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DAILY NEWS ANALYSIS

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FOREWORD

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

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

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

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China infra projects in focus as crisis worsens

Many of them are now gathering dust

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
HAMBANTOTA

An airport without planes, a revolving restaurant with no diners, a debt-laden seaport – Sri Lanka’s economic crisis has been exacerbated by Chinese-funded projects that stand as neglected monuments to government extravagance.

The South Asian island nation borrowed heavily to plug years of budget shortfalls and trade deficits, but squandered huge sums on ill-considered infrastructure projects that have further drained public finances.

Many of the white-elephant projects that helped fuel the current crisis now gather dust in Hambantota district, home of the powerful Rajapaksa clan, which used its political clout and billions in Chinese loans in a failed effort to turn the rural outpost into a major economic hub.

The centrepiece of the infrastructure drive was a deep seaport on the world’s busiest east-west shipping lane, which was meant to spur industrial activity.

Instead, it has haemorrhaged money from the moment it began operations.

“We were very hopeful when the projects were announced, and this area did get better,” Dinuka, a long-time resident of Hambantota, said. “But now it means nothing. That port is not ours and we are struggling to live.”

The Hambantota port was unable to service the \$1.4 billion in Chinese loans rung up to finance its con-

struction, losing \$300 million in six years.

In 2017, a Chinese state-owned company was handed a 99-year lease for the seaport – a deal that sparked concerns across the region that Beijing had secured a strategic toehold in the Indian Ocean.

Overlooking the port is another Chinese-backed extravagance: a \$15.5 million conference centre that has been largely unused since it opened. Nearby is the Rajapaksa Airport, built with a \$200 million loan from China, which is so sparingly used that at one point it was unable to cover its electricity bill.

In the capital Colombo, there is the Chinese-funded Port City project – an artificial 665-acre island set up with the aim of becoming a financial hub rivalling Dubai. But critics have already sounded off on the project becoming a “hidden debt trap”.

China is the government’s biggest bilateral lender and owns at least 10% of its \$51 billion external debt. But analysts believe the true number is substantially higher if loans to state-owned firms and Sri Lanka’s central bank are taken into account.

The borrowing contributed to Sri Lanka’s dire fiscal predicament.

“Fiscal profligacy over many decades and weak governance... got us into trouble,” Murtaza Jafferjee, chairman of Sri Lanka’s Advocata Institute think tank, said.

Can sedition accused get protection, asks SC

Court gives 24 hours for response from Centre

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday indicated a willingness to wait, though wondering for how long, for the government to “re-examine” the colonial law of sedition.

However, the court asked the government to respond within the next 24 hours on how it intended to protect the interests of people already arrested and facing prosecution under Section 124A (sedition) of the Indian Penal Code. The court further sought the government’s response on whether the use of the British-era law could be suspended in view of the reconsideration process.

“We will definitely take into consideration that you are doing a serious exercise of reconsideration of the law. We should not appear unreasonable... But there are concerns. One is about cases which are already pending. The other is the future misuse of Section 124A during the reconsideration. The Attorney-General has himself said there is abuse... How are you going to protect the interests of the people from this abuse while the reconsideration exercise is on,” Chief Justice of India N.V. Ramana asked Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta, appearing



Whenever there is misuse [of sedition law], there are the constitutional courts and remedies

TUSHAR MEHTA
Solicitor-General



Meanwhile, those booked will be in jail for months... we cannot ask each and every individual to go to court

N.V. RAMANA
Chief Justice of India



for the Centre.

The court said the reconsideration process could not be an open-ended one. “How long will you take for the ‘reconsideration’ of the law,” CJI Ramana asked.

Govt. non-committal

But Mr. Mehta was non-committal. “I may not be able to say. The process has started,” he said. He urged the court to trust the earnest tone and spirit of the government’s affidavit which promised the re-examination of the law. “There is a serious application of mind,” he assured the court.

“We will decide the question of how much time should be given,” Chief Justice Ramana said.

On the issue of protecting people from the misuse of sedition law, Mr. Mehta said

those affected could always move the courts. “These cases are booked by the State governments. The Centre does not do it. The aim of Section 124A is to protect the sovereignty and integrity of the nation... Whenever there is misuse, there are the constitutional courts and remedies,” Mr. Mehta submitted.

“Meanwhile, they will be in jail for months,” CJI Ramana retorted. “We cannot ask each and every individual booked for sedition to go to court... That cannot be the case now when the government has itself shown concern about the misuse of civil liberties... Tell us whether people can be protected from abuse while reconsideration is on.”

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Can sedition accused get protection, asks SC

Mr. Mehta said it would be hazardous to completely stop the operation of a penal provision. “Till this exercise is over, people can approach the courts, which will consider each case on the basis of their individual facts and deliver justice,” he replied.

Justices Surya Kant and Hima Kohli, on the Bench, asked whether the Centre could issue a directive to the States to keep the law in abeyance pending reconsideration.

“The people operating Section 124A at the ground level are local police and civil authorities... You [Centre] have to tell them that sedition is being revisited and use of Section 124A should be suspended in the

meantime,” Justice Kant addressed the Centre.

‘Don’t defer hearings’

Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, C.U. Singh and Gopal Sankaranarayanan, for the petitioners, urged not to defer the sedition hearings on the government’s word. “It is the privilege of the legislature to reconsider or frame a new law. Let them take six months or a year and do it. But it is Your Lordships’ duty to deal with our challenge against the present law... Just because they want to reconsider does not mean the court has to stop hearing the case,” Mr. Sibal said.

He argued that even if a new law was brought in, the present cases would still be tried under Section 124A.

‘Minority’ tag: Centre’s U-turn irks Supreme Court

“States can also declare a religious or linguistic community as a minority community within the said State,” the Ministry had said earlier.

In the “superseding” affidavit filed by the Ministry on May 9, it said the Centre alone was vested with the power to notify a minority community.

The affidavit said Section 2(f) and Section 2(c) of the National Commission for Minorities Educational Institutions Act, 2004, and the National Commission for Minorities Act, 1992, respec-

tively, passed by Parliament, empowered the Centre to notify a minority community.

The Centre, in the same second affidavit, however turned around to say it would still have to engage in a “wide consultation with the State governments and other stakeholders” before notifying any community as a minority.

The “wide consultations” would avoid “any unintended complications in future with regard to such a vital issue”, it reasoned with the court.

Measuring the change

India should invest more to enhance the reliability of various socio-economic surveys

The fifth edition of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) provides a valuable insight into changes underway in Indian society. It throws light on traditional parameters, for instance immunisation among children, births in registered hospital facilities, and nutritional levels. While there is a general improvement in these parameters, there were mixed signals in nutrition. Gains in childhood nutrition were minimal as were improvements in obesity levels. The prevalence of anaemia has actually worsened since the last survey in 2015-16. But the survey's major contribution is its insight into behavioural and sociological churn. When highlights were made public last year, the focus was on India's declining total fertility rate that had, for the first time in the country's history, dipped to below the replacement level, or a TFR (Total Fertility Rate) of 2.1. If the trend were to persist, India's population was on the decline in line with what has been observed in developed countries, and theoretically means improved living standards per capita and greater gender equity. Because this TFR had been achieved across most States, two notable exceptions being most populous Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, it was also evidence that population decline could be achieved without coercive state policies and family planning has struck deep roots. The more detailed findings, made public last week, suggest that this decline is agnostic to religion.

The fertility rate among Muslims dipped to 2.3 in 2019-2021 from 2.6 in 2015-16, the sharpest among all religious communities when compared to the 4.4 in NFHS 1 in 1992-93. Another set of subjective questions that the NFHS attempts to answer using hard data is gender equity. Less than a third of married women are working and nearly 44% do not have the freedom to go to the market alone. However, a little over 80% have said that they can refuse demands for sex from their husband. This has implications for legal questions surrounding marital rape. Only 72% of Indian men think it is not right to coerce, threaten or use force on a woman if denied sex, which again points to the vast territory that needs to be covered in educating men about equality, choice and freedom in marriage. This question made it for the first time in the family health survey as did another question, about the number of registered births and deaths, in the family survey. Multiple surveys such as the NFHS, Sample Registration Surveys, the Census, labour, economic surveys and ways of interrogation are necessary for insights about a country as vast and complex as India; the Centre should invest more substantially in improving their reliability.

This food regulator needs to step up to the plate

The FSSAI should be impartial and uninfluenced by the same food industry which it has to control and regulate



K.R. ANTONY

In science and academics, the search for the truth is the main driving force for advancement. Ego and stubbornness are stumbling blocks. When it comes to policymaking for millions of people in India with regard to their health and safety, it should be guided by science and hard evidence generated from systematic research.

The interview, “Expert panel will study star rating: FSSAI CEO” (*The Hindu*, Inside pages, May 6, 2022), with Arun Singhal, CEO, Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), reflects a different story. The FSSAI is a regulator on healthy and safe foods produced in the country, constituted by the government, for the people and funded by tax-payer’s money. It should be impartial and uninfluenced by the same food industry which it has to control and regulate.

“Six rounds of stake holder consultations already conducted” – a line in the interview – do not exempt the FSSAI from any more consultations if pending issues have still to be sorted out. Unresolved issues may require more consultations with the new evidence generated. If the consultation is dominated by the industry, how can consumer interest be protected adequately? The classification of foods, as healthy or unhealthy, is a technical or

professional step. This should be decided by a governance body such as the FSSAI or food and nutrition experts or professionals. Not by the food industry or manufacturers.

There are health concerns

What is our concern? The consumption of junk foods that are high in calories, sugar, fat and salt lead to the early onset of obesity among adolescents, insulin insufficiency, and in adulthood results in diabetes, hypertension, cardiac and renal diseases. We need to reduce the production, the marketing and the availability of such unhealthy foods and even if available, change consumer behaviour in purchasing such processed food by due warning of their contents using the labels on the packets. We appeal to their reasoning and responsible decision making to dissuade them from purchasing dangerous foods.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has issued a threshold for sugar, salt, fat, and calories per 100 grams of processed food packaged or 100 ml of liquid beverages bottled. Unless we generate competing technical data for the Indian population, we have to abide by WHO norms. A technical group set up by the FSSAI has undertaken an evaluation of processed foods on the racks of Indian supermarkets and found 96% of products for one component and 62.8% for three components are above WHO thresholds. We cannot relax thresholds to suit the industry but industry must alter its composition to healthy limits. The FSSAI must ensure that.

Any order or guideline issued in

GETTY IMAGES/STOCKPHOTO



public interest must be mandatory from day one. We cannot have the flexibility of voluntary adoption and staggered implementation as suggested by Mr. Singhal. The regulator cannot be pleading on behalf of food producers with various untenable excuses to not implement its own stipulations. That is an absolute abdication of its power and purpose. It does not make sense to allow a voluntary adoption of rules, and if someone does not adopt the regulation, relaxing the norms later. Will one ever allow voluntary adoption of wearing helmets while riding two wheelers or locking a seat belt while driving a four-wheeler over a long period and then agree for a relaxation of norms if compliance is poor? Is this a regulator’s way of functioning?

No one denies that the Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad – mentioned in the interview as having conducted a consumer survey involving 20,500 people – is an institution of repute. So too are the other IIMs in the country, the Indian Council of Medical Research, the International Institute for Population Sciences, the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, the National Institute of Nutrition Hyderabad. Were they invited and given a chance to bid for such a

large expensive study? Financial regulations mandate requesting for a minimum three bids.

On package labelling

So how is the front of package labelling (FOPL) to be done? Is it by the methods of Multiple Traffic Lights (MTL), Monochrome GDA, Nutri-Score, Warning Labels, and Health Star Rating (HSR)? If the objective of the study is to find out “which kind of FOPL is most comprehensible, acceptable and yet effective in influencing purchase intentions”, the methodology must meet that objective, it would be ideal to provide the crystallised information in the best acceptable way for consumption and leave it open for the consumer to decide. We have done it with tobacco packs and alcohol bottles.

The participants of the study must have the capacity to objectively evaluate the various formats of FOPL based on the information content. They must have the ability to compare and identify least harmful, or identify higher content than recommended. Why do we seek the opinion of the consumer who is not knowledgeable or unlettered? It is pointless.

The methodology states that the profile of the respondent is captured after the respondent has made a choice rating of the FOPL. There must be some tools to assess the basic level of understanding and then decide on the inclusion or the exclusion of the participant from the study. There is no exclusion and inclusion criteria based on the profile of the respondent, before conducting an opinion poll.

The authors admit in this study that 13.8% of respondents have not

had schooling at all or are illiterate while 28%-35% of respondents are those who never read food labels. Therefore, they should have been excluded from making a relative comparison between labels in this study. Will one ever ask a teetotaler for his opinion on the relative merits of three comparable brands of whisky?

Children have been left out

At the same time, the exclusion of young adolescent children aged 10-18 years – who are big consumers of packaged biscuits chips and bottled soft drinks – from the study is a big methodological error. It is a case of significant missing data.

The “priming of the respondent” is an unnecessary step, with questionable benefits in the methodology. It complicates the study design with several levels of stratification and no conclusive findings emerging. Unfortunately, no firm policy guideline tips can be derived from the findings of this elaborate expensive study as it has many avoidable methodological errors.

The FSSAI cannot go ahead with a draft regulation based on a highly contested study design and whose findings are not yet peer reviewed. Its decision to stick to a Health Star Rating based on an algorithm known to the food industry only, as a front of pack labelling, is without sound logic or evidence.

Dr. K.R. Antony is a pediatrician at Kochi, an independent monitor, National Health Mission, and a former Director of the State Health Resource Centre, Chhattisgarh

Control inflation by acting on liquidity

Inflation in India cannot be described just as 'cost-push'; an abundance of liquidity has been an important factor



C. RANGARAJAN

The recent action of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to raise the repo rate by 40 basis points and cash reserve ratio (CRR) by 50 basis points is a recognition of the serious situation with respect to inflation in our country and the resolve to tackle inflation. Inflation has assumed a menacing proportion in almost all countries. The situation is the worst in the United States where the consumer price inflation stood (in March 2022) at 8.56%, a level not reached for several decades. Consumer price index (CPI) inflation in India stood (in March 2022) at 6.95%. It is expected to rise further in April. India's CPI inflation has been fluctuating around a high level. As early as October 2020, it had hit a peak of 7.61%. It had remained at a high level of over 6% since April 2020. It did come down after December 2020 but has started rising significantly from January 2022.

On the other hand, the Wholesale Price Index (WPI) inflation had remained in double digits since April 2021. The GDP implicit price deflator-based inflation rate for 2021-22 is 9.6%.

Impact on production

Even though the RBI's mandate is with respect to CPI inflation, policymakers cannot ignore the behaviour of other price indices. In the 2008-09 crisis, central banks of developed countries, particularly the Fed, had been blamed for overlooking the sharp rise in asset prices, even though CPI inflation was modest.

After the advent of COVID-19, the major concern of policymakers

all over the world was to revive demand. This was sought to be achieved by raising government expenditure. This is the standard Keynesian prescription. The severe lockdowns imposed to prevent the spread of COVID-19 restricted the mobility of people, goods and services.

Thus, the expansion in government expenditure did not immediately result in increased production in countries where the lockdown was taken seriously. India belongs to this category. As V.K.R.V. Rao pointed out in the 1950s, the Keynesian multiplier did not work when there were supply constraints as in developing countries. That is why he argued that the multiplier operated in nominal terms rather than in real terms in such countries. Something similar has happened in the present case where the supply constraint came from a non-mobility of factors of production.

Issue of inflation

Nevertheless, the prescription of enhanced government expenditure is still valid under the present circumstances. Perhaps the increase in output could happen with a lag and also with the relaxation of restrictions. Initially, the focus of monetary policy in India has been to keep the interest rate low and increase the availability of liquidity through various channels, some of which have been newly introduced. However, the growth rate of money was below the growth rate in reserve money. This is because of lower credit growth which also depends on business sentiment and investment climate. Thus the money multiplier is lower than usual. The Government's borrowing programme which was larger went through smoothly, thanks to abundant liquidity.

Even as the economy picked up steam in 2021-22, inflation also be-



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came an issue. As mentioned at the beginning, this is a worldwide phenomenon. In the U.S., the explanation has been quite simple. There has been a balance sheet explosion of the Fed. On January 1, 2020 the total assets (less some items) of the Fed stood at \$4.17 trillion and in April 2022, at \$8.96 trillion. This massive expansion in assets is the result of quantitative easing which essentially means liquidity support provided by the Fed.

The Fed Chairman has made strong statements expressing the need to reduce the size of the assets. The Fed is planning to shrink its balance sheet by \$95 billion a month. It raised the policy rate by 50 basis points a few days ago. In India too there is a shift in monetary policy. The latest monetary policy reiterates the stance as one of "to remain accommodative while focusing on withdrawal of accommodation to ensure that inflation remains within the target going forward, while supporting growth". Without efforts to curtail liquidity, inflation will not come down.

I go back to a point which I have been making several times recently. While discussing inflation, analysts including policymakers focus almost exclusively on the increases in the prices of individual commodities such as crude oil as the primary cause of inflation. The

Russian-Ukraine war is cited as a primary cause. True, in many situations including the current one, they may be the triggers. Supply disruptions due to domestic or external factors may explain the behaviour of individual prices but not the general price level which is what inflation is about. Given a budget constraint, there will only be an adjustment of relative prices.

Besides the fact that any cost-push increase in one commodity may get generalised, it is the adjustment that happens at the macro level which becomes critical. A long time ago, Friedman said, "it is true that the upward push in wages produced inflation, not because it was necessarily inflationary but because it happened to be the mechanism which forced an increase in the stock of money". Thus, it is the adjustment in the macro level of liquidity that sustains inflation.

Inflation and growth

The possible trade-off between inflation and growth has a long history in economic literature. The Phillip's curve has been analysed theoretically and empirically. Tobin called the Phillip's curve a 'cruel dilemma' because it suggested that full employment was not compatible with price stability. The critical question flowing from these discussions on trade-off is whether cost-push factors can by themselves generate inflation. Tobin said at one place that inflation 'is neither demand-pull nor cost-push or rather it is both', even though he did not agree with Friedman's extreme position that there would be no pure cost-push inflation.

In the current situation, it is sometimes argued that inflation will come down, if some part of the increase in crude prices is absorbed by the government. There may be a case for reducing the duties on petroleum products for the simple

reason that one segment of the population should not bear excessive burden. The same consideration applies to food prices. But to think that it is a magic wand through which inflation can be avoided is wrong. If the additional burden borne by the government (through loss of revenue) is not offset by expenditures, the overall deficit will widen. The borrowing programme will increase and additional liquidity support may be required.

Concomitant decisions

Commenting on the increase in repo rate and a rise in CRR, some have commented that this is double whammy. No, these are concomitant decisions. Central banks cannot order interest rates. For a rise in the interest rate to stick, appropriate actions must be taken to contract liquidity. That is what the rise in CRR will do. In the absence of a rise in CRR, liquidity will have to be sucked by open market operations. As the RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das put it in his statement, "Liquidity conditions need to be modulated in line with the policy action and stance to ensure their full and efficient transmission to the rest of the economy."

Inflation in India cannot be described just as 'cost-push'. Abundance of liquidity has been an important factor. The April Monetary Policy statement talked of a liquidity overhang of the order of ₹8.5 lakh crore. Beyond a point, inflation itself can hinder growth. Negative real rates of interest on savings are not conducive to growth. If we want to control inflation, action on liquidity is very much needed with a concomitant rise in the interest rate on deposits and loans.

C. Rangarajan is a former Chairman of the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister and a former Governor, Reserve Bank of India

'Debt norms cloud States' borrowings'

Deducting off-budget borrowings will lift transparency, but end up cramping States' fiscal room: ICRA

VIKAS DHOOT
NEW DELHI

With States' borrowing limits for this year set to be cut in tune with their off-budget borrowings since 2020-21, some States that had borrowed more in the pandemic years could face challenges in raising resources, ICRA said on Tuesday.

While the rating agency expects States to borrow ₹8.4 lakh crore during FY23, with a borrowing limit of 3.5% of GSDP (Gross State Domestic Product), the off-budget debt calculations could lead to large downward adjustments in some States' effective borrowing room even as uncertainty around payment of GST compensation dues has confounded borrowing plans.

Noting that while including off-budget borrowings



In a spot: States facing large cuts in debt ceilings may have to resort to ways and means advances or overdrafts. ■ FILE PHOTO

raised by State entities in States' own debt would raise transparency, some States could find this change difficult to comply with, given the 'perceived proliferation' of such borrowings since COVID-19's onset, ICRA said. Those facing large cuts in their debt ceilings on this account would have to pare

borrowings and resort to ways and means advances or overdrafts from the RBI.

It was difficult to gauge the downward adjustments to be made to each State's borrowing limits due to the paucity of data on off-budget borrowings and guarantees extended by the States, ICRA observed, adding that States

like Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and Telangana, had sharply raised extension of guarantees to State entities in 2020-21.

The Centre typically conveys the net borrowing ceiling for each State at the start of the fiscal, and this year it has indicated that all incremental off-budget borrowings since 2020-21 will be adjusted from the ceiling. States have also been offered an additional borrowing limit of 0.5% of GSDP tied to specified power sector reforms, and a leeway equivalent to contributions to the National Pension System for government employees.

Tentative participation

The uncertainty about borrowing room appears to be reflecting in States' tentative participation in auctions of

State Development Loans. On Tuesday, even as yields on State Development Loans spiked, Haryana and Punjab borrowed ₹2,000 crore though they had not indicated any plan to participate in this week's issuances. Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh together raised ₹500 crore more than they had planned to. Eight States that had planned to borrow ₹6,300 crore, however, did not bother to participate.

ICRA economists noted that the timing of revenue flows from the Centre for GST compensation, tax devolution and the ₹1 lakh crore loan offered for capital spending will be critical as front-loading the remittances would lift the likelihood of enhanced capital spending, whereas back ending would pare the borrowing amount.

'Plans under way on creation of Integrated Battle Groups'

Army has identified formations to be converted: Gen. Pande

DINAKAR PERI
NEW DELHI

The Army has identified a holding formation on the Western front and a Strike formation on the Northern borders to be converted into agile Integrated Battle Groups (IBG), Army chief Gen. Manoj Pande said while stating that consultations are complete and is now in the process of final compilation.

"The purpose of restructuring our existing formations into integrated battle groups was to have forces which are lean, agile and tailor-made which would afford the commanders the flexibility and more options for their employment in the respective theatres to achieve the desired outcomes. To that extent we have identified a holding formation on the Western front and a Strike formation on the Northern borders for the IBGisation to commence," Gen. Pande said in an interaction with a group of presspersons on Monday.

These consultations with all stakeholders we have more or less formalised and it is now in the process of final compilation, he said adding, once this happens they



Proactive approach: The concept of IBG has already been validated by the 17 Mountain Strike Corps in its exercises. ■AP

will see as to how this can be taken forward and apply to perhaps other formations in the Army.

The concept of IBG has already been test-bedded by the Army's 9 Corps and was later validated by the 17 Mountain Strike Corps in its exercises.

As reported by *The Hindu* earlier, each IBG would be tailor made based on Threat, Terrain and Task and resources will be allotted based on the three T's. The idea is for them to be light with centralised logistics and be able to mobilise within 12 -48 hrs based on the location.

While a Command is the largest static formation of the Army spread across a defined geography, a Corps is

the largest mobile formation. Typically, each Corps has about three Divisions. The idea is to reorganise them into IBGs which are Brigade sized units but have all the essential elements like infantry, armoured, artillery and air defence embedded together. The IBGs will also be defence and offensive in nature.

After the terrorist attack on Parliament in 2001, the Indian military undertook massive mobilisation but the Army's formations which were deep inside took weeks to mobilise losing the element of surprise. Following this, the Army formulated a proactive doctrine known as 'Cold Start' to launch swift offensive, but its existence was denied in the past.

Let ceasefire hold, says Chinar Corps chief

Lt. Gen. Aujla takes charge in Srinagar

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
SRINAGAR

Lt. Gen. Amardeep Singh Aujla, who assumed command of the strategic Kashmir-based 15 Chinar Corps on May 10, has expressed optimism that the ceasefire agreement between India and Pakistan along the Line of Control (LoC) “will further enable improvement of the overall security situation”, an Army spokesperson said.

After assuming office in Srinagar’s Badamibagh Cantonment, Lt. Gen. Aujla expressed satisfaction with the improved security parameters in the Kashmir Valley, the spokesperson said.

The Army officer, with an illustrious military career spanning 35 years, has said he will work closely with the

civil administration and society to further the cause of peace and prosperity in Kashmir. “[With] the support of all community members, Kashmir will move one step closer to its glorious past while leaping forward in the development barometers,” Lt. Gen. Aujla, who paid homage at the Chinar Corps Memorial at Badami-bagh Cantonment in Srinagar, said.

He called upon combatants to take additional steps to connect with citizens and work together.

Lt. Gen. Aujla, who served in J&K over multiple tenures since 1987, earlier held an appointment at the Army Headquarters in the office of the Director General of Information Technology.

‘India guided by Sri Lankans’ interests’

MEA statement supports democratic processes, people’s welfare, but makes no mention of Rajapaksas

SUHASINI HAIDAR
NEW DELHI

In its first reaction to days of violence that led to the resignation of Sri Lankan Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa, the government on Tuesday said that India will be guided by the “best interests” of the Sri Lankan people. The statement, which made no mention of the Rajapaksa government itself, signals that New Delhi will continue to provide Sri Lanka with economic support but not political support during the current crisis, prioritising people-to-people ties instead, senior officials indicated.

“As a close neighbour of Sri Lanka, with historical ties, India is fully supportive of its democracy, stability and economic recovery,” MEA spokesperson Arindam Bagchi said in response to questions about the situation in Sri Lanka.

“India will always be guided by the best interests of the people of Sri Lanka expressed through democratic processes,” he added, in a reference to street protests since early April that have turned violent over the weekend, with several homes and cars set on fire, and at least 8 people have been killed, 200 injured in clashes between political groups,



Connecting dots: A Sri Lankan man holding the national flag as police officers conduct investigation into the aftermath of clashes, in Colombo on Tuesday. ■ AP

and attacks by ruling party supporters.

Detailing India’s assistance to Sri Lanka in the past few months, the MEA spokesperson said that India has extended support worth more than \$3.5 billion, and that “the people of India have provided assistance for mitigating the shortages of essential items such as food, medicine, etc.”. The support package includes a billion dollar credit line for essential imports, and half a billion

dollar line for fuel, debt payment deferrals of loans totalling a billion dollars, and a \$400 million currency swap that has been extended until mid-July.

Public anger

As public anger over the mismanagement of the situation by President Gotabaya and his brother Prime Minister Mahinda has spilled onto the streets, the Modi government has kept a close watch on the situation, but sought

to keep a distance from the Sri Lankan leadership. “In a fluid political situation, it makes sense to emphasise people to people relations,” a senior official said. Apart from the instability that the situation in the neighbouring country generates, New Delhi has also been worried about a rise in refugees fleeing food shortages and other hardships on the island nation.

Former Indian High Commissioner to Sri Lanka

(2009-13) Ashok Kantha said the MEA spokesperson statement “nuances” India’s position.

“As first responder, we will do whatever is required by Sri Lanka – and this includes our support totalling more than \$3.5 billion. But when it comes to the Political stalemate, we don’t want to take sides,” he told *The Hindu*, adding that there is “a massive erosion in the support base of the Rajapaksas, and India will not take a position on the government itself.”

Apart from the credit lines and debt waivers, the government and the Tamil Nadu government have sent consignments of rice and other supplies, hoping to help tide over the crisis.

India has also committed to help Sri Lanka with a bailout plan from the World Bank, and Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had met with Sri Lankan Finance Minister Ali Sabry in Washington during the Spring meetings in April.

A team from International Monetary Fund (IMF) has now begun negotiations with officials in Colombo over the bailout plan, including tough reforms needed by the government for financial support.

Shivkumar Sharma: a sound of spirituality from the Valley

Doyen of santoor passes away leaving behind a regal legacy

ANUJ KUMAR

Pandit Shivkumar Sharma, the maestro who etched an image of the Kashmir Valley and a sound of spirituality every time he struck a chord on his santoor, transcended for a divine concert on Tuesday.

Sharma, 83, who was on regular dialysis, died at his Pali Hill residence in Mumbai after a heart attack, family sources said.

A symbol of the Shaivite and Sufi tradition of Jammu and Kashmir, the Padma Vibhushan awardee toiled to make the folk instrument acceptable on the classical firmament. When critics said santoor was not fit for the *meends* and *gamaks*, Sharma made it possible through his striker, without indulging in any fancy experiments. A master of both *rag-daari* and *riyaz*, he had been drawing crowds with his solo concerts and his discs broke records. Over the years, santoor and Shivkumar Sharma became synonymous.

If his charismatic persona raised the heartbeats, his sublime santoor invariably soothed the nerves. He would etch images of the breeze caressing the grass in the Valley, of flocks of sheep grazing, and a shepherd meeting a young girl in the shikara, all on his modest instrument that is said to have emerged from the Shahtha Tanti Veena and later came under the spell of Sufi music.

Shivkumar Sharma started as a tabla player but his father, Uma Dutt Sharma, a musician who worked in All India Radio, wanted him to take up santoor. The instru-



SHIVKUMAR SHARMA (1938-2022)

ment suited an introvert Sharma because of its soft, spiritual appeal that does not seek attention. He had the rare ability to separate the man from the artist and perhaps that is why he could critique his performance, even when playing on stage.

Plaudits never mattered to him as once his santoor was tuned, Sharma would become one with himself. He would say that an artist should become a *drashta* (onlooker) on stage and would advise the audience to listen and not applaud for the stature of the artist.

Evoked romance

Though he could invoke all the ragas, Sharma's favourites were those that evoked romance and its pathos, like *Jhinjoti*. Perhaps, that's why filmmaker Yash Chopra turned to him and flautist Hariprasad Chaurasiya for composing music when he made a shift from action to romantic films.

From *Silsila* to *Darr*, the duo tuned a young India to the idea of love and separation, never hurting the sentiments of the purists, seldom leaving the commoner out of their canvas. Be it *Dekha Ek Khwab* or *Jadoo Teri Nazar*, the tune is enough to make the hearts go aflutter. Their folk compositions such as *Rang Barse* and *Mere Haatho Main* continue to be in great demand during festivals and weddings.

Sharma and Chaurasiya met in the late 1950s and gradually struck a bond that resulted in a hugely popular album *Call of the Valley* that spurred a craze for instrumental music and resulted in several copycats.

His son Rahul would take forward his legacy but that bewitching smile that surfaced on his face every time he got the right answer to the question he posed to the tabla accompanist will remain etched in the memory of music lovers.

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

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

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