;
R	Philosophical basis of governance and probity;
S	Information sharing and transparency in government, Right to Information, Codes of Ethics, Codes of Conduct, Citizen's Charters, Work culture, Quality of service delivery, Utilization of public funds, challenges of corruption.
T	Case Studies on above issues.