



Current Affairs of the Day

- 10 PMs, WHO chief's staffer, Telegram founder targeted
- India signed 26 pacts to fight the drug menace
- 1.2 lakh Indian children lost caregivers: study
- IT panel to deliberate on Pegasus issue
- SC must take cognisance of Pegasus'
- 'Intelligence agencies not grounded in law'
- Meghalaya Cong. seeks to counter Assam Bill
- Govt. delays release of electoral bond data



10 PMs, WHO chief's staffer, Telegram founder targeted

1. Telephone numbers linked to 10 Prime Ministers, three Presidents and a King appeared on the list of potential targets for spying using the Pegasus spyware of the Israeli company NSO Group, according to reports.
2. The numbers connected with the World Health Organization, founder of the Telegram messaging app, are also on the list of numbers selected by NSO's clients.
3. France's Emmanuel Macron, Iraq's Barham Salih and South Africa's Cyril Ramaphosa are the Presidents on the list.
4. The Pakistan government has said it is investigating whether a number used by Mr Khan was compromised. India has rejected surveillance allegations, saying they have "no concrete basis or truth associated with it whatsoever."

India signed 26 pacts to fight the drug menace

1. India has signed 26 bilateral pacts, 15 memoranda of understanding and two agreements on security cooperation with different countries for combating illicit trafficking of narcotics, drugs and psychotropic substances, besides chemical precursors, according to a Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) reply in the Lok Sabha.
2. The Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) coordinated with various international organisations for sharing information and intelligence to combat transnational drug trafficking.
3. Sharp vigil, effective surveillance, public cooperation, source-based intelligence, sensitisation of field officials and associated measures had resulted in a gradual increase in the registration of a number of drug trafficking-related cases in the country, the MHA stated.
4. For digitisation of pan-India drug seizure data, the MHA has launched an e-portal called 'SIMS' (Seizure Information Management System) in 2019 for all the drug law enforcement agencies under the mandate of the Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act (NDPS).



1.2 lakh Indian children lost caregivers: study

1. As many as 1.19 lakh children in India lost their primary caregivers (one or both parents or one or both custodial grandparents) to COVID-19, placing the country after Mexico (1.4 lakh) and Brazil (1.3 lakh) in this figure, says a new study published in The Lancet.
2. Globally, this figure stood at 11.34 lakh between March 1, 2020, and April 30, 2021.
3. The study developed estimates of pandemic-associated orphanhood and caregiver deaths using excess mortality and deaths for 21 countries that accounted for 76.4% of the global deaths during the period.

IT panel to deliberate on Pegasus issue

1. The Standing Committee on Information Technology, headed by senior Congress leader Shashi Tharoor, will deliberate on the use of the Pegasus spyware against nearly 300 persons in India.
2. Officials of the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Department of Telecommunications have been summoned to depose on the subject — “Citizens’ data security and privacy”.
3. The committee has had several rounds of meetings on the subject. It was also deliberated in two meetings held in November 2019. The panel has not submitted a report so far because the investigation remained inconclusive. The Union government has neither confirmed nor denied its involvement in the snooping episode targeting activists in 2019.

SC must take cognisance of Pegasus’

1. West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee urged the Supreme Court to take suo motu cognisance of the Pegasus spyware issue and asked all the Opposition parties to form a united front against the BJP without delay.
2. Either take suo motu cognisance or set up an SIT [Special Investigation Team] monitored by the court to know whose phones were affected. Only the judiciary can save democracy.



'Intelligence agencies not grounded in law'

1. The use of NSO Group's Pegasus spyware against Opposition leaders, activists, judges and journalists would not have occurred if intelligence agencies were grounded in law and with provisions for holding them accountable.
2. In 2011, Mr Tewari had moved a private member's Bill in the Lok Sabha — the Intelligence Services (Powers and Regulation) Bill — that sought to bring "appropriate statutory basis" for intelligence agencies. It also dealt with the question of balancing the demands of security and privacy of individuals.
3. Mr Tewari listed an improved version of the Bill in 2019, but since the beginning of the 17th Lok Sabha, private members' business has not been taken up.
4. The problem in India is that both the law enforcement and intelligence organisations do not have a sound legal basis.
5. Mr Tewari pointed to a November 2013 Gauhati High Court judgment, which called the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) "illegal". For the past eight years, the CBI's existence hung by the thread of a stay, as the Supreme Court had so far not adjudicated on the legality of the organisation that had the authority to deprive people of their life and liberty, he stated.
6. To a question raised by Mr Tewari in 2009 on the legal basis of the Intelligence Bureau (IB) and the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), the government admitted that the RAW had no basis in law. The IB, it stated, derived its existence from being on the Union List.
7. It creates a spectre of completely unbridled power when you have organisations functioning without any legal framework that has the ability to transgress in the personal lives of the citizens.

Oversight:

1. The world over, he observed, intelligence agencies were governed by law.
2. In each evolved democracy, intelligence agencies are subject to very rigorous parliamentary oversight. There are specific parliamentary committees that look at their functioning so that excess does not get committed. Unfortunately,



in India, there is a complete absence of even a public discussion on how to hold the agencies accountable.

3. If this law had been in place, something like Pegasus would not have happened.

Meghalaya Cong. seeks to counter Assam Bill

1. The Congress in Meghalaya has asked the Conrad K. Sangma government to come up with a law to counter Assam's Cattle Protection Bill, 2021, which seeks to restrict the transport of bovine creatures within and through the State.
2. Beef is part of the diet in some Christian-majority north-eastern States, primarily Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland. Geography makes these States depend on the transportation of most food items through Assam.
3. Section 7 of the Assam Bill is in contravention of the Constitution of India as inter-State trade and commerce fall under the Union List of the Seventh Schedule and no State has the authority to regulate inter-State trade and commerce except by the rule of law passed by Parliament.

Govt. delays release of electoral bond data

1. A day after the Finance Ministry told the Rajya Sabha that it needed more time to furnish data on the sale of electoral bonds asked by an MP, activist Kanhaiya Kumar said that the details had been provided to him by the State Bank of India two months ago in reply to his Right to Information application.
2. Mr Kumar, a Bihar-based RTI activist, received the reply from the SBI, the only bank authorised to sell the bonds. The SBI reply said bonds worth ₹695.34 crores had been sold from April 1 to 10.
3. The SBI declined to share the details of the parties that encashed them and the commission it earned from the sales.