● POLITY   ● ECONOMICS   ● TECHNOLOGY   ● ECOLOGY

INTERNAL SECURITY

Four soldiers, policeman killed in Doda encounter

Four Army personnel, including Captain Brijesh Thapa, Naik D. Rajesh, Sepoy Bijendra, and Sepoy Ajay and a Jammu and Kashmir policeman were killed in a counter-terrorist operation at Doda in Jammu that began on Monday night and was continuing late on Tuesday night. Additional troops and equipment, including drones and other technical resources, were being used to flush out the terrorists.

Army chief General Upendra Dwivedi briefed Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on the situation on the ground. This was the latest in a series of militant attacks over the past few months in Jammu and Kashmir, with terrorist activity particularly shifting to the Jammu region, which has resulted in significant casualties among civilians and security forces. The Minister was apprised of the ground situation and the ongoing counter terrorist operation in Doda by the Army chief.

Infiltrators in Doda

Indian Army has been conducting a series of joint and coordinated operations with the police to eliminate foreign terrorists who have infiltrated and are moving in the upper reaches of Udhampur, Doda, Kishtwar and Bhaderwah areas and thereafter to Kashmir Valley. Twelve to 14 terrorists were estimated to be in the Doda area, split into three groups. Based on intelligence inputs, the Army and Jammu & Kashmir Police launched a joint operation in the Urarbaggi area, about 10 km north of Doda.

Deadly attacks

There has been a distinct shift in terrorist violence to the south of the Pir Panjal in recent months, reminiscent of the early 2000s when this area was a hotbed of terrorism. Since May this year, 13 members of the security forces have been killed in the area, including nine Army personnel, and one person each from the Air Force, Border Security Force, Central Reserve Police Force, and the JKP. Since November 2021, over 30 Army personnel have been killed in terror incidents in the area, while over 40 terrorists have been neutralised.

Defence sources said one of the major reasons for the high casualty rate was the lack of credible ground intelligence in the Jammu region south of the Pir Panjal. This is also exacerbated by the reduced number of security forces in the area in recent years. However, sources said that some additional troops have been brought in recently. In addition to reduced human intelligence, another challenge is the improved Chinese-made communication equipment being used by the terrorists, which has made interception difficult.

WE AIM TO INSPIRE YOU

INTERNAL SECURITY

Since 2021, Jammu accounts for 40% of killings of security personnel in J&K

In the past three years, Jammu and Kashmir has witnessed the killing of 119 security forces personnel, and over 40% of these killings were from the Jammu division. From 2021, at least 51 security personnel had been killed in various incidents initiated by terrorists in Poonch, Rajouri, Kathua, Reasi, Doda, and Udhampur districts, a deviation from the previous three years, when the Valley was the epicentre of such incidents.

Compared with five terrorist incidents and two security personnel killed in the Valley this year, Jammu has seen six such attacks in which 12 security personnel were killed. It is estimated that a group of 20-25 foreign hardened terrorists with sophisticated weapons entrenched in an area of 30-40 sq. km have split into multiple groups and are initiating the attacks. They have a fair idea of the topography, and are taking advantage of thick foliage and forest cover to launch attacks.

J&K has been under Central rule since June 2018. Since November 2023, it has not had a full-time Director-General of Police. After the 2020 Galwan clash, a large number of troops were withdrawn from the Jammu division and deployed to Eastern Ladakh. Officials said the security grid in Jammu is being tightened, and redeployment and recalibration of security forces is being carried out.

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

Karnataka Bill mandates 50% quota for locals in management positions

The Karnataka Cabinet has cleared a Bill mandating that industries, factories and other establishments appoint local candidates in 50% of management positions and 75% in non-management positions. The Karnataka State Employment of Local Candidates in the Industries, Factories and Other Establishments Bill, 2024, was cleared in the Cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on July 15. It is expected to be tabled in the ongoing legislature session.

The Act defines a local candidate as a person "who is born in the State of Karnataka and who is domiciled in the State for a period of 15 years and who is capable of speaking, reading and writing Kannada in a legible way and has passed a required test conducted by the nodal agency".

Under the Act, candidates must have a secondary school certificate with Kannada as a language. If not, they should pass a Kannada proficiency test, as specified by the nodal agency notified by the government.

If qualified or suitable local candidates are not available, the industries and establishments, in collaboration with the

government, should take steps to train local candidates within three years.

If sufficient number of local candidates are not available, then an industry or factory or other establishments may apply for relaxation from the provisions of this Act to the government, and after due enquiry, the government may pass appropriate orders and such orders passed by the government shall be final.

Nevertheless, the percentage of local candidates should not go below 25% in management positions and 50% in non-management categories. Failure to comply may attract penalties ranging from ₹10,000 to ₹25,000.

Long-pending demand

The Bill has been passed against the backdrop of voices calling for 100% job reservation for Kannadigas. Earlier in July, Kannada organisations had organised rallies in parts of the State demanding immediate implementation of the Sarojini Mahishi report submitted in 1984 that recommended a quota for locals in government and private sector jobs. It had 58 recommendations, including 100% reservation for locals in Group C and D jobs in Central departments and PSUs operating in Karnataka.

POLITY & GOVERNANCE
EC offers multiple choices to candidates to re-check voting in recently held polls

Candidates who have applied for a re-check of the voting process in the recently concluded Lok Sabha and Assembly elections can choose from a number of options given by the Election Commission (EC), including picking Electronic Voting Machines (EVM) from any polling station in an Assembly segment and opting for a mock poll and mock Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) slip count. The commission released the technical Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) on Tuesday.

Eleven candidates have applied for EVM and VVPAT memory verification. The requests essentially mean re-matching of votes polled in 5 % of EVMs in each of these constituencies. This is the first time that this re-evaluation will take place following the Supreme Court order of April 24 allowing the verification on the request of the runners-up in any election.

The SOP released by the commission were for EVM burnt memory checking and verification and had been sent to the Chief Electoral Officers of all States, the poll body said in a statement. It said the procedure allowed candidates to make selections from multiple choices.

The 'randomness' and 'enormity' of test vectors and expanded choice-based approach instead of controlled environment C&V process of burnt memory eliminates possibility or apprehension of any bias or hidden functionality in the firmware, by showing intended outcome(s) under parameters selected by the candidate and at every stage of C&V process. The complete C&V process will be held under CCTV monitoring.

"Education is the ability to listen to almost anything without losing your temper or your self-confidence." - Robert Frost

POLITY & GOVERNANCE
With two new judges, Supreme Court back to its full judicial strength

President Droupadi Murmu appointed Justices N. Kotiswar Singh and Justice R. Mahadevan as Supreme Court judges. A five-member Supreme Court Collegium, headed by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud, had recommended their names in a resolution on July 11. The Centre notified the two appointments that would return the top court to its full sanctioned strength of 34 judges. Justice Singh is the first judge from Manipur to be appointed to the Supreme Court.

Justice N. Kotiswar Singh's appointment as a judge of the Supreme Court will provide representation to Northeast India, and in particular, he will be the first from Manipur to be appointed a judge of the Supreme Court, the collegium had highlighted in its resolution. Justice Singh was serving as the Chief Justice of the High Court for Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh. He was due to retire on February 28, 2025.

Collegium's resolution

The Collegium has taken due note of the fact that Mr. Justice R. Mahadevan ranks third in the order of presently serving judges of the Madras High Court including the judges who have been posted as Chief Justices outside the Madras High Court. At this stage, the Collegium has given precedence to the candidature of Mr. Justice R Mahadevan in order to give representation to the backward community. The two judges replace Justices Aniruddha Bose and A.S. Bopanna, who retired in April and May, respectively.

AGRICULTURE
Chouhan asks scientists to visit fields, help farmers to deploy technology

Union Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan addressing agriculture and veterinary scientists at a function to mark the 96th foundation day of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) asked the scientific community to reach out to farmers and help them to increase production using science and technology.

The majority of farmers in the country own small plots of land, prompting a need for model farms. Agricultural diversification shows promise in increasing farmers' income, with a focus on improving livestock farming, aquaculture, wheat, pulses, and oilseeds production. The government prioritizes achieving self-sufficiency in pulses and edible oils.

Scientists are evaluating the adoption of 6,000 crop varieties developed by ICAR, assessing their journey from labs to fields. The collaboration between farmers and scientists is crucial for practical application of scientific advancements. The role of Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs) in this connection requires careful examination. It is suggested that assigning two ICAR scientists to each of the 731 KVKs nationwide could enhance research dissemination and directly benefit farmers.

Union Minister for Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying Rajiv Ranjan Singh, aka Lalan Singh, who also addressed the gathering, the country did not pay attention to the livestock and fisheries sectors, contributing 35% to the GDP.

ECONOMICS & DEVELOPMENT

'1,151-cr. investment can help India in battery tech. race'

A report prepared by the Automotive Research Association of India (ARAI) and commissioned by the Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser (PSA) to the Government of India noted a strategic investment of ₹1,151 crore in four broad areas, or 'buckets': energy storage cells, electric vehicle aggregates, materials and recycling and, charging and refuelling over the next five years to give India a significant international lead in the development of advanced technology necessary to make batteries to electrify the vehicles of tomorrow.Each bucket is subdivided into projects that have timelines ranging from two to five years. The "e-mobility R&D Roadmap" breaks down necessary steps to achieve advanced capabilities in developing the technological know how to get a lead in battery technology.

There are estimates of the degree of risk involved in the project ranging from 'nil' to 'high'. The projects also list out technical institutions that could potentially be roped in to deliver on specific components of the project. India's fleet of electric vehicles is primarily dependent on lithium-battery imports. While there were announcements on large lithium reserves in India, they are yet to be sufficiently exploited though the government has recently paved the private sector to mine for some of these 'rare earth' minerals.

ECONOMICS & DEVELOPMENT

'Food price anxiety may ebb as farm area sown increases'

The farm area sown has increased by 10.3 % compared to last year, potentially tempering the rise in food prices despite the southwest monsoon being slightly below average and last year's levels by mid-July. Currently, 12 states, including Kerala, Odisha, Punjab, Jharkhand, and Haryana, are experiencing deficient rainfall. However, the sowing of rice, pulses, and oilseeds nationwide has risen by over 20 %. Yet, crops like bajra, jowar, and coarse cereals are still behind last year's levels. Among pulses, while arhar cultivation has increased sharply by 26%, moong, bean, and other pulses have decreased. The progress of the monsoon in July and August will be crucial in managing food inflation; any shortfall could lead to price increases. Oilseed cultivation has expanded by 22 % year-on-year, driven largely by a 31% increase in soybean planting.

Surprise acceleration

In June, retail inflation, as measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI), unexpectedly rose to 5.08%, breaking a five-month declining trend and accelerating from May's 4.80%. The increase was primarily driven by higher food prices, which saw the Consumer Food Price Index (CFPI) inflation rise by 67 basis points to 9.36% year-on-year. Food prices surged by 3.17% from May, marking the sharpest monthly increase in 11 months and contributing significantly to the overall CPI rise of 1.33% from the previous month. This volatility in food prices has been a major concern for monetary policymakers, influencing their decision to keep interest rates unchanged.

RBI Deputy Governor Michael Debabrata Patra had been emphatic in observing at the Monetary Policy Committee's meeting last month that "the Indian economy remains hostage to intersecting food price shocks. Their repetitive occurrence calls for intensifying monetary policy vigil to ward off spillovers to other components of inflation and to expectations". Food price data show that the CFPI's nine sub-categories posted month-on-month gains, with eight of them, except the sugar and condiments group, registering sequential accelerations. Vegetables continued to experience the most intense price gains, rising 29.3 % year-on-year and by a worrying 11-month-high sequential pace of 14.2 %. The most widely consumed potato, onion and tomato continued to log some of the fastest gains, with their prices rising year-on-year by 57.6 %, 58.5 % and 26.4 %, respectively.

Nor does the outlook for food prices offer much comfort. Data on the Department of Consumer Affairs Price Monitoring Division's website shows that the all-India average retail price of potato and onion continued to remain on a tear as on July 15, being almost 56 % and 67 % higher, respectively, than a year earlier. And tomato prices, though almost 43 % softer than 12 months ago, were 76 % higher than in mid-June, likely signalling a shift in its price momentum. Prices of cereals, the largest constituent of the food basket, too offered little respite with the average retail price of rice and wheat running almost 10 % and 6 % higher than a year earlier, respectively. Also, IMD data as on July 14 reveal that countrywide precipitation since June 1 was still not only at a 2 % deficit, but also spatially skewed. Eleven of India's 36 meteorological sub-divisions were still classified 'deficient', meaning these regions had received 20 %-59 % lower rainfall than the long-period average. With some key food growing areas including Punjab seeing deficient rains, policymakers face an unenviable task in trying to slow the pace of inflation.

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

Centralised examinations have not aced the test

In 2017, the Government of India established the National Testing Agency (NTA) to conduct entrance examinations for professional courses. Envisioned to conduct multiple choice question (MCQ)-type of examinations in electronic mode, the NTA was to have specialists in the science of testing to set up appropriate question banks and also evaluator frameworks and organisational expertise. The NTA, that conducts more than 15 entrance examinations for various higher education institutions including the Common University Entrance Test (CUET) for central university admissions and the post-graduate admissions in medical and University Grants Commission (UGC) courses, is a lean and thin organisation, with most of the work outsourced. It is headed by a chairman and an Indian Administrative Service officer working as the chief executive officer, neither of whom have the required competence to build an institution as contemplated.

Pertinent questions

Contrary to the grand vision, the NTA conducts examinations in pen to paper mode that provides huge scope for malpractice — from the setting of the paper, to its printing, distribution and final delivery to a large number of examination centres — 4,750 for the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (Undergraduate), or NEET–UG, for admission in undergraduate medical courses. The fiasco this year in the conduct of the

Head Office:
Vedhik IAS Academy, Mercy Estate,MG Road,
Ravipuram, Ernakulam- 682 015
+91 7777 875 588 | +91 9383 432 123 | 0484 4527777

DAILY NEWS ANALYSIS

Page 03

NEET-UG has created dismay and a complete loss of trust in the NTA's ability or willingness to conduct a fair examination.

NEET, which is conducted by the NTA, was conceived with the best intentions but has gone hopelessly wrong due to faulty and incompetent implementation. The idea was to standardise the quality of students aspiring to become doctors, which is an important concern given the varying standards of school boards across India. Its flawed implementation, the widespread leakage of question papers, the arbitrary manner of awarding grace marks, conducting a re-examination for just a handful of students, and now tinkering with the ranking have all made the whole process murky.

The Supreme Court of India has stepped in and is hearing petitions. The government has said that it intends starting the counselling process (the final stage for admissions), from the third week of July. This is an examination where rank is critical. Those with higher ranks get admission to government institutions, getting quality education at subsidised rates. The fact that the cut-off percentages in previous years were in the abysmal range of 19% to 22% indicates how several students with a decent rank were unable to get admission due to high capitation fees, forcing the cut-off percentage to be reduced.

In the wake of widespread fears of the integrity of other national tests having been compromised and after the below par functioning of the NTA, the government has now constituted a seven-member high-level committee of experts chaired by the former chairman of the Indian Space Research Organisation, K. Radhakrishnan. Its terms of reference are: reforming the mechanism of the examination process to forestall any possible breach, and based on a review of the standard operating procedures, suggesting monitoring mechanisms; improving data security protocols to enhance the robustness of the examination; making recommendations on the structure and the functioning of the NTA; defining the roles and the responsibilities of functionaries at all levels, and establishing a responsive grievance redress mechanism. These are basic issues that ought to have been examined and addressed when the NTA was formed. Clearly, the governance mechanism seems to have collapsed somewhere along the way.

Decentralisation as a workable option

Reports of widespread cheating and leakages in examinations conducted at the national levels force us to reconsider and review the centralised testing mechanism for higher education institutions. Why cannot the central government restrict testing for entry to its own institutions and decentralise, where States fill up their own seats on the basis of entrance examinations. This could be based on a standard template that can be prepared by the central government to ensure that the requisite standards are maintained for the test and the evaluator framework.

Testing bodies could be restructured to incorporate domain experts, testing experts and also IT measures of not just testing tools but also cyber safety and multiple types of safeguards that are necessary to conduct large-scale exams in a fair manner and where every decimal counts for a student.

Of all the options listed, the case for decentralisation seems strong and appropriate for our present-day conditions. The examinations that 24 lakh students appear for to fill one lakh seats are high stake tests, bitterly contested and fraught with risk.

Strong vested interests and criminal elements would want to do everything to undermine streamlined systems of merit-based

entrance to professional education or to coveted universities and colleges. This would include selling examination papers for financial gain. Decentralising the examination processes to States and different governing entities could reduce the element of risk. The central government's role could be to mandate the standard to be followed for higher education institutions.

Rejuvenate the schooling system

While the integrity of a national or State-level examination is in the spotlight, what has certainly been missed out in the public discourse is the gradual ruination of the school system which is responsible for creating the citizens of tomorrow. With the emergence of national-level common entrance examinations for every professional course or university course, school-leaving examinations have become redundant and there are now 'dummy' schools. Instead, coaching centres have mushroomed with the sole purpose of preparing students for these national examinations.

The growth of the coaching industry has damaged the schooling system insidiously and relentlessly. This trend has to be stemmed and the value of schools restored by introducing a percentage of school-leaving marks to the final score of the candidates' entrance examination. This was factored in the entrance examination to the Indian Institutes of Technology some years ago but was abandoned without debate. If we cannot safeguard merit, based on good school education, our schooling system will decay even further. Standards of academic competency, hard work and good values that are built up at the school level can never be achieved at the time of higher studies, when a student is much older and is poised for the world of work. This is an issue that needs to be addressed urgently.

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

Heatwaves are evaporating the right to play

The United Nations declared June 11, 2024, as International Day of Play. Enshrined in Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the right to play underscores its significance for a child's well-being and development. Playful interactions contribute to the positive mental health of parents, caregivers, and children, offering respite from adverse experiences.

According to the 'Value of Play' report by The Real Play Coalition (IKEA, the LEGO Foundation, National Geographic and Unilever), globally, one in five children does not have the time to play, and one in 10 children gets no outdoor play. In India, leisure and access to public spaces to play are linked to socio-economic disparities and social identity, including caste, class, disability, and gender. Unfortunately, climate change is emerging as a fierce competitor to these barriers. With extreme weather events and rising temperatures, climate change is limiting the time children get to engage with their peers and the world around them through play.

India's ranking, South Asia's problem

UNICEF's Children's Climate Risk Index (CCRI) report 2021 suggests that with a rank of 26 out of 163 countries, India is among the countries where children are most at climate risk. With floods, heatwaves, and droughts impacting families and children

---

more frequently than ever before, heatwaves, in particular, are making outdoor play increasingly unsafe. India has been experiencing more frequent and severe heat waves, with temperatures soaring to record levels. These extreme conditions not only limit a child's ability to play outdoors but also pose significant health risks. A recent analysis by UNICEF revealed that South Asia has the highest percentage of children exposed to extreme high temperatures compared to other regions. In India, heatwaves have also led to school closures and restricted outdoor activities to protect children. This can have long-term impacts on their physical and mental health.

The lack of play opportunities also disproportionately affects children from disadvantaged backgrounds, exacerbating existing inequalities and perpetuating cycles of poverty. Urbanisation and environmental degradation are reducing the availability of safe play spaces, especially in low-income communities where playgrounds are often non-existent or poorly maintained. The houses are often overcrowded and small, limiting opportunities for indoor play. Research shows that limited access to safe play spaces hinders a child's physical and cognitive development, leading to long-term economic impacts such as a less skilled workforce and higher social welfare costs. A global survey on climate anxiety among children and young people has also revealed heightened climate-anxiety and disillusionment with the role of governments in supporting them, with these feelings also impacting their daily lives.

Adaptive measures

To avoid this long-term impact, we need to focus on implementing bioclimatic design principles in playground infrastructure and integrating urban planning strategies. This involves introducing green spaces and cooling corridors within cities, which will help mitigate urban heat island effect (intensified by an abundance of concrete-based construction) and provide safe-play environments for children.

Further, opening time and access to existing infrastructure and green spaces such as parks should be expanded. In many cities across India, local communities and sometimes municipal governments themselves enforce park closures during certain times of the day which further limit the opportunities for children to play. There is often user conflict in public parks along the lines of age — older citizens versus children and along socio-economic classes.

A concerted effort is required to address these issues locally and without discrimination. Local communities can also come together to create shaded areas in parks where children can meet and play on warmer days. In addition, long-term solutions should prioritise preserving and adapting vernacular architectural techniques to implement passive heating and cooling methods. This dimension of planning should also find its way into State Action Plans on Climate Change and city master plans. Special attention needs to be given to the needs of low-income communities. Slum rehabilitation colonies, for instance, in outer Delhi, have extremely sparse green cover. The places earmarked for playgrounds often become dumping grounds for solid waste. This leads to children spending more time inside their houses with limited avenues for socialisation and recreation.

Empowering children

Children, too, can be powerful champions of change. Providing students with hands-on opportunities and platforms to take concrete actions and play advocacy roles, such as participating in biodiversity mapping, air pollution and water quality assessments, can empower them to understand and address environmental issues. Engaging students in local initiatives around climate, such as carbon neutral panchayats in Kerala, could be a promising starting point.

The first International Day of Play may have passed but it is crucial to recognise the adverse effects of climate change on a child's right to play and take action. By addressing this, we not only support children's development and well-being but also foster a generation that is prepared to tackle the challenges of the future.

Head Office:
Vedhik IAS Academy, Mercy Estate, MG Road,
Ravipuram, Ernakulam- 682 015
+91 7777 875 588 | +91 9383 432 123 | 0484 4527777

DAILY NEWS ANALYSIS
Page 05

VEDHIK
IAS ACADEMY
The New Learning Mantra

START YOUR JOURNEY WITH THE
BEST

INDIA'S TOP MOST CIVIL SERVANTS FOR COACHING

www.vedhikiasacademy.org