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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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'Advantage New Delhi' in Sri Lanka's India lifeline

There is much potential in the humanitarian aid link now to deepen trade and investment linkages



GANESHAN WIGNARAJA

Ranil Wickremesinghe's election as the President of Sri Lanka in a crucial Parliament vote on July 20, 2022, gives India an opportunity to take the lead in the foreign aid game in its neighbourhood. Sri Lanka has been facing economic turbulence since its pre-emptive default on its foreign debt obligations in mid-April this year – the mass protests in its wake eventually forcing the former President of Sri Lanka, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, to flee the country on July 12.

Deepening woes

Following the debt default and a shortage of dollars, the Sri Lankan economy is experiencing stagflation. Inflation has spiralled to over 50%, translating into higher food and fuel prices. Many families are surviving on one meal a day. The economy could contract by at least 6% in 2022. Some three-quarter of a million people are becoming the 'new poor'. Sri Lanka's worst economic crisis since its independence in 1948 is due to a tepid recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russia-Ukraine conflict shock and economic mis-

management under the administration of the Rajapaksas.

Sri Lanka is also facing challenges in getting foreign aid, as 60% of the world's poorest countries are also experiencing debt distress; further, the prospect of a second global recession in three years could dampen enthusiasm to support Sri Lanka.

There are questions by some on why taxpayers in another country should bail out a failed economy such as Sri Lanka, when the perception is that Sri Lanka's debt default is largely one of its own making – the result of mismanagement and corruption.

Opportunity for India

India was the first responder to Sri Lanka's desperate calls for foreign aid to help tackle its crippling debt and economic crisis. India has been motivated by the unfolding humanitarian crisis affecting the Sri Lankan people and the political pressure from South India for Indian intervention. In the first six months of 2022, Indian aid worth \$3.8 billion has flowed to Sri Lanka through loans, swaps and grants. This is India's largest bilateral aid programme in recent times.

Supporting Sri Lanka could be in India's best interests. Stabilising Sri Lanka's economy could prove to be a major win for Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'neighbourhood-first' policy. Moreover, once the Sri Lankan economy stabilises, India can deepen its trade



AFP

and investment linkages with Sri Lanka, transcending the current humanitarian aid relationship. This could spur regional integration and prosperity. On the other hand, an unstable Sri Lankan economy could pose security risks to India and lead to a flood of refugees across the Palk Strait. This is an opportunity for India to strengthen bilateral and regional partnerships.

Dimensions to Chinese aid

In recent years, China has emerged as a major partner for Sri Lanka, especially for infrastructure projects, many of which are under scrutiny now. This provides an opportunity for India to upscale its aid and cement its first mover advantage over China by leading an aid consortium for Sri Lanka, working closely with other friendly countries such as the United States, Japan and the European Union as well as the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Back of the envelope calculations sug-

gest that Sri Lanka would require financing that falls between \$20 billion to \$25 billion over the next three years to ensure essential imports of food, medicine and fuel for its people and help in stabilising the economy.

Despite gaining benefits from commercial loans for Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects in Sri Lanka which has fuelled a 'debt trap' narrative, China faces a dilemma in bailing out Sri Lanka. China worries that unilaterally restructuring Sri Lanka's debt or giving it moratoria would set a new precedent in its lending practices, leading to a queue of similarly distressed countries seeking debt relief from Beijing. Furthermore, China, which is a G2 economy, and wanting to challenge the U.S., does not want its reputation to be tarnished by bailing out a floundering economy.

Steps to take

There are five important items in the in-tray of the new administration under President Wickremesinghe.

The government must show that it is serious about stabilising the economy by concluding talks on an IMF programme which will increase taxes and utility prices to raise revenue and increase interest rates to control inflation while preserving social welfare expenditures to protect the poor.

It has to implement structural reforms to make the economy

more open to trade and investment and allow market forces to determine resource allocation. This means reducing barriers to trade and investment, cutting red tape hampering business and privatising loss-making state-owned enterprises such as Sri Lankan Airlines and the Ceylon Petroleum Corporation.

It has to build national consensus on implementing the IMF programme and reforms by explaining that this is the only solution to the crisis.

It has to restore the rule of law and enforce strong anti-corruption policies (including asset declarations for all parliamentarians and a strong anti-corruption office supported by the United Nations). Later, the executive presidency should be abolished.

It has to reset foreign policy towards a more neutral direction and away from the pro-China stance of the Rajapaksas.

With political will and the right set of policies, Sri Lanka stands a sporting chance of achieving some economic normalcy within the next three years. India stands to gain by supporting Sri Lanka in its hour of need. A friend in need is a friend indeed.

Ganeshan Wignaraja is Non-Resident Senior Fellow, Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS), National University of Singapore, and former Director of Research of the Asian Development Bank Institute in Tokyo

What can the world do to help Sri Lanka?

PARLEY

Sri Lanka needs all its creditors to come together and give it some breathing space

On July 20, acting President Ranil Wickremesinghe was elected the President of Sri Lanka. The Government of India, which held an all-party meeting on the crisis in the island nation, said that “fiscal prudence and responsible governance” are the lessons to be learnt from the situation in Sri Lanka and that there should not be a “culture of freebies”. India promised to be supportive of Sri Lanka, which is struggling to deal with the devastation caused by the economic crisis. In such a scenario, what must the world, and India in particular, do to help Sri Lanka? Nirupama Rao and D. Subbarao discuss the question in a conversation moderated by Suhasini Haidar. Edited excerpts:

How predictable was the crisis that came to a head in April 2022 with the protests, and how much of the blame lies with the Rajapaksa who have now been pushed out of power?

Nirupama Rao: At the end of the civil war [with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam] in 2009, Sri Lanka had to go to the IMF (International Monetary Fund) for support. Successive governments can be charged with economic mismanagement – fiscal and budgetary – but you can implicate the Gotabaya Rajapaksa presidency with a lot of missteps that led the country to where it is now, staring over the economic precipice. What you see now is a perfect storm – economic mismanagement over the years and political malfeasance, which you can lay at the door of the Rajapaksa.

D. Subbarao: The crisis is a consequence of the twin deficit problem: an unsustainable current account deficit and an unsustainable fiscal deficit, some of which they [the Rajapaksa] were not responsible for. Tourism collapsed starting with the Easter bombings, then the pandemic, and remittances from migrant workers declined, again because of the pandemic. The import bill rose because of the war on Ukraine and the spike in oil prices.

On the domestic front, however, the fiscal crisis is completely homemade. The Rajapaksa government gave in to unaffordable populism by

cutting taxes. They cut the value added tax by half, eliminated capital gains tax, made expenditure commitments on subsidies that they couldn't afford, and so debt ballooned. The Rajapaksa government was responsible for three specific things: one, unaffordable populism; two, erratic economic management – for example, the abrupt shift to organic farming; and three, it did not go to the IMF early enough. If it had approached the IMF, say, six months ago, the crisis would not have been as intense.

Do you think global powers could have moved in sooner to try and help at least with the debt repayment deferrals rather than wait for the crisis to have reached the level it has?

DS: Sri Lanka's crisis was so deep that no country by itself could have averted it. And if a country had moved in by itself to solve the problem, it would have taken on more burden without actually solving the crisis. A crisis like this requires IMF assistance, and for other countries to come on board in support of the IMF programme. Take, for example, bilateral debt that Sri Lanka owes to countries such as Japan, China, India. For these countries to reduce or restructure their debt, they will require an IMF programme. So, what countries can do bilaterally is provide a bridge loan, which is what India has done, but the structured solution has to come through the IMF.

NR: What precipitated the crisis was the big tax holiday that Mr. Gotabaya Rajapaksa gave soon after he assumed office. The balance of payments suffered a great amount of pressure, especially on Sri Lanka's currency, after COVID. They should have allowed the currency to depreciate, but they spent \$5 billion to \$6 billion of precious foreign exchange to keep the currency afloat. The advice by the governor of the central bank was a mix of hubris and incompetence and unwillingness to go to the IMF. The President knew nothing about the economy. They followed nationalist economic policies. They kept borrowing from the commercial market. They were not seeking any assistance from the



IMF. In fact, they came to India at the end of last year, asking India to reschedule the debt repayment. We had a portfolio of debt of under \$1 billion. We wondered why they were coming to us; it was a well-managed portfolio. But they said India is an important partner and that's why they were coming here. India's help has been unprecedented. No other country has really come to Sri Lanka's rescue.

Do you think India's assistance to Sri Lanka of about \$3.8 billion was adequate and timely? How do you evaluate China's role, which owns at least 10% of Sri Lanka's debt?

DS: The Indian Government by itself cannot solve Sri Lanka's problem. Sri Lanka needs everybody who it owes debt to – the IMF, the World Bank, the ADB (Asian Development Bank) and all other partners – to come together and give it some breathing space. That's what India tried to provide. India could not have restructured all its loans or given all the money that Sri Lanka wanted. India gave aid on time and in sufficient quantity for Sri Lanka to get some breathing space in order to approach the IMF and reach an arrangement with the IMF.

On China's involvement, Sri Lanka's debt problem has two egregious sins. One is over-dependence on one country for a bilateral partner, China. The second is the sovereign borrowing in a foreign currency. Given that many of these loans went into infrastructure projects that have taken too long or have been underutilised, debt has piled up, but there are no revenues to repay for it. To that extent, China is responsible for loading on debt, irresponsible lending, and now responsible for not coming soon enough to Sri Lanka's aid.

Maybe the thrust in India should be to look at more regionalising factors when it comes to trade and whether regionalisation of the Indian rupee can be of help to us and our neighbours.

NIRUPAMA RAO

NR: India's help has been unprecedented – other countries have come up with very small amounts of humanitarian assistance at the very most. You may argue that countries like Japan could do more. But if you see the record of the Rajapaksa government, it was very cavalier and churlish in its treatment of Japan over the last few years, by cancelling projects. Japan has every reason to be upset about the way the relationship with Sri Lanka has developed over the last few years.

You mentioned 10% of Sri Lanka's debt being held by China, but that figure is understated. There's much more hidden debt held by Chinese entities. Meanwhile, returns on Chinese projects have not added much value to the economy. The 99-year lease of the Hambantota Port was concluded without settling the loans owed to China, and now they are incurring recurring expenditure for running the port. So, that has been a white elephant. The Chinese want more control in Sri Lanka, they want an FTA (Free Trade Agreement), but Chinese goods already flood the market.

Are there other alternatives to the IMF that India should be tapping or helping Sri Lanka tap? Should India now be looking to use its own resources in a regional fashion and can India even do that?

DS: Well, we've been struggling

with this question for the last 25 years. Countries around the world have been trying to find an alternative to the IMF, because of the concern that IMF conditionality is too harsh and does not result in long-term structural adjustment. But nothing has proved to be an adequate substitute for the IMF – neither bilateral arrangements nor the regional ones. The fact is that if a country is under an IMF programme, external investors, external creditors become confident that they can go back into the country. And that's why I keep saying that Sri Lanka should have gone to the IMF sooner so that that confidence levels would not have sunk.

NR: Sri Lanka has to go to the IMF, but even that has problems. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman made a strong case for Sri Lanka to be classified temporarily as a low-income country so that it can get assistance on a more emergency basis from the IMF and on the lines of what has been provided to Ukraine. But that has not happened. Sri Lanka has not been able to reach a staff-level agreement with the IMF. It has to legislate decisions on the taxation and revenue side, but it is not able to move in Parliament on that front, given the political crisis. Even the fundamental assessment of debt sustainability has not been reached with the IMF.

What is worrying is that [in this crisis], a fertile ground could be provided for extremist ideologies. The capacity of the country to ensure its maritime security will also suffer and there is a scenario of drugs and arms smuggling staring us in the face. India has to consider how far it can go to help Sri Lanka; I don't know if the government has taken that decision yet. But we must remember that economic and security factors are interlinked. Maybe the thrust in India should be to look at more regionalising factors when it comes to trade and whether regionalisation of the Indian rupee can be of help to us and our neighbours.

To what extent is the situation in Sri Lanka comparable to that in Indian States, if not the entire economy? External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar's presentation to parliamentarians seemed to indicate worry about a “spillover” effect.

DS: The fact is fiscal profligacy and fiscal irresponsibility will invariably end in tears. Some Indian States are borrowing money and using it on freebies, which do not add to productivity or future economic activity or production capacity, but add to current consumption. So, they do not support long-term growth. But beyond that, States in India cannot be compared to Sri Lanka because Sri Lanka is an independent economic entity whereas the States in India are part of a national economic entity. States in India do not have their own balance of payments, they do not have debt denominated in external currency like Sri Lanka. Second, Sri Lanka can deal with domestic debt by printing currency, as it did, but States in India cannot do that. So, it's important for us, as the Prime Minister said, to get this into public conversation about whether States and even the Centre should continue to spend money like this on transfer payments and freebies instead of spending on infrastructure that supports long-term growth and employment generation. I don't believe the Centre and the States should talk about these decisions in an adversarial manner, but agree on some norms. The Supreme Court has also said there must be some norms about how much can be spent on freebies. Politicians might take umbrage, but we must get it right.

Equally, the worries come from not just India but the rest of the neighbourhood. How can India prepare for crises in the rest of South Asia?

DS: A lot has been written about the economic crisis facing Pakistan and Nepal. We should be looking hard at Nepal because Nepal is tied to us in many ways. But one redeeming factor is that Nepal's currency is pegged to ours and its trade being landlocked, it is completely dependent on India. The issue of regionalisation of the Indian rupee should be looked at more closely. If we apply the regionalisation of our rupee, make it possible for us to trade in rupees with Sri Lanka, it will help Sri Lanka save on hard currency. The digital interface payments that we have, like BHIM, can be used in countries in the neighbourhood such as Nepal and Bhutan. With Sri Lanka, those discussions have not been able to go forward.



Nirupama Rao
is former Foreign Secretary



D. Subbarao
is former Governor of the Reserve Bank of India



Scan the QR code to listen to the full interview online

Dinesh Gunawardena likely to be named Sri Lankan PM

President Ranil invites all parties to join the govt.

MEERA SRINIVASAN
COLOMBO

Ranil Wickremesinghe, who was sworn in as President of Sri Lanka on Thursday, is expected to appoint long-time Rajapaksa loyalist and senior politician Dinesh Gunawardena as Prime Minister, a source close to the President's office told *The Hindu*.

Further, Mr. Wickremesinghe will continue with the



Dinesh Gunawardena

last-appointed Cabinet until Opposition parties are “ready to cooperate” in an all-party government, the source said, requesting anonymity. Cabinet members

will be sworn in on Friday morning, the President's office said.

President Wickremesinghe, who faces fierce public criticism for joining the discredited Rajapaksa government earlier, has invited all parties to join his government to combat the national economic crisis, which set off political upheaval and led to changes at the island nation's helm. Opposition parties are yet to signal their willingness.

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Gunawardena likely to be named Sri Lanka PM

Following a party leaders' meeting on Thursday, Opposition Leader Sajith Premadasa said in a tweet: "Met with President @RW_UNP [Ranil Wickremesinghe] at the party leaders' meeting today. Had a cordial and frank exchange of ideas. Reiterated the Opposition's determination to provide constructive support to avert misery and disaster." The Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB or United People's Force) Leader said he proposed to strengthen the committee system in Parliament to achieve national consensus "rather than dishing out ministerial portfolios to political opportunists resulting in a drain of scarce national resources."

'No invitation yet'

SJB lawmaker Eran Wickramaratne said the party has received no "formal invitation" so far, to be part of the government, following President Wickremesinghe's open invitation to all parties in Parliament.

"We will hold talks when that happens. Meanwhile, we will continue participating in parliamentary processes constructively," he told *The Hindu*.

Mr. Wickremesinghe, who served as Prime Minister – his sixth stint – since May and as Acting President more recently, rose to Presidency winning a key parliamentary vote on Wednesday, after mass protests dislodged Gotabaya Rajapaksa from the country's highest office last week. He fled the island and is now in

Singapore, where he has been granted a 14-day short-term visit pass, according to the city-state's immigration authorities.

Chandrika wishes Ranil

Former President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga wished Mr. Wickremesinghe "good luck and success", as he takes over the reins of the country "at a moment when it is besieged with unprecedented challenges." "I have no doubt President Wickremesinghe will remember that this change was made entirely possible by the extraordinary activism of the young civil activists of our country, with the full support of a vast majority of citizens," she said in a message posted on Facebook, underscoring the need for "visionary leaders with far sightedness and generosity of heart."

"Their [citizens'] strident call is for a regime that governs in the people's interest and not its own, where the rule of law, honesty, and good governance will reign supreme," Ms. Kumaratunga said. She added that it would be a "difficult task".

Sri Lanka is facing one of its worst economic downturns in history, putting citizens through untold suffering amid shortages of essentials and soaring living costs. Mr. Wickremesinghe's government is expected to soon resume talks with the International Monetary Fund, which has made its support contingent on Colombo successfully restructuring its foreign debt.

Welcome relief

It is not a good sign that the Supreme Court is now the sole forum to protect personal liberty

There is a sense of relief among everyone who values personal liberty and free speech, following the grant of interim bail to Mohammed Zubair, co-founder of fact-checking website Alt News. Given that multiple cases were registered for the same alleged offence, most of them based on tweets, personal liberty and freedom of expression were both under threat. In the face of an assertive executive in times of majoritarian nationalism, it has become normal for magistrates to comply with any demand for the police to remand those brought before them to custody and to deny them bail regardless of the merit or lack of it in those cases. In the case of Mr. Zubair, it was quite palpable that he was being hounded by the police acting on complaints manifestly motivated by communal considerations. Apart from the first FIR in Delhi based on a 2018 tweet referencing a scene in a film from the early 1980s, he has been accused of receiving foreign donations without a licence to do so. Further, some obviously trivial and absurd cases of insulting religious feelings based on innocuous tweets have made it quite clear that the investigation is not so much about what he said as about how he could be harassed and hounded to the point of making him leave his vocation of fact-checking and silence his voice. Everyone must, therefore, welcome the judicial pushback from the Supreme Court in seeing through the game plan behind the registration of multiple FIRs at the instance of votaries of Hindutva.

The Bench did not proceed to quash the various cases against Mr. Zubair, but it has ordered the clubbing of all cases and transferring the investigation to the Delhi Police. As a consequence, the Special Investigation Team formed by the Uttar Pradesh Police to initiate a wide-ranging probe against him has been ordered to be disbanded. The virtues of the order are not limited to the grant of relief. In the process, the Bench has recognised that some FIRs are similar in content and that there is an effort to subject him to “endless rounds of proceedings before diverse courts”. It has also declined to bar him from tweeting further, noting that no one’s voice could be stifled like that when anything said in the public domain was open to scrutiny for possible transgressions of the law. This is a blow for free speech at a time when some courts impose gag orders as part of the conditions for grant of bail. That it needed the country’s highest court to grant such relief is a sad commentary on the state of affairs in the country. The overall atmosphere is so vitiated by state-backed majoritarianism that the Supreme Court has become the only forum for protecting personal liberty, while the lower judicial echelons do not seem to be up to the task.

RS sees walkout, adjournments over price rise

DMK, TRS, AAP and CPI(M) members had given notice for a discussion on the issue and GST

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Several Opposition members walked out from the Rajya Sabha on Thursday as their demand to discuss price rise and the imposition of Goods and Services Tax (GST) on packaged food products such as milk and curd was not accepted. House Chairman M. Venkaiah Naidu said placards and other articles were not allowed and the members who brought them shall be named in the bulletin for carrying objectionable items.

After the House proceedings resumed at 2 p.m., Tiruchi Siva of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam said the remarks made by Information and Broadcasting Minister Anurag Thakur during Question Hour should be expunged because he made statements accusing the members of the Opposition parties. Question Hour could



Raising voice: Opposition members protesting in the Rajya Sabha on Thursday. ■SANSAD TV/PTI

not be used for such statements, he added.

Mr. Thakur, while responding to a question, said the “ones standing here (with placards) will never raise their voice against anti-India agenda”, and newspapers and TV channels should not give space to members who spread fake news on issues such as Agnipath, GST and vaccines. Mr. Siva said the members of the

DMK, the Telangana Rashtra Samiti, the Aam Aadmi Party and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) had given notice under Rule 267 to suspend the business of the day and take up discussions on price rise. Bhubaneswar Kalita, who was in the Chair, said the Chairman had declined the discussion.

The House was adjourned twice during the day before it was finally adjourned a lit-

tle after 2.30 p.m. after Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs V. Muraleedharan requested the Chair that the Weapons of Mass Destruction and their Delivery Systems (Prohibition of Unlawful Activities) Amendment Bill, 2022 be taken up for discussion on Monday as none of the Opposition members were present.

After the House met at 11 a.m., members demanded discussion on the price rise. Mr. Naidu adjourned the House till noon.

Question Hour, which began at noon, witnessed vociferous protests with AAP members leading the charge by trooping into the Well of the House. Sanjay Singh of the AAP stood close to Deputy Chairman Harivansh's desk forcing an adjournment for 10 minutes. Members of the Left parties, the DMK and the TRS also joined the

protest. Members from the Shiv Sena and the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) remained seated and did not join the other members in the Well.

P. Wilson of the DMK, while participating in a discussion on the WMD Bill, said the real weapons of mass destruction were the rise in prices of essential commodities such as gas, milk and petrol, which affected the common man while the salary and wages remained the same.

Mr. Kalita asked the member to speak on the Bill and not derail the discussion as it was a matter of international commitment.

Manoj Jha of the Rashtriya Janta Dal said, “We are seeing a weapon of mass destruction and weapon of mass disruption in society” at an unimaginable scale and minds of many were poisoned in society.

NDA nominee Droupadi Murmu elected 15th President of India

Amid heavy cross-voting, she received 64.03% of the total valid votes polled

NISTULA HEBBAR
NEW DELHI

Former Jharkhand Governor and National Democratic Alliance (NDA) candidate Droupadi Murmu was elected the 15th President of India, the first tribal woman to be appointed to the position and the youngest as well.

She was declared elected on Thursday after four rounds of counting, though she had crossed the halfway mark after the third round of counting, posting an unsailable lead over her rival and the Opposition's candidate, Yashwant Sinha, who conceded the election thereafter.

After four rounds of polling, Ms. Murmu received 2,824 votes of 6,76,803 value, while Mr. Sinha received 1,877 votes of 3,80,177 value. She received 64.03% of the total valid votes polled, much more than what was openly declared in her support and pointing to the fact there had been a lot of cross-voting in Ms. Murmu's favour from the Opposition ranks.

"In my capacity as Returning Officer, I duly declare



Ultimate win: PM Narendra Modi with President-elect Droupadi Murmu in New Delhi on Thursday. ■PTI

that Smt. Droupadi Murmu has been duly elected as President of India," said P.C. Mody, Secretary-General of the Rajya Sabha, who was the Returning Officer for the election.

'India scripts history'

Prime Minister Narendra Modi was the first to greet Ms. Murmu at her residence in New Delhi after the third round of counting showed that she had crossed the halfway mark. "India scripts his-

tory. At a time when 1.3 billion Indians are marking *Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav*, a daughter of India hailing from a tribal community born in a remote part of eastern India has been elected our President!" tweeted Mr. Modi, adding that "Smt Droupadi Murmu's life, her early struggles, her rich service and her success motivates each and every Indian. She has emerged as a ray of hope for our citizens especially the poor, marginalised

and the downtrodden."

Ms. Murmu, who had been a former Governor of Jharkhand, hails from the Santhal tribe and was born in Mayurbhanj, coming up the hard way in life, graduating and teaching in Odisha before entering politics at the local body level and later being elected MLA and serving as a Minister from 2000 to 2004.

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Droupadi Murmu elected 15th President of India

She remained an MLA till 2009, representing Rairangpur in Odisha, a town that burst into celebrations since her name was announced as a candidate for the post of President of India. She holds the record of being the only Governor of Jharkhand till date to complete a full tenure, and was known to intervene in stopping amendments to the Chota Nagpur Tenancy Act that was being brought in by the BJP government of Raghubar Das, which involved changing land use in tribal areas.

Congratulatory messages poured out as her victory was assured, with Union Ministers Rajnath Singh, Amit Shah and BJP president J.P. Nadda also going in person to greet Ms. Murmu. Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla said Ms. Murmu “has always given voice to the hopes and aspirations of the people, understood their grievances and resolved them.”

Assam CM’s tweet

Ms. Murmu’s lead was substantial from the first round itself when votes of all MPs were counted, but by the third round, her unassailable lead had made it quite

clear that there had been much cross-voting in her favour across party lines. Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma in fact tweeted that in Assam, as many as 22 non-NDA MLAs had voted in favour of Ms. Murmu.

“Smt. Droupadi Murmu polled 104 votes compared to NDA’s original strength of 79 in the 126-member Assam Assembly. 2 Absent. My heartfelt gratitude to the people of Assam for reposing their faith in the NDA’s presidential candidate,” he said.

Election managers for the ruling coalition tracking the counting said that as many as 17 MPs and 126 MLAs had voted across party lines for Ms. Murmu. Apart from the 22 MLAs in Assam, the NDA claimed that Bihar saw six MLAs cross-vote, Gujarat saw 10, Jharkhand also saw 10 opposition MLAs vote in favour of her. Madhya Pradesh saw 19 MLAs cross-vote, while 16 did so in Maharashtra.

The massive cross-voting showed a larger scatter in the Opposition ranks over these polls, which had also seen a steady depletion in its ranks since the candidature of Ms. Murmu was announced.

Karnataka tops NITI Aayog innovation index list

Report suggests steps to secure a place among top 25 nations in the Global Innovation Index

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Karnataka has bagged the top rank in NITI Aayog's India Innovation Index, 2022, which determines innovation capacities and ecosystems at the sub-national level. The State has held this position, under the Major States category, in all three editions of the Index so far.

In the Index released on Thursday, Manipur secured the lead in the Northeast and Hill States category, while Chandigarh was the top performer in the Union Territories and City States category.

Karnataka was followed by Telangana, Haryana, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu. Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Bi-

Innovation index

The table lists the score and ranking of 17 major States in the third edition of NITI Aayog's India Innovation Index. Karnataka ranked first followed by Telangana and Haryana while Chhattisgarh, Odisha and Bihar were ranked at the bottom of the index



State	Score	Rank	State	Score	Rank
Karnataka	18.01	1	M.P.	12.74	13
Telangana	17.66	2	Gujarat	12.41	14
Haryana	16.35	3	Bihar	11.58	15
Maharashtra	16.06	4	Odisha	11.42	16
Tamil Nadu	15.69	5	Chhattisgarh	10.97	17

har and Gujarat were at the bottom of the index.

Pointing out that India's average innovation score is insufficient, given the coun-

try's ambitious targets to be named among the top 25 nations in the Global Innovation Index, the report by the government think tank has

recommended measures, such as increasing Gross Domestic Expenditure on R&D (GDERD), promoting private sector participation in R&D and closing the gap between industry demand and what the country produces through its education systems.

The report went on to state that countries that spend less on GDERD fail to retain their human capital in the long run and the ability to innovate is dependent on the quality of human capital; India's GDERD as a percentage of GDP stood at about 0.7%.

"Therefore, GDERD needs considerable improvement and should touch at least 2%,

which would play an instrumental role in India achieving the goal of 5 trillion economy," it suggested.

It added that the private sector needs to pick up pace in R&D.

Taking evidence from countries such as South Korea, and the U.S. where the presence of private players is evident, the report noted that public expenditure is productive up to some extent; once the growth follows a trajectory, it is desirable to shift to R&D mostly drive by the private sector. "Therefore, it is important for India to find that inflexion point after which private sector takes over the government sector," it added.

EXPLAINER

Kerala's fight against monkeypox

What are the various steps being taken by the State Health department to stop transmission? How does it help other States?

MAYA JOHN

The story so far: On July 14, Kerala detected the first case of monkeypox in the country in a 35-year-old, who had flown into Thiruvananthapuram from the UAE. Four days later, the authorities confirmed a second case, this time at Kannur again in a passenger from the UAE. While both patients are in isolation and treatment, the State Health department has strengthened surveillance and control measures across all districts.

Why did cases first surface in Kerala? As a State with four international airports, a sizeable expatriate population and being a globally favoured travel destination, the probability of any newly emerging pathogen first arriving at the shores of Kerala has always been high. The State Health authorities are, therefore, relieved that the health system managed to pick up the first two cases of monkeypox, an affirmation of the robustness and efficiency of the State's disease surveillance mechanism.

In Thiruvananthapuram as well as Kannur, the patients themselves had approached the doctors/authorities, raising the suspicion that they might have contracted monkeypox. Doctors point to the increased public awareness, the high level of clinical suspicion maintained by the medical fraternity about the new disease and the social commitment of the people that led to the detection of the monkeypox cases.

What are the steps being taken by Kerala?

One of the first public health messages sent out by the Health department was that there was no need for the public to panic as monkeypox was not a disease which could spread through the air like COVID-19.

However, the public needed to be vigilant about maintaining all universal precautions that were put in place when COVID-19 was

first reported.

As soon as the patient was isolated, close contacts were also isolated. A list of primary contacts for contact tracing was also drawn up. The contacts were put on symptom surveillance for 21 days and the respective districts were asked to monitor them closely.

Furthermore, monkeypox advisories were sent out to districts which resulted in the setting up of State and district-level monitoring cells. All districts were asked to set up isolation facilities in select hospitals and special ambulances to transport sick persons.

Next, all districts were asked to strengthen field-level surveillance of cases with fever and rashes along with one or more of these symptoms – enlarged lymph nodes, headache, bodyache and profound weakness. Help desks were set up at all airports, with trained health workers manning them.

The official confirmation of both monkeypox cases came from the National Institute of Virology (NIV), Pune. However, as part of the surveillance network, strengthening of in-house diagnostic facility was important to avoid delays in treatment. A monkeypox testing facility was thus made available at NIV's field unit at Alapuzha.

How should monkeypox cases be treated?

The Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) prepared by the Kerala government with regard to monkeypox is a detailed document which outlines the steps that need to be followed with regard to the isolation, treatment and sample collection of suspected and probable cases of the disease which are reported to the healthcare facilities of the State.

All healthcare institutions in the State in the public and private sector are expected to strictly follow the SOP when dealing with monkeypox or cases with similar symptoms. A person having a history of travel to

monkeypox-affected countries within the last 21 days and presenting an unexplained acute rash with one or more of the earlier mentioned symptoms is defined as a 'suspected case' under the SOP.

The SOP details how the samples are to be collected as per NIV's directives and the precautions that health personnel have to take when a case has to be transported in an ambulance.

What does this mean for other States?

The fact that monkeypox has not been documented in other States does not mean that the virus has not reached other parts of the country. Kerala detecting the first two cases from international travellers is a signal to other States to strengthen their surveillance networks, especially surveillance among travellers, so that source cases can be identified at the earliest and prevented from establishing other contacts in the community.

States will have to focus on creating more awareness about monkeypox and its transmission dynamics among the public, the medical community and health workers so that they learn to maintain a high index of suspicion when encountering cases of fever with rashes. While airport surveillance has a huge role, monkeypox has a long incubation period and it is possible that some passengers who may have been infected, may develop symptoms only much later. These cases can be detected from the community only if adequate awareness is created.

Is Kerala worried about community transmission of monkeypox?

Public health experts point out that given the transmission dynamics of monkeypox, the secondary attack rate of the virus is less than 10%, indicating that even amongst close family contacts of confirmed cases, the chances of monkeypox spreading are remote. In fact, the Health department



confirmed that two of the close contacts of the very first case of monkeypox had tested negative for the virus (they will however remain in surveillance for 21 days).

What is now worrying the health experts are reports from the U.K. and some other European nations that many recent cases of monkeypox have been presenting with atypical symptoms – sometimes with no fever at all and the lesions few or confined to the genital region. It was reported that for many of the recent cases, health authorities had no idea how the person contracted the virus. In Belgium, asymptomatic cases were also detected.

Extreme high-risk skin-to-skin contact seems to be the way in which the virus is getting transmitted and hence the Health department will also be tapping into its HIV surveillance network to sharpen surveillance and sensitise MSM (men who have sex with men) communities about the threat of a sustained transmission of monkeypox.

On guard: International passengers being screened at the Chennai airport following the detection of a case of monkeypox in Kerala. •PTI

THE GIST

■ On July 14, Kerala detected the first case of monkeypox in the country in a 35-year old returning from UAE. Four days later, the authorities confirmed a second case also in a passenger from UAE.

■ A Standard Operating Procedure prepared by the Kerala government with regard to monkeypox is a detailed document which outlines the steps that need to be followed with regard to the isolation, treatment and sample collection of suspected and probable cases of the disease which are reported to the healthcare facilities of the State.

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Banks' NPA ratio likely to fall to 5-5.55% by March 2024: S&P

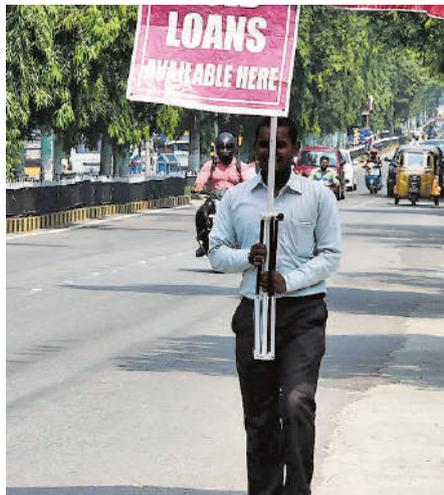
Agency sees credit costs stabilising at 1.5% for FY23

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

S&P Global Ratings on Thursday said non-performing loans of banks are expected to decline to 5-5.5% of the total advances by March 2024.

As per the RBI's latest Financial Stability Report, the gross non-performing assets (GNPA) declined to a six-year low of 5.9% in March 2022.

"We project the banking sector's weak loans will decline to 5-5.5% of gross loans by March 31, 2024," the rating agency said in a report. "Likewise, we forecast the credit costs to stabilise at 1.5% for fiscal 2023 and further normalise to 1.3%, making credit costs compar-



able to those of other emerging markets and India's 15-year average," it added.

The small and midsize enterprise sector and low-income households are vulnerable to rising interest rates and high inflation, but it expects these risks to be limited, S&P Global added.

With an economic pick-

up, residual stress for these segments should start abating, it said, adding that NPL recoveries are likely to also gain momentum.

'Risk management vital'

It also said India's economic growth prospects should remain strong over the medium term, with GDP expanding 6.5-7% annually in fiscal years 2024-2026. India's wide range of structural trends, including healthy demographics and competitive unit labour costs, work in its favour, it noted.

Still, if risk management does not improve, the coming growth cycle could produce a new crop of sour loans, the agency cautioned.

In Pegasus battle, the fight for surveillance reform

The gaps in an intrusive surveillance framework are causing severe harm to India's democratic ideals



ANUSHKA JAIN &
KRISHNESH BAPAT

A year has passed since the disclosures about the Pegasus Project revealed the threat to India's democracy. A leading digital news platform reported that the cellphones of at least 300 Indians had been hacked with Pegasus, the spyware from the Israel-based NSO Group; 10 of the cases were confirmed by Amnesty International's Security Lab using forensic analysis. The victims, important members of India's constitutional order, included cabinet Ministers, Opposition leaders, journalists, judges and human rights defenders.

India has been aware of the existence of Pegasus since October 30, 2019 when WhatsApp confirmed that the spyware has been used to exploit a vulnerability in its platform to target activists, academics, journalists and lawyers in India. Since then, NSO has been able to advance its technology, and Pegasus can now infect devices without any action on the user's part. Considering the severity of the threat posed by these disclosures, and the credibility of the evidence which backs them, it is important to examine how each branch of the Indian state has responded, or failed to respond, in protecting the privacy of citizens.

Official apathy, opacity

The expectation is that the executive will provide the first response and that government agencies will respond with action given the serious nature of the disclosures. But on July 19, 2021, the Minister of Electronics and Information Technology, Ashwini Vaishnaw, referring to "press reports of 18th July 2021", refused to directly address the claims made by the Pegasus Project; he stated that the existing legal framework prevents unauthorised surveillance.

On November 28, 2019, the former Minister of Electronics and Information Technology, Ravi

Shankar Prasad, had responded similarly to allegations over the use of Pegasus. A report by *The New York Times* of January 31, 2022 contradicted both their statements and stated that 'India has bought Pegasus in 2017 as part of a \$2-billion' defence package. The apathy shown by cabinet Ministers has been mirrored by specialised agencies.

In response to disclosures by the Pegasus Project, CERT-IN, the nodal agency, the Indian Computer Emergency Response Team, that deals with cybersecurity threats, has remained silent. However, WhatsApp's statement in 2019 did compel CERT-IN to issue notices to NSO and WhatsApp on November 26, 2019. But the agency has not provided any updates on what has transpired.

Under India's constitutional scheme, the legislature is responsible for holding the executive accountable. However, practice has failed to match principles. When on July 28, 2021, the IT Committee sought to question officials from the IT Ministry and the Home Ministry on Pegasus, members (primarily from the ruling party), according to news reports, abstained as a bloc and prevented a quorum. Previously, on November 19, 2019, those who had been targeted by Pegasus using a vulnerability in WhatsApp, wrote to the IT Committee which even discussed the issue. However, it has not provided any updates on its findings. Separately, in every parliamentary session since the revelations, the Opposition has sought a discussion and a probe. Both demands have been ignored.

Judicial response

When it became evident that no answers were forthcoming from the executive and the legislative branches, the victims turned towards the judiciary to seek redress. Thus, on August 5, 2021, the victims approached the Supreme Court of India where they demonstrated that forensic analysis had found their phones to have been infected.

On October 27, 2021, the Court constituted a technical committee to examine whether the spyware had been used on Indian citizens. Eight months have passed but the



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

committee has yet to arrive at any findings. In this period, the committee has been examining the phones of the victims and seeking comments from the public on surveillance reform. On May 20, 2022, it placed an 'interim report' before the Court asking for time to place the final report; this was granted. The case is now listed for the end of July 2022. While the top court is waiting for the technical committee to submit its report, on December 16, 2021 it restrained a Commission of Inquiry (constituted by the Government of West Bengal) from investigating whether the spyware had been used on residents of West Bengal.

No accountability

Perhaps commentators jumped the gun when they made the remark that Pegasus was India's 'Watergate Moment'. In the aftermath of Watergate, the institutional response in the United States held President Richard Nixon and others involved accountable, in which all branches of the state acted to check the abuse of power. But in India, the story continues to persist as one of official stonewalling with no accountability in sight.

Unlike the polity in India, other countries have responded to the Pegasus disclosures. Israel, for example, set up a senior inter-ministerial team to begin an investigation while the Foreign Minister, Yair Lapid, said that the government would work to ensure that Pegasus did not fall into the wrong hands. France ordered a series of investigations within a day of the revelations; on September 25, 2021, its cybersecurity agency confirmed that the spyware had been used to target French citizens. On November 3, 2021, the United States added NSO to its 'Entity List for Malicious Cyber Activities', which restricted the ability of U.S. companies to export goods or ser-

vices to NSO. In the United Kingdom, the spyware company implemented a change to ensure that Pegasus could no longer target U.K. numbers after revelations, in 2021, that Dubai's ruler, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, had used the spyware to hack the phones of his wife, Princess Haya, and her divorce lawyers, Baroness Fiona Shackleton and Nick Mannings, amid an ongoing custody battle.

The lack of accountability has spurred further violations. While the Pegasus victims in India wait for answers, there are documented instances of the advanced spyware being used in India against human rights defenders. Reports by a digital forensics consulting company, Arsenal Consulting (dated February 8, March 27, and June 21, 2021) revealed that two of the 16 accused in the Bhima Koregaon case, Rona Wilson and Surendra Gadling, had been targeted by a commercially available spyware, 'NetWire', for almost two years. The spyware was used to surveil and plant incriminating documents on their devices – documents which now form the basis of the National Investigation Agency's case against them.

The Indian 'surveillance for hire' industry is growing. These firms offer their services to anyone who can pay, following which they proceed to spy on indicated targets by hacking their devices. A Reuters report from June 30, 2022 termed these firms as "Indian cyber mercenaries" who were being used by litigants around the world to sway litigation battles. One such Indian company, BellTroX, was engaged in surveillance-for-hire activities and was one of the several entities Facebook investigated, identified, and removed from its platforms in December 2021. Much like what happened with the Pegasus Project, there has been no official response to both these reports.

Overhaul the laws

An overhaul of surveillance laws is necessary to prevent the indiscriminate monitoring of people and entities by the state and private actors. The Information Technology Act, 2000 and the Indian Telegraph Act 1885 which empow-

er the Government to surveil, concentrate surveillance powers in the hands of the executive, and do not contain any independent oversight provisions, judicial or parliamentary. These legislations are from an era before spyware such as Pegasus were developed, and, thus, do not respond to the modern-day surveillance industry.

Unfortunately, legislative proposals by the Union Government for surveillance reform do not exist. The proposed data protection law does not address these concerns despite proposals from members of the Joint Parliamentary Committee. Instead, the proposed law provides wide exemptions to the Government relating to select agencies from the application of the law; one which might be used to exempt intelligence and other law enforcement agencies. This gap in the surveillance framework has led to severe harm being caused to India's democratic ideals.

Endangered right

The past year has showcased why the need for comprehensive surveillance reform is so urgent. The Freedom House 'Freedom in the World' report – it tracks global trends in political rights and civil liberties – changed India's status from 'free' to 'partly free' in 2021. It has cited the alleged use of Pegasus on Indian citizens as one of the reasons for the downgrade. From targeting activists and journalists for civil and political purposes, to the targeting of litigants for commercial benefits, the surveillance industry is becoming increasingly accessible, and the nature of surveillance, exponentially intrusive. In the absence of immediate and far-reaching surveillance reform, and urgent redress to those who approach authorities against unlawful surveillance, the right to privacy may soon become obsolete.

Anushka Jain is the Associate Policy Counsel (Surveillance and Transparency) and Krishnesh Bapat is the Associate Litigation Counsel at the Internet Freedom Foundation. Mr. Bapat is representing victims of Pegasus in proceedings before the Supreme Court of India

EXPLAINER

One year since the Pegasus spyware revelations

How does the Pegasus spyware operate? Who does it target and why is the government under scrutiny?

P.J. GEORGE
SAPTAPARNO GHOSH

The story so far: The Supreme Court will be hearing the case pertaining to the alleged use of the Pegasus spyware software later this month. Last year, a consortium of 17 journalistic organisations globally put forth a list alleging the use of the spyware by the Union government to snoop on several prominent individuals. The matter first reached the apex court on October 27 last year. Back then, the court constituted a committee, overseen by former Supreme Court judge Justice R.V. Raveendran, to look into the charges and accordingly submit a report “expeditiously”.

What were the objectives of the committee?

The committee overseen by Justice R.V. Raveendran was mandated to inquire, investigate and determine, among other things, if Pegasus was used to eavesdrop on phones and other devices of Indian citizens. Details were sought on whether the government had taken any action after reports emerged in 2019 about WhatsApp accounts being hacked by the same spyware and if the government had indeed acquired such a suite. The article had alleged that Pegasus was part of a \$2 billion “package of sophisticated weapons and intelligence gear” between India and Israel after Narendra Modi became the first Indian Prime Minister to visit Israel. It added that it was after this deal that India changed its historically pro-Palestine stance.



What is Pegasus?

The Pegasus spyware can not only mop up information stored on phones such as photos and contacts, but can also activate a phone’s camera and microphone and turn it into a spying device without the owner’s knowledge.

The earliest avatars of Pegasus used spear phishing to enter phones, utilising a message designed to entice the target to click on a malicious link. However, it evolved into using “zero-click” attacks wherein the phones were infected without any action from the target individual. In 2019, WhatsApp released a statement saying that Pegasus could enter phones via calls made on the platform, even if they were not attended. Pegasus used several such “exploits” to enter Android and Apple phones. Many of these exploits were reportedly “zero day”, which meant that even the device manufacturers were unaware of these weaknesses. Pegasus can also be delivered through a nearby wireless transmitter, or manually inserted if the target phone is physically available. Once

inside the phone, Pegasus can start transmitting any data stored on the phone to its command-and-control centres.

How was Pegasus used in India?

Reports that appeared in July 2021 from the Pegasus Project, which includes *The Wire* in India, *The Guardian* in the U.K., and *The Washington Post* in the U.S., said that in India, at least 40 journalists, Cabinet Ministers, and holders of constitutional positions were possibly subjected to surveillance using Pegasus. The reports were based on a database of about 50,000 phone numbers accessed by the Paris-based non-profit Forbidden Stories and Amnesty International. These numbers were reportedly of interest to clients of the NSO Group (developer of the Pegasus software). According to *The Guardian*, Amnesty International’s Security Lab tested 67 of the phones linked to the Indian numbers in the database and found that “23 were successfully infected and 14 showed signs of attempted penetration”.

Since Pegasus is graded as a cyberweapon and can only be sold to authorised government entities as per Israeli law, most reports have suggested that the governments in these countries are the clients.

What has been the fallout?

The Indian government has so far neither confirmed nor denied that it has deployed Pegasus for any operation. In the wake of the Pegasus Project revelations, several petitions were filed

with the Supreme Court alleging that the government had indulged in mass surveillance in an attempt to muzzle free speech and democratic dissent. In response to the petitions, the Supreme Court asked the Centre to file a detailed affidavit regarding the use of Pegasus. However, the Centre refused to comply, arguing that such a public affidavit would compromise national security. Following this, the Supreme Court had appointed the expert panel led by Justice R.V. Raveendran. The Government has so far not responded to the *NYT* report, except for Minister of State Gen (Retd) V.K. Singh calling *The New York Times* a “supari” (hit-job) newspaper.

What do Indian laws outline?

Section 5(2) of The Indian Telegraph Act, 1885, states that the government can intercept a “message or class of messages” when it is “in the interests of the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the state, friendly relations with foreign states or public order or for preventing incitement to the commission of an offence”. The operational process for it appears in Rule 419A of the Indian Telegraph Rules, 1951. Rule 419A was added to the Telegraph Rules after the verdict in the *People’s Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) vs Union of India* case, in which the Supreme Court said telephonic conversations are covered by the right to privacy, which can be breached only if there are established procedures. Under Rule 419A, surveillance needs the sanction of the Home Secretary at the Central or State

level, but in “unavoidable circumstance” can be cleared by a Joint Secretary or officers above, if they have the Home Secretary’s authorisation. In the *K.S. Puttaswamy vs Union of India* verdict of 2017, the Supreme Court further reiterated the need for oversight of surveillance, stating that it should be legally valid and serve a legitimate aim of the government.

The second legislation enabling surveillance is Section 69 of the Information Technology Act, 2000. It facilitates government “interception or monitoring or decryption of any information through any computer resource” if it is in the interest of the “sovereignty or integrity of India, defence of India, security of the state, friendly relations with foreign States or public order” or for preventing or investigating any cognisable offence. The procedure for it is detailed in the Information Technology Rules, 2009.

These rules, according to Apar Gupta, lawyer and executive director of the Internet Freedom Foundation, are very broad and allow even the redirection of traffic to false websites or the planting of any device to acquire information. Mr. Gupta is of the opinion that the use of Pegasus is illegal as it constitutes unauthorised access under Section 66 of the Information Technology Act. Section 66 prescribes punishment to anyone who gains unauthorised access and “downloads, copies or extracts any data”, or “introduces or causes to be introduced any computer contaminant or computer virus,” as laid down in Section 43.

THE GIST

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■ The Pegasus spyware can not only mop up information stored on phones such as photos and contacts, but can also activate a phone’s camera and microphone and turn it into a spying device without the owner’s knowledge.

■ Reports that appeared in July 2021 said that in India, at least 40 journalists, Cabinet Ministers, and holders of constitutional positions were possibly subjected to surveillance using Pegasus. The Indian government has so far neither confirmed nor denied that it has deployed Pegasus for any operation.

India is watching developments near LAC: MEA

The 'right step' towards enabling progress in relations is disengagement, says Arindam Bagchi

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

India is keeping a "relentless watch" on the developments near the Line of Actual Control (LAC) with China and will take "necessary measures" to deal with steps that may affect India's security.

Addressing the weekly press briefing, official spokesperson of the Ministry of External Affairs, Arindam Bagchi, said that resolving the issues along the LAC in the western sector would help India-China relations.

"We had issued after the recent commander-level talks, a joint statement from the both sides wherein they talked about the importance of moving ahead and implement some of the agree-



An Indian soldier sits inside an upgraded L70 anti-aircraft gun near the LAC. ■ FILE PHOTO

ments and understandings they have reached. They talked about frank and in-depth exchange of views and about the resolution of the remaining issues at the earliest as per guidance provid-

ed by the state leaders," said Mr. Bagchi.

"Of course, our point is that if you can resolve the issues, particularly on disengagement that would help in the de-escalation and resto-

ration of peace and tranquility along the LAC in the western sector, it would be the right step towards enabling progress in the bilateral relation," said Mr. Bagchi.

He refused to respond to the report published in the *South China Morning Post* of Hong Kong about Beijing building a highway near Ladakh.

The highway from Lhunze county in Tibet to Mazha in Xinjiang in western China is among the 345 construction projects that are part of the proposed new national programme of China, the newspaper had reported.

Mr. Bagchi's comments came after the 16th round of military-level talks that was the latest in a long chain of

conversation between the military representatives of both sides since the deadly clashes of June 2020 at Galwan Valley.

Apart from the report of construction of a new highway near the western sector of the LAC, there are also reports that China has settled personnel in villages near the Doklam region in the tri-junction of India-Bhutan and Tibet.

Mr. Bagchi declined to get into the specifics of the report on Doklam but said India was "watching" and would take necessary measures. "India maintains a relentless watch on steps that can hurt India's security and will take necessary actions," said Mr. Bagchi.

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.