Mental Health of Military Personnel

Why in news?

Recently a task force submitted its final draft to Ministry of Home Affairs which was established to investigate the causes of suicides and fratricides within the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs).

What is CAPF?

- Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) is the collective name of central police organisations under the *Ministry of Home Affairs.*
- These are technically paramilitary forces formerly known as the Central Para-Military Forces.
- Since 2011, India adopted the term "central armed police forces" to drop the word "paramilitary".

Classification of CAPF	CAPF	Description
Border Guarding Forces	Assam Rifles	• It is the oldest Central Para Military Force in India. • Primary role- To guard *Indo-Myanmar border*.
	Border Security Force	• It is the world's largest border guarding force. • Mandate- To guard the *Indo-Pakistan* and *Indo-Bangladesh* border.
	Indo Tibetan Border Police	• Primary role- To patrol *India-China border* from the Karakoram Pass in Ladakh to Diphu La in Arunachal Pradesh. • It is the first responder for natural disasters in the Himalayas.
	Sashastra Seema Bal	• Mandate- To guard the *Indo-Nepal* and *Indo-Bhutan* borders. • The sole objective is to achieve 'Total security preparedness' in the remote border areas for performing a 'stay-behind' role in the event of a war.

Forces of internal security	Central Industrial Security Force	• It is the *largest industrial security force* in the world. • It is responsible for providing security and protection to various industrial establishments, government infrastructure projects, and other important installations in India.
	Central Reserve Police Force	• It is the largest of the Central Armed Police Forces units. • ***Rapid Action Force*** is an anti-riot force trained to respond to sectarian violence. • The Commando Battalion for Resolute Action (*COBRA*), it is a strong anti-Naxalite and counter insurgency force.
Special Task Force	National Security Guard (NSG)	• It is a *counter-terrorism unit* which is commonly known as **Black Cats**. • It was founded in 1984 under the National Security Guard Act, 1986.

What are the key findings of the final draft report?

- **Study**- It covered 642 suicide cases and 51 fratricidal deaths over five years.

  Fratricide in military refers to a soldier or security personnel killing their own colleagues.

- **Major factors**- It identified working conditions, service conditions, and personal/individual issues as the major factors contributing to suicides and fratricides in the CAPFs.
- **Working conditions**- Prolonged deployment in high-risk areas, long separation from families, forced bachelorship, and tough duty hours in inhospitable conditions.
- **Service conditions**- Trauma of being abused, bullying at the workplace, leave-related problems, extended working hours, and inadequate time for rest were cited as significant reasons for service-related stress
- **Personal/individual issues**-
- **Gender difference**- The report noted that suicide attempts and committed cases by women personnel were fewer compared to male personnel.
- Male personnel were more hesitant to share their problems due to the fear of being mocked by their peers.
- **Mental health taboos**- It was considered as a taboos in security force, personnel hesitated to share their problems due to fear of being mocked or taunted by colleagues for appearing weak.
- **Suicides after returning from leave-** Over 80% of suicides occurred when personnel returned to work after availing leave, with a majority happening between 7 to 15 days after returning from home.

  The trigger for suicides could be either family or duty-related issues.

What are the recommendations by the final draft report?

- The recommendations aim to address systemic issues and improve the mental health and well-being of CAPF personnel, acknowledging the importance of both working and service conditions in their overall welfare.
- **Sensitization of immediate bosses**- They should treat newly recruited jawans with dignity, hear their grievances and recognize their services.
- **Treat decently**- Senior officers were advised to refrain from using abusive language and to behave decently with their juniors.
- **Mental health screening-** It should be done for all CAPF personnel returning from leave or other long-term duties through a questionnaire.
- This screening would address common challenges associated with combat zones, such as insomnia, agitation, and nightmares.
- **Address mental health taboos**- The report acknowledged the stigma around mental health issues in both the forces and society.
- It emphasized the need to address this stigma to encourage personnel to open up about their problems without fear of mockery or job loss.

Steps taken be the government to tackle the mental health of military personnel
• **Ministry of Defence-** It has outlined various initiatives aimed at fostering a positive and conducive environment for the Armed Forces, with a particular focus on mental health and overall well-being. • **Access to mental health**- The measures include the establishment of Military Psychiatry Treatment Centres in Mumbai and the creation of Mental Health Centres in multiple locations such as Mumbai, Visakhapatnam, Kochi, Port Blair, Goa, and Karwar. • **Routine activities**- Yoga and meditation have been introduced. • **Mental health helpline**- Both the Army and Airforce have set up a Mansik Sahayata (Mental Health) Helpline for professional counseling. • **Improved living conditions**- The government has taken steps to improve the quality of ration and uniforms, particularly in conflict zones. • **Housing projects-** They have been initiated to accommodate more personnel with their families, and defense-aided schools are being constructed to provide quality education at reduced costs for the children of armed forces members. • **Ministry of Home Affairs**- In addressing mental health concerns within CAPF, the ministry has implemented measures such as transparent transfer policies, an enhanced promotion and financial benefit system, and improved leave policies. • **Regular interaction**- It is done with senior officers to address grievances, ensuring adequate rest and relief, especially in regulating duty hours, and enhancing living conditions by providing recreational, entertainment, sports, and communication facilities.

Reference

[Indian Express- Mental health final draft report]



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