

VEDHIK

DAILY NEWS ANALYSIS

30 - SEP - 2022

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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UNESCO lists 50 iconic Indian textiles

It mentions causes for their dwindling popularity and provides strategies for their preservation

Sreeparna Chakrabarty
NEW DELHI

UNESCO on Thursday released a list of 50 exclusive and iconic heritage textile crafts of the country. Toda embroidery and Sungadi from Tamil Nadu, Himroo from Hyderabad, and Bandha tie and dye from Sambalpur in Odisha were some of the textiles that made the cut.

Handmade for the 21st Century: Safeguarding Traditional Indian Textile lists the histories and legends behind the textiles, describes the complicated and secret processes behind their making, men-



Making the cut: Hand-embroidered shawls made by the Toda community of the Nilgiris in Tamil Nadu on display. FILE PHOTO

tions the causes for their dwindling popularity, and provides strategies for their preservation.

According to UNESCO, one of the major challenges to the safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Herit-

age in the South Asia is the lack of proper inventory and documentation. The publication, which aims to bridge this gap, brings together years of research on the 50 selected textiles.

Some of the iconic

handcrafted textiles documented from north India are Khes from Panipat, Chamba rumals from Himachal Pradesh, Thigma or wool tie and dye from Ladakh, and Awadh Jamdani from Varanasi.

Finding a place

From the south, Ilkal and Lambadi or Banjara embroidery from Karnataka, Sikalnayakanpet Kalamkari from Thanjavur have been included.

Kunbi weaves from Goa, Mashru weaves and Patola from Gujarat, Himroo from Maharashtra and Garad-Koirial from West Bengal also find a place among the 50 iconic textiles.

‘India wants a relationship of mutual sensitivity with China’

Jaishankar’s comments come after the remarks by Chinese Ambassador to India, claiming that the situation along the LAC was moving towards being ‘normalised’

Sriram Lakshman
WASHINGTON

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said India sought a relationship with China but one that was built on mutual respect. His comments were made at a press briefing on Wednesday in Washington DC in the context of Chinese Ambassador to India Sun Weidong claiming that the situation along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) was moving towards being “normalised” and “overall stable”. Mr. Jaishankar had said earlier – such as in Bengaluru in August – that the relationship with China was not normal and could not be normal as the border situation was not normal.

“No, look, I think, if the spokesperson [sic] of a Fo-



Taking a stand: External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken hold a press conference at the State Department in Washington on Tuesday. AP

reign Ministry were to say something, I would urge you to seek comment from the spokesperson of the Foreign Ministry of the corresponding country,” said Mr. Jaishankar, who is con-

cluding an approximately 10-day visit to the UN in New York and to Washington DC.

“I think what I have said to my mind represents accurate policy assessment

of where the state of our relations are. We continue to strive for a relationship with China. But one that is built on mutual sensitivity, mutual respect and mutual interest,” he said.

Decriminalising adultery: Centre seeks clarification

Krishnadas Rajagopal

NEW DELHI

Adultery is a cause of deep pain in the family. Families are torn asunder by adultery, Justice K.M. Joseph said while heading a Constitution Bench on Wednesday.

“Everybody is ultimately dependent on the family as a unit. The integrity of the family is based on the faithfulness each spouse expects of the other,” Justice Joseph observed.

A five-judge Bench, headed by Justice K.M. Joseph, is hearing an application filed by the government seeking a clarification as to whether the 2018 judgment of the Supreme Court decriminalising adultery in the Indian Penal Code (IPC) would affect action taken under Armed Forces laws against officers who indulge in adultery with their colleagues’ wives.

The Centre approached the Supreme Court after

Govt. approaches SC after Armed Forces Tribunal dismissed cases of misconduct against officers

the Armed Forces Tribunal (AFT) started dismissing cases of misconduct against officers after the Joseph Shine judgment in 2018.

Additional Solicitor General Madhavi Divan said unlike the IPC offence of adultery under Section 497, which is based on patriarchal notions, the Armed Forces take action for misconduct even against women officers. “The Armed Forces law is completely gender-neutral,” Ms. Divan said.

The Bench asked the government whether it would want to withdraw the application and challenge a particular case rejected by the AFT.

The court listed the case on December 6.

SC axes 51-year-old curb, single women get equal abortion rights

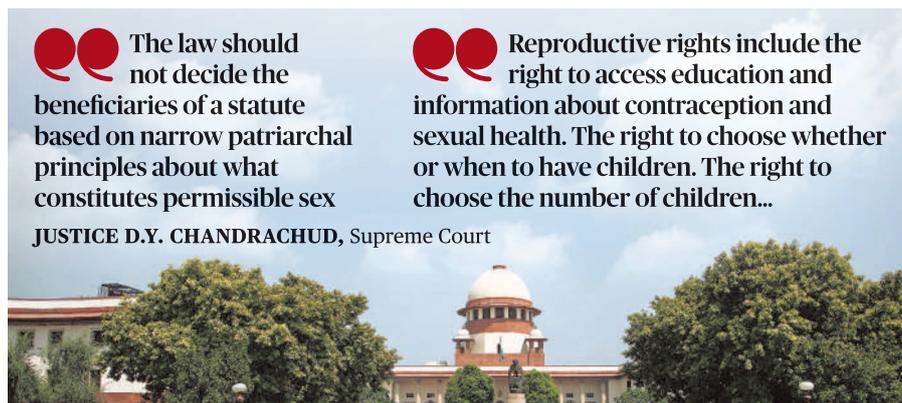
Bench says prohibiting single women with pregnancies up to 24 weeks from accessing abortion while allowing married women with the same term to get the care amounted to discrimination; artificial distinction is not constitutionally sustainable

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

In a historic judgment, the Supreme Court on Thursday declared that single women with pregnancies between 20 and 24 weeks are entitled to access the same safe and legal abortion care as married women.

A three-judge Bench, led by Justice D.Y. Chandrachud, pried open the restrictive grip of a 51-year-old abortion law which barred unmarried women from terminating pregnancies that are up to 24 weeks old.

The judgment came in an appeal by a person who wanted to terminate her pregnancy before her term completed 24 weeks. The Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act, 1971



prohibits unmarried women who are between 20 and 24 weeks' pregnant to abort with the help of registered doctors.

"The rights of reproductive autonomy, dignity and privacy give an unmarried woman the right of choice as to whether or not to bear a child on a similar footing

as that of a married woman," Justice Chandrachud held in an order issued on a petition filed by a person who chose to remain anonymous.

The court declared that prohibiting single women with pregnancies up to 24 weeks from accessing abortion while allowing married

women with the same term of pregnancy to avail the care amounted to discrimination. The court said a single woman may have suffered the same "change in material circumstances" as a married pregnant woman.

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‘Sexual assault of wife can take form of rape’

The court also dealt with how married women, like single women, were exposed to sexual assault within the family and suffer forced pregnancies.

“A woman may become pregnant as a result of non-consensual sexual intercourse performed upon her by her husband. We would be remiss in not recognising that intimate partner violence is a reality and can take the form of rape. The misconception that strangers are exclusively or almost exclusively responsible for sex and gender-based violence is a deeply regrettable one. Sex and gender based violence within the context of the family has long formed a part of the lived experiences of scores of women,” a Bench led by Justice D.Y. Chandrachud held.

“It is not inconceivable that married women become pregnant as a result of their husbands having ‘raped’ them. The institution of marriage does not influence the answer to the question of whether a woman has consented to sexual relations,” Justice Chandrachud observed.

Marital rape is not recognised as an offence under the IPC. Exception 2 to Section 375 of the IPC removes marital rape from the ambit of rape. Another Bench of the court is currently hearing appeals to remove the Exception.

Justice Chandrachud said Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act recognises a husband’s act of sexual assault or forced intercourse committed on his wife as ‘rape’. It said the Exception to Section 375 (rape) was only a “legal fiction”. However, the court stopped short there, saying understanding ‘rape’ under the MTP Act would not have the effect of striking down Exception 2 to Section 375 .

Single women get equal abortion rights

The single woman may have been abandoned or without a job or been a victim of violence during her pregnancy. Her life could be in danger due to foetal abnormalities. She may have been a victim of sexual exploitation leading to the pregnancy. There would be cases in which she could have got pregnant due to contraceptive failure, leaving her in a state of mental anguish.

“The law should not decide the beneficiaries of a statute based on narrow patriarchal principles about what constitutes permissible sex. This would create invidious classifications,” Justice Chandrachud said in the judgment. The court said eight women die every day in India due to unsafe abortions. 67% of the abortions carried out between 2007 and 2011 were classified unsafe. Illegal abortion is a “continuing crisis”, especially among unmarried women. The MTP (Amendment) Act in 2021 included the term ‘partner’ to show that the law was not just concerned about women within marriage. The court said the artificial distinction between married and unmarried women was not constitutionally sustainable. The state would be stripping single women of their autonomy over their bodies and lives by forcing them to carry unwanted pregnancy to full term. Reproductive autonomy included the right to choose whether or not to have an abortion. A woman does not need the permission of a third party to abort.

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The draft Telecommunication Bill, 2022

Does the new Bill dilute the powers of the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India? What will be the effects of including OTT communication services within the definition of "telecommunication services"?

EXPLAINER

Trishee Goyal

The story so far:

The Ministry of Communications released a draft of the Indian Telecommunication Bill, 2022 last week for public comments. Since then, the draft has generated a significant amount of discussion on various changes that it proposes to make to the current telecom regulatory framework. The Minister for Communications, Ashwini Vaishnav, has stated that the Bill would become law in the next 6-10 months.

What is the draft Indian Telecommunication Bill, 2022?

The draft Indian Telecommunication Bill is an attempt by the government to update the extant regulatory framework in keeping with the advancements and challenges in the sector. This was much needed given that the three main legislations that occupy this domain are considerably outdated, with the most recent of these having been enacted more than 70 years back. These legislations are the Indian Telegraph Act enacted in 1885, the Indian Wireless Telegraphy Act enacted in 1933 and the Telegraph Wires (Unlawful) Possession Act in 1950. The Indian Telecommunication Bill looks to repeal these legislations and "restructure the legal and regulatory framework" for the telecommunications sector.

How does the draft telecommunication Bill affect over-the-top communication services?

Over-the-top (OTT) communication services refer to services that provide real time person-to-person telecommunication services. Some popular examples of these include messaging platforms like Whatsapp, Telegram, Signal, Messenger, Duo, Google Meet etc. These platforms use the network infrastructure of telecom service providers like Airtel, Vodafone and Jio and provide features that compete with telecommunication services such as voice calls and SMS services. Telecom Service Providers (TSPs) allege that these features result in a double whammy for them as they cut into their sources of revenue (voice calls, SMS) while not having to deal with infrastructure and licensing costs that they have to undertake. Therefore, TSPs have been demanding a level playing field with OTT services.

The current draft of the Bill expands the definition of "telecommunication services" to include OTT communication services. As a consequence of this, OTT telecommunication services may be subject to the same licensing conditions as TSPs. Under the extant framework, TSPs have to be issued the Unified Access Service Licence (UASL) for them to be able to provide telecom services in India. If OTT communication services are required to obtain the same licence, they would also be subject to a number of conditions such as maintaining 'know your customer' details of their users, adhering to certain encryption regulations and allowing lawful access to the government of their equipment and networks.

What are some of the consumer protection measures in the draft Bill?

To curtail the ever-increasing incidence of spam calls and frauds, the draft Bill proposes that the identity of the person communicating using any form of telecommunication services shall be available to the user receiving such communication. This would mean that unlike now where only



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the phone number of the person making the communication is displayed, going forward the name of the person would also be displayed. As per the Communications Minister, this facility would not only be available for voice calls but also for users of OTT communication services.

The draft Bill provides that commercial communications which are advertising and promotional in nature should be made only with the prior consent of a subscriber

The draft Bill obligates licence holders to identify the users of its service through a verifiable mode of identification. To ensure that a user provides correct details, the draft Bill penalises providing wrong identification details with a ₹50,000 fine and suspending the operation of the specific mobile number or barring the person from using the telecom service for a certain duration. Further, the draft Bill also provides that commercial communications which are advertising and promotional in nature should be made only with the prior consent of a subscriber. While the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) has previously issued the "Telecom Commercial Communications Customer Preference Regulations" in 2018, spam communications and sharing of contact details without any safeguards continues to be rampant. Its inclusion in the draft Bill takes it out from the purview of TRAI and gives government the power to take stringent measures against violators.

How does the draft Bill impact the position of the TRAI?

The TRAI was set up in 1997 as an independent and specialised regulator for the telecom sector. Given that the government is a

major player in the telecom sector in various roles such as provisioning of services, licensing and allocating spectrum, the need was felt to institute a regulator that is at an arms' length from the government to ensure a level playing field, fairness for private TSPs and for the protection of consumer interests.

However, the current draft considerably dilutes TRAI's position in a number of ways reducing it from a regulatory to a recommendatory body. First, the government would no longer be required to seek recommendations from the TRAI before issuing licences. Second, it also removes the power of the TRAI to requisition from the government information or documents that are necessary to make such recommendations. Moreover, the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) will no longer be required to refer back to TRAI the recommendations for reconsideration – those recommendations that it does not agree with, as it was required to do previously. The removal of such powers would not be keeping with international practice where telecom regulators are endowed with a greater degree of independence to ensure that investor confidence and consumer protection is maintained in the market.

What are the draft Bill's provisions on internet shutdowns?

For the first time in the Indian legal framework, a specific provision enabling the government to order suspension of internet power has been introduced through the draft Bill. Currently, suspension of internet services is ordered under the Temporary Suspension of Telecom Services (Public Emergency and Public Safety) Rules, 2017 that have been made under the Indian Telegraph Act, 1885. However, civil society has raised concerns that the proposed provision gives the government power to or-

der internet shutdowns while failing to incorporate safeguards such as judicial oversight that have been recommended by the Standing Committee on Information Technology.

How does the Bill facilitate TSPs?

The draft Bill clears up a lot of confusion around the allocation of spectrum. It lays down that while the primary route for allocation of the spectrum is auction, when spectrum is to be allocated for certain functions of the government such as defence or transportation, the administrative process is to be followed. It also allows the TSP to exploit its spectrum resource fully by enabling sharing, trading, leasing, surrendering or returning unutilised spectrum. The Bill also simplifies the process for restructuring, merging or demerger.

Since the government is a major player in the telecom sector, it was felt that a regulator which is at an arms' length from the government is necessary to ensure a level playing field

On the issue of right of way (the legal framework for setting up telecom towers), it mandates that land owned by a public entity should be available expeditiously unless there is an express ground of refusal. This is likely to face opposition from States which have the power to administer lands within their territorial jurisdiction. Lastly, the draft allows the funds under the Universal Service Obligation Fund to be utilised for other purposes such as urban areas connectivity, research etc, expanding its current mandate from the limited aspect of enhancing rural connectivity.

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THE GIST

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For the first time, a specific provision enabling the government to order suspension of internet power has been introduced through the draft Bill. Civil society has however, raised concerns that the proposed provision gives the government power to order internet shutdowns while failing to incorporate safeguards such as judicial oversight.

India lacks a complete paediatric cardio-care service

It is overwhelming for parents to be told that their child may have heart defects. It is worse when the child does not get treated in time due to lack of paediatric cardiac care in the vicinity of his/her home.

Congenital Heart Disease (CHD), which the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Atlanta, U.S., acknowledges to be the most common congenital disorder, is responsible for 28% of all congenital birth defects, and accounts for 6%-10 % of all the infant deaths in India.

Paediatricians say timely medical intervention can save 75% of these children and give them normal lives. The lack of a national policy for the treatment of cardiovascular diseases in children keeps a huge number outside the ambit of treatment. It is estimated that over 1,00,000 children keep getting added to the existing pool of children awaiting surgery.

According to the Pediatric Cardiac Society of India (PCSI), the prevalence of congenital cardiac anomalies is one in every 100 live births; or an estimated 2,00,000 children are born with CHD every year. Only 15,000 of them receive treatment. At least 30% of infants who have complex defects require surgical intervention to survive their first birthday but only 2,500 operations can be performed each year. A case in point is the premier All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), where infants are waitlisted till 2026 for cardiac surgery.

A distressing perception, ground realities

A retired health bureaucrat says that there has been more neglect and little improvement in child health care because creating a comprehensive paediatric cardiology care service is usually considered economically unviable – it is resource intensive and requires infrastructure investment that politicians and policymakers choose to evade.

There are 22 hospitals and less than 50 centres



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A dearth of specialists and infrastructure in India, in the government and private sectors, is hampering the future of children with congenital heart disease

in India with infant and neonatal cardiac services. Geographically, these centres are not well distributed either. A 2018 cardiology department report of AIIMS, highlighted how South India accounted for 70% of these centres; most centres are located in regions with a lower burden of CHD. For instance, Kerala has eight centres offering neonatal cardiac surgeries for an estimated 4.5 lakh annual childbirths. Populous Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, with an estimated annual childbirth of 48 and 27 lakh births per annum, respectively (Census of India, 2012), do not have a centre capable of performing neonatal cardiac surgery.

It taxes the vulnerable and the marginalised

For 600 districts with a 1.4 billion population, there are only 250 paediatric cardiologists available. The doctor to patient ratio is an abysmal one for half-a-crore population. According to the *Annals of Pediatric Cardiology* journal, the United States had 2,966 paediatric cardiologists in 2019 – a ratio of one per 29,196 population. Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Punjab, Odisha (besides U.P. and Bihar) have a higher CHD burden but do not have paediatric cardiologists in the government sector. There are four paediatric cardiologists for 38 Delhi government hospitals. Now, Jaipur (Rajasthan), Raipur (Chhattisgarh), Coimbatore (Tamil Nadu), Madurai (Tamil Nadu), Bhubaneswar (Odisha), Palwal (Haryana), Indore (Madhya Pradesh), are on the map of paediatric cardiac care, but largely in the private sector.

Apart from the low number of paediatric cardiologists and cardiac surgeons, and critical care centres, poverty is another barrier before treatment. Transporting sick neonates from States with little or no cardiac care facilities to faraway centres for accurate diagnosis and treatment burdens parents financially.

It is not just unaffordability but also inaccessibility that constraints paediatric services. In addition, there is the non-availability of crucial equipment that is essential for diagnosis of heart diseases in the unborn. Accentuating the problem is the general lack of awareness about early symptoms of CHD among parents.

Antenatal checks are crucial

The Child Heart Foundation, a non-governmental organisation working in Siliguri (West Bengal), Jalandhar (Punjab) and Delhi, with underprivileged children with CHD, has been flagging the need for fetal echocardiography.

Paediatricians say antenatal detection of congenital anomalies is crucial for neonatal care and management. But certain congenital defects such as accurate heart health assessment are not visible in a normal ultrasonography of an unborn baby. Fetal echocardiography done in a pregnant woman of 18 to 24 weeks allows better visualisation of the structure and function of the heart. There are programmes worth emulating such as Kerala's 'Hridayam (for little hearts)', aimed at early detection, management and support to children with CHD or the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister's Comprehensive Health Insurance Scheme offering free specialised surgeries.

The National Health Protection Scheme (Ayushman Bharat), is expected to financially assist 10 crore poor families but has still to take off. So far, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh have apparently got going.

A 2018 article by the Department of Cardiothoracic Cardiology, AIIMS, states, "paediatric cardiology is not a priority area in the face of competing demands for the resources".

Nothing seems to have changed, and as another World Heart Day (September 29) has passed by, we need to act fast to help India's many children in need.

How much should India prop up the rupee?

PARLEY



Dharmakirti Joshi

is Chief Economist, CRISIL Ltd



Lekha Chakraborty

is Professor, NIPFP; and Member, Governing Board of Management of International Institute of Public Finance, Munich

Last week, the rupee weakened against the dollar past the 81-mark to a record low. In recent months, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has been intervening in the forex market to smoothen the decline. With the RBI dipping into its kitty for this purpose, Indian foreign exchange reserves have fallen by about \$94 billion in 12 months to about \$545 billion until mid-September. How much more forex can the RBI afford to use in reducing currency volatility? Does the benchmark interest rate, as a policy tool, have a role to play? Dharmakirti Joshi and Lekha Chakraborty discuss these questions in a conversation moderated by K. Bharat Kumar. Edited excerpts:

What is your view on the RBI's actions to stem the rupee's decline? How much of its forex reserves should it use for this?

Dharmakirti Joshi: The use of forex reserves is appropriate at this juncture. You build your reserves during good times and spend them during bad times. Right now, reserves are being spent in trying to curb currency volatility. You can't defend the rupee at a particular level, because that would be swimming against the tide, which is not possible in this environment. But you can make it less volatile. Having said that, there is also a limit to how much you can lean on the reserves. They can burn out pretty quickly if you are aggressive in your interventions. So, you need a multi-pronged approach, which involves several measures, which the RBI has already taken to increase the supply of U.S. dollars in the Indian market, such as easing provisions for remittances, allowing short-term foreign portfolio investments in government securities, etc. We can even think of a scheme similar to the one introduced in 2014 to attract NRI investments.

You also need to let the rupee depreciate in an orderly manner. Some, but not too much, depreciation will partly help the export sector, as global demand is the key influencer of exports, and currencies of our competitors are also weakening. So, the vulnerability that stems from high current account deficit (CAD) can get addressed to some extent.

The interest rate channel also needs to be used. In Friday's monetary policy announcement, we believe the RBI will go in for a 50 basis point hike. Part of it will be to address domestic concerns and part of it will also help mute the impact of the U.S. Federal Reserve's rate hikes.

Lekha Chakraborty: There is a limit to the



Containing volatility: The Reserve Bank of India building at Connaught Place, New Delhi. GETTY IMAGES

RBI continuously managing volatility because exchange rate management is not its mandate, but price stability through inflation containment is. The root cause of this rupee volatility is the Federal Reserve's decision to raise rates. They are in an aggressive, hawkish mode, which is spurring foreign portfolio investors to move out of emerging markets. So, bridging the interest rate differential is the policy tool we should be using, because volatility management can also give a panic signal to the market. In the [current] Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) meetings, if we can front load that for macroeconomic stability, and for stability in the currency markets, that could be effective. I can understand that geopolitical uncertainties, the war in Ukraine, energy price volatility, all contribute to this situation, but predominantly, it is the Western world going hawkish, with U.S. Federal Reserve Chair Jay Powell at the Jackson Hole meetings talking about "keeping at it... until the job is done", referring to a series of interest rate hikes... given all that, the predominant narrative for us should be interest rate defence, rather than continuous currency market management by intervening to control the volatility. Let the rupee depreciate.

For an economy like India's, what is the level of forex reserves in terms of number of months of import cover? Is this measure adequate?

DJ: The import cover is one way to measure reserves adequacy, but it's a very narrow one. There are other measures such as the Guidotti-Greenspan rule that looks at external debt that is less than one year, i.e., short-term debt. Forex reserves should be sufficient to service those. From that point of view, we still have adequate reserves.



There is a limit to the RBI continuously managing volatility because exchange rate management is not its mandate, but price stability through inflation containment is.

LEKHA CHAKRABORTY

Is the real effective exchange rate (REER) that measures trade competitiveness with other nations using a basket of currencies a good guidepost for the RBI in forex management?

LC: It may not be a good approach. I would stick to the interest rate defence. On Friday, if the MPC moves back to 'neutral' from an 'accommodative' stance, and front loads the rate hike, that could be an effective way to target macroeconomic stability. During the taper tantrum in 2013, what helped us was addressing the macroeconomic fundamentals. Mounting inflation is also feeding into import costs. And that is widening the CAD. But even earlier, we have lived with CAD of 4% of GDP; what is important is how you finance this deficit. If we can finance the CAD with capital inflows, and prevent hot money outflow with the aid of interest rates, that could be an effective long-term solution.

As a policy tool, is the interest rate lever adequate?

DJ: I would broadly agree that the interest rate instrument has to be used; what it means is that interest rates are being raised not only to control inflation, but also to address external imbalances. But let's also look at past episodes of sharp depreciation of the currency which we have seen during the global financial crisis, during the taper tantrum. They tell us that that the currency weakens very sharply during these episodes of global shocks, but it also corrects. If you plot it over a 15-20-year period, you will see that the overshooting of the currency typically gets corrected after the event is over. So, the aim now should only be to ensure that volatility is not too high, not to steer the currency in any direction.

If the CAD hits 4%, as is being projected by some agencies, what are the consequences for the economy?

LC: We must look at the CAD and the capital account holistically. The focus should be on how we can stem capital that is flighty. Even during the tenure of Raghuram Rajan [as RBI

Governor], the CAD went up to 4%. But the moment hot money became flighty, panic set in. Till then, we were comfortably financing the CAD with capital flows. Again, if you can manoeuvre the interest rate effectively, that can stem the outflow. But in using this tool, we have to focus on the real interest rate and economic growth, i.e., R and G, for public debt management. If the R is going to be greater than G, then we are in an unsustainable situation. The only way to address these concerns such as fiscal consolidation, twin deficit crisis, given that the real rate of interest is negative, given the hawkish mode of the Fed, is to raise rates.

A falling rupee was supposed to have exacerbated our external debt situation. Is that less of a concern now?

DJ: As per an RBI report, the stock of unhedged exposure of Indian corporates is about 44%, which means that 44% of the outstanding debt has not been hedged and is vulnerable to forex volatility. Weakening of the rupee, if sustained, will create stress in pockets. But the rupee hasn't seen the kind of weakness that it saw during the taper tantrum; it was a massive depreciation over a very short period. Now, it is extremely orderly; it is even more orderly than in 2017-18, when the Fed was raising rates, trying to normalise policy. The pace of rupee depreciation has not been very severe this time to cause concern. But in this volatile global environment with a very aggressive Fed, we need to keep our fingers crossed.

Can you put a figure to how much more the rupee can decline?

LC: I will not take a guess on how far we can allow the rupee to depreciate because it's all ad hoc configuration of the demand and supply... our exchange rate is market-determined. So, let the market forces play out. I only want to clarify my point that the RBI needs to intervene only if the rupee is on a sustained free fall. I will be comfortable if forex reserves in terms of the import cover are close to 15 months. So, that's the way we learned last year around September, the import cover was close to 15 months, when forex [reserves] were at their all-time high. This can be a guiding measure, not a threshold or anything. RBI's liquidity guidance is yet another.



To listen to the full interview
Scan the code or go to the link
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Ensure equal Net privacy for Indians and others: Centre

Social media companies, however big they were, have to comply with the laws of India and 'have to treat Indian citizens with an equal degree of privacy', the government tells Supreme Court

Krishnadas Rajagopal

NEW DELHI

The government on Thursday stated in the Supreme Court that it expects social media companies, however "big" they were, to treat Indian users' privacy on a par with foreign customers.

"My stand is clear. However big the multinational corporation be, if you are operating in India, you have to comply with the laws of India and have to treat Indian citizens with an equal degree of privacy as you treat others across the world," Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta declared the government's commitment to protecting Internet privacy during a hearing before a Constitution Bench headed by Justice K.M. Joseph.

Mr. Mehta said, "Many directions of the Central government are flouted.



Many legal directions under the statutory regime are flouted."

He said the government is in the process of making a law to protect social media users.

"Government is alive to the situation. The preparation of making the Bill is already going on. This issue requires more of a legislative response than a judicial intervention," said the Solicitor General, asking the Bench to wait for the new law.

To Justice Joseph's statement, "If the government was keen to bring legisla-

 If the government was keen to bring legislation, it would have done so. This case is pending for nearly five years

JUSTICE K.M. JOSEPH

tion, it would have done so. This case is pending for nearly five years", Mr. Mehta said a draft Bill had been earlier tabled and then withdrawn.

Senior advocate Shyam Divan, for the petitioners, argued that corporations have to adopt a "golden mean or value" even in the absence of domestic online privacy laws.

Waiting for outcome

The Bench decided to wait for the outcome of the government's efforts to bring a Bill and posted the case for January 17 for final

disposal.

The case is based on a petition by Karmanya Singh Sareen and Shreya Sethi challenging a 2016 policy of instant messaging app - WhatsApp - to give Facebook access to information and personal details shared by millions of its users.

Against free speech

The petitioners had said the policy was a violation of their privacy and free speech.

The duo had moved the apex court after the Delhi High Court upheld the contract.

The High Court had taken a nuanced position by confirming the legality of the policy while directing WhatsApp to "delete completely" from its server information or data or details of all users who choose to delete their account.

Current account deficit widened to 2.8% of GDP in Q1

The Hindu Bureau

MUMBAI

India's current account deficit (CAD) widened to \$23.9 billion, or 2.8% of GDP, in the April-June period, from \$13.4 billion or 1.5% in the preceding quarter, and compared with a surplus of \$6.6 billion (0.9%) a year earlier, Reserve Bank of India data released on Thursday show.

"CAD will certainly widen further despite the moderation in crude oil prices," said Rupa Rege Nitsure, chief economist at L&T Financial Holdings.

"India can attract more capital inflows if and only if it shows an improvement in growth prospects. Going by the underlying trends, India's CAD may be 3.5-3.7%... in FY23," she noted.

While debits were to the tune of \$254.9 billion, credits totalled \$231 billion.

'Trade deficit widens'

The CAD widened mainly on account of the merchandise trade deficit broadening to \$68.6 billion, from \$30.7 billion, as well as an increase in net outgo of investment income payments.

Net services receipts increased, both sequentially



Going by the underlying trends, India's current account deficit may be 3.5-3.7% of GDP in FY23

RUPA REGE NITSURE

Chief Economist at L&T Financial Holdings

and on a year-on-year basis, on the back of rising exports of computer and business services.

Services exports grew 35.4% from a year earlier, led by broad-based growth in computer, business, transportation, and travel services, the RBI said.

Private transfer receipts, mainly remittances by Indians employed overseas, grew 22.6% year-on-year to \$25.6 billion. Net outgo on the income account, primarily reflecting payments of investment income, increased to \$9.3 billion, from \$7.5 billion.

In the financial account, net foreign direct investment (FDI) rose to \$13.6 billion, from \$11.6 billion a year earlier.

Net foreign portfolio investment saw outflows of \$14.6 billion, versus inflows of \$0.4 billion in Q1 FY22.

(With Reuters inputs)

External debt slid by \$2.5 billion in Q1 on valuation gains: RBI

Press Trust of India

MUMBAI

India's external debt during the first quarter of 2022-23 declined by \$2.5 billion to \$617.1 billion over end-March 2022, the Reserve Bank of India said.

The external debt to GDP ratio declined to 19.4% at end-June, from 19.9% at end-March.

Valuation gains due to the appreciation of the U.S. dollar vis-a-vis the Indian rupee and major currencies including the yen and euro were placed at \$14.4 billion, RBI data on India's external debt as of end-June 2022 show.

"Excluding the valuation effect, external debt would have increased by \$11.9 billion instead of a decrease of \$2.5 billion," the central bank said.

At end-June 2022, long-term debt (with an original maturity of above one

Excluding the valuation effect, external debt would have increased by \$11.9 billion

year) was placed at \$487.3 billion, recording a decrease of \$10.6 billion over its level at end-March 2022.

On the other hand, the share of short-term debt (with an original maturity of up to one year) in total external debt increased to 21% at end-June 2022, from 19.6% at end-March 2022.

U.S. dollar-denominated debt remained the largest part of external debt, with a share of 54.7% at end-June, followed by rupee-denominated debt (30.4%), SDR (6.3%), yen (5.1%), and the euro (2.8%). Outstanding debt of the general government declined while non-government debt rose.

Govt. aims to borrow ₹10,000 cr. less in FY23 on tax mop up

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

The government on Thursday slashed its market borrowing target for FY23 by ₹10,000 crore, indicating buoyant tax collections which would be enough to bear ₹44,762 crore additional expenditure on free ration distribution.

In addition to the Budgeted collection from direct and indirect taxes, the government is also expecting gains from the windfall profit tax on oil that was levied from July 1.

In a statement, the Finance Ministry said the government would borrow a total of ₹5.92 lakh crore during the October-March period of the current fiscal, including from issuance of its maiden Sovereign Green Bonds (SGB) of ₹16,000 crore.

The government had in Budget for 2022-23 project-



ed a gross market borrowing of ₹14.31 lakh crore.

Of this, the government decided to borrow ₹14.21 lakh crore during 2022-23.

“Accordingly, the balance amount of ₹5.92 lakh crore (41.7% of ₹14.21 lakh crore) is planned to be borrowed in the second half of the fiscal year 2022-23 through dated securities,” it said.

The gross direct tax collections till September 17 grew 30% to more than ₹8.36 lakh crore.

Senior citizens, families to see small gains in small savings

Government raises interest rates on 5 schemes by 0.1% to 0.3% for Dec. quarter, increases are the first change after a nine-quarter pause

Vikas Dhoot
NEW DELHI

The Centre on Thursday announced increases of 0.1-0.3 percentage points in interest rates payable on five small savings instruments (SSIs) including the Kisan Vikas Patra, Senior Citizens' Savings scheme and time deposits for 2 and 3 years, for the quarter beginning October 1, marking the first increase in small savings rates since January 2019.

The rate for Kisan Vikas Patra has been raised to 7% from 6.9% for the coming quarter, and senior citizens' savings will earn 7.6%, instead of the 7.4% payable till September 30. Rates were left unchanged for seven other designated small savings schemes, including the Public Provident Fund (PPF) at 7.1%, and the Sukanya Samriddhi Account Scheme at 7.6%.

The last time small savings rates were raised was for the January to March



Inching up: Senior citizens' savings will earn 7.6% from October 1, instead of the 7.4% payable till September 30. PTI

quarter of 2019, just ahead of the last Lok Sabha elections. The rates had been kept unchanged for nine successive quarters since the April to June quarter of 2020, when they were slashed across schemes.

'Negative spread'

In August, the RBI had observed that the rise in yields on government securities (G-secs) had turned 'the spread between the existing interest rates' and formula-based

rates 'negative for most small saving schemes'.

Returns on SSIs are linked to market yields on G-secs with a lag and are fixed on a quarterly basis at a spread of 0-100 basis points over and above G-sec yields of comparable maturities. The decision to raise rates on just five SSIs, will mean that returns for some of the schemes, such as the PPF, will be negative in the coming quarter in relation to the formula, an economist said.

After the floods, Bengaluru needs to clean up its act

The floods have abated in Bengaluru. As individuals struggle to clean their houses, the silt on the roads left behind by the receding water – now a fine dust that flies in the air choking us – is a reminder of those difficult times.

Various analyses now attribute Bengaluru's flooding to more rainfall – in the future, it is expected to increase to an average of 1,000 mm per annum from the current 650 mm per annum – and unplanned, overcrowded growth that is destroying the greenery, tanks and wetlands.

Clearly, we must decongest the city, plant more trees, save wetlands, even reclaim them, desilt drains, enlarge sewers, deconcretise pavements and stop the clogging of waterways with unsegregated garbage. The State government announced tough measures such as the demolition of unauthorised encroachments impeding drainage streams in the city, but quickly backed away. It now plans to divert drains to avoid already built-up areas. This is not a solution because nature will carry on inundating encroachments until people abandon them of their own volition.

The 'grease' of the system

Everybody has a favourite villain to blame – from the builder mafia to the migrant, from the lack of spatial planning to uncontrolled violations of building bye-laws. Yet, the herd of restive elephants in the room is led by a particularly malevolent matriarch: corruption.

Everybody decries corruption outwardly, but submits to it meekly. Fear apart, it is also a matter of convenience, of time saved and of benefits, often through the violation of rules. Some justify corruption as the grease that keeps the fast-growing economic engine of Bengaluru whirring smoothly. However, corruption cripples economic growth in ways not readily apparent. Apart from transferring inordinate wealth to the undeserving, it creates a slew of vested interests, who resist anti-corruption process reforms. Understanding how corrupt officials, politicians,



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Everybody has a favourite villain to blame, yet the herd of restive elephants in the room is led by a particularly malevolent matriarch – corruption

regulators and private players act in concert is essential to successfully implementing corruption-reducing strategies. Further, we must understand that the corrupt often use the honest to further their subversive agendas. Examples abound.

Most game theories concerning the dynamics of corruption reveal that the original sinner is often, paradoxically, a well-intentioned government. A good, but misguided government could make narrowly rigid rules, thus giving venal politicians and bureaucrats the leeway to bend them. For example, building bye-laws are so labyrinthine that the strictest law-abiding citizen cannot comply with them. That provides opportunities for agents who bypass the system's rigidities. Ironically then, corruption actually reduces red tape. Hence, not many complain about resorting to bribing to get work done through a parallel, 'efficient' system.

One could also have a good government that aims to reduce red tape, making overly lax rules capable of being interpreted differently. In this 'anything goes', system, frontline officials invent discretionary practices to create impediments and seek bribes. 'You show me your face, and I'll show you the rule,' is an old and cynical adage.

The loopholes

Next, our narrow, legal definition of corruption enables many in a corrupt system to escape culpability. Indian law recognises only corrupt acts by public servants to be 'acts of corruption' under the law. As private corruption is not criminalised, many government actions are outsourced to private agents, who collect 'handling fees' on behalf of their partners in crime within the government. Witness builders' agents, who collect bribes openly to have properties registered, even as the government IT enable such processes, aiming at efficiency and honesty.

E-Governance is often not the effective solution as claimed. E-enabled systems often only relocate the locus of corruption; they do not solve all of it. Large databases, such as land records, when moved to paperless systems are vulnerable to manipulation. Encroachments are enabled when old records are destroyed and new ones are created. Power shifts from land administrators to the one who possesses the digital signature. The data entry operator becomes an all-important and corruptible cog in the wheel.

How then do we tackle corruption? How do we destroy the entrenched resistance to true reforms, which harmonises citizen and collective interest in protecting the environment and promoting a healthy economy? Worldwide experience reveals no easy way out. The battle against networks of corrupt interests of

politicians, bureaucrats, the private sector and regulators, has been a hard fought one. There are uneasy transitions and fake equilibriums in this battle of attrition; the corrupt do not cede ground easily.

Kick-start these strategies

Successful anti-corruption strategies rely on actions across three fronts.

First, regular assessments and evaluations of ongoing anti-corruption measures, eliminate the possibility of declaring false victories. They help in red-flagging new corruption opportunities, even as old ones are eliminated. A cycle of ongoing process reforms gets initiated.

Second, a genuine regime of whistle-blower protection assures honest citizens, politicians, bureaucrats and judges of protection, as they otherwise fear the adverse repercussions for uncovering illegal activities. Whistle-blowers today are exposed to danger. They draw attention to themselves and are vulnerable to attacks, ranging from character assassination, to counter accusations, to physical harm. Confidence-assuring whistle-blower protection measures can lead to exposure of more corruption, particularly at higher levels. Swift punishment of the guilty, could instil a sense of fear and reduce the feeling of impunity that the corrupt enjoy.

Third, there has to be a conscious move towards promoting ethical behaviour. Unfortunately, moral science education has been tainted by religious colours; but surely, are we not able to develop agnostic, religion-neutral ways of educating young people to be empathetic, kind, mindful of their larger responsibilities to the community, be honest, and intolerant of corruption?

All these strategies have been tried successfully in countries and cultures that have been able to reduce corruption substantially. This in turn has translated into better quality of services, and thus, a better quality of life. In turn, this nurtures creativity and bolsters the economy. Surely, Bengaluru deserves such a future.

However, there is one necessary ingredient remaining, going by the experience of cities and countries that have cleaned up their acts. If anti-corruption strategies are to be successful, the process needs enlightened leadership. No extent of process changes will succeed if the leadership – it need not be a single leader, but a network of high-ranking individuals cutting across the government and non-government sectors – is corrupt or insincere. In a democracy, waiting for such a leadership to emerge miraculously from so-called benevolent dictators is wishful thinking. The emergence of such a leadership depends upon us.



K. MURALI KUMAR

States to up vigil on communally charged posts on social media

S. Vijay Kumar

CHENNAI

A couple of days after the nationwide raids on the premises of Popular Front of India (PFI) functionaries and the subsequent ban on the organisation and its associates, affiliates, and fronts, the Union government has sent out an advisory that there has been a significant increase in the posting of communally provocative content on social media platforms.

The Centre urged the States to take effective steps to curb the misuse of cyberspace by miscreants to stoke communal passions by circulating provocative messages, photos or videos.

Enhanced vigil

The advisory called for taking down such objectionable content and blocking user accounts by following the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs).

It underlined the need

Security advisory calls for taking down of objectionable content online by following SOPs

for enhanced vigil and heightened security arrangements at communally hyper-sensitive and sensitive locations, police sources told *The Hindu* on Thursday.

Asked for comment, Tamil Nadu Director-General of Police C. Sylendra Babu said that 'Social Media Monitoring Cells' and 'Cyber Forensic Cells' were established in all cities and districts in the State to block communally sensitive or any other objectionable content posted on social media platforms.

Adequate security arrangements were in place to protect prominent personalities and important establishments of the Central and State governments, the DGP said.

Evolving chair

Clarity is needed on the relationship of the CDS with the Service Chiefs

The Government on Wednesday announced the appointment of former Eastern Army Commander Lt. Gen. Anil Chauhan, 61, as the next Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), nine months after the untimely death of India's first CDS, Gen. Bipin Rawat in December 2021. He could be in office for almost four years. His appointment is until further orders, or when he turns 65. Lt. Gen. Chauhan will pick up the stalled process of transformation and reorganisation of the armed forces and bring in synergy that was envisaged along with the creation of the post. An ambitious component of the new vision is the proposed reorganisation of the armed forces into integrated theatre commands, which is yet to get the required consensus among military leaders. When the office of the CDS was created in 2019, its mandate was to ensure "jointness" of the three services in operations, logistics, transport, training, support services, communications, repairs and maintenance, within three years of the first CDS assuming office. That ambition was disrupted by the death of Gen. Rawat, and then the delay in the appointment of his successor. Lt. Gen. Chauhan has served a range of command, staff and instrumental appointments including that of Director General of Military Operations, and brings hope and experience.

The nine months and changes in eligibility criteria it took before the appointment could be made point to the fact the CDS is still an evolving institution. The arbitrary changes which expanded the pool of eligible candidates for appointment as CDS may have diminished the dignity of the evolving office. In 2019, the Ministry of Defence was reorganised and a new department of military affairs was carved out with the CDS as its secretary. That did not, however, ensure clarity in terms of functions and roles across the Defence Ministry. The CDS is also the Principal Military Adviser to the Defence Minister and Permanent Chairman, Chiefs of Staff Committee, which requires him to straddle administrative and operational functions. More clarity is needed regarding the functions of the CDS, particularly his relationship with the Service Chiefs in terms of operational roles and administrative duties. While the big focus is likely going to be the theatreisation process, the other tasks before him would be to bring in fiscal prudence and optimisation in utilisation of the defence budget especially given the tough economic outlook. The war in Ukraine has also underscored the need to accelerate the effort to build indigenous capacities in defence manufacturing and resilient logistical chains to be prepared for future wars effectively.



Stronghold breached: Security personnel at the camp set up at Tisia village in Jharkhand after driving the Maoists out of Burha Pahar; and (below) residents of Hatidih village interact with a police officer. V.V. KRISHNAN

All quiet on the Maoist front

The fall of Burha Pahar, a command centre of the CPI(Maoist) in the jungles along the Jharkhand-Chhattisgarh border, signifies a broader trend — the ultras are on the retreat across the country. Despite the gains made in depleting the strength of the rebels, the Union Home Ministry's take-no-prisoners approach and expansion of security operations have raised human rights concerns. **Devesh K. Pandey** reports from the battlefields that are now calm

Every monsoon, fresh spells of rain revitalise the rivers, waterfalls, streams and multitudinous brooks that flow out of the hills of Burha Pahar, a forested area spread over 50 sq. km in the trijunction of Latehar and Garhwa districts in Jharkhand and Balarampur district in Chhattisgarh. The rolling landscape offers a tranquil getaway for urban travellers and an inviting challenge for adventure seekers.

However, for over three decades, large parts of this picturesque terrain remained inaccessible as it served as the command centre of the Communist Party of India (Maoist), a banned organisation of left-wing guerrilla fighters engaged in constant battles with Indian security forces.

Early this month, a counter-insurgency offensive codenamed Operation Octopus — jointly launched by special teams from the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), its elite Commando Battalion for Resolute Action (CoBRA) unit, Jharkhand Jaguar, and the district police of Garhwa and Latehar — finally freed Burha Pahar from the control of Maoists. A large bunker was demolished and over 100 improvised explosive devices (IEDs) were recovered. Union Home Minister Amit Shah termed the mission a "historic milestone" in the fight against Left Wing Extremism (LWE) and lauded the troops that had led the offensive.

The area was one of the last bastions of the Maoist insurgency, which traces its roots to a 1967 uprising in Naxalbari, a village in West Bengal. The Maoists organised uprisings among landless workers in West Bengal, Bihar and Andhra Pradesh, and later spread to the mineral-rich States of Odisha, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand.

In 2004, two armed wings, the People's War Group in Andhra Pradesh, and the Maoist Communist Centre in Jharkhand and Bihar, united to form the CPI(Maoist). In 2006, the then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh described the rebels as "the single biggest internal security challenge ever faced by our country". Armed conflict in the "red corridor" has claimed the lives of about 16,650 security personnel in the past 40 years and 3,000 Maoists over the last two decades.

Following the trail
The Hindu followed the trail taken by the security forces to piece together the capture of Burha Pahar. Riding pillion on motorcycles driven by Jharkhand Police's Small Action Team commands, the team began its 13-km journey from Baresan in Latehar district to Tisia village, which sits on the edge of the former Maoist stronghold. At Hatidih hamlet, the team met locals who complained about the State Forest Department's objections to them gathering wood for putting up fences in their fields. But they remained tight-lipped when questioned about the Maoists on the run. After climbing over boulders on the nearby Tetuk Nallah, the squad reached a makeshift bridge, where the motorcycles had to be dragged through the sandy riverbed while crossing a tributary of the Burha river. The final five km of the hour-long trip was a bumpy ride through slushy terrain.

"For the first time, we have entered deep into Naxal-dominated territory and established a base," said an officer supervising work at the new camp being set up in Tisia village. Within days, multiple tents, basic infrastructure and a power generator were set up at the site. Expecting an anti-

bush, sandbag bunkers and a barbed wire fence were also put up. The officer said they planned to source water from a nearby hamlet.

The police said the Tisia camp would be instrumental in securing uninterrupted supply of essentials and conducting area domination exercises in the region that was once run by top Maoist commander Deo Kumar Singh alias Arvindji, who fearlessly roamed the forests on horseback. A member of the central committee of the CPI(Maoist) who carried a reward of 31 crore on his head, Arvindji died of an illness in 2018. He was succeeded by Ogu Satwaji alias Sudhakar, another central committee member, who carried a bounty of 41 crore in Jharkhand and 25 lakh in Telangana. Under his leadership, the Maoists continued to launch attacks. On June 26, 2018, six jawans of the Jharkhand Jaguar were killed in a landmine blast. In February 2019, Sudhakar and his wife Vydygula Aruna surrendered before the Telangana police. The charge of Burha Pahar then fell on central committee member Mithlesh Mehta alias Bhikhari. The same year, the Home Ministry set up more camps and relocated existing ones in consultation with States to plug the security vacuum. Since then, 108 camps have come up, including 22 in Jharkhand, five in Bihar and six in Odisha.

As the security forces closed in on the rebels, the number of arrests went up. The rate of surrenders also increased by 140% from 2,428 (2006 to 2014) to 5,816 up to May this year. In Jharkhand, among the 440 Maoists arrested last year were politburo member Prashant Bose alias Kishanda and central committee member Sheela Marandi.

This year, Rupesh Kumar Singh, who allegedly mobilised funds for the outfit's operations, was arrested along with 309 other members of the organisation. Twenty Maoists surrendered last year and 12, including zonal committee member Maharaaj Pramanik, gave up arms this year. Encounters in Jharkhand led to the killing of six Maoists last year and five till August this year.

Tightening the noose

Over the past few years, a series of exercises have been undertaken to smoke out Maoists from Parasnath, Saranda, Kolhan and the Saral Kela-Khunti-Chaibasa trijunction in Jharkhand and choke their funding channels. Assets worth ₹22 crore have been seized in LWE-affected States.

Crackdowns by Central law enforcement agencies on Maoists, however, have not been without controversy as several human rights activists have been embroiled in cases for their alleged links with the banned outfit. The special wing of the National Investigation Agency has registered 55 such cases, with over 50% of them lodged in the past three years. In July last year, Father Stan Swamy,

an 84-year-old Jesuit priest, who spent five decades fighting for the rights of the tribal community in Jharkhand, died in judicial custody in Mumbai. He was one of the 16 human rights activists arrested by the probe agency under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act for their alleged links with Maoists in the 2018 Bhima-Koregaon case.

Clampdown begins

On February 8 this year, the security forces launched Operation Double Bull based on a specific input about the presence of several key CPI (Maoist) leaders in Bulubul and Peshar areas in Lohardaga district and Gotag in Latehar district. Personnel from the CoBRA, Jharkhand Jaguar, bomb detection and disposal squads, 19 CRPF companies and local police took part in the exercise spread across 1,000 sq. km.

One Naxal commander was killed and three security personnel were injured in the offensive that lasted till February 21. The teams blocked the supply routes of Maoists,

forcing them to flee after a brief gunfight. After the final face-off at Harkatatali in the Pakhar hills, 14 Maoist leaders and their aides were arrested. Thirty firearms, 23 IEDs, and 194 kg of explosives, using which 750 small landmines powerful enough to blow off the lower limbs of security personnel could be made, were seized. "The operation had a debilitating impact on Naxal formations in Lohardaga, Gumla, Latehar, Simdega, Palamu and Garhwa districts. It created conditions for possible large-scale desertions and surrender of Naxals," said Anil Vinukant Homkar, Inspector General of Jharkhand Police, who heads the Operations and State Intelligence Bureau wings.

In an intercepted conversation, Maoist leader Bhikhari was heard saying he "fears for his life". He was arrested in Bihar's Gaya in March based on a tip-off from Jharkhand Police. Sourav, the son of politburo member Jagdish Master, a founding member of the erstwhile Maoist Communist Centre, replaced him as the head of operations in Burha Pahar. Of late, the area had become the headquarters for Maoist operations in the Koel-Sankh zone comprising Palamu, Latehar, Garhwa, Gumla, Lohardaga and Simdega districts.

The security forces then turned their focus on adjoining Bihar where over the past three-four years, Maoist presence in the Chakarbandha forests, spread across Gaya and Aurangabad districts, and the Lakhisarai-Jamui-Munger trijunction in the Bhimbandha forests had emerged as a major challenge. The CRPF set up six camps in the State between February and March. In April, the paramilitary force launched Operation Chakarbandha, which resulted in the Maoists fleeing to Palamu and Chhata districts in Jharkhand.

Follow-up action in June and August led to the collapse of Maoist infrastructure in Bihar. All major leaders of the outfit in the Bhimbandha forests had either surrendered or were arrested, dealing a major blow to the insurgents. Most of the 2,500 landmines planted in the area were detected and destroyed. A CRPF official said the rebels earlier placed a series of IEDs that were "command-detegrated" by wired or wireless remote devices. However, in the recent past, they often carpeted the area surrounding their hideouts and bunkers with 30 to 50 IEDs containing just 250 gm of explosives that used syringes as pressure activators. The moment someone stepped on the IED, the syringe was depressed and the bomb went off. "The main objective was to incapacitate security personnel by blowing off their legs," the official said.

The final assault
Jharkhand Director General of Police Niraj Sinha said the inputs gleaned from the previous operations proved vital in executing the final assault on Burha Pahar. He said in mid-August, the advance of the security forces into the safe haven of the Maoists was hampered by heavy rain.

On September 4, after several brainstorming sessions, senior officers decided to launch Operation Octopus. Over 25 companies of joint forces were pressed into action to strike a final blow to the Maoists, said an officer who was part of the war room. Two teams — one from the CRPF camp in Pundag in Chhattisgarh and the other from Tisia and Nawatoli villages in Jharkhand — had to cross rivers, navigate dense forests, scale steep hills and evade landmines while making their way to Burha Pahar. The first team reached the Maoist hotbed the same night and the second unit soon joined it. After a brief exchange of fire, the Maoists took to their heels, the official said. Within hours, tents were set up and a helipad was built atop the hill as a contingency measure.

On September 21, CRPF Director General Kuldeep Singh said following the operations, Burha Pahar and the Chakarbandha forests had been "completely cleaned off and captured". "We want to ensure that the Maoists get no chance to return to these areas now," he said. Mr. Singh said this year, in comparison with 2018, there had been a 33% reduction in incidents of LWE violence, a 20% dip in the number of casualties suffered by security forces and a 44% fall in civilian deaths.

The number of LWE-affected districts dropped by 24% to just 39 (128 police station areas) in 2022, he added. Of these, only 25 were in the category of most violence-prone districts, Mr. Singh said, adding that the areas under the control of the Maoists were now "shrinking".

On September 23, a security review meeting chaired by Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren, police officials said 27 Maoists had been killed and 1,131 arrested in the State since January 2020. A total of 108 gunfights took place between the Maoists and the security forces between January 2020 and August 2022, and 45 Maoists surrendered before the police. The officials said eight of the State's 24 districts were Maoist-free in 2020. On July 20, Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai had informed the Rajya Sabha that incidents of Maoist violence had declined by 77% from an all-time high of 2,258 in 2009 to 509 in 2021. "Similarly, the resultant deaths (civilians and security forces) have reduced by 85% from 1,005 in 2010 to 147 in 2021," the Minister said. Only 46 districts reported LWE-related violence in 2021 compared with 96 in 2010, Mr. Rai said.

Road to development
At the Tisia camp, villagers have gathered to witness the security personnel at work. "Just days before the camp came up, the Maoists were spotted in the jungles. They demanded cooked meals and threatened us with dire consequences if we spoke to the police. They have now fled," said Uday Kumar Yadav, a resident of Nawatoli, whose uncle was killed in an IED blast last year.

The security personnel said a team led by Latehar Superintendent of Police Anjan Anjan had helped them identify land for the Tisia and Nawatoli camps, and secure excavators and workers to flatten a boulder-strewn track. When strong currents in the Burha river made it difficult for tractors to transport construction material, Mr. Anjan suggested forming a bridge by placing sandbags on Hume pipes (concrete tubes). The bridge was built in just 12 hours, facilitating the movement of excavators and tractors. Within a few days, the camp site was cleared of boulders and levelled.

Not far away from the camp lies the ruins of a school building. When a villager pointed out that teachers seldom visited the school, Mr. Anjan gave orders for the construction of a makeshift school and the distribution of books and uniforms to students. He also urged the villagers to open shops to provide supplies to security personnel at the camp. "It will create long-term livelihood opportunities for them," Mr. Anjan said, adding that similar initiatives would be undertaken in Nawatoli where work is in progress to build a camp.

The fall of Burha Pahar offers the hope of development to villagers who have borne witness to the Maoists bringing government projects to a grinding halt. Officials cited the example of the Kutku Mandal dam on the North Koel river in the Palamu Tiger Reserve. They said construction of the dam had started in 1974, but it was stalled in August 1997 after the Maoists executed an engineer whom they had held responsible for flooding in the area that led to the death of several villagers. In 2019, Prime Minister Narendra Modi laid the foundation stone for the completion of the project. "We are hopeful that counter-insurgency operations will instil confidence in the contractors to resume work," an administration official said.



AMOL VINUKANT HOMKAR
Inspector General of Jharkhand Police

CENTRAL FUNDING

₹978 crore released in past three years to step up security in LWE-affected districts

₹374 crore spent on projects to bolster special forces and intelligence wings in States under Special Infrastructure Scheme

₹3,085 crore released for the ₹30 crore earmarked per annum to fill critical gaps in public infrastructure and services

PATH TO PROGRESS

8,175 roads built in the past eight years

4,903 banking service centres opened by the Department of Posts in 80 districts

1,253 new bank branches opened by the Department of Financial Services

1,264 ATMs installed in 30 districts since April 2015

Mobile tower project 2,343 signal towers installed in first phase

2,542 towers installed in second phase

4,312 towers approved for aspirational districts

April 2022 (Jan 2019) Online clear-up upgrade from 26 to 40 service in first phase

Eklayra Model Residential Schools 234 schools sanctioned

63 schools started

Skill Development Scheme 47 districts receiving benefits since 2016

30 Andhra Training Institutes set up of the sanctioned 47

61 Sakshik Development Centres set up of the sanctioned 66



| 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 |
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| 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; |

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| 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; |

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| 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. |
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| 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. |