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NEWS JUICE

Intelligent Compilation from The Hindu, Indian Express & others along with News Background

NEWS HEADLINES

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What is News Juice?

BY PREPMATE



1. Pegasus spyware issue

Relevant for GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Science & Technology

Pegasus spyware use in India

At least a 1,000 Indian phone numbers are in a list of potential targets of surveillance using the Pegasus spyware sold by Israeli company the NSO Group to “vetted governments” with the approval of the Israeli government.

Of these, 300 numbers have been verified; 22 phones were subjected to forensic analysis by Amnesty International and peer reviewed by University of Toronto’s Citizen Lab. Of these, 10 were clearly established as being targeted by Pegasus; eight of the other 12 yielded inconclusive results. The evidence is strong, and the credibility of these revelations is extremely high. Indian citizens were indeed targets of a vicious, abominable and uncivil surveillance campaign by a government entity, Indian or foreign.

View of GOI

The buck stops with the Government of India. Instead of coming clean and explaining what it intends to do to protect citizens, the GoI has fallen back on a disingenuous claim that no illegal surveillance is possible in India. There are legal provisions for intercepting communication and accessing digitally stored information in the interests of national security and public safety. The capture of a handheld machine by Pegasus turns that into a real-time spy on the target who can be watched over and followed every step. This surveillance is total, into their private and intimate lives, which have no bearing on any public interest.

Who was targeted?

The cohort of people who were potential targets — journalists, politicians, probably a Supreme Court judge and a former Election Commissioner — does not indicate that the surveillance was necessitated by national security or public safety concerns.

It is safe to assume that no information regarding terrorism or Chinese intrusion can be obtained by spying on a woman who complained of sexual harassment by a former CJI. On the contrary, the composition suggests that private craving, turpitude and even voyeurism motivated the perpetrators. This violation is about privacy and much more. Information obtained illegally may have been used to compromise institutions, to steal elections, sabotage Opposition campaigns, and even dislodge an Opposition government. That the accused in the Bhima Koregaon case had their computers breached by unknown entities to plant evidence that the prosecution is now using against them is notable in this context. That state agencies can trample upon the lives of citizens in such manner while elected representatives plead ignorance is unsettling for a democracy. This is antithetical to the basic creed of democracy.

What is required?

The truth about these revelations must be unearthed through an investigation by a JPC or by the Supreme Court or any other credible mechanism. A starting point for the Government must be in clearing the air on the foremost question it is skirting around — has any Indian agency bought Pegasus?

Source: The Hindu

2. The Hundred – cricket’s fourth format ready to take off in England

Relevant for GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Miscellaneous

English cricket makes an audacious dive into the unknown with the launch of The Hundred — a unique 100 balls per side format, touted as the game’s fourth version — on Wednesday. Cricket already has three formats at international level — five-day Tests, 50-over duels, and T20s. Even though T20s have been conceptualised in England, the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) believes a slimmer version is needed to attract a younger and more ethnically diverse audience to the game. “The idea behind The Hundred is to bring mums and kids during the summer holidays,” Andrew Strauss, former director of England cricket had said.

The ECB had plans of kick-starting this competition last year before the pandemic derailed their plans. The Hundred will consist of eight franchises, featuring men’s and women’s teams, beginning on July 21 with the women’s match between Oval Invincibles and Manchester Originals at The Oval.

How is The Hundred different from a T20 game?

As the name suggests, The Hundred will feature 100 balls per innings, 20 less than a traditional T20 game, with a duration of two and a half hours. The six-ball overs are done away with in this competition, and replaced by a set of five deliveries known as ‘fives’. The umpire will hold a white card to signal the end of the first set of fives. It’s the fielding captain’s discretion whether to allow a particular bowler to bowl 10 balls (two consecutive fives) from one end or one ‘five’. There’s a two-minute timeout that a fielding side can take after the first 25 balls, though it’s not mandatory. The term ‘batsman’ does not exist in The Hundred. It’s replaced by a gender-neutral term called batter.

A few other changes are as follows:

* A bowler can bowl up to four ‘fives’.

* The first 25 balls in each innings will be a Powerplay, where only two fielders are allowed to be stationed outside the inner ring.

* In The Hundred, no-balls are worth two runs, followed by a free-hit.

* A fielding captain can station a maximum of up to five fielders on the leg-side.

- * If a fielding team doesn't finish its quota within the allotted time, they will have to bring an extra fielder inside the ring till the time they end the innings.
- * Unlike in a T20 game, the non-striker does not take strike even if he has crossed during a dismissal.
- * An amended Duckwoth-Lewis-Stern method, which will look at the number of balls and not overs during rain-hit games.
- * In case of a tie in the group stage, both teams will earn one point each.
- * If it's a tie in the knockout stage, a 'Super Five' tie-breaker will be used. If the second Super Five is also tied, the team that finished higher on the ladder during the group stage will progress.

Why does English cricket need this format?

Simpler and shorter when compared with the T20, The Hundred is aimed at making the game more accessible to a wider audience, especially mothers and kids. The popularity of the Indian Premier League has prompted the ECB to create its own prototype, one that's unique and stood out from the rest. In an interview with Sky Sports, Tom Harrison, while terming The Hundred as "a profit centre", reckoned the cricket board would stand to earn upto £11m as profits by staging the Hundred this year — inclusive of broadcasting rights, sponsorship deals, tickets sale and merchandising. Harrison argued this would help ECB tide over most of the losses incurred during the last 18 months due to the pandemic.

If that's the case, why are people opposed to The Hundred?

The Hundred is termed gimmicky and unwelcome addition to an already congested calendar. The ECB has also received considerable flak for downplaying the intelligence of their target audience — "mums and kids" — by suggesting that conventional cricket was too complicated a sport for them to understand.

Critics have also labelled it an "attempt to reduce the number of counties by stealth." The home-grown 50-over domestic tournament, which was a showpiece event in the English summer, has now lost its sheen, with the final being played on Thursday, and not on a weekend. In essence, this will see an exodus of players to The Hundred, with counties like Surrey losing a dozen players. Resultantly, many feel the level of competition in domestic cricket will reduce considerably. In a similar vein, the T20 Vitality Blast is now being squeezed into a smaller window. Even the first-class fixtures' itinerary have been scuttled around — played between April and May and the second half during September — thereby giving The Hundred a much bigger stage.

Are Indians participating in this competition?

There are no Indians from the men's team in The Hundred's draft because the Board of Control for Cricket in India does not allow them to participate in overseas franchise events.

However, five women cricketers will be participating in this competition. They include Shafali Verma, Harmanpreet Kaur, Jemimah Rodrigues, Smriti Mandhana, and Deepti Sharma.

Have international players withdrawn due to the pandemic?

Yes, there has been a spate of withdrawals by international players due to the pandemic, bio-bubble fatigue, and travel restrictions. It's not the start ECB had hoped for. Australia's David Warner and Glenn Maxwell, New Zealand's Kane Williamson, South Africa's Kagiso Rabada, and Pakistan's Shaheen Shah Afridi are some of the big names to have pulled out from the men's event, while Australia's Meg Lanning, Ellyse Perry, and Alyssa Healy will not be available in the women's competition.

What does the future hold for cricket's diet version?

Without the presence of major international players, it remains to be seen whether people will come in hordes to the stadiums or plant themselves in front of their television sets to watch The Hundred. Despite the surfeit of T20 leagues mushrooming across the globe, it's too early to predict whether ECB's dream 100-ball project will bring about the next big revolution in cricket.

Source: The Indian Express

3. China's heaviest rain in 1,000 years, resulting in devastating floods

Relevant for GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Environment

Horrifying visuals of overturned cars and people trapped in flooded subways and streets of China have inundated social media in the past three days. A video by the China Xinhua News shows commuters in neck-deep water inside a metro line at the Zhengzhou city, which has a population of over 1.2 crore citizens, as they wait for rescuers to arrive.

At least 25 people, including 12 subway passengers, have been killed in the downpour so far, as China's central Henan province witnesses its heaviest rainfall in a 1,000 years. Officials have stated that Zhengzhou recorded 617.1 mm rainfall from Saturday to Tuesday, nearly the same as the annual average rainfall in the city (640.8 mm).

According to state-run media, a total of 1.24 million people were affected by the flooding and as many as 1,60,000 were evacuated. Seven individuals have been reported as missing, while two were killed due to a wall collapse. Not just subways, streets, hotels, and a large number of buildings were waterlogged, bringing the city's public transport to a halt. The Shaolin Temple, a sanctuary for Buddhist monks, has also been reportedly hit by severe floods.

China floods: The damage and the rescue efforts

As meteorologists predict more rain across the Henan province for the next three days, President Xi Jinping deployed as many as 5,700 People's Liberation Army soldiers to the city, nearly 650 km southwest of Beijing, for search and rescue operations.

Visuals on CGTN show firefighters rescuing 150 children and staff from a school in the Zhengzhou city. While hospitals and schools have been cut-off, libraries, cinemas and museums have also turned into shelters for those stranded in the torrential rains. Reuters reported that the First Affiliated Hospital of Zhengzhou, the city's largest with more than 7,000 beds, lost all power, prompting officials to arrange transport for nearly 600 critically ill patients.

On Wednesday, Xi took note of the "significant loss of life and damage to property." The state media quoted him as saying that the rainfall has made the flood control situation very severe, with water levels in alarming levels in rivers and damages to dams. While sections of railways have been suspended, several flights have also been cancelled.

The downpour has led to the breach of several dams. Local authorities in the Luoyang city reported a 20-metre breach in the Yihetan dam, fearing it could collapse any time. On Tuesday night, the military blasted the dam to release the floodwaters. In Zhengzhou, the Guojiazui reservoir has been breached but there have been no reports of a dam failure yet. The president ordered all authorities to organise flood relief forces and highlighted the need to minimise casualties as well as take care of hygiene and disease control to prevent epidemics.

What has caused the heavy flooding in China?

The South China Morning Post has reported that the incoming Typhoon In-Fa is responsible for the heavy rainfall. The typhoon, along with the air currents, has carried atmospheric water, concentrating at the Zhengzhou city, which is surrounded by the Taihang and Funiu mountains.

However, China's flooding isn't unprecedented. The country sees severe water-logging every year, causing loss of life and property. However, over the years, the impact has worsened with climate change and rapid urbanisation. As more of the land gets covered with impermeable concrete, the risk of water-logging at the surface increases. Last year, floods in the country left more than 200 people dead or missing and caused \$25 billion in direct damage.

Zhengzhou city sits on the banks of the Yellow River, the second longest river in China, which is another reason why it's harder to control floods in the area. The country has relied on man-made dams and reservoirs to mitigate flooding, but with extreme rainfall, the dams are unable to hold water. Officials in the past have also raised concerns over the strength of the Three Gorges Dam, the world's biggest hydroelectric station, built on the Yangtze River, as rainfalls get heavier over the years.

According to Li Shuo, a climate analyst for Greenpeace East Asia, the floods “ring an alarm bell for China that climate change is here,” news agency AFP reported. Another expert, Benjamin Horton, director of the Earth Observatory of Singapore, stated that with global warming, the Earth’s atmosphere holds more moisture, resulting in heavier downpours.

Is the rest of the world seeing effects of climate change?

Climate change has caused extreme weather conditions all over the world. The western countries of US and Canada were hit by severe heat waves, resulting in heavy loss of life. Similarly, Jacobabad, located in the Sindh province of Pakistan, saw temperatures rising well above human tolerance, at a life-threatening 52 degrees Celsius.

Germany, too, saw devastating floods, killing at least 196 people in Western Europe. India witnessed back-to-back cyclones Tauktae and Yaas at its east and west coast, respectively. The monsoon, too, saw an advanced onset for at least half of the country, coming to a complete halt for states like Haryana, Punjab and Delhi, which witnessed severe heatwaves as they awaited rainfall. In fact, new research suggests that global warming is making India’s monsoon wetter and more dangerous.

Source: The Indian Express

4. UK is balking at the Northern Ireland protocol. So, what is that?

Relevant for GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Issues

First came the shortages on supermarket shelves. Then the “sausage wars” over the supply of chilled meat. Now, the rift over post-Brexit trade rules for Northern Ireland is threatening to become a full-scale confrontation between Britain and the European Union — and one that could upset the United States, too.

On Wednesday, Britain said that a Brexit treaty on Northern Ireland, negotiated by Prime Minister Boris Johnson and called the Northern Ireland Protocol, could create so many problems that it might have to be abandoned if it cannot be rewritten. The European Commission, the EU’s executive body, said it would seek creative solutions but would not renegotiate the deal.

For critics of Johnson, the latest statement is evidence of his lack of trustworthiness, his willingness to break international commitments and his denial of responsibility for the consequences of the withdrawal from Europe he championed. Johnson’s allies accuse the EU of inflexibility in applying rules, a pettifoggish lack of sensitivity to feelings in parts of Northern Ireland and vengeful hostility toward Britain for exiting the bloc.

Behind all the bluster lie fears about the fragility of the Northern Ireland peace, and that raises the stakes beyond those of typical trade disputes. President Joe Biden, who talks

often about his Irish heritage, has already warned Johnson not to do anything to undermine the Good Friday Agreement that helped to end the violence.

What is the Northern Ireland Protocol?

It's fair to say that however spy thriller-like the name, this dry legal text won't be found on most people's summer beach lists.

The protocol aims to resolve one of the thorniest issues created by Brexit: what to do about the border between Northern Ireland, which is part of the United Kingdom, and the Republic of Ireland, which remains part of the EU.

This frontier is contested, and parts of it were fortified during the decades of violence known as The Troubles. But after a peace deal in the late 1990s, those visible signs of division have melted away along the open border. No one wants checkpoints back, but as part of his Brexit plan, Johnson insisted on leaving Europe's customs union and its single market, which allows goods to flow freely across European borders without checks.

The protocol sets out a plan to deal with this unique situation. It does so by effectively leaving Northern Ireland half inside the European system, and half inside the British one. It sounds neat — logical, even — until you try to make it work.

Why doesn't Britain like it?

The plan means more checks on goods entering Northern Ireland from mainland Britain, effectively creating a border down the Irish Sea and dividing the UK. Faced with all the new bureaucracy, some British companies have stopped supplying stores in Northern Ireland, saying they simply can't handle the added paperwork now needed.

This has enraged some Conservative lawmakers and inflamed sentiment among those in Northern Ireland who want the region to remain part of the UK. The unionists, mostly Protestants, identify as British and believe the changes could threaten their future in the UK.

So, while not being able to get the right kind of sausages might seem like a small inconvenience, to many unionists, it feels as if their British identity is what's in the fryer.

Why is the EU insisting on it?

The bloc has dug in its heels, partly because not only did Johnson sign on to the protocol, but he also negotiated it himself and pushed it through the British Parliament.

British critics accuse the Europeans of being overly rigorous and legalistic in their interpretation of the protocol, and of being overzealous in the checks required.

But EU leaders believe that the bloc's existential interests are being put at risk. For Brussels, the single market is one of its cornerstones. If that is undermined, it could threaten the building blocks of European integration.

What about those sausages?

Under the protocol, foods with animal origins — yes, like sausage — coming from mainland Britain into Northern Ireland need health certification to ensure they meet European standards should they end up in Ireland, which, of course, is still part of the EU's single market.

The British want a light-touch system — that is, one in which there are minimal checks — on goods that companies promise will stay in Northern Ireland.

But the EU wants Britain to sign up to Europe's health certification rules to minimize the need for controls. So far, many of the regulations have been waived during a "grace period," but that is scheduled to end later this year.

What would happen if Britain withdrew from the protocol?

Britain says it has grounds already to deploy an emergency clause known as Article 16 that permits it to act unilaterally, effectively allowing it to suspend parts of the protocol. It doesn't plan to do so for the moment, but the option remains on the table.

If Britain does this, the European side will most likely accuse Johnson of breaking a treaty. This could lead to retaliation and even a trade war between Britain and the EU.

Is this all just a negotiation tactic?

That's likely.

During the endless Brexit talks, Johnson often played hardball with the Europeans, sometimes relying on a so-called madman strategy and threatening to quit the bloc without any deal at all.

So, this may just be another roll of the negotiating dice, and most analysts believe that, for the British, the best outcome would be winning concessions on the protocol from Brussels.

But isn't it risky?

Yes, because ultimately Johnson has no real alternative to the protocol short of ripping it up and daring the Republic of Ireland to resurrect the Irish border. That could inflame sectarian tensions in Northern Ireland, provoke a trade war with Brussels and heighten tension with the Biden administration.

Leaving aside the impact on Northern Ireland, that wouldn't be an ideal backdrop for the UN climate change conference that Johnson is to host in Glasgow, Scotland, later this year — a moment when he will need international allies.



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Source: The Indian Express



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