

VEDHIK

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The New Learning Mantra

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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India, Australia edge closer to final 'interim deal'

Both sides respect each other's 'sensitivities', says Dan Tehan

KALLOL BHATTACHERJEE
NEW DELHI

The interim trade agreement between India and Australia is unlikely to include items that both sides consider "sensitive", said Canberra's Trade and Tourism Minister Dan Tehan on Friday.

Addressing a joint press

conference here, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal announced that the Indian and Australian negotiators will have the final "interim agreement" ready in 30 days and that the agreement will be a "win-win" document.

"We understand India's sensitivities about dairy, wheat and beef. We have respected each other's sensitivities in the interim agreement," said Mr. Tehan who spent the last two days negotiating the trade deal.



Piyush Goyal with Dan Tehan, in New Delhi. •PTI

The assurance about Australia's understanding of India's economic and socio-political concerns regarding dairy and agricultural items

stems from growing anxiety among the Indian farmers' unions who have been keeping a close watch on the ongoing negotiations about the interim agreement ahead of the signing of the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA).

Early harvest deal

Both sides expressed confidence about signing a comprehensive Free Trade Agreement – CECA – and argued that the "interim agreement" is an "early harvest

deal" aimed at boosting bilateral trade before the completion of the negotiations on the final CECA.

The interim agreement will mark the beginning of a phase of FTAs that India is aiming to achieve in the coming year. India is in talks to conclude similar FTAs and early harvest deals with Israel, Canada, the European Union and the United Arab Emirates. According to informed sources, India and UAE may finalise the draft agreement of the FTA soon.



Test fire: Indian Navy ships testing weapons at the Eastern Naval Command, in Visakhapatnam. •FILE PHOTO

Navy's Milan to bring together 46 countries

Quad countries, Russia to participate

DINAKAR PERI
NEW DELHI

The Navy is set to hold the 12th President's Fleet Review (PFR) on February 21 at Visakhapatnam and few days from that it will host the largest multilateral exercise in this region, Milan 2022, which will see participation of all major Navies including Quad countries, Russia and from West Asia amid tensions in Ukraine and developments in West Asia.

This year's Milan will see the participation of all Quad countries, with the U.S. being invited for the first time.

Exercise Milan is scheduled to be held from February 25 to March 4 for which 46 countries have been invited. The harbour phase is scheduled from Fe-

bruary 25 to 28 and the sea phase from March 1 to 4. It has several themes such as ant-submarine warfare among others along with deliberations, including by subject matter experts.

Rare capability

During the exercise, the Navy will also be showcasing its Deep Submergence Rescue Vessel (DSRV) capabilities meant to rescue submarines in distress. India is one of the few countries in the region which possesses this capability.

More than 60 ships from the Navy, Coast Guard, Shipping Corporation of India and the National Institute of Ocean technology and submarines and more than 50 aircraft are expected to be part of the PFR this year.

Quad meet focuses on Indo-Pacific ties

Divisions emerge over Russia, Myanmar

SUHASINI HAIDAR
NEW DELHI

Calling for justice for the 26/11 terror attacks in Mumbai (2008) and the Pathankot airbase attack (2016) for the first time since the group was formed, the Foreign Ministers of Australia, India, Japan and the U.S. said the Quad was already cooperating on sharing intelligence on threats in the Indo-Pacific region.

The group of Ministers, who held their fourth Quad Ministerial meeting in Melbourne on Friday, also resolved to speed up delivery of more than a billion COVID-19 vaccines to be manufactured in India, to hold a special meet on climate change this year, and to step up efforts to ensure maritime security in the region.

Joint statement

"We call on all countries to ensure that territory under their control is not used to launch terror attacks and to expeditiously bring to justice the perpetrators of such attacks," said a joint statement issued at the end of talks between the Foreign Ministers.

"We reiterate our condemnation of terrorist attacks in India, including 26/11 Mumbai and Pathankot attacks," it added.

The statement also made a veiled reference to China's



S. Jaishankar, right, with his Japanese counterpart, Yoshihisa Hayashi. •AFP

actions in the South and East China seas, reaffirming a commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific, "in which states strive to protect the interests of their people, free from coercion".

While the countries committed to stronger cooperation on Indo-Pacific initiatives, divisions appeared in their stand on global developments such as Russia-NATO tensions over Ukraine and sanctions against Myanmar's military, as External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar expressed an independent line during a press conference held after the meeting.

"Where we are concerned, we don't follow a policy of national sanctions," Mr. Jaishankar said, pointing out that India is "troubled" by the situation in Myanmar post-coup, but its thinking is guided by cross-border concerns.

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Quad meet focuses on Indo-Pacific cooperation

These include insurgencies, COVID infections, and concerns of a humanitarian situation that could arise from food shortages, Mr Jaishankar said when asked about fresh U.S. sanctions being placed on Myanmar. In contrast, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who has backed the sanctions, pushed for countries to stop arms trade with the Myanmar military.

The joint statement called for a return to democracy in Myanmar, and also condemned North Korea's recent ballistic missile tests.

The grouping announced plans for a Quad summit between Prime Minister Narendra Modi, U.S. President Joe Biden, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida in Tokyo in the "first half of 2022".

The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson called the Quad mechanism "only a tool to contain China". "This is a deliberate move to stoke confrontation and undermine international solidarity and cooperation," spoke-

person Zhao Lijian said in Beijing, calling on Quad countries to "abandon the outdated Cold War mentality".

The Foreign Ministers of Australia, Japan and U.S. also took a sharp line on the build up of Russian troops along the border with Ukraine in the recent weeks, with Mr. Blinken warning that "an invasion [by Russian troops] could begin at any time". When asked by Australian journalists about India's stand, Mr. Jaishankar said the Quad meeting was "focused on the Indo-Pacific." "So I think you should figure out the geography there, and where we stand," he added.

The joint statement issued included a renewed commitment to the "flagship" Quad Vaccine initiative to deliver at least one billion vaccines produced at Hyderabad's Biological E facility by the end of 2022 to Indo-Pacific countries.

Mr. Jaishankar also held separate bilateral meetings with Mr. Blinken and Japanese Foreign Minister Hayashi Yoshimasa.

Will continue to support India's rise and regional leadership: U.S.

Collective action key to Washington's new Indo-Pacific strategy

SRIRAM LAKSHMAN
WASHINGTON DC

The Biden administration announced its long-awaited Indo-Pacific strategy on Friday. The document focuses on building collective capacity to deal with challenges in the region – China's assertiveness, the pandemic and climate change, among others.

The policies set out in the document have continuity with previous administrations' strategies. These include a focus on challenges from China, advancing the U.S. relationship, a major defence partnership with India and supporting its role as a net security provider in the region. There is an emphasis on working with other countries not just from the region, but also from beyond.

Speaking to reporters on Friday a senior administration official, who did not want to be named, said that India's role in the Quad was an important element of the U.S.-India relationship, and a means to "speak frankly about issues in the region," and to deliver together on public goods. The Quad is rolling out a plan to deliver



Common goal: Antony Blinken with S. Jaishankar during the Quad meeting, in Melbourne, on Friday. ■ AFP

over a billion COVID-19 vaccines to the region by the end of this year.

Responding to a question regarding India's enthusiasm for greater alignment with the U.S., the official said China's action along the Line of Actual Control (i.e., its border conflict with India) has had a "galvanizing impact" on India.

The strategy document says the U.S. will "continue to support India's rise and regional leadership," working with India bilaterally and through groups on a range of issues. It refers to India as

a "like-minded partner" and "driving force" in the Quad.

The overall increasing focus of the U.S. on the region is due to its increasing challenges, especially from China, according to the strategy document.

"The PRC's coercion and aggression spans the globe, but it is most acute in the Indo-Pacific. From the economic coercion of Australia to the conflict along the Line of Actual Control with India to the growing pressure on Taiwan and bullying of neighbours in the East and South China Seas, our allies

and partners in the region bear much of the cost of the PRC's harmful behaviour," it says. "We recognise the limitations in our ability to change China, and therefore, seek to shape the strategic environment around China...." said the senior administration official who briefed reporters.

More broadly, the U.S. will seek an Indo-Pacific that is free and open, connected, prosperous, secure and resilient. On the "free" aspect – one of the strategic actions outlined is investing in civil society, a free press and democratic institutions.

On the topic of "connections" within and beyond the region, the U.S. says it will work "in flexible groupings" to tackle major issues, "particularly through the Quad." It will also deepen its (five) regional treaty alliances and work with groups such as ASEAN, the European Union (EU) and NATO.

To advance its prosperity goal for the region, the U.S.'s strategy includes seeking higher labour and environmental standards, helping to establish secure supply chains and investing in clean energy.

Biden urges Americans to leave Ukraine

'We are dealing with one of the largest armies in the world...; things could go crazy quickly,' he says

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
WASHINGTON

U.S. President Joe Biden urged Americans to leave Ukraine immediately, as his top diplomat said on Friday that a Russian invasion could come "any time" – including during the Winter Olympics, which end in nine days.

With Moscow continuing to amass tens of thousands of troops on the Ukraine border, and talks to avoid war making little headway, Mr. Biden issued a stark warning for U.S. citizens to get out.

"American citizens should leave, should leave now," Mr. Biden told NBC News. "We're dealing with one of the largest armies in the world. This is a very different situation and things could go crazy quickly."

On the other side of the world in Melbourne, his Secretary of State Antony Blinken huddled with Asia-Pacific allies, stressing that



Crisis period: U.S. military vehicles waiting to be loaded onto trucks in Germany for deployment in Romania. ■ AFP

Russian President Vladimir Putin may be days, or even hours away from launching a war in continental Europe.

Live-fire drills

Observers have described the gathering of Russian forces on three of Ukraine's flanks as the largest show of force since the Soviet Army marched on Berlin at the end

of the Second World War.

Some U.S. estimates put the number of Russian soldiers at 1,30,000, grouped in dozens of combat brigades.

On Thursday, Russia rolled its tanks across Belarus for live-fire drills. Washington has said that around 30,000 soldiers were involved, coming from locations that included Russia's

Far East. Russia has also sent six warships through the Bosphorus for naval drills on the Black Sea and the neighbouring Sea of Azov.

Kiev condemned their presence as an "unprecedented" attempt to cut off Ukraine from both seas.

Kiev has launched its own military drills expected to mirror Russia's games, but officials have said little about them out of apparent fear of escalating tensions.

'Difficult talks'

With the drumbeat of war growing louder, the already intense push by European leaders to find a diplomatic solution gained a new sense of urgency.

Russia is seeking written guarantees that NATO will withdraw its presence from eastern Europe and never expand into Ukraine.

The United States and its European allies have official-

ly rejected Russia's demands.

"Difficult talks" between German, Russian, Ukrainian and French representatives broke late on Thursday, with the quartet agreeing to meet again in March.

Promises from Moscow

In Moscow, British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss reported receiving promises from her Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov that the Kremlin had no plans to invade Ukraine.

"We need to see those words followed up by actions," she told reporters after the talks.

But Mr. Lavrov said he was "disappointed" by the talks, saying the military drills and the movement of troops across Russia's own territory had spurred "incomprehensible alarm and quite strong emotions from our British counterparts and other Western representatives".

In a double bind, facing conservatism and politics

The campaign of Indian Muslim women to occupy public spaces and protect democracy is a lonely one



AZANIA IMTIAZ KHATRI-PATEL

Last week I was chased out of a graveyard in Mumbai. On a visit home, I decided to pray *Fathia* over my father's grave. But upon the realisation that there was a 'woman' in the graveyard, the imam from the nearby mosque broke into a panic interrupting my prayer and sending me out from the final resting place. The subject of women visiting graveyards is a contentious one in the Sunni practice of Islam. One *hadeeth* (prophetic narration) indicates that the Prophet forbade women from visiting graves. A second narration holds that the prohibition was recanted and all believers were asked to visit graveyards – to remind themselves of their return to the Divine.

Beyond my own experience, this conflict played out years ago when the Haji Ali dargah in Mumbai banned women from entering the shrine's inner sanctum. This ban was overturned by the judiciary but remains a bone of contention amongst shrine leadership and management.

More about a discomfort

My contention here is that this debate has less to do with religious stipulations and far more to do with the deep discomfort that emerges from seeing Muslim women occupying public spaces in

India. Unfortunately, most voices that claim to politically or societally represent Muslims in India have been male. Even in the electoral sphere, this remains a historically underrepresented group. Despite making up 6.9% of the Indian population, a 2019 report showed that Muslim women have only a 0.6% representation in the Lok Sabha.

On the matter of Personal Law, after the volatility of the Shah Bano judgment and the passing of the dilutive Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986, the country's Islamic leadership had the opportunity to treat the misuse of legal provisions as an internal matter. The Muslim community has the rare, inbuilt grassroots communication system of Friday prayers and the *khutba* (sermon) that precedes it. This platform to address, assuage and compel the community remains underutilised. Of course this is not helped by the fact that the majority of mosque doors remain closed to women.

Aiding a narrative

As critic Ziya Us Salam argues, the exclusion of women from spaces of prayer and community is a deep injustice and a consequence of *jahiliyyat* (malicious ignorance). The largest mosques in the nation claim that they have no room to spare for women. In this state the spiritual and social needs of women play second fiddle to masculine comfort. Beyond the woman question, these conditions are damaging to the social fabric of Indian Islam as a whole. The systematic exclusion of women from their rightful seat at the table



NISRAR AHMAD

creates the perfect feeding frenzy towards the narrative that 'Muslim women need saving'.

This narrative was propagated by the far right, helping curate the image of the barbaric, cruel Muslim man. It also provides legitimacy to the calls for the Uniform Civil Code as an act of rescue. As media-person Sonali Verma puts it, the declaration of triple talaq, while posturing as a pro-women move, remains mired in communal politics. The invisibilisation of the Muslim women means that there is an artificial lacuna in which multiple bodies (with multiple motives) claim to speak for them.

As a target

This conundrum is made more complicated when Muslim women do in fact occupy public and political space. With the Citizenship (Amendment) Act protests, and particularly the Shaheen Bagh sit-in, the visual of the veiled Muslim woman stopped being synonymous with passivity. With these protests itself there was a recognition of the double bind of Muslim women. The lack of *kagazat* (documentation) has disproportionate impacts over gender lines, and the

calls for *azadi* (freedom) are multifold. The visual metaphor of visible Muslim women protesting in the name of the Constitution and democratic principles subverts many mainstream imaginations.

The consequence of this has been brutal. Protesters at the sit-ins were termed *bikau* (for sale) and described in humiliating terms. From potent invisibilisation and portrayals as objects needing rescue, the Right has turned to a hypersexualisation of Muslim women. Online campaigns have seen videos and songs encouraging the abuse of and violence against Muslim women. Prominent figures are often faced with barrages of abuse and hate messaging. This took a particularly crude turn with Sulli Deals (in 2021) and its successor, Bulli Bai (in 2022) where images of influential Muslim women were 'auctioned' online.

Affecting a right

Most recently, we can see this through the Karnataka hijab row, where young Muslim girls have not been allowed to access their campus when veiling. A segment has argued that this is to prevent 'regressive/religious practices' from seeping into secular spaces. The conflation of regression with Islamic practices aside, this is a direct violation of the girls' fundamental right to education. Barring Muslim women from secular spaces unless they literally strip off markers of their faith and identity is vitriolic. It serves no purpose but to propagate a malicious narrative that on the one hand pretends to save Muslim women and on the other denies them the tools

to craft their own narrative.

In this way the internal fear that the occupation of Muslim women occupying public spaces leading to shame has become a self-fulfilling prophecy. They are left outside the insular, safety net of the community and in turn face vilification by the growing Right. The lack of a middle path here means that Muslim women are forced to occupy spaces on two ends of the spectrum – one that requires a compromise of political agency and the second that requires accepting an exclusion from one's own community.

This sorry state of affairs bodes poorly for Indian democracy and its political axis as a whole. In a country with as many intersecting identities as ours, no issues or circumstances exist in silos. To be included is an obligation *erga omnes* (an obligation to all), and damage to it is erosive to a secular democracy. A non-representative leadership is a breeding ground for polarisation, spillovers of which affect us beyond gendered and religious lines.

My submission here remains pained yet hopeful; the campaign of Muslim women to occupy public spaces and protect democracy is a lonely one. However, in the current political climate, it remains necessary to fight this fight – and protect an equal, democratic India.

Azania Imtiaz Khatri-Patel is a Rhodes Scholar in Residence at the University of Oxford. She is currently pursuing her Masters' in Public Policy at the Blavatnik School of Government. The views expressed are personal

Do not spread things to a larger level, SC observes on hijab row

Court says it will protect petitioners' rights, intervene at an appropriate moment

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday said it will protect the constitutional rights of petitioners and intervene at an "appropriate time" even as it cautioned against the "spreading" of the controversy triggered by the hijab ban in Karnataka classrooms to a "national level".

"Do not spread things to a larger level. We are watching what is happening there. You have to think whether it is necessary to bring it to a national level. If there is something wrong, we will protect your constitutional rights. We are also concerned. Let us see... at the appropriate time, we will interfere," Chief Justice of India N.V. Ramana addressed senior advocate Devadut Kamat, appearing for some students.

Mr. Kamat was orally mentioning an appeal against an "interim order" of the Karnataka High Court on Thursday in petitions challenging the hijab ban in classrooms. "The High Court has indicated that it would pass an interim order that none of the students should wear anything which would disclose their religious identity... Such an order would have wide ramifications not only for Muslims but also for peo-

Key questions | Two students of a government college in Karnataka have raised the following questions of law in their petition

■ Whether the effect of an interim order passed by a constitutional court can be the suspension of fundamental rights of citizens, guaranteed under Article 15, 19, 21, 25 of the Constitution?

■ When hijab is an essential and integral facet of the belief and faith of the petitioners herein, will the Hon'ble

High Court direct the petitioners to give up their faith in order to attend an educational institution?

OTHER CONTENTIONS

■ Their exams are due in March and they have not been able to attend classes

■ Should they be denied of their right to education at the cost of their conscience, belief and faith?



Making a stand: Muslim women participating in a protest rally in Kolkata on Friday. ■ PTI

ple following other faiths. For example, Sikhs wear turbans. Such an order would amount to a complete suspension of Article 25 [right to religious freedom]," Mr. Kamat submitted.

He urged the CJI to list the appeal for hearing on Monday. Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the State government, said the High Court order was yet to come out. Mr. Kamat should have mentioned that fact. "We do not know what the order is yet. Meanwhile, the issue should not be made communal or political," Mr. Mehta submitted.

Mr. Kamat said the appeal delved solely on constitu-

tional issues and had nothing communal or political about it. He said the arguments in the special leave petition were entirely legal and focused on a crucial right guaranteed by the Constitution.

On February 10, a Bench of the High Court led by Karnataka Chief Justice Ritu Raj Awasthi indicated to the advocates for the petitioner-students and the State Advocate-General that the court would pass an interim order and that students should not insist on wearing head scarves or saffron shawls till the court decided the issues raised in the petitions.

HC INTERIM ORDER ► PAGE 5

IIP growth slowed to 0.4% in December

Data shows capital goods, consumer durables output shrank signalling poor investment, consumption

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

India's industrial recovery slowed sharply in December, with output growing just 0.4% year-on-year, and manufacturing activity contracting 0.1%, as per official estimates for the Index of Industrial Production (IIP).

Electricity output grew 2.8%, while mining activity rose 2.6%. The IIP data also shows capital goods output shrank 4.6% in December while consumer durables and consumer non-durables saw output shrink 2.7% and 0.6%, respectively. Consumer durables contracted for the fourth straight month.

Growth in other use-based segments was marginal and couldn't lift the overall industrial output trend, with primary goods output rising



Capex stalls: The contraction in capital goods highlights the tentativeness in investment, says ICRA's Nayar. •KAMAL NARANG

2.8%, infrastructure and construction goods growing 1.7% and intermediate goods seeing a mere 0.3% uptick.

Industrial output had grown a mere 1.34% in November as per revised data

from the National Statistical Office (NSO). The NSO also revised upwards IIP numbers for September and October 2021, to 4.35% from 3.1% and to 4.01% from 3.2%, respectively, using updated

production data. Economists said the latest IIP print was lower-than-expected.

Recovery in jeopardy

"Contrary to our expectations of 2.5%... growth has come in at 0.4% which is disappointing," said Madan Sabnavis, chief economist at Bank of Baroda. "The pent-up demand story witnessed in the earlier months has eased with the mini lockdown," he added, noting that the main engines of growth the government was banking on for the coming year – investment and consumption – had fared dismally.

India Ratings economists Sunil Kumar Sinha and Paras Jasrai said that the lacklustre IIP growth puts a question mark over the current recovery and indicates that policy

makers may have to take more measures as high commodity prices have made most inputs, particularly fuel and materials, expensive.

ICRA chief economist Aditi Nayar said the contraction in capital goods was not just a year-on-year phenomenon, but also relative to the pre-COVID level, highlighting the 'tentativeness in the investment cycle'. Citing a recent RBI assessment that capacity utilisation in the second quarter of 2021-22 was 68%, Ms. Nayar said she expects this would improve to 71-72% in the ongoing quarter despite the third wave, but not be enough to trigger a pickup in the private capex cycle.

"We expect the IIP to grow by 1%-2% in January," estimated Ms. Nayar.

Taking a byte out of cyber threats

Rather than wait for the 'Big Bang cyber attack', nations and institutions ought to be prepared for a rash of cyber strikes



M.K. NARAYANAN

Cyber attacks may be a relatively new phenomenon, but in a short time frame have come to be assessed as dangerous as terrorism. The world was possibly made aware of the danger and threat posed by cyber weapons with the advent of the Stuxnet Worm in 2010, which resulted in large-scale damage to Iran's centrifuge capabilities. Two years later, in 2012, a bank of computers belonging to the Saudi Aramco Oil Company were targeted, reportedly by Iranian operatives, employing malware that wiped out data on 30,000 computers. A few weeks later, Iran was again believed to have been behind a targeted attack on the Qatar natural gas company, RasGas. The string of instances appear to have provoked then United States Defence Secretary, Leon Panetta, to utter the warning that the world had to prepare for a kind of 'cyber Pearl Harbour', highlighting a new era of potential vulnerabilities.

Static response

In the decade that followed, and while preparing for a 'potential Pearl Harbour' type of strike, including seeking ways and means to retaliate in the eventuality of such attacks, the West seemed to lose its way on how to deal with the emerging cyber threat. Each succeeding year, despite an increase in cyber threats, witnessed no change in the method of response. The years 2020 and 2021 have proved to be extremely difficult from the perspective of cyber attacks but no changes in methodology have been seen. In 2021, cyber attacks that attracted the maximum attention were SolarWinds and Colonial Pipeline in the U.S., but these were merely the tip of a much bigger iceberg among the string of attacks that plagued the world. Estimates of the cost to the world in 2021 from cyber attacks are still being computed, but

if the cost of cyber crimes in 2020 (believed to be more than \$1 trillion) is any guide, it is likely to range between \$3trillion-\$4 trillion. What is not disputed any longer is that soon, if not already, cyber crime damage costs would become more profitable than the global trade of all major illegal drugs combined.

Sectors that are vulnerable

As 2022 begins, the general consensus is that the cyber threat is likely to be among, if not the biggest, concern for both companies and governments across the globe. In the Information age, data is gold. Credential threats and the threat of data breaches, phishing, and ransomware attacks, apart from major IT outages, are expected to be among the main concerns. Results are also likely to far eclipse the damage stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic or any natural disasters. A little publicised fact is that the vast majority of cyber attacks are directed at small and medium sized businesses, and it is likely that this trend will grow.

According to experts, among the most targeted sectors in the coming period are likely to be: health care, education and research, communications and governments. Health-care ransomware has been little publicised, but the reality is that ransomware attacks have led to longer stays in hospitals, apart from delays in procedures and tests, resulting in an increase in patient mortality.

Far more than merely apportioning costs linked to cyber crime is the reality that no organisation can possibly claim to be completely immune from cyber attacks. While preventive and reactive cyber security strategies are needed – and are essential to mitigate cyber risks – they are proving to be highly illusive in an increasingly hyper-connected world. Comprehending the consequences of this reality could be devastating.

For instance, despite all talk about managing and protecting data, the reality is that ransomware is increasing in intensity and is tending to become a near destructive threat, because there are many available soft targets. Statis-



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

tics in this regard are also telling, viz., that new attacks are taking place every 10 seconds. Apart from loss of data, what is also becoming evident is that ransomware criminals are becoming more sophisticated, and are using ransomware to cripple large enterprises and even governments. Talk of the emergence of 'Ransomware as a Service' (RaaS) – a business model for ransomware developers – is no mere idle threat.

The huge security impact of working from home, dictated largely by the prevailing novel coronavirus pandemic, must again not be underestimated as it is likely to further accelerate the pace of cyber attacks. A conservative estimate is that a rash of attacks is almost certain to occur on home computers and networks. Additionally, according to experts, a tendency seen more recently to put everything on the Cloud could backfire, causing many security holes, challenges, misconfigurations and outages. Furthermore, even as Identity and Multifactor Authentication (MFA) take centre stage, the gloomy prognostication of experts is that Advanced Persistent Threats (APT) attacks are set to increase, with criminal networks working overtime and the Dark web allowing criminals to access even sensitive corporate networks.

Scant clarity

Unfortunately, and despite the plethora of such evidence, cyber security experts appear to be floundering in finding proper solutions to the ever widening cyber threat. There is a great deal of talk among cyber security experts about emerging cyber security technologies and protocols intended to protect systems, networks and devices, but little clarity whether what is available can

ensure protection from all-encompassing cyber attacks. Technology geeks, meanwhile, are having a field day, insisting on every enterprise incorporating SASE – Secure Access Service Edge – to reduce the risk of cyber attacks. Additional solutions are being proposed such as CASB – Cloud Access Security Broker – and SWG – Secure Web Gateway – aimed at limiting the risks to users from web-based threats. Constant references to the Zero Trust Model and Micro Segmentation as a means to limit cyber attacks, can again be self-limiting. Zero Trust does put the onus on strict identity verification 'allowing only authorized and authenticated users to access data applications', but it is not certain how successful this and other applications will prove to be in the face of the current wave of cyber attacks. What is most needed is absent, viz., that cyber security experts should aim at being two steps ahead of cyber criminals. This is not evident as of now.

Unique challenges

Missing from the canvas is that cyber technology presents certain unique challenges which need particularised answers. Instead of attempting to devise standard methodologies, and arrive at certain international norms that govern its use, a decade of misplaced effort by the West in preparing for a 'potential Pearl Harbour type of strike' has enabled cyber criminals to gain the upper hand. While the West focused on 'militarization' of the cyber threat, and how best it could win with its superior capabilities, valuable time was lost. It led to misplaced ideas and erroneous generalisations, resulting in a decade of lost opportunity.

This situation needs to be reversed. A detailed study of the series of low- and medium-level proactive cyber attacks that have occurred during the past decade is clearly warranted. It could reinforce the belief that when it comes to deterrence in cyber space, what is required is not a piece of 'grand strategy': low and medium tech, low and medium risk targeted operations could be just as effective. A related aspect is to prevent individual companies from attempting

their own tradeoffs – between investing in security and maximising short-term profits. What many companies and even others fail to realise is that inadequate corporate protection and defence could have huge external costs for national security, as was evident in the SolarWinds attack.

Defence and backup plans

Nations and institutions, instead of waiting for the 'Big Bang cyber attack', should actively prepare for a rash of cyber attacks – essentially ransomware – mainly directed at available data. The emphasis should be on prioritising the defence of data above everything else. Consequently, law enforcement agencies would need to play a vital role in providing effective defence against cyber attacks.

On the strategic plane, understanding the nature of cyber space is important. While solving the technical side is 'one part of the solution, networks and data structures need at the same time to prioritise resilience through decentralised and dense networks, hybrid cloud structures, redundant applications and backup processes'. This implies 'planning and training for network failures so that individuals could adapt and continue to provide service even in the midst of an offensive cyber campaign'.

The short answer is to prioritise building trust in systems – whether it is an electrical grid, banks or the like, and creating backup plans including 'strategic decisions about what should be online or digital and what needs to stay analog or physical, and building capacity within networks to survive' even if one node is attacked. Failure to build resilience – at both the 'technical and human level – will mean that the cycle of cyber attacks and the distrust they give rise to will continue to threaten the foundations of democratic society'. Preventing an erosion of trust is critical in this day and age.

M.K. Narayanan, a former Director, Intelligence Bureau, a former National Security Adviser and a former Governor of West Bengal, is currently Executive Chairman of CyQureX Pvt. Ltd., a U.K.-U.S.A. cyber security joint venture

'133 drones sighted along Pak. border in 2 years'

Punjab says movement has increased

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NEW DELHI

Punjab government informed a Parliamentary Committee on Home Affairs that drones have been sighted near Pakistan border over 133 times in the last two years.

The total length of Punjab's border with Pakistan is 553 kilometres.

"The State Government of Punjab further informed the Committee that in recent past, the movement of drones from across the international border has increased significantly...The first recorded delivery of arms/ammunition by drone was in August, 2019," said the report, Police Training, Modernisation and Police Reforms, by Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs tabled in the Rajya Sabha on Thursday.

The International Border with Pakistan is guarded by the Border Security Force (BSF), a Central armed police force under the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA). According to a BSF official, from January 1 to 15, the BSF spotted 42 drones along the Pakistan border, of which 16 were along Punjab border and 21 in Jammu.



BSF had recovered over 4 kg of RDX and a pistol dropped by a drone along the border.

On February 9, the BSF recovered over 4 kg of RDX, a pistol and a few bomb-making materials that were dropped by a drone in an agricultural field near Panjgrain Gurdaspur district along the Punjab border. In November 2021, BSF said that at least 67 drones had been sighted along the Pakistan border that year.

Punjab informed the committee that similar drone sightings have also been observed in Jammu and Kashmir and "there is no effective anti-drone technology available in the country".

The committee recommended that MHA create a Central pool of anti-drone technology at the earliest and give its access to all States "to deal with the menace of illicit use of drones."

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-drawal 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.