

VEDHIK
DAJLY NEWS
ANALYSIS

18 - D E C E M B E R 2 0 2 1

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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Raising women's legal age of marriage to 21 in House agenda

3 Bills introduced in Lok Sabha amid protests over MoS Mishra's resignation

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT,
NEW DELHI**

With four sittings of winter session remaining the government has listed eight Bills for the next week, including The Prohibition of Child Marriage (A) Bill, 2021 that seeks to raise the legal age of marriage for women from 18 to 21 years and bringing it at par with men.

While the Bill is likely to be introduced on Monday in Rajya Sabha, Minister of State (MoS) for Parliamentary Affairs Arjun Ram Meghwal, informed Lok Sabha on Friday that it is part of the House's agenda for the next week.

Other important Bills on top of the government's legislative agenda for the next week include the passage of the supplementary demands for grants/Appropriation (No.5) Bill and the Election Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2021 that seeks to link the Aadhaar card with the voter identity card.

While Rajya Sabha is likely to take up the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (Amendment) Bill, 2021,



Democracy at work: Members in the Rajya Sabha during the Winter Session of the Parliament, in New Delhi on Thursday. ■PTI

as passed by Lok Sabha, the Mediation Bill, 2021 - seeking to promote and facilitate institutional mediation for resolution of disputes - is likely to be sent to the Standing Committee.

Opposition's demand

Three of the eight Bills – the National Anti-Doping Bill, 2021, the Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Bill, 2021, and the Chartered Accountants, the Cost and Works Accountants and the Company Secretaries (Amendment) Bill, 2021 – were introduced in the Lok Sabha on Friday amid constant protests from

Opposition members, who were demanding the resignation of Minister of State (MoS) for Home Affairs Ajay Mishra 'Teni', for his alleged involvement in the Lakhimpur Kheri violence earlier this year.

When the Lok Sabha met at 2 p.m., apart from introduction of the Bills, it also approved changes made to the Surrogacy (Regulation) Bill by Rajya Sabha through a voice vote and soon after the House was adjourned for the day.

Protests over the Lakhimpur Kheri killings had erupted almost as soon as Lok

Sabha proceedings started at 11 a.m. but Speaker Om Birla tried running the Question Hour for half an hour.

Opposition warned

He had also issued a stern warning to Opposition members who were protesting in the Well of the House.

"Honorable members, if there is any damage to any Lok Sabha property, then the responsibility lies with the members. I would like make this request to member," Mr. Birla cautioned the members who were protesting in the Well and around the secretary general's desk.

Kovind inaugurates Kalibari temple in Dhaka

It is a symbol of the spiritual and cultural bonding among the people of India and Bangladesh, he said

KALLOL BHATTACHERJEE
NEW DELHI

President Ram Nath Kovind on Friday inaugurated a famous Hindu temple in Dhaka that was destroyed by Pakistani forces in 1971. He declared that the revived shrine represents the “spiritual and cultural” bonds between India and Bangladesh.

Addressing the Indian community in Dhaka after inaugurating the new Ramna Kalibari, Mr. Kovind said the relationship between India and Bangladesh is marked by shared language, culture and kinship. “I pay tribute to the enormous sacrifices made by the people of Bangladesh to achieve freedom from tyranny. We salute your indomitable courage in fighting against the formidable odds and standing up against injustice,” Mr. Kovind said in his speech.

At the Ramna temple, President Kovind was welcomed by the Bangladesh Deputy Minister of Religious Affairs, Faridul Haq Khan. He inaugurated the main temple, a guest house, a deep tubewell and the main entry gate. The plaque unveiled by President Kovind stated that the construction had been done by the Government of India.

The original Ramna Kalibari was built during the medieval era and was famous for its tall structure. In 1929, the temple complex acquired an additional building for the devotees of the famous saint Anandamayee, who later became Prime Minister Indira Gandhi’s spiritual advisor.

The inauguration coincided with the 50th anniversary of the victory of Bangladesh and India in the Liberation War.



Seeking blessings: President Ram Nath Kovind offering prayers after inaugurating the renovated Sri Ramna Kali Mandir in Dhaka on Friday. •PTI

Russia drafts pact to limit U.S., NATO role in ex-Soviet nations

Alliance must commit not to expand membership, establish new bases: document

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
MOSCOW

Russia on Friday unveiled proposals to contain the U.S. and NATO in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, calling for urgent negotiations with Washington as it amasses forces near Ukraine.

The U.S. said it was willing to talk but stated upfront that it disagreed with much in the far-reaching proposals, as it renewed warnings of painful reprisals if Russia invades Ukraine.

Russia released unfinished security documents – an unusual move in diplomacy – that call for U.S.-led NATO alliance not to bring in new members or establish bases in ex-Soviet countries.

Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said Russia was ready to hold urgent security talks with the U.S. “as early as” on Saturday.

“We are ready to immediately, even tomorrow – lit-



Conflict zone: Russian Army's self-propelled howitzers fire during military drills near Orenburg in the Urals, Russia. •AP

erally tomorrow, on Saturday – go for talks with the U.S. in a third country,” he told reporters, suggesting Geneva as a venue.

In Washington, a senior official said the U.S. expected to respond “sometime next week” to Russia on a format for talks but made clear it was not enthusiastic about the proposals.

“If there is any further aggression against Ukraine, that will have massive, massive consequences and will

tack on Ukraine, which has been battling a pro-Moscow insurgency in its east since 2014.

Russian President Vladimir Putin denies planning an attack and blames NATO for the rise in tensions, demanding “legal guarantees” the alliance will not expand eastwards.

The draft document addressed to NATO says its members should “commit themselves to refrain from further enlargement, including the accession of Ukraine as well as other states”.

It also insists that alliance members not conduct military activity in Ukraine or other countries in Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and Central Asia.

Moscow and NATO, the document said, should limit the deployment of missiles, set up an emergency telephone hotline and also work to “prevent incidents” in the Baltics and the Black Sea.

The West says Moscow has readied some 1,00,000 troops for an imminent at-

U.S. hits China's DJI, others with sanctions over 'rights abuse'

Companies accused of complicity in oppression of Uighurs

REUTERS
WASHINGTON

The U.S. government hit dozens of Chinese companies with investment and export restrictions on Thursday, including top drone maker DJI, accusing them of complicity in the oppression of China's Uighur minority or helping the military, further ratcheting up tensions between the world's top two economies.

Blaming DJI and seven other tech firms for supporting "the biometric surveillance and tracking" of Uighurs, the U.S. Treasury Department added them to a list of entities suspected of having Chinese military links, barring Americans from trading in their securities.

Separately, the Commerce Department added China's Academy of Military Medical Sciences and its 11 research institutes to a trade blacklist, restricting access to U.S. exports. It said such



A drone made by the Chinese company DJI flying in Miami, U.S. ■ AFP

aid included "purported brain-control weaponry" without defining the technology further.

The department also added HMN International, formerly Huawei Marine, Jiangsu Hengtong Marine Cable Systems, Jiangsu Hengtong OpticElectric, Shanghai Aoshi Control Technology Co, Ltd, and Zhongtian Technology Submarine Cable to the list over U.S. allegations of acquiring, or attempting to acquire, technology from the U.S. to help modernise the People's Liberation Army.

UN experts and rights groups estimate that more than a million people, mainly Uighurs and members of other Muslim minorities, have been detained in recent years in a vast system of camps in China's far-west region of Xinjiang.

Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo said China is choosing to use biotechnologies "to pursue control over its people and its repression of members of ethnic and religious minority groups."

Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesman, Wang Wenbin, said the measure approved on Thursday "indicates that the U.S. has no scruples about smearing China by every means."

"China strongly deplores and rejects that and urges the U.S. to immediately correct its mistake. China will take all necessary measures to resolutely safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of Chinese institutions and enterprises," he said.

WHO emergency nod for Serum Institute's Covovax

'It will help lower income countries'

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
GENEVA

The World Health Organisation on Friday said it had granted emergency approval to the India-manufactured coronavirus vaccine Covovax.

The jab, produced by the Serum Institute of India under licence from the U.S.-based Novavax, will now be distributed as part of global vaccine-sharing system Covax, "giving a much-needed boost to ongoing efforts to vaccinate more people in lower income countries", the WHO said.

"Even with new variants emerging, vaccines remain one of the most effective tools to protect people against serious illness and death from SARS-COV-2," said Mariangela Simao, the WHO's access to vaccines chief.



Covishield, also produced by SII, is widely used in India.

"This listing aims to increase access, particularly in lower income countries, 41 of which have still not been able to vaccinate 10% of their populations, while 98 countries have not reached 40%," she said.

Covovax requires two doses and is stable at 2 to 8 degrees Celsius refrigerated temperatures.

'Advance tax collection rises 54% to ₹4.60 lakh cr.'

Indicates economy's recovery: FinMin

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

The finance ministry on Friday said advance tax collection increased by 53.50% to ₹4.60 lakh crore so far this fiscal year, indicating recovery in the economy.

Direct tax collections for 2021-22, as on December 16, show that net collections are at ₹9.45 lakh crore compared with ₹5.88 lakh crore over the year-earlier period, representing an increase of 60.8%, the ministry said.

"The net collection [as on December 16] in FY22 has registered a growth of 40% over the corresponding period of the previous year when the net collection was ₹6,75,409.5 crore, and a growth of 40.93% over the corresponding period of



2018-19 when the net collection was ₹6,70,739.1 crore," the ministry said.

The cumulative advance tax collections for the first, second and third quarter of 2021-22 stand at ₹4,59,917.1 crore as on December 16, 2021, against advance tax collections of ₹2,99,620.5 crore for the corresponding period of 2020-21, a growth of about 53.5%, it said.

The challenge of achieving 9.5% growth rate

The key lies in the government's ongoing emphasis on infrastructure spending as reflected in its capital expenditure



C. RANGARAJAN
& D.K. SRIVASTAVA

The National Statistical Office (NSO) released the second quarter gross value added (GVA) and gross domestic product (GDP) numbers on November 30, 2021, indicating the pace of economic recovery in India after the two COVID-19 waves. The contraction was highest in the first quarter of 2020-21, gradually easing off in the subsequent quarters. The resultant base effect was the strongest in the first quarter of 2021-22 as reflected in real GDP and GVA growth rates of 20.1% and 18.8%, respectively. The base effect weakened in the second quarter with GDP and GVA growth rates at 8.4% and 8.5%, respectively. Considering these two quarters together, the real GVA for the first half of 2021-22 at ₹63.4 lakh crore has remained below the level in the first half of 2019-20 at ₹65.8 lakh crore by (-3.7%). This difference is even larger for GDP which at the end of first half of 2021-22 stood at ₹68.1 lakh crore, which is (-) 4.4% below the corresponding level of GDP at ₹71.3 lakh crore in 2019-20. As the base effect weakens in the third and fourth quarters of 2021-22, a strong growth momentum would be needed to ensure that at the end of this fiscal year, in terms of magnitude, GVA and GDP in real terms exceed their corresponding pre-COVID-19 levels of 2019-20.

Sectors that improved

In the first half of 2021-22, on the

output side, only four of the eight GVA sectors have exceeded their corresponding 2019-20 levels. These are agriculture; electricity, gas, et al.; mining and quarrying; and public administration, defence and other services. Of these, the first and second quarter growth of public administration, defence and other services was at 5.8% and 17.4%, respectively. The upsurge in the growth of this sector in the second quarter of 2021-22 reflects the Central government's emphasis on capital expenditure which started gathering momentum in recent months. The Central government capital expenditure grew by 38.3% during the first half of 2021-22. This emphasis on government investment expenditure, supplemented by recovery of private investment expenditure, resulted in gross fixed capital formation (GFCF) showing a positive growth of 1.5% in the second quarter of 2021-22 over its corresponding level in 2019-20. However, even in this case, the level of GFCF in the first half of 2021-22 has remained below its corresponding level in 2019-20 by a margin of ₹1.93 lakh crore. Overall, domestic demand including private final consumption expenditure (PFCE) in the first half of 2021-22 remains below its corresponding level in 2019-20 by nearly ₹5.5 lakh crore. This indicates that investment as well as consumption demand have to pick up strongly in the remaining two quarters to ensure that the economy emerges on the positive side at the end of 2021-22 as compared to its pre-COVID-19 level. Private consumption demand would pick up with employment and income growth, especially in the small and medium sectors, which is linked to the recovery in



Y. SHEENIVASA MURTHY

the services sectors, particularly the trade, hotels et al. sector. This may happen in the second half of 2021-22 provided economic activities are not beset again by COVID-19's new strain, Omicron.

Annual growth prospects

To realise the projected annual growth at 9.5% for 2021-22 given both by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), we require a growth of 6.2% in the second half of 2021-22. This will have to be achieved even as the base effect weakens in the third and fourth quarters since GDP growth rate in these quarters of 2020-21 was at 0.5% and 1.6%, respectively. Thus, achieving the projected growth rate of 9.5% is going to be a big challenge. Had the growth rate of the second quarter been higher, the task would have been easier. If, in fact, we achieve the growth rate 9.5% in 2021-22, we can be confident that 2022-23 will see a growth rate of 6% to 7%.

The policy instrument for achieving a higher growth may have to be a strong fiscal support in the form of government capital expenditure. This is currently being facilitated by the buoyant Centre's gross tax revenues. The

Centre's gross tax revenues have shown an unprecedented growth rate of 64.2% and a buoyancy of 2.7 in the first half of 2021-22. The nominal GDP growth at 23.9% and the implicit price deflator-based inflation at 9.0% in H1FY22 is the key reason for the buoyant tax revenues. The fiscal deficit target of 6.8% may come under pressure because of upward revisions in some expenditure items such as food and fertilizer subsidies, MGNREGA and extension of the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana along with some shortfall in non-tax and non-debt capital receipts. In spite of these pressures, it would be advisable for the Centre to continue infrastructure spending. The Centre's incentivisation of state capital expenditure through additional borrowing limits would also help in this regard. According to available information, 11 States in the first quarter and seven States in the second quarter qualified for the release of the additional tranche under this window. Even as Central and State capital expenditures gather momentum, high frequency indicators reflect an ongoing pick-up in private sector economic activities.

High frequency indicators

PMI manufacturing increased to a 10-month high of 57.6 in November 2021, increasing from 55.9 in October 2021. PMI services remained high at 58.1 in November 2021, its second-highest level since July 2011. Gross GST collections at ₹1.31 lakh crore remained above the benchmark of ₹1 lakh crore for the fifth consecutive month in November 2021. Core IIP growth increased to 7.5% in October 2021 from 4.4% in September 2021.

Compared to its October 2019 value, core IIP showed a growth of 7.0% in October 2021. Merchandise exports growth was at 26.5% in November 2021 and 43.0% in October 2021 as compared to the corresponding month of the previous year. When compared to 2019 levels, exports grew by 35.9% in October and 15.9% in November 2021, reflecting robust external demand.

An important difference between 2019-20 and 2021-22 arises from the performance of the Centre's gross tax revenues (GTR). The growth in the Centre's GTR in the first half of 2019-20 was at 1.5% and there was a contraction of (-)3.4% for the year as a whole. In the face of such weak revenues, the Central government could not mount a meaningful fiscal stimulus in 2019-20 even as real GDP growth fell to 4.0%. In contrast, the government is in a significantly stronger position in 2021-22 since the growth in GTR in the first half is 64.2% and the full year growth is expected to be quite robust. Thus, the key to attaining a 9.5% real GDP annual growth in 2021-22 lies in the government's ongoing emphasis on infrastructure spending as reflected in government's capital expenditure. This is also seen in the high real growth in public administration, defence and other services of 17.4% in the second quarter of 2021-22. It is imperative that this momentum is sustained in the remaining part of the fiscal year.

C. Rangarajan is former Chairman, Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council and Former Governor, Reserve Bank of India. D.K. Srivastava is Chief Policy Advisor, EY India and former Director, Madras School of Economics. Views are personal

CCI freezes Amazon-Future deal, slaps ₹200 crore fine on U.S. firm

E-commerce company concealed details while seeking approval, says regulator

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Competition Commission of India (CCI) on Friday froze its approval given in November 2019 to Amazon's investment in a Future Group unit on the grounds that the U.S. e-commerce company had suppressed the scope and full details of its investment while seeking regulatory approval.

The antitrust regulator also imposed a penalty of ₹200 crore on Amazon for failing to notify the details of its 'combination', as required in law. It also imposed a separate penalty of ₹2 crore for suppressing the actual scope and purpose of the combination, a term used in competition law for acquisition, merger or amal-

CCI freezes Amazon-Future deal

Amazon, in responses to CCI reported by Reuters this week, said it never concealed material information, warning the watchdog that the deal's revocation would send a negative signal to foreign investors.

The Future-Reliance deal

Deal goes awry | A brief look at the tussle between Amazon and Future Group

■ In Aug. 2019, Amazon signed a **\$200 million deal** to acquire a **49% stake** in Future Coupons, which owns 7.3% equity in Future Retail, with the right to buy into Future Retail after a period of three to 10 years

■ In August 2020, Reliance entered into a deal with Future Group to acquire its retail assets for **₹24,713 crore**

■ **Amazon contested the deal, arguing that the terms agreed in its 2019 deal prevented Future Group from selling its retail business to certain rivals, including Reliance**



gamation of two or more enterprises.

The Commission had on November 28, 2019, granted approval for Amazon.com NV Investment Holdings' proposal to acquire 49% in

Future Coupons Private Ltd.

The CCI decision further roils the legal landscape as Amazon seeks to block the Future Group's 2020 decision to sell its retail assets to Reliance Industries.

Amazon has 60 days to pay the monetary penalty. It has the same period to notify the combination afresh with "true, correct and complete information".

The Commission said it would examine the Amazon-Future deal afresh, "given that the combination is between players who are known in the online marketplace and offline retailing and they have contemplated strategic alignment between their businesses".

Amazon has for months successfully used the terms of its toehold \$200 million investment in Future Group in 2019 to block the Indian retailer's attempt to sell retail assets to Reliance.

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has been on hold for months as Amazon got favourable interim rulings from a Singapore arbitrator and Indian courts.

Future denies any wrongdoing.

(With inputs from Reuters)

India offers 8 oil, gas blocks for bidding in latest round

Bids due on Feb. 15; earlier round attracted only 3 bidders

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

India has offered 8 oil and gas blocks, mostly in Assam, for bidding in the latest bid round with a view to bringing more area under exploration, so as to increase domestic production and reduce imports.

Eight blocks have been offered in the seventh bid round of Open Acreage Licensing Policy (OALP), with bids due on February 15, the Directorate General of Hydrocarbons (DGH) said.

The “8 Blocks spread over 6 Sedimentary Basins, 5 States covering 15,766 sq. km of area. Out of 8 Blocks, 5 Blocks are Onland type, 2 Blocks are Shallow Water-



type and 1 Block is Ultra Deep-Water type,” DGH said in the notice inviting offers.

Three of the five onland blocks are in Assam Arakan or Assam Shelf while one is in Rajasthan. One block in the Satpura basin has also been offered. Two shallow water blocks are in Cambay off the Gujarat coast while

one ultra-deepwater block in the Cauvery basin is also on offer.

The last bid round, OALP-VI, attracted just three bidders, two of whom were state-owned explorers Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) and Oil India Ltd. (OIL). Twenty-one blocks or areas were offered for exploration and production of oil and gas in the OALP Bid Round-VI, for which bidding closed on October 6.

Besides ONGC and OIL, Sun Petrochemicals was the only other company to have bid, according to ‘Summary of Bids’ posted by DGH.

Of the 21 blocks on offer, 18 got a single bid and the remaining 3 had two bidders.

Sowing the seeds of a disaster

The rash policy shift to 'organic only' agriculture in May could severely impact Sri Lanka's food security, according to experts. With farmers angry, it could also have a considerable political cost for the ruling Rajapaksa, reports **Meera Srinivasan**

From the time he began voting, Kurunegala farmer B.M.H. Jayatileka has not backed any party other than the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) at the polls. By extension, his vote in recent elections went to Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP or People's Front) that the Rajapaksa carved out of the SLFP where they made their political careers.

In the presidential poll of 2019, Jayatileka voted for Gotabaya Rajapaksa. In the 2020 general elections, he campaigned hard for Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa who contested from Kurunegala district, located in Sri Lanka's North Western Province and came to a large population of farmers and military families. Prime Minister Mahinda polled a record 5,27,364 preferential votes in that election, reflecting his enduring electoral appeal a decade after the armed forces under his leadership defeated the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), ending the country's long civil war.

In the last few months, though, Jayatileka feels very differently about his hitherto favourite political camp, with his staunch loyalty giving way to seething anger. "I will never vote for them [Rajapaksa] in this lifetime," vowed the farmer last week, aged 70. His shift is drastic, much like President Gotabaya's overnight policy switch to 'organic only' agriculture that triggered it.

No transition plan

On May 6, President Gotabaya issued a gazette banning the import and use of fertilizers, in what was widely seen as a rash embrace of organic farming proffered in his poll manifesto. At a time when all sectors, including agriculture, were reeling under the persisting economic impact of the pandemic, the Rajapaksa administration's announcement, perhaps the most consequential change to agriculture policy in the region in recent decades, came with no consultation, forethought, or convincing transition plan apparent. In a notoriously belated effort months after changing policy, the Ministry of Agriculture on Thursday (December 16) said it was setting up a task force to study and report on the "adverse effects of the use of chemical fertilizers and chemical pesticides on the human body."

President Gotabaya also defended his ambitious initiative locally and at international fora. "We need a new agricultural revolution that is not against nature," he said, speaking on the sidelines of the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) in Glasgow held in October-November. Acknowledging there was "some criticism" of and "resistance" to his government's 'organic only' policy, he told the summit: "In addition to chemical fertilizer lobby groups, this resistance has come from farmers who have grown accustomed to overusing fertilizer as an easy means of increasing yields." He did not mention Sri Lankan scientists, who have opposed the initiative, terming it "ill-advised" and "a catastrophe" in the making.

"The ban was a big jolt," Jayatileka said, seated in a community adjacent to a Buddhist temple in Jibbaganawa, about 13 km from Kurunegala town. "Paddy is our livelihood, our main source of income for our families. And that is under serious threat now."

In the face of criticism, government spokespersons have sought to justify the move with more than one reason. They pitch it as a necessary step to prevent a chronic kidney condition - loosely attributed by non-scientists to chemicals in the soil - and to save dollars spent on fertilizer import (about \$300 million annually) for the country that is in a dire forex and economic crisis.

But the argument did not find many takers among farmers, who came under enormous pressure soon after the new policy took effect. They had no organic fertilizer to use during the planting season - one of two tied to Sri Lanka's monsoons - began in September. As for organic fertilizers, farmers face huge uncertainty - over its availability, quality and potential effect. "It is all just chaotic," said Jayatileka, who heads a farmers' society in the region. E.P.D.K. Aluthgamage even considered quitting farming. "The pressure to buy organic fertilizer, the transport costs and the uncertainty about the quality of organic fertilizer... all this made me think why I must farm hereafter. Is it worth growing paddy with all these risks," he asked.

The district, with over 4 lakh farmers, is among the top paddy producers in the country. For paddy cultivators like Jayatileka and Aluthgamage, whose farming lives began in the 1960s, coinciding with the Green Revolution that aimed to increase productivity, organic agriculture is alien. They rushed through without a plan since they are used to are a consequence of using chemical fertilizer, one of the chief drivers of the Green Revolution, and the subsidy it promotes, especially by the earlier Rajapaksa administrations from 2005 to 2014 - that made



A farmer works in a rice paddy field in Katragama, located about 230 km south-east of Colombo in Sri Lanka. (Below): A tea plantation in Sri Lanka. © GETTY IMAGES



It is easily accessible to them all this time.

Some 1.8 million farmers across the island are engaged in paddy production, delivering an average yield of over 2 million tonnes a year, data published by Sri Lanka's Rice Research and Development Institute showed. Like many other countries, Sri Lanka too witnessed a marked increase in productivity in the last five decades, achieving self-sufficiency.

From importing 60% of the country's rice requirement in the 1940s, when Sri Lanka's population was about 6 million, to producing more than what is consumed now (barring a small percentage of foreign varieties still being imported) - when the population is nearly 22 million - is a significant leap, remarked Buddhist Marambe, a senior professor at the Department of Crop Science at the Faculty of Agriculture, University of Peradeniya, located in the central Kandy district.

Top crop in peril
The government's ban, while putting Sri Lanka's top staple crop in peril, also endangers the country's food security achieved through decades, experts like him fear. "With this decision, the government has taken the entire country for a ride. The policy will affect the next crop, the farmers who grow them, and consequently the whole society. A food crisis is imminent," Prof. Marambe noted, expressing a sentiment that several field scientists have aired from the time President Gotabaya imposed the ban.

Critics of the move are not necessarily opposed to organic farming. As academics studying the science of food production, they were only voicing concern that a transition that ought to take place in phases, over years, was being rushed through without a plan. Now, the implications of the abrupt shift are beginning to manifest. Farmers are dreading their next paddy harvest in January and February, with most fearing their yield would drop by 50%.

Those growing vegetables and fruits

are also already noticing worrisome changes, according to W.A.D. Sylvester, a 65-year-old farmer. "The quality of bananas has suffered. Earlier, one large bunch would weigh 25 kg to 30 kg, but now it's barely 15 kg. For coconuts grown commercially, we use chemical fertilizer once in six months. Now I see that coconuts have shrunk without the fertilizer," he said.

The ban will also adversely impact Sri Lanka's \$1.3-billion tea industry, a vital foreign exchange earner for the country, planners have warned. They anticipate a 40-50% slash in production, despite the government relating the chemical fertilizer ban for the sector in October after their repeated appeals. Even for other crops, the government partially revoked the ban last month. Agriculture Minister Mahindananda Aluthgamage on November 24 said the private sector would be allowed to import agrochemicals, but the par-reversal is too little, too late, in farmers' view.

Farmers' resistance

Their resentment over the government's policy change is no secret. Men and women who rely on agriculture for a living have been agitating across the country for months. Visuals of angry farmers, anti-government slogans, and protesters burning effigies of the Agriculture Minister dominated prime time news. As Prof. Marambe observed: "Instead of spending their time on their lands cultivating, farmers were forced to take to the streets."

But the government did not budge, even a little, until late November. Addressing a special meeting on organic farming on November 22, President Gotabaya said there was no change in the government's green agriculture policy, and that subsidies would be provided only for organic farming. Farmers were organising protests and delaying cultivation "because they have not been properly educated," he said, as per a statement issued by his office. "If officials who do not agree with the government policy wished to leave, there would be no obstacle," he said.

The government's stubbornness for

almost seven months, despite its fast-declining popularity and mounting protests, baffled some of its own supporters. It defied popular analysis that the Rajapaksa are more politically astute than their rivals.

It was also amply clear that the ruling regime despised any resistance or challenge, even if it came from subject experts. Minister Aluthgamage removed Prof. Marambe, who earlier questioned the government's policy in the media, from an experts' committee advising the government on the national agriculture policy. However, the government's emphatic claims of supporting farmers in the long run could not drown the criticism, by now widespread and loud in the public sphere.

Far from being able to locally produce all the organic fertilizer required in the country, Sri Lanka was, rather ironically, importing organic inputs, including from India and China, despite banning agrochemicals in order to preserve draining foreign reserves. In what turned out to be an unexpected diplomatic confrontation, Sri Lankan authorities in October rejected the Chinese company's fertilizer consignment on grounds that it was "contaminated." As the dispute escalated, China blacklisted a top public sector bank in Sri Lanka, and the Chinese firm filed a lawsuit in Singapore, challenging Colombo's "backtracking and insincerity." The government has said it would pay \$6.7 million to the Chinese company, amid criticism from detractors accusing the government of "succumbing" to pressure.

Meanwhile, farmers are watching an unprecedented crisis unfold in their plots, just as a growing fear of a food security next year grips the country.

Confusing messages

Just like the ban in May, the government's decision in late November to permit the private sector to import chemical fertilizers also came all of a sudden. A gazette on November 30 repealed the May 6 gazette, along with another issued on July 31 on the subject.

A series of announcements was made

around the time of top officials including the Cabinet Minister, State Minister and a senior bureaucrat attached to the Ministry, none clarifying the part-reversal of policy. In fact, farmers and scientists did not know what to make of their statements - some pointing to an exemption for paddy, and others denying the same. They found the messages conflicting and confusing. The *Hindu's* attempts to reach the Minister and Secretary for a comment were unsuccessful. Gleaming the essence of their statements, farmers found two takeaways - neither of the two state-owned fertilizer companies would now be involved in importing agrochemicals, and the government was doing away with subsidies on chemical fertilizers, that they received at heavily discounted rates or for free thus far, they deduced.

According to Nimal Karunaratne, National Convener of the All Ceylon Farmers' Federation (ACFF), there is currently a small stock of imported chemical fertilizers that is grossly inadequate to fulfill the nationwide requirement. It takes months to import a large consignment of chemical fertilizers, from the time of placing the order until it reaches the farmer. Even if the chemical fertilizers were immediately available, few farmers would be able to afford it, spending tens of thousands without the subsidy anymore.

Moreover, with 75% of the current crop's life cycle already over, chemical fertilizers will not be much help to paddy growers, who add it at different stages after the sowing season, it pointed out. "It might make a difference to farmers growing vegetable and fruits, though," he added.

Karunaratne is now a familiar name in the media in recent months. He has been consistently challenging the government's policy shift, countering its claims with hard data and prevalent scientific opinion. The ACFF is affiliated to the Vanathukumbura Peramuna (JVP) - currently in Opposition with just three seats in the 225-member House. It is the largest organised body of farmers in the country.

In his assessment, the government's ban on chemical fertilizers and subsequent tweak in policy allowing private players alone to import the same reveals its "actual agenda." "They just want to cancel the fertilizer subsidy, which they know will be an unpopular decision at any time," he said. "Sadly, because of the route they took, our farmers will now forever be repulsed by the idea of organic farming, aware of exploring its merits." The government's efforts, he said, is the "greatest disservice" to the concept of organic farming.

Speaking more broadly about the country's "much-neglected" agriculture sector, Karunaratne said it was naive on the part of the government to think that they could "simply tinker with" one aspect - fertilizer use - of farming, without reviewing Sri Lanka's water policy that "heavily tilted towards hydropower" generation, and much less towards agriculture.

The "neglect," he said, began after Sri Lanka liberalised its economy in 1977, ahead of any other country in the region. "Before 1977, agriculture contributed 78% to our GDP. After opening up, it has reduced to about 7%, despite employing 28% of our labour force," he said. The thrust gradually moved to agro-business, with successive governments failing to look at value addition, or value chains within the market. "In that way, agriculture in Sri Lanka is still at a very primitive stage," he remarked.

Short-sighted policy

Regardless of how the government changes its fertilizer policy, the farmers' protests through the last seven months have "built political momentum," he noted. "They [Rajapaksa] promised national security, but fail to realise that a crucial component of national security is food security. And that is in complete disarray now. This is bound to have a political cost."

What began as a farmers' problem is already manifesting as a problem of all consumers - seen in the soaring costs of rice and vegetables, and the fear of an imminent shortage, he pointed out. "LPG cylinders are in short supply, or are exploding," he said, referring to a series of recent accidents amid shortages. "People are just frustrated."

"It was this frustration that Jayatileka voiced, while swearing never to vote for the Rajapaksa again. "It is time to weed out the old crop of politicians; they don't care about us," he said. The fertilizer controversy has upset his decades-old voting reflex, while also making him averse to "all politicians - those in government, those in opposition, everyone."

The sentiment is not insignificant, just two years into President Gotabaya's term. Coming from a senior citizen in Sri Lanka's Sinhala Buddhist heartland - no less than Prime Minister Mahinda's own constituency - it begs the question of whether the shift of the Rajapaksa brand might be wearing off now.

On the one hand, it is evident that the Rajapaksa administration's biggest slip yet was not on account of a challenge thrown by the political opposition or due to pressure from the international community. It was its own short-sighted policy change that is proving a costly political error. On the other, with no imminent election or formidable opposition - the ruling coalition has a two-thirds majority in Parliament - it is difficult to see what might come of the disillusionment voiced by traditional supporters.

Although vehement in their condemnation of the government's fertilizer policy dilemma, farmers are barely preoccupied with its political implications now. They have more pressing concerns about the next harvest, aware that could mean to their families' three meals in the coming year. "My father was a farmer. I am 65, and I have grown food all my working life. I never thought I would be facing a food shortage at home," Sylvester said.

France ready to supply more Rafale jets

Minister Florence Parly says country wants to preserve the Indo-Pacific as open and inclusive area

DINAKAR PERI
NEW DELHI

France is ready to answer any additional needs or requests that could be made by India for additional Rafale fighter jets, including for its indigenous aircraft carrier, French Minister for Armed Forces Florence Parly said on Friday. On the Indo-Pacific, she observed that they wanted to preserve it as an open and inclusive area and free from any “coercion” and based on compliance with international law and multilateralism.

“We know that aircraft carrier will soon be delivered and aircraft are needed. So we are open and ready to provide any other Rafale if this is India’s decision,” Ms. Parly stated at the Ananta Aspen Centre on the possibility of purchase of more Rafales by India.

Her comments come as in-



Bilateral links: Defence Minister Rajnath Singh with his French counterpart Florence Parly in New Delhi. •R.V. MOORTHY

igenous aircraft carrier *Vikrant*, which is undergoing sea trials, is set to be commissioned next year and in the backdrop of the Navy’s tender to procure carrier based fighter jets.

Ms. Parly is in Delhi for the third bilateral defence dialogue with Defence Minister Rajnath Singh. A wide range

of bilateral, regional, defence and defence industrial cooperation issues were discussed in the annual meeting and the Ministers reviewed the existing military-to-military cooperation, which has increased in spite of pandemic challenges, a Defence Ministry statement said after the talks. “Defence industrial

cooperation was discussed with focus on future collaborations and co-production between the two countries,” it added.

The two Ministers expressed commitment to working together to “enhance cooperation in bilateral, regional and multilateral forums,” the statement noted.

Ms. Parly also met Prime Minister Narendra Modi and National Security Adviser Ajit Doval.

This is the first interaction between the two Defence Ministers since Australia, U.K and U.S. announced the AUKUS tripartite arrangement.

Defence dialogue

She said: “Indo-Pacific is a very wide area and the political focus is more on the eastern part of this large area due to the tensions in relations with China. But Indo-

Pacific is also made of the Indian Ocean. And there is no doubt that India is the centre of this area. France is an Indo-Pacific nation...”

She noted, “There are also many tensions in the Indian Ocean especially in the eastern part of Africa. It is our joint responsibility that we can contribute to ease up the tensions.”

She said that China was a partner to fight climate change and also in trade and commerce. “We see that China is getting more and more aggressive in the region, and it is even more specific when it comes to the China Sea. France and India share the same views on something which is key, on the international maritime law,” the Minister said.

France is set to take over the Presidency of the European Union (EU) Council in January 2022.

Ecologists oppose changes to Biological Diversity Act, 2002

'Bill prioritises commercial trade at the cost of conserving biological resources'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Environmentalists have expressed concern over amendments to the Biological Diversity Act, 2002 on the grounds that it prioritises intellectual property and commercial trade at the expense of the Act's key aim of conserving biological resources.

Amendments to the Act were introduced as a Bill in the Lok Sabha by Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav on Thursday.

On Friday, Rajya Sabha member Jairam Ramesh, who also chairs the Parliament's Standing Committee on Science, Technology and Environment, wrote a letter to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla "protesting" his decision to refer the amended Bill to a select committee when the Bill ought to have been perused by a standing committee that had existing mandate to examine questions of science and environment.

The amended Bill was



Little connect: The changes do not increase the stake of local communities in sustainable growth, say ecologists. ■ FILE PHOTO

drafted in response to complaints by traditional Indian medicine practitioners, seed sector, and industry and researchers that the Biological Diversity Act, 2002.

Compliance Burden

The bill was enacted for conservation of biological diversity and ensure fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the use of biological resources with indigenous and local com-

munities, imposed a heavy "compliance burden" and made it hard to conduct collaborative research and investments and simplify patent application processes.

The text of the Bill also says that it proposes to "widen the scope of levying access and benefit sharing with local communities and for further conservation of biological resources."

The Bill seeks to exempt registered AYUSH medical

practitioners and people accessing codified traditional knowledge, among others, from giving prior intimation to State biodiversity boards for accessing biological resources for certain purposes.

A statement from the Legal Initiative for Forest and Environment (LIFE) said the Bill would "undo all the efforts made in the last few years to implement the Biological Diversity Act."

There was not a "single provision in the proposed amendment to protect, conserve or increase the stake of local communities in the sustainable use and conservation of biodiversity."

LIFE said the amendments were done to "solely benefit" the AYUSH Ministry. The Bill in the current form would pave the way for "bio piracy" and would mean AYUSH manufacturing companies would no longer need to take approvals and thus defeat the purpose for which the Act was created in the first place.

When the chips are down

The Semiconductor Mission can power the development of the chip and display industry

The Union Cabinet's decision this week to set aside ₹76,000 crore for supporting the development of a 'semiconductors and display manufacturing ecosystem' is a belated but welcome acknowledgment of the strategic significance of integrated circuits, or chips, to a modern economy. The basic building blocks that serve as the heart and brain of all modern electronics and information and communications technology products, the ubiquitous chips are now an integral part of contemporary automobiles, household gadgets such as refrigerators, and essential medical devices such as ECG machines. The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically thrown into sharp relief the vulnerability that a range of manufacturing industries and, by extension, national economies are exposed to in the face of disruptions in the supply of these vital semiconductors. The pandemic-driven push to take sizeable parts of daily economic and essential activity online, or at least digitally enable them, has also highlighted the centrality of the chip-powered computers and smartphones in people's lives. With the bulk of semiconductor manufacturing and supply capability concentrated in a handful of countries including Taiwan, South Korea, U.S., Japan and, more recently, China, governments worldwide have realised that it is in the national interest to treat chip manufacturing as a strategic imperative. The Cabinet decision to simultaneously establish an India Semiconductor Mission helmed by 'global industry experts' to drive long-term strategies for the sustainable development of the chip and display industry is therefore a step in the right direction.

The challenge ahead, however, is fairly daunting. For one, the level of fiscal support currently envisioned is minuscule when one considers the scale of investments typically required to set up manufacturing capacities in the various sub sectors of the semiconductor industry. A semiconductor fabrication facility, or fab, can cost multiples of a billion dollars to set up even on a relatively small scale and lagging by a generation or two behind the latest in technology. Even granting that India's Production Linked Incentive scheme intends to give only 50% of the cost of setting up at least two greenfield semiconductor fabs by way of fiscal support, not much of the current scheme outlay of approximately \$10 billion is likely to be left to support other elements including display fabs, packaging and testing facilities, and chip design centres. Chip fabs are also very thirsty units requiring millions of litres of clean water and extremely stable power supply. It may be best if the new mission focuses fiscal support, for now, on other parts of the chip-making chain including design, where surely India already has considerable talent and experience.

Modi to get Bhutan's top civilian award

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Bhutan on Friday conferred the Order of the Druk Gyalpo, its highest civilian honour, on Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

This was announced on the occasion of the 114th national day of Bhutan.

"Overjoyed to hear His Majesty pronounce Your Excellency Modiji's name for the highest civilian decoration, Order of the Druk Gyalpo," tweeted Prime Minister of Bhutan Lotay Tshering.

In response, Mr. Modi said, "I am deeply touched by this warm gesture, and express my grateful thanks to His Majesty the King of Bhutan."

Bhutan was the first country that Mr. Modi visited upon taking charge as Prime Minister on May 26, 2014.

Tamil Thai Vaazhthu declared T.N. State song

Mandatory for all to rise when played

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

CHENNAI

The Tamil Nadu Government on Friday declared the *Tamil Thai Vaazhthu*, penned by 'Manonmaniam' Sundaranar, the State song of Tamil Nadu. Everyone except the differently abled and pregnant women should rise when the song is sung at educational institutions, government offices and public functions.

The announcement came days after Justice G.R. Swaminathan of the Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court observed that *Tamil Thai Vaazhthu* was a prayer song and not an an-

them, and there was no statutory or executive order requiring attendees to stand up when it was being sung.

According to an official release, the song should compulsorily be sung at the beginning of events organised by all educational institutions, government offices and public sector undertakings, among other public organisations. The song should be sung in 55 seconds in *Mullaipaani Ragam (Mohana Raagam)*. At public functions, the playing of the song with musical instruments/recordings is to be avoided, and trained singers should sing it.

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 th 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.
General Studies Paper IV	
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.