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DAILY NEWS ANALYSIS

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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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Dravidian is a geographical division, not racial: R.N. Ravi

‘The British created the false history as part of their divide-and-rule policy’

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
VELLORE

Blaming the British for creating a “false history” as part of their divide-and-rule policy, Tamil Nadu Governor R.N. Ravi on Sunday contended that the concept of Aryans and Dravidians was mainly a geographical, rather than racial, division. But the British made it racial to suit their needs.

Speaking at a function to mark the 216th year of Vellore Sepoy Uprising, also known as the Sepoy Mutiny, he said that according to ancient literature and historical records, the northern parts of the Vindhya Range were known for the settlements of Aryans and the areas to the south, which covers the modern-day Maharashtra, Karnataka, Telangana, Tamil Nadu and parts of Odisha, were known as the Dravidian land. “It is a false history, created by the British as part of their divide-and-rule policy, that Dravidian is a race. This was evident from the fact that when they [the Brit-



Tamil Nadu Governor R.N. Ravi paying homage at the Sepoy Mutiny Memorial Pillar on Sunday. ■ C. VENKATACHALAPATHY

ish] left, India had 600 independent countries, apart from Pakistan, within it in 1947,” he said.

‘Work like family’

The Governor said that after Independence, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the then Union Home Minister, brought all provinces and States under one Union. However, many divisions, based on caste and tribe, had occurred since then, resulting in an imbalanced growth. Even in progressive States like Tamil Nadu, there were variations in growth among different communities. Such a problem, he said, could be re-

solved only with the one-nation concept. “Age-old problems like poverty, illiteracy and power supply still persist. Because we don’t address these problems in totality. In other words, we have to work like a family,” he said. The Governor stressed the need to cherish the sacrifices made by martyrs and freedom fighters. They were forgotten for years after Independence. However, steps had been taken to remember their contributions to the freedom struggle. “A nation cannot be great if it is ungrateful to the sacrifices made by its freedom fighters for the coun-

try’s independence,” he said.

Tracing the origin of the Sepoy Mutiny, Mr. Ravi said the history penned by the British had said the reason for the revolt was a dress code that was opposed by the native soldiers. That interpretation was wrong because any difference over the dress code could have been resolved by the army with its in-built mechanism. Proper research had to be done to find the actual reasons. “What happened in Vellore was not just a mutiny but the country’s first struggle for Independence in which soldiers from various places took part,” he said.

Earlier, the Governor laid a wreath at the Vellore Sepoy Mutiny Memorial at Makkan Junction near the fort. Mayor Sujatha Ananthakumar, Collector P. Kumaravel Pandian, S. Rajesh Kannan, SP (Vellore), NCC cadets, NSS volunteers, college students, residents, families of INA veterans and freedom fighters and retired soldiers participated.

No resolution to Sri Lanka crisis

The Rajapaksas' parliamentary majority, public anger complicate govt. formation

MEERA SRINIVASAN
COLOMBO

Political parties in Sri Lanka are scrambling to form an all-party government, a day after President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe pledged to resign in the wake of a historic citizens' protest.

Sri Lankans are living through a harrowing economic collapse, with accessing essentials such as fuel, food, and medicines becoming an everyday battle. In a culmination of people's agitations spanning months, massive crowds on Saturday thronged Colombo's seafront, where anti-government protests persisted for three months over the government's failure to address the long-simmering crisis.

Demonstrators stormed the Presidential palace, the Secretariat, and the official residence of the Prime Minister, and occupied the country's seats of power, in a rare display of public fury. Arsonists torched Mr. Wickremesinghe's private residence.

The escalation of citizens' anger pushed the top two leaders to agree to step down, though neither has formally handed in his resignation. Mr. Gotabaya has informed the Speaker that he will step down on July 13.

Five Cabinet Ministers have announced their resig-



Asserting strength: Demonstrators waiting in line for breakfast after entering the Presidential Secretariat premises in Colombo on Sunday. ■ REUTERS

nation since.

Party leaders met on Saturday for talks convened by the Speaker. They sought the immediate resignation of the President and the Prime Minister, agreed that Speaker Mahinda Yapa Abeywardena be made Acting President as per the Constitution, after which Parliament be convened to elect a President from among its members, to pave way for an interim, all-party government. A flurry of political meetings followed on Sunday.

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CITIZENS FLOCK TO POWER
CENTRES ► PAGE 13

No resolution to Sri Lanka crisis

With the Rajapaksas still holding a parliamentary majority, it is not a straightforward choice for the main Opposition party Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB or United People's Power), which has nearly 50 seats in the 225-member House. While the party may feel pressured to help restore stability on the island, the road ahead for a new, caretaker government is bound to be rocky and rife with risk amid a worsening economic crisis.

"We are speaking to various parties and independent groups in Parliament. We are looking at how the two top positions of President and Prime Minister could be shared among us," SJB legislator Harsha de Silva told *The Hindu*. Two names that have come up in this connection are longtime Rajapaksa loyalist Dullas Alahapperuma, an MP from Matara district, and Opposition Leader Sajith Premadasa. The numbers in

the House are still stacked in favour of the ruling Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP, or People's Front), making Opposition actors ambivalent about an "all-party" arrangement.

Almost all Opposition parties are apprehensive, knowing that a possible stint in the next government may impact their chances of winning back the trust of angry, disenchanted voters in the next elections that most of them want to be held in about six months.

"We have been consulted and the SJB has invited us. We have asked them to go ahead with a new government if they have the numbers. However, if they need our support, we said will then talk about the conditions on which we might be able to support them," TNA spokesman and Jaffna legislator M.A. Sumanthiran told *The Hindu*. The Speaker is will convene another party leaders' meeting on Monday, political sources said.



Nation in crisis: Police officers walk past a slogan written on the walls near the President's house after demonstrators entered the building in Colombo, Sri Lanka on July 10. •REUTERS

FROM THE ARCHIVES

The ground beneath the President's feet

Continuing failures and confusion in policy making are at the heart of Sri Lanka's governance crisis

THE GIST

■ Soon after Gotabaya Rajapaksa assumed office, he launched a programme of restoring Sri Lanka's personalised model of executive authoritarianism. In October 2020, Mr. Rajapaksa used the newly gained two-thirds parliamentary majority to abolish the 19th Amendment. Sri Lanka was thus brought back to executive presidentialism.

■ Having been persuaded by nativist ideologues and local conspiracy theorists, President Rajapaksa initially de-emphasised the urgency of launching a rapid vaccination programme. It is only after the pandemic had reached crisis proportions by middle of this year that President Rajapaksa turned to vaccination.

■ Amidst economic and healthcare failures, what baffles critics and supporters alike of President Rajapaksa is the degree of insensitivity he and his government display to the consequences of his policy failures and crisis of governance for people's lives and their survival.

JAYADEVA UYANGODA

Following the storming of the Sri Lankan Presidential palace by demonstrators, Gotabaya Rajapaksa has agreed to step down as President of the erstwhile head of Sri Lanka.

What has Gotabaya Rajapaksa achieved when he enters his third year in office as Sri Lanka's President on November 18? A not-so-attractive record of failures in governance.

President Rajapaksa has also been losing much of the public support, popularity and trust that brought him into power in November 2019. The present crisis which President Rajapaksa and his regime are facing has four interconnected dimensions – economic, social, governance, and legitimacy. Sri Lanka's worsening economic crisis is not Mr. Rajapaksa's creation. Yet, he and his team of policy advisers seem to be at a loss even to comprehend its gravity and its disastrous consequences which the people are forced to bear.

While the impact of the protracted public health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic on Sri Lanka's economy may take a few years to manage, its social impact has been devastating. The absence of any effective government interventions to alleviate economic hardships faced by the poor, the new poor produced by the pandemic, the working people and all strata of the middle class, both urban and rural, have a fresh social crisis too.

A strong leader

Mr. Gotabaya Rajapaksa began his tenure as President in November 2019 by promising the Sri Lankan people a fresh beginning for a future of stability, security, development, and prosperity. He was also open about his ideological project that gave primacy to the aspirations of Sri Lanka's majority ethnic community, the Sinhalese Buddhists. He did not have any democratic pretensions either.

Mr. Rajapaksa's promise was for a 'strong government' under a 'strong leader' to ensure national security, law and order, political stability, and victor's peace with the ethnic minorities. Soon after assuming office, he launched a programme of restoring Sri Lanka's personalised model of executive authoritarianism, that had been suspended by the previous government under the 19th Amendment to the Constitution. For this objective, Mr. Rajapaksa made use of the public health emergency caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020.

By-passing the then Opposition-dominated Parliament, Mr. Rajapaksa concentrated a great deal of financial and administrative power into his hands, thereby re-establishing the presidential executive as the central institution of state power. In October 2020, Mr. Rajapaksa used the newly gained two-thirds parliamentary majority to abolish the 19th Amendment. Under the 20th

Amendment, Sri Lanka was thus brought back to executive presidentialism, which has been the mainstay of Sri Lanka's democratic decay for decades.

Civil-military ties

Mr. Rajapaksa also initiated a new trend in civil-military relations in Sri Lanka's structures of governance. Appointing the army commander to head a new presidential task force to manage the public health crisis as well as medical and civilian professionals were its first signs. In the new political and administrative order, serving and retired senior military officers are given key roles.

As critics insist, militarisation of public administration is a key component of Mr. Rajapaksa's project of de-democratisation. Continuing failures and confusion in policy making and implementation are at the heart of an on-going governance crisis since the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, mid last year. Having been persuaded by nativist ideologues and local conspiracy theorists, President Rajapaksa initially de-emphasised the urgency of launching a rapid vaccination programme throughout the country. His encouragement of magic and sorcery to combat the pandemic put the public health policy into disarray. It is only after the pandemic had reached crisis proportions by middle of this year that President Rajapaksa turned to science, expert advice and vaccination.

Meanwhile, the current controversy caused by the President's ideologically-inspired decision to ban chemical fertilizers and inputs in all spheres of agriculture epitomises the Rajapaksa regime's record of inept and autocratic approach to initiating economic and social transformation. This inexplicably rash and inappropriate policy intervention has already caused much social unrest and discontent among very wide sections of the peasantry.

Similarly, the recent mishandling of Sri Lanka's chronic foreign exchange crisis, leading to further destabilisation of the country's currency and economy, has caused a fear among citizens that continuing economic policy failures might even trigger an economic collapse. Moreover, the government's repeated failures to intervene to bring the prices of essential consumer items down and manage the runaway cost of living, amidst uncertainties and confusion in policy decisions and their implementation, have further dented the President's much advertised claim to an efficient, result-oriented, professionalised, technocratic, and no-nonsense style of leadership and governance.

Core issues

Thus, the Sri Lankan government's apathy towards the suffering of the people amidst rapidly declining income levels and an erosion of living standards and economic insecurity caused by a rampant economic and financial crisis is just one among many instances of a serious failure in

governance. Moreover, the severity of the economic crisis has also made it impossible for President Rajapaksa to initiate a state-sponsored social support programme for the poor, the new poor and vulnerable segments of the people. This, obviously, is at the mainstay of Sri Lanka's growing social crisis at present.

Amidst all this, what baffles the critics and the supporters alike of President Rajapaksa is the degree of insensitivity he and his government display to the consequences of his policy failures and crisis of governance for people's lives and their survival. It is the accumulation of such failures at multiple levels of policy, governance, and leadership that has seriously eroded the popular support that Mr. Rajapaksa enjoyed just two years ago. It also constitutes the core of the legitimacy crisis he has to deal with at the personal level as well.

The Rajapaksa administration is now facing open defiance and protests by three large segments of citizens who may have overwhelmingly voted for him in November 2019: rural farmers, small producers engaged in export agriculture, and public sector schoolteachers. As many of them are reported to have been saying at their protest rallies, defying police threats and the ridicule by ruling party politicians, they now regret that they have voted such a band of rulers into power. It is this open expression of a generalised feeling of loss of political trust and public disillusionment with President Rajapaksa's leadership that symbolises the acuteness of the legitimacy crisis he has to deal with in the weeks and months to come.

International relations

One area where the President has managed to secure some success is foreign relations. He seems to have taken note of the bad press he got locally, regionally and internationally for his regime's close proximity to China at the expense of Sri Lanka's traditional allies and friends. Mending relations with India, Europe and America appears to be a recent policy shift he has engineered.

However, the President seems to be quite determined to stay in power till the end of his current term and beyond. If Charles de Gaulle and Lee Kuan Yew were the role models of former Sri Lankan leader J.R. Jayewardene, Lee Kuan Yew and Chinese President Xi Jinping are Mr. Rajapaksa's idols.

One crucial lesson that he seems to have learnt from all those leaders is that one term of office is hardly adequate for a ruler who thinks of himself as personifying the nation's destiny. Meanwhile, a weakened and politically unassertive parliamentary Opposition seems to be President Rajapaksa's only credible political asset at the moment.

Jayadeva Uyangoda is Former Professor of Political Science, Department of Political Science and Public Policy, University of Colombo, Colombo, Sri Lanka. The views expressed are personal

BRICS media groups look to boost synergy

Amid new challenges, initiatives include training of journalists, exploring new tech

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
BEIJING

Prominent media groups from the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) countries on Friday committed to stepping up dialogue and finding ways to generate strong synergies as they confront new common challenges, from the COVID-19 pandemic to the impact of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

An action plan released following the Fifth BRICS Media Forum "committed to supporting and facilitating" BRICS media organisations through a range of initiatives, from joint training of journalists to exploring the application of new technologies, such as smart content production, smart broadcasting, satellite news, and AI anchors.

The Forum was established in 2015 by media organisations from the five countries, including *The Hindu*, Brazil's CMA Group, Russia's Sputnik, China's

Xinhua and South Africa's Independent Media.

China is the BRICS chair this year, with President Xi Jinping last month hosting the 14th BRICS leaders summit virtually, which was attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Russian President Vladimir Putin and other BRICS leaders. Xinhua, which hosted the media forum this year, said Friday's virtual gathering was attended by nearly 300 representatives of over 170 media organisations from 73 developing countries.

'Period of turbulence'

N. Ram, a member of the Presidium of the BRICS Media Forum representing *The Hindu* and Director, The Hindu Publishing Group, told the forum it was "our common understanding that this is a new period of turbulence as well as of transformation."

"It is a time of unprecedented changes and of the evolution of a pandemic that

has wreaked havoc, on many fronts, on an unaccustomed global scale but may be reaching an end, so much so that we can hopefully begin soon to address a post-pandemic situation," Mr. Ram said.

"In this pursuit, the BRICS Partnership, which has been forged through 14 BRICS Summits held since June 2009, represents a highly positive force with a special part to play."

He pointed to the recently held BRICS International Journalism Online Training Programme, conducted over three months, as an example of practical cooperation that brought in experienced journalists and scholars from the five BRICS countries to give lectures supplemented by assignments to 25 trainees drawn from these countries.

Since the launch of the BRICS Media Forum in 2015, the grouping had held four forums and five presidium meetings in Beijing, Cape Town and Sao Paulo, said Fu

Hua, President of Xinhua News Agency, adding that "as the world enters yet another period of turbulence and transformation, BRICS media need to inject more positive energy into the world... and further expand the space for exchange, cooperation and interaction among BRICS media organisations."

Jose Juan Sanchez, President of CMA Group in Brazil, said COVID-19 and the Ukraine crisis presented "a series of challenges but more responsibilities" to explain the impact on the world economy, particularly from the perspective of emerging countries.

Iqbal Surve, Executive Chairman of the Independent Media Group in South Africa, which will take over as BRICS' host next year, pointed to the potential for greater digital cooperation. "Many of our BRICS partners," he said, "lead the global charge in the fourth industrial revolution."

EPFO to start quick pension payment

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

The Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) will consider and approve a proposal for setting up a central pension disbursement system at its meeting on July 29 and 30, paving the way for crediting the benefit into over 73 lakh pensioners' bank accounts in one go across India.

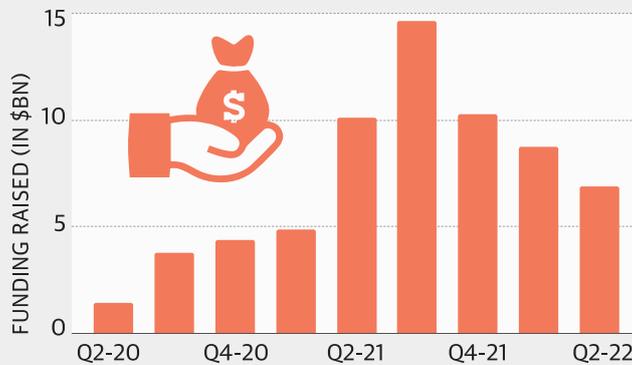
Presently, over 138 regional offices of the EPFO disburse pensions to beneficiaries in their region separately.

"A proposal for setting up a central pension disbursement system will be placed in the EPFO's apex decision making body, Central Board of Trustees (CBT), in a meeting scheduled on July 29 and 30," a source told *PTI*.

The source further stated that the pension would be disbursed using a central database of regional offices and this will facilitate crediting the benefit into bank accounts of over 73 lakh beneficiaries in one go. The source explained that all regional offices cater to the pensioners in their regions separately and that is why pensioners across the country get pension at different times.

In the 229th meeting of the CBT held on November 20, 2021, the trustees had approved the proposal for development of centralised IT-enabled systems by C-DAC.

Investment dips | Funding raised by Indian start-ups declined from \$10.3 billion in January-March to \$6.9 billion in April-June this year



SOURCE: TRACXN, NEWS REPORTS

Start-ups brace for a 'long and bitter winter'

Funds dry up, jobs being axed

YUTHIKA BHARGAVA
NEW DELHI

With funding starting to dry up due to global macro-economic factors, the start-up ecosystem in India is bracing itself for a “long and bitter winter” and potential mass layoffs in the next 12 to 18 months, particularly in sectors such as edtech and gaming that got a significant push during the pandemic, according to experts.

In the April-June quarter, start-up funding fell by about 40% to about \$6-7 billion, Amit Nawka, partner, deals & start-ups leader, PwC India, noted, adding that prior to this, start-ups were seeing investments of about \$10-11 billion per quarter.

“When we are talking to investors globally, there is li-

imited visibility on when things will stabilise due to factors such as overall macro economic scenario, inflationary pressures, war and fall in the stock markets. Everyone is bracing themselves for a year of low funding. Given all this, start-ups are conserving cash,” he added.

As start-ups look to extend the runway with existing funds, estimates peg the job losses in them at over 10,000 this year. “After an extended period of sunshine, Indian start-ups are now waking up to a potentially long, bitter and cold winter,” Prabhu Ram, head of Industry Intelligence Group at CyberMedia Research, told *The Hindu*.

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Start-ups brace for a 'long and bitter winter'

“A slew of factors have led us here, including the Russia-Ukraine conflict, supply chain disruptions, consequent inflationary pressures, and rising cost of capital, amongst others. As the funding squeeze set in, the layoffs were imminent,” Prabhu Ram, head of Industry Intelligence Group at CyberMedia Research told *The Hindu*.

Mr. Prabhu Ram added that over the past years, India’s strong digital boom, along with the relative ease of obtaining funding, fuelled the rise of Indian start-ups, and with an intent to ramp-up growth through new offerings - including products and solutions, they went on a rapid expansion of their product and tech teams.

'Renewable energy to reduce revenues'

Major developing countries are highly dependent on fossil fuel, says IISD study

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The global transition away from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources could trigger financial challenges for India and major developing countries such as Russia, Brazil and China because of their high dependence on revenues from fossil fuel, according to a study by the International Institute of Sustainable Development (IISD).

Though India is a net im-

porter of petroleum products, it earns substantial revenues – via cesses and taxes – from the consumption of petrol, diesel and oil.

The study finds that by 2050, overall fossil fuel revenues in Brazil, Russia, Indonesia, India and China could be as much as \$570 billion, lower than a business-as-usual scenario where governments fail to phase down fossil fuels enough to avoid the worst climate impacts.

The widest gaps are expected to occur in India (\$178 billion), China (\$140 billion), and Russia (\$134 billion).

Public revenues from fossil fuel production and consumption currently account for 34% of general government revenue in Russia, 18% in India, and 16% in Indonesia. The share stands at 8% in Brazil, and 6% in South Africa. This includes only direct, first-order, government financial revenues.

By comparison, such revenues form a smaller fraction of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in developed countries.

'Unreliable, erratic'

Fossil fuel revenue streams, the IISD report noted, were "unreliable and erratic" and undermined by the negative economic impacts of fossil fuel use, such as health costs due to air pollution and damage from climate change.

As debt drives Punjab farmers to death, loan waiver demand sparks debate

Farmer outfits in the State say they will be forced to start an agitation against the AAP government if a complete farm loan waiver is not announced shortly

VIKAS VASUDEVA
CHANDIGARH

A recent study on farmers' suicide in Punjab by the Ludhiana-based Punjab Agricultural University (PAU) has revealed that in six districts of the State, as many as 9,291 farmers died by suicide between 2000 and 2018 and nearly 88% of the suicide cases were a fallout of farm-related debts.

The relatively higher number of debt-related suicides is all set to bring the issue of "farm loan debt waiver" yet again into the spotlight in the near future as farmer outfits across the State are planning to corner the ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government on their long-pending demand to announce a complete farm loan debt waiver.

"Farmers have been demanding a complete loan waiver for long, but successive governments have not paid any heed to it. The current AAP government's atti-

tude towards farm loan waivers is also disappointing. If the government's apathy towards farmers continued, then farmers of different outfits will join hands and start agitation against the State government. If by September 15, the government doesn't take a decisive step on loan waiver, we will under the umbrella of Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) begin our struggle for loan waiver," Jagmohan Singh, general secretary of the Bharatiya Kisan Union Ekta (Dakaunda), told *The Hindu* on Sunday.

Purchasing crops at MSP Sarvan Singh Pandher, general secretary of the Punjab unit of the Kisan Mazdoor Sangharsh Committee, said the Punjab government should ensure complete loan waiver for farmers and simultaneously work on a policy to make farming profitable, for which announcing and purchasing crops at

the minimum support price (MSP) is the first important step that needs to be taken by the government.

"Farmers suicide across the State are only rising, the government should waive all outstanding loans, whether private or government loans, against the farmers and labourers. We were hoping some concrete step will be announced in this direction in the State

SPECIAL

budget, but there's nothing. The government has not even given any road map surrounding steps for sustaining the agriculture sector. We are not pinning high hopes on the AAP government, but let us wait for two or three months. If no steps are initiated for loan waiver and other demands of farmers, we will be forced to start an agitation," he said.

Sukhdev Singh Korikalan, general secretary of the Bha-



Grim reality: The highest rate of suicides was found in Sangrur district with 2,506 reported suicide cases. *AFP

ratiya Kisan Union (Ugrahan), one of the largest outfits in Punjab, firmly believes that it is important that the government announce a complete loan waiver.

"It's the ill-conceived policies of the Union and the State governments that have resulted in farmers falling into debt traps. The key reason for farmers getting into the debt trap is the lack of MSP on all crops. We want

that MSP should be announced for all crops and also its purchase to be guaranteed," he said.

Study in four phases

A joint study titled "Farmer suicides in Punjab – incidence, causes, and policy suggestions" in the six districts of Punjab was carried out by the Department of Economics and Sociology, PAU, in four phases for the period 2000 to 2018 by

Sukhpal Singh (principal economist), Manjeet Kaur (principal agricultural economist) and H.S. Kingra (senior agricultural economist).

The first phase survey was carried out in Bathinda and Sangrur between 2000 and 2008 followed by another phase that included four districts – Barnala, Ludhiana, Mansa, and Moga – for the period 2000 to 2010. The third phase survey was conducted in 2016 in all the six districts for the period 2000 to 2015. The fourth phase survey was undertaken in 2019, in which the cases of farmer deaths by suicide in all these six districts for the period 2016 to 2018 were studied.

The present study consolidates the total number of deaths by suicide of farmers reported in all the surveys from 2000 to 2018. All the villages falling in the jurisdiction of the six districts were covered in the door-

door and village-to-village survey.

Grim situation

Pointing out that the high rate of suicides in the six districts of Punjab throws light on the grim situation of farmers in the State, the study notes in these six districts as many as 9,291 farmers died by suicide during 2000 to 2018. The highest rate of suicides was found in Sangrur district with 2,506 reported suicide cases, followed by 2,098 suicides in Mansa, 1,956 in Bathinda, 1,126 in Barnala, 880 in Moga and 725 in Ludhiana. The number of suicide cases was the highest (630) in 2008 and declined thereafter. This decline in suicide cases may be an outcome of the "debt waiver scheme" of the Union government initiated in 2008. Overall, about 88% of the farmers died by suicide due to heavy debt burden, said the study.

Professor Sukhpal said in

the study that the suicide victims were classified into debt and non-debt category on the basis of the level of debt per acre of land, level of income of the family and assets owned and assets sold by the family to pay off the debt.

"The observations of the study found that around 88% of the suicide cases fell in the debt category and the remaining about 12% occurred for non-debt reasons. The farm size-wise distribution clearly depicts that the main reason for small farmer suicides was heavy debt burden, as over 89% of these victims were motivated by the heavy debt as compared with large farmers, where debt-related cases were around 57%. As the farm size increases, the proportion of suicide cases with heavy debt burden decreases. Around 43% of the large farmers died by suicide due to non-debt reasons," he said.

Sown area of paddy rises marginally

Centre asks States to encourage farmers to increase cultivation citing the global demand for grain

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The area sown with paddy rose marginally from that of the previous week, but was 23.95% less than in the corresponding period of last year, according to data collected by the Crop Division of the Union Agriculture Ministry till July 8.

The difference in the area coverage from the 2021 figure is 22.75 lakh hectares. Sowing of pulses such as black gram and yellow split pigeon pea has decreased, while the cultivation of green gram (*moong dal*) has increased by 37.47% and other pulses by 135.12%.

The Ministry has been maintaining that it is too early to suggest a decrease in paddy cultivation in the



Steep fall: The difference in the area coverage from the 2021 figure is 22.75 lakh hectares. ■ AM FARUQI

States during this kharif season.

Farmers' organisations, on the other hand, have been claiming that scarcity

of water and fertilizers is forcing farmers to reduce the sowing of paddy.

Till July 1, the decrease in area was about 27%.

Chhattisgarh showed a decrease of about 6.1 lakh hectares, while the area in Punjab is down by 4.8 lakh hectares. In Madhya Pradesh, there has been a decrease by 4.6 lakh hectares.

Madhya Pradesh showed the most decrease – by 22.4 lakh hectares – in the sowing of all kharif crops, while Rajasthan increased cultivation by about 25 lakh hectares till July 8.

Oilseed cultivation

On total oilseeds too, the decrease in cultivation is more than 20%.

Groundnut and soyabean cultivation is down by 18.95% and 21.74%, respectively.

Farmers seem to have preferred to sow sunflower during this kharif season as its

cultivation has increased by about 43%, though the acreage is just about 1.16 lakh hectares.

Among coarse cereals, Bajra has shown an increase of about 79.26%, while the cultivation of jowar, ragi, maize and small millets have significantly reduced as compared to last year's cultivation.

The Centre has been asking the States to encourage farmers to cultivate paddy, citing the global demand for the foodgrain. It has been pushing for nutrition security by asking farmers to raise coarse cereals.

The increasing prices of edible oils due to import dependence had given tough moments for the Centre recently.

Rescue operation on hold due to bad weather in J&K

Efforts under way to restore route

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
SRINAGAR

Hopes of finding those missing in the Amarnath flash floods alive are fading by the hour even as the rescuers are making last-ditch efforts to look for any survivor and the Army has pressed heavy machinery into service to restore the track to the holy cave shrine in the south Kashmir Himalayas, officials said on Sunday.

A flash flood triggered by a cloudburst near the cave shrine on Friday afternoon has led to the death of least 16 people. Around 40 people are still missing.

“The rescue operations are going on as personnel from various agencies are clearing the debris in the hope of finding any survivor,” a State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) official said. He said most of the debris clearance is being done at the areas pointed at by sniffer dogs.

“We are still hopeful but anyone still alive under that debris will be a miracle,” the official said. He said there has been no breakthrough as far as finding the survivors or even recovering a new body is concerned.

Meanwhile, the Army has



Amarnath pilgrims waiting to board a bus to return home on Sunday. ■PTI

pressed heavy machinery into service in order to restore the route to the cave shrine at the earliest.

Meanwhile, the Indian Air Force (IAF) evacuated 34 injured pilgrims from the medical facility at the Amarnath yatra base camp to a hospital here on Sunday.

“An additional 34 injured pilgrims were evacuated by IAF Mi-17 V5 and Cheetal helicopters on Sunday,” a defence spokesperson said.

He said the IAF choppers also airlifted 20 National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) personnel, along with six canines, from Srinagar to take part in the search operation to trace the missing people believed to be stuck under debris.

CPWD faces cyber attacks, reiterates norms to staff

‘Reports about targeted attacks surged in past few months’

DAMINI NATH
NEW DELHI

The Central Public Works Department (CPWD) has been facing a spate of targeted cyber attacks on computers across its offices, according to an advisory it issued to employees last week reiterating earlier cyber security guidelines.

“References are being received from security agencies of Government of India regarding targeted attacks on the compromised computers in various CPWD offices for collection of sensitive information. Frequency of such references has increased in past few months,” the CPWD said on July 8.

It added that the references from security agencies are being sent to the regional heads of CPWD for analysing the root cause and sanitisation of devices. Reports are also sought on compliance.



References from agencies are sent to the regional heads of CPWD. ■ ISTOCK

However, the CPWD said action with regard to the references is not being taken in a timely manner and the reports are getting “delayed abnormally”. The office memorandum informed employees that the CPWD “can’t question the findings of security agencies who are tracking such incidents”.

Reiterating earlier guidelines, including one issued

on May 13, the CPWD asked employees to follow the cyber security measures. “Any consequences arising out of such delay shall be the responsibility of official concerned,” the office memo stated.

A CPWD official told *The Hindu* that one or two such instances are being observed every month from various offices. The official said the CPWD has about 2,000 offices across the country and employees are being reminded to follow the cyber security rules. The official further said CERT-In (Indian Computer Emergency Response Team) is tracking the attacks.

A construction agency that functions under the Union Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry, the CPWD has carried out many some of the most prominent projects in the past.

20-bed Army medical facility at Galwan

The unit will provide treatment for gunshot wounds sustained by personnel at over 14,000 feet

DINAKAR PERI
VIJAITA SINGH
NEW DELHI

Two years after 20 soldiers were killed in clashes with the Chinese Army in Ladakh's Galwan, the Indian Army has for the first time set up a medical unit in Galwan that, among other capabilities, will provide treatment for gunshot wounds at an altitude of over 14,000 feet.

India and China have been engaged in eyeball-to-eyeball positions at multiple locations along the undefined Line of Actual Control in eastern Ladakh for more than two years. While several rounds of talks at the diplomatic and military levels have eased the stand-off in a few points, turning these areas into no-patrolling zones, there are others where the build-up continues.

Ad hoc facility

A senior government official said the 20-bed field dressing station (FDS), which is an "ad-hoc" medical facility un-



Need of the hour: The medical centre is important because seriously ill patients are now taken to the field hospital in Leh, 200 km away. ■ GETTY IMAGES

like a regular field hospital, became operational in Galwan around three months ago. "It can cater to all kinds of treatment a field hospital has but at a smaller scale," said a defence source.

The government official said that the opening of the medical facility at such a high altitude is significant as there was no such arrangement earlier and any patient in a serious condition had to

be either airlifted or brought down by road to the field hospital in Leh, more than 200 km away.

Paramedical team

"A paramedical team and a doctor is always there on standby with all patrolling units. However, the field dressing station will come in handy when there is no time to be lost. It will have the paraphernalia to treat soldiers

with gunshot injuries, or serious patients, and then they can be referred to the field hospital in Leh," the official said.

After the June 15 Galwan incident in 2020 in which 20 soldiers were killed, shots were fired at the south bank of the Pangong Lake in August-September but no injuries were reported. It was the first time since 1975 that shots were fired along the

LAC. The Army issued a statement then that China had carried out provocative military movements to change the status quo in south Pangong Tso and "Indian troops pre-empted this PLA [People's Liberation Army] activity".

India and China have held 15 rounds of meetings of senior commanders so far. Both sides failed to achieve a breakthrough for disengagement at Patrolling Point 15 in the Hot Springs area in the 15th meeting held on March 11. The troops have pulled back from their positions in Galwan and on both the banks of Pangong Tso.

"After China amassed troops in April-May 2020, the deployment at Ladakh was also increased manifold. It takes time for freshly deployed soldiers to acclimatise to the weather at such a high altitude. There have been many cases of hypothermia and other injuries among the troops. The newly opened medical facility will cater to those needs as well," the official said.

Army needs new utility helicopters

Fleets of ageing Cheetah and Chetak helicopters are awaiting replacement

DINAKAR PERI
NEW DELHI

The Army Aviation Corps is in the process of a major augmentation of its firepower with the induction of the indigenous Light Combat Helicopter (LCH) under way, and Apache attack helicopters joining from 2024.

However, its fleet of ageing Cheetah and Chetak helicopters, which are a lifeline for high-altitude areas, are in dire need of replacement. Of the 190 of them in service, 134, or over 70%, of them are over 30 years old.

“While combat potential has increased manifold and is on an upswing, reconnaissance and surveillance capabilities are going to take a hit unless induction of the Ka-226T and the indigenous Light Utility Helicopter (LUH) takes place simultaneously to replace the ageing fleet,” a defence official said.

The LUH, designed and developed by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), has



On air: The Army operates 145 indigenous Advanced Light Helicopters. ■ FILE PHOTO

come up well, but it will take time for sufficient numbers to come in, the official stated. The Air Force is also scheduled to raise its first LCH squadron shortly.

However, the deal with Russia for 200 Ka-226T utility helicopters has been stuck for several years over indigenisation issues and is now on the verge of cancellation with the availability of the LUH and the global situation compounded by the war in Ukraine, two defence offi-

cial confirmed.

The Army and the Air Force together have a requirement of over 400 helicopters of this class.

LCH squadron

On June 1, the Army raised its first LCH squadron in Bengaluru. “It will move to the Eastern Command on completion next year,” the official stated.

The Cabinet Committee had sanctioned the procurement of 39 AH-64 Apache at-

tack helicopters from the U.S. Following this, the IAF procured 22 Apaches under a deal signed in September 2015. The government has decided any further Apache procurements would go to the Army.

In August 2021, Army Aviation got control of the Army’s Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV), which were earlier under the Artillery. The Army has over 30 Herons UAVs procured from Israel and a major upgrade plan for weaponisation and facilitation of satellite communication for them at an estimated cost of over ₹6000 crore has been delayed, officials said.

Army Aviation currently operates around 190 Cheetah, Chetak and Cheetal helicopters, with five of them, the oldest, being over 50 years old. A bulk of the fleet, close to 130 of the 190, are between 30 and 50 years old, a senior official in the know said.

Army to induct Mandarin experts

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Army has initiated the process to induct Mandarin experts into the Territorial Army (TA), with a notification issued on Sunday inviting applications for six vacancies – five civilians and one ex-service officer. This follows a recent effort by the

Army to increase the number of Mandarin speakers as well as offer courses in Tibetology for officers posted along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) to orient them in Tibetan culture, traditions and practices.

The Army has recently obtained requisite approvals to induct Mandarin trained

personnel in the TA, an official said. “With recalibration of the Indian Army’s strategic outlook towards the northern borders, the Army has upscaled its Chinese language training and has synergistically enmeshed appropriate scaling of Chinese linguists within its overall strategy,” he said.

Villagers' stir against solar plants protects khejri trees

Agreement reached between energy firms and Bishnoi activists to save trees in western Rajasthan

MOHAMMED IQBAL
JAIPUR

The proposed installation of eight solar power plants in Jodhpur district's Phalodi tehsil has led to a major confrontation with the Bishnoi activists, who have strongly protested against the felling of khejri trees. The solar energy companies, which have acquired 25,000-bigha land on lease in the region, have cut down a large number of khejri trees, which is the State tree of Rajasthan.

Though the expansion of solar and wind power projects on the vast desert land in western Rajasthan is set to bring the State to the forefront of power generation, the process of their installation has adversely affected the desert ecosystem. The trees need to be felled to let the solar panels be aligned horizontally for a certain length of space.

The two new entrants in the power sector have provided economic gains to the agriculturists whose land was taken over to install the plants with the payment of cash compensation. While several villagers have welcomed these projects because of their economic benefits, the vast majority of others are bitterly opposed to this new intervention across the semi-arid agricultural fields.

The Bishnoi activists, who have a sentimental attachment with khejri or *Prosopis cineraria* trees, claim that the solar panels are causing incredible loss to Thar desert's flora and fauna. Thousands of



Villagers protesting at a solar plant site in Badi Sid where khejri trees were felled and buried. ■SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

khejri trees have been chopped off wherever the new solar power plants have been set up. The incident in Phalodi tehsil's Badi Sid region is the latest one involving a clash with the villagers.

Move opposed

After the solar energy firms cut down the khejri trees and buried them in earth to make the fields plain to set up panels, three organisations of the region joined hands to forge a front for opposing the move. The activists, who had raised the issue for more than four months, held demonstrations for several days outside the fields last month and brought a bulldozer to dig out the trees.

"The impact of new power intervention by private companies on the desert ecosystem is quite visible. The majority of our population depends on the wild vegetation which is getting lost forever for the gains of power

plants," Ramniwas Budhnagar, general secretary of Bishnoi Tiger Force, told *The Hindu*. He said the evidence of indiscriminate felling of trees in Badi Sid was submitted to the district authorities.

Hundreds of Bishnoi youths and people from other communities gathered to stop the traffic on Phalodi-Bikaner road. Several protesters laid down across the road to press the demand for stopping the destruction of trees and the saints led by Guru Bhagwan Das, representing the Jamba seat of Bishnoi sect, reached the spot to extend their support.

Many detained

However, the police detained several persons, including a Sarpanch, Kailash Bishnoi, on charges of disruption of work of solar plants and the allied sections. The prolonged agitation finally led to an agreement brokered by the administration, in which the solar



A bulldozer digging out the khejri trees buried at the site of a solar power plant in Badi Sid. ■SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

energy firms were directed to protect khejri trees and translocate them elsewhere if their removal was necessary for installation of the plants.

Phalodi's Additional Collector Hakam Khan said the companies would plant new trees as compensation for the loss of trees to be cut and action would be taken under the Forest Act for burying the trees in the ground. According to the agreement, cases registered by the firms against the villagers would be investigated in an unbiased manner and security provided to the families staying in the nearby hamlets which had received threats from the interested persons.

The three organisations - Bishnoi Tiger Force, Akhil Bharatiya Bishnoi Mahasabha and Akhil Bharatiya Jeev Raksha Samiti - have since called off the agitation after the signing of agreement. Mr. Budhnagar said the State government should formulate a

policy to ensure co-existence of solar energy plants and khejri trees. "A new alignment of panels will be required to be developed that can be tackled easily," he said.

The solar power plants are being set up in an area measuring about 3.50-lakh bighas, mainly in western parts of the State. Trees have been felled at the places such as Devkot, Rasla, Mulana, Devda, Jhinjhiyali, Myajlar, Ramgarh, Pokhran and other regions of Thar desert.

Important role

Khejri tree plays an important role in maintaining the ecosystem of Thar region because of its ability to survive in dry weather. The tree is used in different ways, such as a source of fodder and firewood, and it helps in sustaining the soil's nutrient value and ensuring a good yield of desert crops and food plants. Its fruit is used to make the popular dish 'Sangri'.

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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,
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H	Effects of globalization on Indian society;
I	Role of women and women's organization;
J	Social empowerment, communalism, regionalism & secularism
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R	Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States, Performance of these schemes;
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