

Special Issue

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Why Indian Armed Forces don't use the term 'martyr' for personnel who die in the line of duty?

Context: *The Ministry of Defence clarified in Parliament on March 28 that the Indian Armed Forces do not use the term "martyr" for personnel who sacrifice their lives in the line of duty.*

What is the latest statement of the Ministry of Defence on the term 'martyr'?

- On March 28, during the ongoing session of Parliament, the Minister of State for Defence answered a question put up by Dr Santanu Sen of the Trinamool Congress in Rajya Sabha on the term 'martyr'. Dr Sen had asked whether the government has stopped using the term 'martyr' for those who made the supreme sacrifice in the line of duty.
- The Minister of State for Defence informed the House that "the term 'martyr' is not used in the Indian Armed Forces".

What has been the stance of the government in this regard in the past?

- For almost a decade now, the government has maintained that the word 'martyr' does not have any official recognition.
- Back in 2013 and 2014, the Ministry of Home Affairs clarified in answers to RTI applications that the words 'martyr' and 'shaheed' are not defined anywhere by the Government of India.
- In December 2015, then Minister of State for Home Affairs Kirren Rijiju stated in Lok Sabha that the Ministry of Defence has informed that the word 'martyr' is not used in reference to any of the casualties in the Indian Armed Forces. He added that such terms are not used for Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) and Assam Rifles personnel also.
- In December 2021, the Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai again informed Rajya Sabha that there was no official nomenclature such as 'martyr'.

What is the objection to the word 'martyr'?

- The word 'martyr' has religious connotations and has been used in history to refer to the sacrifices made by people for their religious beliefs, particularly in Christianity.
- The word 'shaheed', which is used as a Hindustani alternative to the word 'martyr', also has religious connotations and is linked to the concept of Shahadat in Islam.
- The word 'martyr' is said to have its roots in the Greek word 'martur'. Various dictionaries define 'martyr' as a person who voluntarily suffers death as penalty of refusing to renounce religion.
- Since the armed forces of India are not associated with any one religion and do not lay down their lives for religious principles, the use of such words for their sacrifice has been found wrong in several quarters, including the top brass of the Army.
- Many retired senior officers and legal experts have pointed out that using the term 'martyr' or 'shaheed' for a soldier who dies for his country is incorrect in the Indian perspective.

What steps have been taken to prevent the use of the word 'martyr'?

- Despite the repeated assertions of the government about the word 'martyr' having no official recognition, it was used liberally in government statements issued by various Public Relations Officers for the defence services and the CAPFs.
- Many senior serving and retired officers also used it frequently to describe the death of soldiers in action. Thus, the word remained in common use.
- In February 2022, the Army issued a letter to all its commands asking them to desist from using the word 'martyr' as it may not be appropriate for soldiers who die in the line of duty.



- They have been, instead, asked to use phrases such as ‘laid down their lives’, ‘killed in action’, ‘supreme sacrifice for the nation’, ‘fallen heroes’, ‘Indian Army braves and fallen soldiers’, ‘battle casualty’, ‘bravehearts’, ‘braves whom we lost’, and *veergati/veergati prapt/veer*.

All about Myanmar’s continued suspension of democracy

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: On March 27, Myanmar commemorated its Armed Forces Day with a grand parade featuring Russia as the guest of honour. The Armed Forces Day is in honour of the army’s rebellion against the Japanese occupation in 1945. The leader of the country’s ruling military junta, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, gave exceptionally inflammatory comments aimed to quell dissidents and protesters. He said that the armed forces would “annihilate” the dissidents who he deemed “supporters of terrorist groups” looking to threaten the peace and security of the country. The country has led intense crackdowns on those resisting junta rule. The General invalidated the identity and agency of those protesting, and by deeming them terrorists, provided the authorities a basis to engage violently.

What is happening on the ground?

- The military continues to conduct operations in different regions of the country to quash dissident voices. The regions under artillery attack, airstrikes, and other physical forms of violent attacks include Sagaing, the Kayah State, the Chin State, and the Kayin State, reminiscent of last year’s bloody operations on Armed Forces Day.
- Myanmar continues its resistance with political opponents of the junta also joining militias. These militias have collaborated with some long-standing ethnic armed groups which have operated in the borderlands of the country.
- These States have rarely been centrally controlled. For most part of their history, these have been ruled by local leaders. These States can also serve as a buffer between Myanmar and its bordering nations and thus be a site of constant assaults.
- The Wa state of the larger Shan State in particular has a remarkably complex history with it being overrun by Mao Zedong’s forces during the Chinese Civil War. After about two decades, the region was taken over by the Communist Party of Burma. Deng Xiaoping’s tenure saw China making a halt on the assaults and instead focusing on potential trade opportunities. As a result of such historical events, China enjoys a complex relationship with the local factions and the military junta.

What is the Myanmar-Russia relationship?

- Myanmar’s military junta seized power last year on February 1 and then invited Russia, their “true friend”, as a guest of honour for its Armed Forces Day celebrations. Apart from Russia, India and seven other countries sent their representatives to attend the military parade.
- Keeping the bonhomie alive, Myanmar was one of the very few countries which came to Moscow’s defence after the invasion of Ukraine. Russia also continues to be a major defence exporter to Myanmar. Myanmar doesn’t like to exclusively depend on one country for its defence needs and its history shows that it likes to cozy up to different seemingly sympathetic countries.
- Apart from Russia, China is another major player which offers arms to Myanmar. Pakistan, India, Serbia, Belarus, Ukraine, and the Republic of Korea also routinely export defence equipment, and small to medium size arms and ammunitions. Myanmar has a tumultuous relationship with China as Beijing is also involved in arming rebel factions and thus, Myanmar wishes to diversify its dependence.

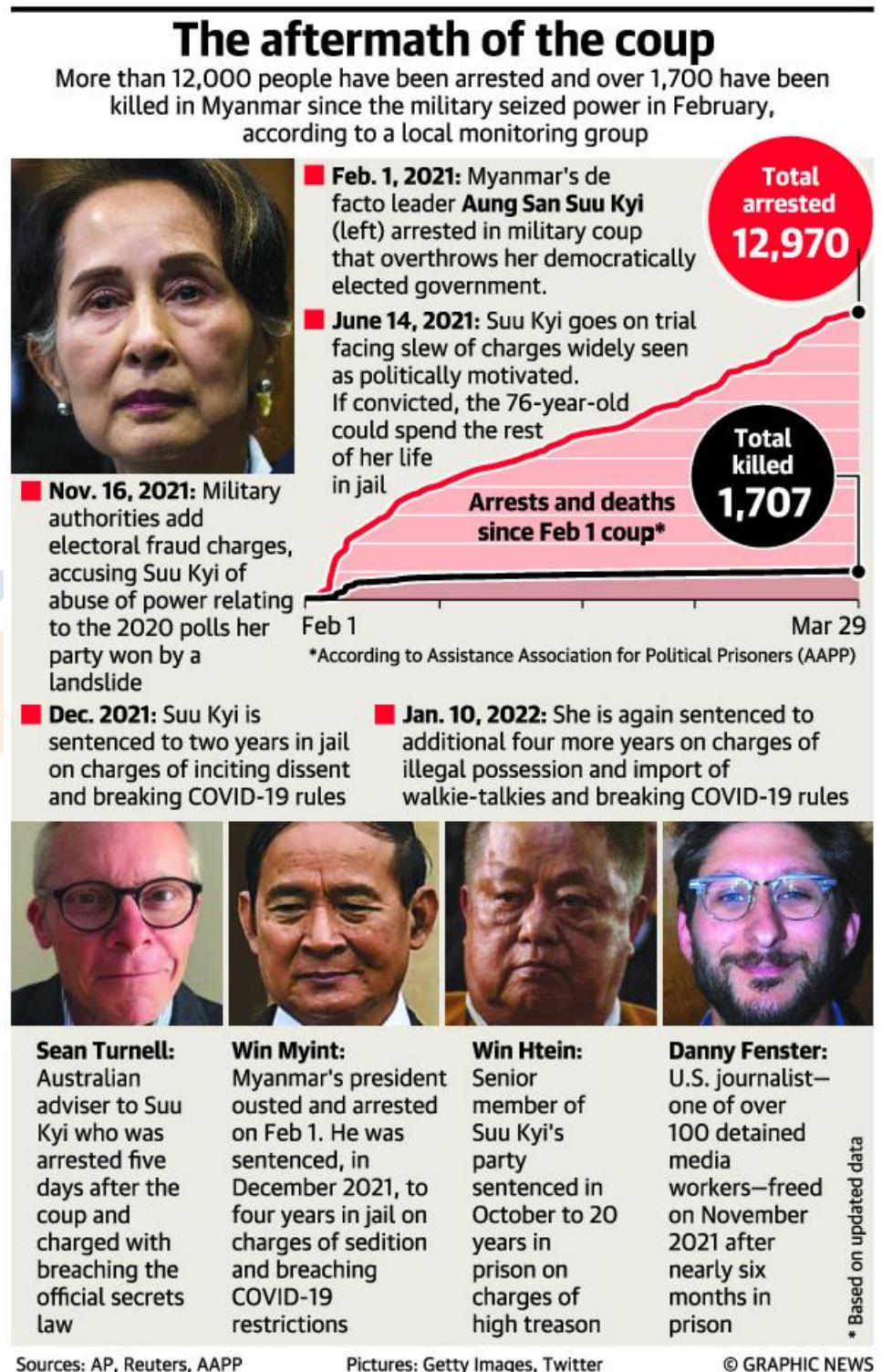


- The relationship between Russia and the junta seems to be of cooperation, one which now favours Moscow more than before as it faces sanctions from a host of countries.
- Myanmar is looking to use their raw materials as currency which works out for them as well as Moscow.
- The flip side to this story is that as the Russian offence continues in Ukraine, it would not have the capacity or the willingness to export its defence equipment to Myanmar.
- Myanmar continues to run the Moscow agenda in international fora whenever it can by being sympathetic to Russia's actions and referring to Vladimir Putin as "a visionary leader who had the foresight to quietly build up his military and economic strength".
- In doing so, they are propagating a strong-man argument and thus trying to solidify their domestic support to sell a similarly constructed imagination of what a nation could be with just the right kind of actions.

How has the junta acted?

- The junta's actions in Myanmar have been downright horrific. Hundreds of children were detained since the junta seized power back in 2021 in a bid to use them as leverage in order to find and arrest their family members and relatives who may be part of dissident groups.
- The junta was and continues to be allegedly involved in mass killings, acts of sexual violence, and arbitrary arrests of protesters and other civic society members who refuse to toe the line.
- On February 1, 2021, the junta arrested the country's elected leaders including Aung San Suu Kyi and then president Win Myint. It is reported that close to 4,00,000 people have been internally displaced since the beginning of the coup in 2021.

What led to the coup?





- To make sense of the 2021 coup in Myanmar, it is important to look at the chequered history of independent Myanmar.
- The country has been in a constant tussle between democracy and military rule. Before the 2021 coup, it had previously witnessed two coups; in 1962 and in 1988. Even during the brief periods of democracy, the junta continued to remain the strongest institution.
- Myanmar has seen three Constitutions being drawn up and enacted, the latest of it being a result of the military junta. They gave themselves 25% of the seats in the legislature and thus made it possible that amendments couldn't pass without their support.
- The junta gave concessions to the democratic elements and released Aung San Suu Kyi from house arrest in 2010 under strict conditions, one of which was that she could never be the President. She was, however, able to circumvent this clause by taking control as 'State Counsellor' with de-facto power residing with her as a customary President's post was taken up by a proxy. What the junta did not realise was how her popularity would surge. The year 2015 saw the National League of Democracy (NLD), led by Suu Kyi, winning 77% of the seats in Parliament.
- The reasons for the 2021 coup stem from this growing popularity of Suu Kyi and her party. The junta would have wanted to squash this before democracy made any more inroads into the junta's stronghold on the country.

Who's the coup leader?

- Gen. Min Aung Hlaing became Myanmar's military chief in 2011, at a time when the country was transitioning into quasi democracy. When Aung Saan Suu Kyi's NLD swept the 2015 election, the military accepted the results.
- But the political peace did not last long. When the NLD swept the 2020 election with a bigger mandate, the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), a proxy of the military, alleged election fraud. On February 1, Gen. Min Aung Hlaing carried out the third coup in the country's history.
- As a commanding officer, he led several military campaigns against the country's myriad rebels. But his rise to the top echelons of the powerful military was sealed after he led the 2009 offensive against the Myanmar Nationalities Democratic Alliance Army, an insurgents group in the Kokang region, along the border of China's Yunnan province. Within one week, the Myanmar military dislodged thousands of insurgents from the border.
- The campaign also resulted in thousands of refugees fleeing the border villages to the Chinese side of the border. Within the military, the campaign was hailed as a victory and Gen. Min Aung Hlaing got the attention of Senior General Than Shwe. In August 2010, he was appointed joint chief of staff. And in March 2011, when Gen. Than Shwe, in his mid-70s, retired, he picked Gen. Min Aung Hlaing as his successor.
- When the NLD swept the 2020 election, the Army considered the rising popularity of the party and its leader a threat. The Generals made three demands to Ms. Suu Kyi, according to a Reuters report: disband the Election Commission, announce a probe into alleged election fraud and postpone the meeting of Parliament. Ms. Suu Kyi said 'no' to all three. Then came the coup.

What is India's stand?

- India's relationship with Myanmar has been predicated on maintaining a balance in its neighbourhood in a bid to keep a check on China's growing influence. In doing so, it has forgone certain democratic ideals and allowed itself to not publicly speak against the events transpiring in Myanmar.
- It abstained from voting on the United Nations General Assembly's resolution on Myanmar and has constantly refused to actively speak out against the junta. Recently, India urged Myanmar to end violence and implement ASEAN's five-point consensus. It continues to offer military exports to Myanmar.
- Different multilateral forums and organisations are trying to get the junta to mend their ways but to little avail. In his recent visit to Myanmar, ASEAN's special envoy, Prak Sokhonn, hinted that the junta



leadership gave a positive response towards the possibility of him being able to meet the democratic leadership.

- Sri Lanka's Foreign Secretary, Admiral Jayanath Colombage, communicated the idea that they would be looking to engage with Myanmar. As of now, the Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa is hosting the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other regional leaders from BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) in a hybrid mode.
- Recently, the Biden administration, in a bid to put Myanmar under the limelight internationally, ruled that the military junta carried out genocide against the Rohingya minority. It also, along with the U.K. and Canada, implemented sanctions against high-ranking members of the junta. The U.N. Security Council condemned the actions of the junta falling short of terming the events of 2021 as a "coup". New Zealand suspended political and diplomatic ties with Myanmar back in 2021 but continued to make sure that developmental programmes function seamlessly.
- It becomes especially important for the international community to act in ways which while punishing the military junta for its actions and trying to force them into taking corrective measures also doesn't hurt the local population of the country. Blind economic sanctions won't get the job done and would only hurt the already hurting populace, say observers.

All about Sri Lanka's economic crisis

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *The Sri Lankan economy has been facing a crisis owing to a serious balance of payments (BoP) problem. Its foreign exchange reserves are depleting rapidly. It is becoming increasingly difficult to import essential consumption goods. The country is unable to repay past debts. This article is an effort to locate the proximate causes of the current crisis and document the roles of different groups and organisations in its making.*

Details:

- One can, of course, trace the roots of the crisis to colonialism and Sri Lanka's post-war developmental pathway but let us stick to the last decade for our purposes.
- Even in the 21st century, Sri Lanka's economic fortunes continued to be tied to the export of primary commodities such as tea and rubber, and garments. It mobilised foreign exchange reserves through primary commodity exports, tourism and remittances, and used it to import essential consumption items including food.
- When Sri Lanka emerged from a 26-year long war in 2009, it was expected that economic growth would revive. Possibly because of pent-up demand, Sri Lanka's post-war GDP growth was reasonably high at 8-9% per annum between 2009 and 2012.
- However, the economy was on a downward spiral after 2013 as global commodity prices fell, exports slowed down and imports rose. The average GDP growth rate almost halved after 2013. A counter-cyclical fiscal policy was ruled out, as the hands of the then Mahinda Rajapaksa government were tied by a \$2.6 billion loan obtained from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 2009. During the period of the war, budget deficits were high.
- Further, the capital flight that accompanied the global financial crisis of 2008 drained Sri Lanka's foreign exchange reserves. The IMF loan in 2009 was obtained in this context, with the conditionality that budget deficits would be reduced to 5% of the GDP by 2011.
- With no pick-up in growth or exports, and the continuing drain of foreign exchange reserves, the new United National Party (UNP)-led coalition government approached the IMF in 2016 for another US\$1.5 billion loan for a three-year period between 2016 and 2019. The IMF's conditionality was that the fiscal



deficit must be reduced to 3.5% by 2020. Other conditionalities included a reform of the tax policy and tax administration; control of expenditures; commercialisation of public enterprises; flexibility in exchange rates; improvement of competitiveness; and a free environment for foreign investment.

- The IMF package led to a deterioration of Sri Lanka's economic health. GDP growth rates shrank from 5% in 2015 to 2.9% in 2019.
- Investment rate fell from 31.2% in 2015 to 26.8% in 2019. Savings rate fell from 28.8% in 2015 to 24.6% in 2019. Government revenues shrank from 14.1% of the GDP in 2016 to 12.6% of the GDP in 2019. Gross government debt rose from 78.5% of the GDP in 2015 to 86.8% of the GDP in 2019.

New shocks to economy

- In 2019, there were two further shocks to the economy.
- First, the Easter bomb blasts of April 2019 in churches in Colombo led to the death of 253 people. Consequently, the number of tourists fell sharply leading to a decline in foreign exchange reserves. The blasts dealt a severe blow to the prospects of economic recovery.
- Secondly, the UNP-led government was replaced in November 2019 by a new government led by the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP), headed by Gotabaya Rajapaksa. The SLPP had promised lower tax rates and wide-ranging sops for farmers during their campaign. On the surface, these promises appeared divergent from the IMF package. However, in the absence of a concrete policy alternative to the IMF's neoliberal package, these promises were hollow.
- Gotabaya Rajapaksa was quick to implement the ill-advised plan to slash taxes. In December 2019, the value added tax (VAT) rates were reduced from 15% to 8%. The annual threshold for VAT registration was raised from LKR 12 million to LKR 300 million. The annual income threshold for waiver of personal income tax was raised from LKR 500,000 to LKR 3,000,000. The nation building tax, the PAYE tax and the economic service charges were abolished.
- Estimates show that there was a 33.5% decline in the number of registered taxpayers between 2019 and 2020, and close to 2% of the GDP was lost in taxes thus foregone. GST/VAT revenues were halved between 2019 and 2020.
- The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 made the bad situation worse. Exports of tea, rubber, spices and garments suffered. Tourism arrivals and revenues fell further. The pandemic also necessitated a rise in government expenditures: the fiscal deficit exceeded 10% in 2020 and 2021, and the ratio of public debt to GDP rose from 94% in 2019 to 119% in 2021.
- Sri Lanka annually spent about \$260 million (or about 0.3% of its GDP) on fertiliser subsidies. Most of the fertilisers are imported. To prevent the drain of foreign exchange reserves, the Gotabaya government came up with a novel, but thoroughly bizarre, solution in 2021.
- All fertiliser imports were completely banned from May 2021, and it was declared that Sri Lanka would overnight become a 100% organic farming nation. This policy, which was withdrawn in November 2021 after protests by farmers, literally pushed Sri Lanka to the brink of a disaster.
- Agricultural scientists were unanimous in warning the Gotabaya government of the potential losses from the organic farming policy. They wrote to the government that yields may drop by 25% in paddy, 35% in tea and 30% in coconut if chemical fertilisers were banned.

Fertilizer ban fiasco

- The scientists were proven right. In February 2022, the IMF assessed that there was a "worse-than-anticipated impact of the chemical fertilizer ban on agricultural production", which was likely to drag down the prospects of economic recovery.
- As agricultural production fell, more imports of food became necessary. But increasing imports was difficult in the face of foreign exchange shortages. Thus, inflation rose to 17.5% in February 2022. Also, a fall in the productivity of tea and rubber led to lower export incomes.
- And thus, the organic farming policy, which aimed to soften the pressure on reserves, ended up straining them even further.

- The current Sri Lankan economic crisis, then, is the product of the historical imbalances in the economic structure, the IMF's loan-related conditionalities, misguided policies of authoritarian rulers and the official embrace of pseudo-science.
- The future looks bleak too. The government might approach the IMF once again for a new loan with fresh conditionalities.
- With the global outlook appearing dim, a renewed push to such a deflationary policy would not just limit the prospects of economic revival, but also exacerbate the sufferings of the Sri Lankan people.

