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Delhi HC steps in to bridge digital divide

- The Delhi High Court on Friday directed both private and government schools in the Capital to provide gadgets and Internet package free of cost to poor students for attending online classes, a verdict aimed at narrowing the COVID-19 pandemic-induced digital divide.

High Court observations:

- A Bench of Justices Manmohan and Sanjeev Narula said if a school decides to opt for online mode as a medium of instruction, it will have to ensure that students belonging to the economically weaker section (EWS) and disadvantaged group (DG) category also have access and are able to avail of the same.
- “To separate the EWS/DG students from others in the same class due to non-availability of a gadget/device would generate a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the class that may affect their hearts and minds unlikely ever to be undone (sic),” Justice Manmohan said.
- “We must also acknowledge that because of the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, there could be a tendency amongst the underprivileged children to abandon education for work,” Justice Narula said in a concurring verdict.
- “This likely fallout needs to be immediately addressed, otherwise the gap between the learning experiences of children from economically weaker sections and the relatively privileged children will widen,” Justice Narula said.
- The High Court said schools are erecting a financial barrier for EWS/DG category students by not providing the required equipment, preventing them from pursuing their elementary education as the pandemic rages.
- This, the court said, was in violation of Sections 3, 8, 12(1)(c) of the Right to Education Act, 2009.

Digital apartheid:

- Intra-class discrimination, especially between the 75% fee-paying students and the 25% EWS/DG students, upsets the level playing field and “amounts to discrimination as well as creates a vertical division, digital divide or digital gap or digital apartheid in addition to segregation in a classroom which is



violative of RTE, 2009, and Articles 14, 20 and 21 of the Constitution”, the court said.

- The Bench said private unaided schools will be entitled to claim reimbursement of reasonable cost for procurement of the gadget and Internet package from the government under Section 12(2) of the RTE Act.

Committee formed:

- The court also ordered the formation of a three-member committee, including the Central and Delhi Education Secretaries, within a week to expedite and streamline the process of identifying and supplying the gadgets to poor and disadvantaged students.
- The High Court’s direction came on a public interest litigation filed by NGO Justice for All through advocate Khagesh B. Jha, seeking direction to authorities to supply free laptops or mobile phones with high-speed Internet to EWS/DG students so they could attend online classes.

Media should not target minorities: SC

- A message needs to go out to the media that it cannot make a religious minority the target of its attacks, the Supreme Court said on Friday. The dignity of a community is as important as journalistic freedom, it noted.
- “We want a cohesive nation. We, as citizens and judges, are concerned about national security but we are also equally concerned about protecting human dignity... We, as a court, know what happened in the Emergency. So, we want a free flow of ideas. But we are also equally conscious about the right to dignity of a community,” Justice D.Y. Chandrachud, heading a three-judge Bench, observed.
- The court was hearing a plea for pre-telecast ban on a programme partially aired by Sudarshan TV on “UPSC Jihad”.
- The show, anchored by its editor-in-chief, Suresh Chavhanke, claims that members of the Muslim community are attempting to infiltrate the civil services. It raises questions about several organisations, such as the Zakat Foundation, which are run by Muslim community members.



- The show questions their funding and even accuses them of facilitating the “infiltration” of people with terror links into the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC).

‘National security plan for safe cyberspace soon’

National Cyber Security Strategy 2020:

The Union government is set to come up with National Cyber Security Strategy 2020 for ensuring a safe, secured, trusted and resilient cyber space, National Security Adviser Ajit Doval has said.

He was delivering the keynote address at c0c0n, the two-day virtual international conference on hacking and cybersecurity, being organised jointly by the Kerala police, the Society for the Policing of Cyber Space and the Information Security and Research Association.

Significance:

- Mr. Doval said that the proposed strategy aimed at bringing together all cybersecurity agencies for securing, strengthening and synergising the cybersecurity ecosystem by closely associating with businesses, citizens and beyond. He said that attempts were being made by adversaries to exploit the crisis in the wake of the pandemic through various misinformation, fake news and social media campaigns.
- He said that phishing campaigns using the COVID-19 theme targeted banks, defence and critical infrastructure during this period.

Increase in crime:

- “Malicious domains and websites to the tune of around 5,000 were registered in a short span of time. We have also witnessed an increase of 500% in cybercrime owing to people’s limited awareness and poor cyber hygiene. Financial frauds have also increased owing to the increased reliance on digital payment platforms,” he said.

RS passes Bill to slash salaries of MPs

- The Bill to reduce the salaries of parliamentarians by 30% for one year to meet the exigencies arising out of the COVID-19 pandemic was cleared by Rajya



Sabha on Friday even as the government came under a sharp attack from the Opposition for not cutting down on “luxuries” like the Central Vista redevelopment project and construction of a new Parliament building.

Salary, Allowances and Pension of Members of Parliament (Amendment) Bill, 2020:

- Lok Sabha had passed the Salary, Allowances and Pension of Members of Parliament (Amendment) Bill, 2020 bill earlier this week.
- It will replace the Salary, Allowances And Pension of Members of Parliament (Amendment) Ordinance, 2020, that was cleared by the Cabinet on April 6 and promulgated the next day.

‘Powers under AFSPA exceeded in Shopian’

- The Army on Friday said it has concluded the inquiry ordered into the Shopian encounter of July 18 and suggested that the powers vested under the **Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA)** were “exceeded during the operation”.
- During the operation, the powers vested under the AFSPA, 1990, were exceeded and the do’s and don’ts of Chief of Army Staff [COAS] as approved by the Supreme Court have been contravened.

Value Added Information

What does the AFSPA mean?

- In simple terms, AFSPA gives armed forces the power to maintain public order in “**disturbed areas**”.

Powers given to armed forces:

- They have **the authority to prohibit a gathering of five or more persons in an area, can use force or even open fire after giving due warning if they feel a person is in contravention of the law.**
- If reasonable suspicion exists, the army can also **arrest a person without a warrant; enter or search premises without a warrant; and ban the possession of firearms.**
- **Any person arrested or taken into custody may be handed over to the officer in charge of the nearest police station along with a report detailing the circumstances that led to the arrest.**



What is a “disturbed area” and who has the power to declare it?

- A disturbed area is one which is declared by notification under **Section 3 of the AFSPA**. An area can be disturbed due to differences or disputes between members of different religious, racial, language or regional groups or castes or communities.
- The **Central Government, or the Governor of the State or administrator of the Union Territory can declare the whole or part of the State or Union Territory as a disturbed area**. A suitable notification would have to be made in the Official Gazette. As per Section 3, it can be invoked in places where “the use of armed forces in aid of the civil power is necessary”.

What’s the origin of AFSPA?

- The Act came into force in the context of increasing violence in the Northeastern States decades ago, which the State governments found difficult to control. The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Bill was passed by both the Houses of Parliament and it was approved by the President on September 11, 1958. It became known as the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, 1958.

Has there been any review of the Act?

- On November 19, 2004, the Central government appointed a **five-member committee headed by Justice B P Jeevan Reddy** to review the provisions of the act in the north eastern states.
- The committee submitted its report in 2005, which included the following recommendations: (a) AFSPA should be repealed and appropriate provisions should be inserted in the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967; (b) The Unlawful Activities Act should be modified to clearly specify the powers of the armed forces and paramilitary forces and (c) grievance cells should be set up in each district where the armed forces are deployed.
- The 5th report of the **Second Administrative Reforms Commission on public order** has also recommended the repeal of the AFSPA.



To boost trade, Pak. plans to set up markets on Afghan, Iran borders

- Afghanistan and Iran to simultaneously boost trade with the both its neighbours, according to a media report on Friday.
- It also plans to curb the menace of smuggling that has dented the economies on both sides, said the report.
- According to a decision taken at a meeting chaired by Prime Minister Imran Khan on Thursday, initially the government would set up three markets — two in Balochistan and one in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa — as pilot projects, the Dawn newspaper reported.