

FAQs

Havana Syndrome

Why is it in News?

Recently, two US officials have shown symptoms of a mystery illness that is linked to Havana Syndrome.

- In 2020, a report by the National Academies of Sciences (NAS), US found directed microwave radiation to be the plausible cause of the Havana syndrome.
- Increasing number of cases is being considered a mass psychogenic illness.

What is meant by Mass Psychogenic Illness?

Mass psychogenic illness is when people in a group start feeling sick at the same time even though there is no physical or environmental reason for them to be sick. They could think they've been exposed to something dangerous, like a germ or a toxin (poison).

What is Havana Syndrome?

- In late 2016, a few diplomats from the USA and their employees had reported certain usual symptoms during their stay in Havana, Cuba.
 - They experienced some odd physical sensations and heard peculiar sounds, after which they started feeling sick.
 - The US had even accused Cuba of carrying out sonic attacks. But Cuba denied the accusations of the sonic attacks and refused awareness of any such illness or syndrome.
 - Ever since many bodies and institutions have been researching the cause of the Havana syndrome and many plausible factors have been discovered till date.
 - The symptoms of the syndrome include Nausea, Severe headaches, Fatigue, Dizziness, Sleep problems, Hearing loss.
 - A few of those who had been affected more faced chronic issues like vestibular processing and cognitive problems.

What are Microwave Weapons?

- **Microwave Weapons:**
 - They are a type of direct energy weapons, which aim highly focused energy in the form of sonic, laser, or microwaves, at a target.

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- They release electromagnetic radiations which cause sensations in the human body.

Which Countries have Microwave Weapons?

- A number of countries are thought to have developed these weapons to target both humans and electronic systems.
- China had first put on display its microwave weapon, called Poly WB-1, at an air show in 2014.
- The US has also developed a prototype microwave-style weapon, which it calls the “Active Denial System”, which is the first non-lethal, directed-energy, counter-personnel system with an extended range greater than currently fielded non-lethal weapons.

What are India’s Plans for Directed Energy Weapons?

- Recently, the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) has announced its plans to develop (DEWs) using high-energy lasers and microwaves.
- Development of DEWs is seen as particularly important in the context of India’s worsening security environment, especially its ties with China.

What are concerns related with this?

- These weapons are a cause of concern as they can affect both machines and human beings.
- They can cause long-term damages without leaving a single mark on the human body.