

The Resurgent India

A Monthly National Review

August 2021



“Let us all work for the Greatness of India.”

– The Mother

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Successful Future

(Full of Promise and Joyful Surprises)

Botanical name: Gaillardia Pulchella

Common name: Indian blanket, Blanket flower, Fire-wheels

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A DECLARATION

We do not fight against any creed, any religion.

We do not fight against any form of government.

We do not fight against any social class.

We do not fight against any nation or civilisation.

We are fighting division, unconsciousness, ignorance, inertia and falsehood.

We are endeavouring to establish upon earth union, knowledge, consciousness, Truth, and we fight whatever opposes the advent of this new creation of Light, Peace, Truth and Love.

— The Mother

(Collected works of the Mother, Vol. 13, pp. 124-25)

AFGHANISTAN FIASCO: A DEEPER PERSPECTIVE FOR INDIA IN THE INSPIRING WORDS OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

Last month, on July 8, The US President Joe Biden announced that America’s “military mission in Afghanistan will conclude on August 31st.” In the time since the statement, the Taliban offensive has overrun city after city across the country. Finally, on Sunday, August 15th, the militant group entered the Afghan capital of Kabul, and seizing the presidential palace, practically took the reign of the country in its hand.

As the Afghan Military put virtually no resistance, the Taliban, in a statement, said its rapid gains showed it was popularly accepted by the Afghan people. The Islamic Emirate, as the Taliban calls itself, “will, as always, protect their life, property and honour, and create a peaceful and secure environment for its beloved nation,” it said.

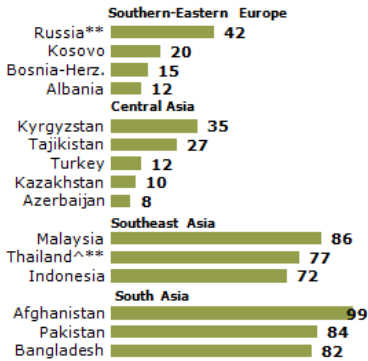
While the US and several other countries, including India, are hurriedly evacuating their embassies and citizens, amid a lot of rhetoric and opinionated noise, we hear an interesting statement by Imran Khan, the Pakistan’s Prime Minister. He said, “You take over the other culture and become psychologically subservient. When that happens, please remember, it is worse than actual slavery. It is harder to throw off the chains of cultural enslavement. What is happening in Afghanistan now, they have broken the shackles of slavery.”¹ Certainly, the Taliban does not exist in vacuum. The society must have provided the soil and seed. Other external factors might just have provided water. Findings of a research² done by Pew in 2013 showed that even after living in

¹<https://www.independent.co.uk/asia/south-asia/taliban-pakistan-imran-khan-afghanistan-b1903821.html>

² <https://www.pewforum.org/2013/04/30/the-worlds-muslims-religion-politics-society-beliefs-about-sharia>

Favor or Oppose Making Sharia the Law of the Land?

% of Muslims who favor making Islamic law the official law in their country



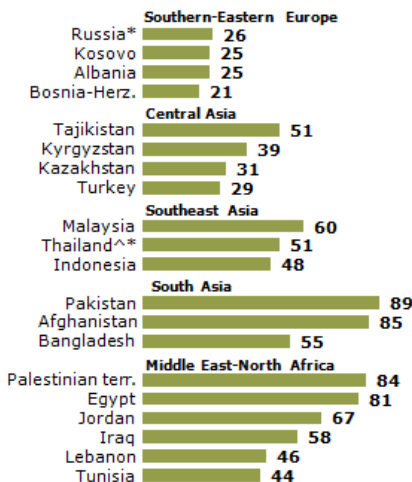
the liberal regime for more than 10 years, 99 percent of people in Afghanistan favored making Sharia, the Islamic Law, the official law in their country. In Pakistan (89%) and Afghanistan (85%), more than eight-in-ten Muslims who want Islamic law as their country's official law say adulterers should be stoned, and almost same percentage of the people, 76% and 79% respectively, support taking

lives of those who convert to other faiths.

Muslims who pray several times a day are more likely to say sharia is the revealed word of God, to say that it has only one

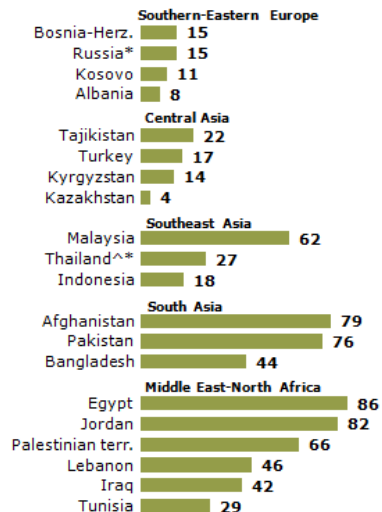
Stoning as Punishment for Adultery

Among Muslims who say sharia should be the law of the land, % who favor stoning as a punishment for adultery



Death Penalty for Leaving Islam

Among Muslims who say sharia should be the law of the land, % who favor the death penalty for converts



interpretation and to support the implementation of Islamic law in their country. There are 26 predominantly Muslim countries which have anchored Islam or a specific form of it in their constitution as a state religion. Among them 8 countries³ – Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Mauritania, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Yemen – are Sharia ruled.

The above research and also increasing numbers of sharia zones in even most liberal and developed countries, compels one to conclude that these people are rooted in their faith, however barbaric or savage it may be or seem to our sensibilities. Reform, if any, must come from within and can't be imposed from outside. In the absence of reforms the cult may collapse under its own weight and inner conflicts.

Of course, this doesn't mean that the Taliban or its ideology and culture must be hailed and supported. Certainly, it is a barbaric cult and its invasion of the country would be regressive according to the modern notions of development, perhaps leading it back to the stone age. But then, isn't it quite undemocratic to impose democracy on a population where a majority doesn't want it at all?

Besides, do our modern scientific developments along with the western notions of liberty and equality really take us, or the world, forward? And forward to where? Recent crisis of 'Covid-19' pandemic, which is apparently the outcome of such 'development' and which brought the world to its knees, proves otherwise. Prospect of the unbridled so-called development is perhaps a complete annihilation of mankind, or any 'kind', from the earth. In two of our publications, "The Truth About Modern Polity" and "The Truth About Economic Development", we have elaborated the subject in detail. To quote a passage from one of the publications, **"These latest flowers of modern man's efforts – Democracy and Capitalism – have been successful in**

³ <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/countries-that-follow-sharia-law.html>

cultivating a more and more acute and shortsighted spirit of utilitarianism among the masses. This is perhaps one of the grossest expressions of man's egoism and selfishness."⁴

At present India has to chart its course out of two opposite attractions that it has been facing since the nineteenth century and still does – the move towards the orthodox religious spirit or the modern materialistic scientific culture of the West. With the new revival of the nationalistic Hindu spirit this struggle, which seemed to have been moving decisively towards the materialism of the West during the last seventy years after Independence, has become animated again. Even though there is practically hardly any risk of India falling into any kind of orthodoxy, whether native (Hindu, Sikh, Jain, Buddhist) or semitic (Muslim or Christian) still we cannot completely rule out the possibility. More than a hundred years ago, Swami Vivekananda – seeing behind appearances with his penetrating spiritual gaze – had seen this issue very clearly. He stated, "There are two great obstacles on our path in India, the Scylla of old orthodoxy and the Charybdis of modern European civilisation. Of these two, I vote for the old orthodoxy, and not for the Europeanised system; for the old orthodox man may be ignorant, he may be crude, but he is a man, he has a faith, he has strength, he stands on his own feet; while the Europeanised man has no backbone, he is a mass of heterogeneous ideas picked up at random from every source – and these ideas are unassimilated, undigested, unharmonised. He does not stand on his own feet, and his head is turning round and round. Where is the motive power of his work? – in a few patronizing pats from the English people. His schemes of reforms, his vehement vituperations against the evils of certain social customs, have, as the mainspring, some European patronage. Why are some of our customs called evils? Because the Europeans say so. That is about the reason he gives. I would not submit to that. Stand and die in your own strength, if there is any sin in the world, it

⁴ The Truth about Modern Polity, Page 76.

is weakness; avoid all weakness, for weakness is sin, weakness is death. These unbalanced creatures are not yet formed into distinct personalities; what are we to call them – men, women, or animals? While those old orthodox people were staunch and were men. ... **Stand on your own feet, and assimilate what you can; learn from every nation, take what is of use to you. But remember that as Hindus everything else must be subordinated to our own national ideals. Each man has a mission in life, which is the result of all his infinite past Karma. Each of you was born with a splendid heritage, which is the whole of the infinite past life of your glorious nation. Millions of your ancestors are watching, as it were, every action of yours, so be alert. And what is the mission with which every Hindu child is born? Have you not read the proud declaration of Manu regarding the Brahmin where he says that the birth of the Brahmin is “for the protection of the treasury of religion”? I should say that that is the mission not only of the Brahmin, but of every child, whether boy or girl, who is born in this blessed land “for the protection of the treasury of religion”. And every other problem in life must be subordinated to that one principal theme.** That is also the law of harmony in music. There may be a nation whose theme of life is political supremacy; religion and everything else must become subordinate to that one great theme of its life. But here is another nation whose great theme of life is spirituality and renunciation, whose one watchword is that this world is all vanity and a delusion of three days, and everything else, whether science or knowledge, enjoyment or powers, wealth, name, or fame, must be subordinated to that one theme. The secret of a true Hindu’s character lies in the subordination of his knowledge of European sciences and learning, of his wealth, position, and name, to that one principal theme which is inborn in every Hindu child – the spirituality and purity of the race. Therefore between these two, the case of the orthodox man who has the whole of that life-spring of the race, spirituality, and the other man whose

hands are full of Western imitation jewels but has no hold on the life-giving principle, spirituality – of these, I do not doubt that every one here will agree that we should choose the first, the orthodox, because there is some hope in him – he has the national theme, something to hold to; so he will live, but the other will die. ...But mark you, if you give up that spirituality, leaving it aside to go after the materialising civilisation of the West, the result will be that in three generations you will be an extinct race; because the backbone of the nation will be broken, the foundation upon which the national edifice has been built will be undermined, and the result will be annihilation all round.”⁵ “... the way out is that first and foremost we must keep a firm hold on spirituality – that inestimable gift handed down to us by our ancient forefathers. Did you ever hear of a country where the greatest kings tried to trace their descent not to kings, not to robber-barons living in old castles who plundered poor travellers, but to semi-naked sages who lived in the forest? Did you ever hear of such a land? This is the land. In other countries great priests try to trace their descent to some king, but here the greatest kings would trace their descent to some ancient priest. Therefore, whether you believe in spirituality or not, for the sake of the national life, you have to get a hold on spirituality and keep to it. Then stretch the other hand out and gain all you can from other races, but everything must be subordinated to that one ideal of life; and out of that a wonderful, glorious, future India will come – I am sure it is coming – a greater India than ever was. Sages will spring up greater than all the ancient sages; and your ancestors will not only be satisfied, but I am sure, they will be proud from their positions in other worlds to look down upon their descendants, so glorious, and so great.

Let us all work hard, my brethren; this is no time for sleep. On our work depends the coming of the India of the future. She is there ready waiting. She is only sleeping. Arise and awake

⁵ CWSV 3: 151-53

and see her seated here on her eternal throne, rejuvenated, more glorious than she ever was – this motherland of ours. The idea of God was nowhere else ever so fully developed as in this motherland of ours, for the same idea of God never existed anywhere else. Perhaps you are astonished at my assertion; but show me any idea of God from any other scripture equal to ours; they have only clan-Gods, the God of the Jews, the God of the Arabs, and of such and such a race, and their God is fighting the Gods of the other races. But the idea of that beneficent, most merciful God, our father, our mother, our friend, the friend of our friends, the soul of our souls, is here and here alone. And may He who is the Shiva of the Shaivites, the Vishnu of the Vaishnavites, the Karma of the Karmis, the Buddha of the Buddhists, the Jina of the Jains, the Jehovah of the Christians and the Jews, the Allah of the Mohammedans, the Lord of every sect, the Brahman of the Vedantists, He the all-pervading, whose glory has been known only in this land – may He bless us, may He help us, may He give strength unto us, energy unto us, to carry this idea into practice. May that which we have listened to and studied become food to us, may it become strength in us, may it become energy in us to help each other; may we, the teacher and the taught, not be jealous of each other! Peace, peace, peace, in the name of Hari!”⁶

“Let them talk of India’s regeneration as they like. Let me tell you as one who has been working – at least trying to work – all his life, that there is no regeneration for India until you be spiritual. Not only so, but upon it depends the welfare of the whole world. For I must tell you frankly that the very foundations of Western civilisation have been shaken to their base. The mightiest buildings, if built upon the loose sand foundations of materialism, must come to grief one day, must totter to their destruction some day. The history of the world is our witness. Nation after nation has arisen and based its greatness upon materialism, declaring man was all matter. Ay, in Western language, a man gives up the

⁶ CWSV 3: 153-54

ghost, but in our language a man gives up his body. The Western man is a body first, and then he has a soul; with us a man is a soul and spirit, and he has a body. Therein lies a world of difference. All such civilisations, therefore, as have been based upon such sand foundations as material comfort and all that, have disappeared one after another, after short lives, from the face of the world; but the civilisation of India and the other nations that have stood at India's feet to listen and learn, namely, Japan and China, live even to the present day, and there are signs even of revival among them. Their lives are like that of the Phoenix, a thousand times destroyed, but ready to spring up again more glorious. But a materialistic civilisation once dashed down, never can come up again; that building once thrown down is broken into pieces once for all. Therefore have patience and wait, the future is in store for us.

Do not be in a hurry, do not go out to imitate anybody else. This is another great lesson we have to remember; imitation is not civilisation. I may deck myself out in a Raja's dress, but will that make me a Raja? An ass in a lion's skin never makes a lion. Imitation, cowardly imitation, never makes for progress. It is verily the sign of awful degradation in a man. Ay, when a man has begun to hate himself, then the last blow has come. When a man has begun to be ashamed of his ancestors, the end has come. Here am I, one of the least of the Hindu race, yet proud of my race, proud of my ancestors. I am proud to call myself a Hindu, I am proud that I am one of your unworthy servants. I am proud that I am a countryman of yours, you the descendants of the sages, you the descendants of the most glorious Rishis the world ever saw. Therefore have faith in yourselves, be proud of your ancestors, instead of being ashamed of them. And do not imitate, do not imitate!"⁷

These words of Swami Vivekananda should leave one in no doubt about the vulgarity of the course we have been following

⁷ CWSV 3: 380-81

in India, especially after Independence. It is right that we tolerate all faiths and beliefs and assert a man's right to chart his chosen course in life so long as he does not refuse the right of others to do the same. Semitic religions have still to learn this kind of tolerance. As long as they maintain a spirit of conversion forced or otherwise, one has to be on one's guard against the tendency and defend oneself by whatever means necessary. India suffered for almost a millennium at the hands of savage and uncivilised hoards largely because of the failure of Indians to rise to the true virile spirit of Sanatana Dharma sticking, instead, tamasicly to the tolerant spirit of Ascetic Spirituality even going so far as to be tolerating that which ought not to be tolerated for the good of everyone. Forceful resistance – certainly India was not without a great deal of it – to such tyranny or intolerance is in line with the true spirit of Sanatana Dharma and brings about the real well-being of all including of the perpetrators of tyranny. To see things clearly is to know that “it is also the divine compassion that smites down the strong tyrant and the confident oppressor, not in wrath and with hatred, – for these are not the high divine qualities, the wrath of God against the sinner, God's hatred of the wicked are the fables of half-enlightened creeds, as much a fable as the eternal torture of the Hells they have invented, – but, as the old Indian spirituality clearly saw, with as much love and compassion for the strong Titan erring by his strength and slain for his sins as for the sufferer and the oppressed who have to be saved from his violence and injustice.”⁸

⁸ CWSA 19: 58-59

THE PEGASUS LEAKS: SUPERFICIALITY VERSUS SUBSTANCE

The Parliament proceedings in the Monsoon Session saw the ‘Pegasus’ spying issue becoming the centerpiece of much havoc in the Parliament. The Opposition chose to converge its strategy to corner the government over the damning accusations that an Israeli spyware, developed by a private company, was used by different countries, including India, to spy on its own citizens. In India, the spyware allegations allegedly include over 300 Indian citizens, including activists, journalists, politicians and businessmen.

The issue becomes significant as it involves debates about the seriousness or superficiality of unbacked allegations on a serious issue, the scope of privacy in the age of information technology and the imperatives of national security considerations.

THE PEGASUS SPYWARE

Pegasus is a spyware technology that has been manufactured and marketed by an Israeli company called NSO, consisting mainly of veterans of Israeli intelligence agencies. The spyware is used for spying on its ‘targets’ or victims by infiltrating their mobile phone (usually a smartphone) or any other smart gadget, gaining access to their private information and transferring their data on to a master server, without the knowledge of the target/victim.

The NSO group stated that it sells this technology only to ‘vetted foreign governments’. The spyware is described as ‘a world-leading cyber intelligence solution that enables law enforcement and intelligence agencies to remotely and covertly extract data from virtually any mobile devices’ (Mazoomdaar 2021).

Typically, till 2018, the spyware worked – like any other software virus – when the victim clicked on, or opened, links on their mobile phones or computers/laptops, usually transmitted

through messages. It normally works in a smartphone or any device with an internet connection, disguising itself subtly as a useful protective application, which, after gaining user permissions, works in the background in the device, recording and transmitting all user information, by becoming ‘device administrator’ without the user’s knowledge and vision (TIE 2021).

After 2018, more updated versions of the spyware can work even when the victim does not open or click on any link. This was documented by Amnesty International in a 2019 report, wherein it was shown that ‘network injections’ could be used to infect a smart device without needing any interaction with the target or the user (Mazoomdaar 2021).

Based on the instructions of its remote master server, the spyware inside a smart device can automatically turn on the camera and microphone, record a person’s speech and can access a person’s chats, messages, emails, contacts and various other data on the device, and transmit all this information to the central server. In other words, it enables the person’s smart device to become a digital spy.

Allegations of Surveillance:

The existence of this spyware, Pegasus, was first reported in 2016 by a lab based at the University of Toronto. In 2019, a major controversy regarding the spyware was created when an American technology firm, WhatsApp, sued the NSO group in a U.S. court, alleging that its spyware was being used to compromise the privacy of WhatsApp users.

Subsequently, a group of journalists and activists, under the umbrella of Amnesty International, undertook a collaborative investigation – known as the ‘Pegasus Project’ – into the spyware issue. In 2021, Amnesty International⁹ and an unknown non-

⁹ Amnesty’s operations were completely frozen in India in 2020 in wake of government regulations. Even during Congress rule, the global NGO was restricted in terms of finance access due to the dubious nature of its India agenda.

profit group ‘Forbidden Stories’ – along with a consortium of 13 global media outlets – released their report into the spying allegations. From India, an extreme Left digital portal – The Wire – was a part of the project.

The report detailed how the spyware was used by at least 10 countries to spy on their own citizens – a charge that all the implicated governments have consistently denied. These countries include Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Morocco, Rwanda, Hungary, India and the UAE. India was faced with the charge of being the only democracy on this list.

The Pegasus Project alleged that the phone numbers of prominent Indian politicians, businessmen, activists and journalists were found on a common database linked to Pegasus spyware, and that they were potential hacking targets. Besides, it was alleged that the Indian government was using the spyware to eavesdrop on foreign leaders – Pak PM Imran Khan and diplomats from Iran, Afghanistan, China, Nepal and Saudi Arabia.

THE INDIAN GOVERNMENT AND NSO RESPONSE:

In the Monsoon session of the Parliament, India’s Defence Ministry categorically denied having any links or transactions with the NSO group, and, subsequently, in a recent Supreme Court hearing on the issue, the Indian government denied the use of Pegasus. The government has also stated that any covert surveillance is done as per strict rules and oversight. The government also stated that the issue potentially has national security implications.

Presently, the case is pending in the Supreme Court and the Court has assured that it will not undertake any course of action that might compromise the security or national defence of the country, while looking into allegations by ‘persons of eminence’ whose phones were alleged to have been hacked. The Court may undertake any action, such as the setting up of an inquiry committee for investigation into the issue.

Israel's NSO group has maintained that no such database of potential targets exists as has been alleged by Amnesty International and its associated media partners in the investigative project. **The NSO group has also stated that it only sells its software to clients after the prior approval from the Israeli Defence Ministry.** Therefore, it is not clear who put these phone numbers on a list/database and why this was done. The group has threatened to sue the Pegasus Project partners, and alleged that the Project was likely being funded by either Qatar or anti-Israel movements.

According to the official statement of the group, "The report by Forbidden Stories is full of wrong assumptions and uncorroborated theories that raise serious doubts about the reliability and interests of the sources. It seems like the 'unidentified sources' have supplied information that has no factual basis and is far from reality" (Asian News International 2021). The group also clarified that, "the list of countries in this story is totally incorrect, some are not even our clients" (Asian News International 2021).

Presently, NSO licenses Pegasus to governments in 45 undisclosed countries. The group has maintained that they do not operate the systems once sold to their clients, nor do they have access to the data of their client's targets (Mishra 2021).

A SPURIOUS, SPECULATIVE ISSUE

Despite the massive sensationalization of the Pegasus issue, till now, it has unsurprisingly done little damage to the government's position, based as it is on unproven and uncorroborated media speculations. The manner in which the Pegasus issue was sensationalized – with burning media headlines and by Opposition creating a havoc in the Parliament, has not resonated much with the common people.

As per a 12-state survey by an organization, Prashnam, only 15% people knew about the Pegasus issue (Jain 2021). Even the

Opposition is not entirely sure that prioritizing the Pegasus issue will help them at all in the upcoming state assembly elections next year (Nair 2021).

The issue clearly does not resonate with the masses, who would perhaps be more concerned about the COVID19 mis-management, the economic condition etc. The issue is premised on the argument that the governments use technology like Pegasus to spy on their own citizens and wield private information to criminalise dissent, violate the right to privacy and violate the freedom of speech and expression.

RIGHT TO PRIVACY NOT ABSOLUTE

In India, there are specific laws governing privacy, with rules, codes and designated government and intelligence agencies that have the authorization to interception. These include Section 92 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC), Rule 419A of the Telegraph Rules and Sections 69 and 69B of the Information Technology Act.

In 2017, in the Puttaswamy judgement, the Supreme Court had ruled that in the age of internet when individuals freely divulge their data, the right to privacy is not absolute, and can be compromised legally on the legitimate ground of national security considerations.

During the time of UPA, there were some attempts – though never implemented – to dilute the power of intelligence agencies, such as the 2010 recommendation by the Vice-President to ensure that intelligence agencies are within Parliamentary scrutiny. However, in India, as in most other countries, interception and intelligence-gathering continue to be based on the grounds of national security and remain outside the purview of public speculation and debate.

While Pegasus issue clearly falls within this domain, even a basic review of Amnesty allegations place them on a rather spurious ground.

GRAY AREAS ABOUND

The global investigation spearheaded by Amnesty clearly has various gray areas that, as of now, struggle to meet the standards of even basic legal and public scrutiny.

First, the biggest diluting point for Amnesty and other partners of the Pegasus Project is the fact that the presence of phone numbers on a certain list or database – whose ownership has further been denied by NSO – does not lead to the conclusion that these phones were hacked. Even if they were hacked, it cannot be conclusively proven who hacked them. Legally, as in any criminal law investigation, the mere fact that a certain client (in this case, a government) was the buyer of a technology does not lead to the conclusion that it was used by them, unless concretely proven.

Forensic analysis – done by Amnesty itself – has shown that around 37 numbers were hacked out of the list containing at least 50,000 world-wide ‘potential targets’ (Mishra 2021). In India, forensic analysis by Amnesty showed that 7 phones had traces of hacking or attempted hacking. Even in these instances, no causality can be attributed to anyone, without a proper, legal criminal investigation, and impartial verification of Amnesty’s forensic analysis.

Second, Amnesty and its co-partners have been unable to provide any concrete evidence to support their claims that the ‘list’ of phone numbers was linked to NSO database. In their public statements, Amnesty and others do not dispute NSO’s claim that the ‘list’ of potential targets never originated at NSO. This automatically means that there must be multiple lists of targets of individual countries – which no government would ever share with a commercial vendor like NSO, as it is intelligence data, or place on a common ‘database’ – which Amnesty somehow managed to obtain from across the world. This mysterious list has never been independently found or verified and is simply based

on claims of Amnesty. It can neither be produced or proven in a Court of Law. Amnesty has refused to reveal the source of the 'list' which neither originated at NSO nor with any government.

Third, even the list of targets is only a list of 'potential' targets – which means they may or may not have been tapped. According to the statement of one of the Amnesty's media partners, "The presence of a phone number in the data does not reveal whether a device was infected with Pegasus or subject to an attempted hack. However, the consortium believes the data is indicative of the potential targets NSO's government clients identified in advance of possible surveillance attempts" (The Guardian 2021). It appears that even allegations about 'potential targets' are based on 'belief' and partial forensic analysis of a handful of phone numbers.

Fourth, the Supreme Court in hearing petitions filed against the government on the Pegasus issue raised pertinent questions about why the victims had not filed an FIR prior to approaching the Court in a matter as serious as this, and, why was the issue raised at this moment after a gap of two years, when the spying allegations had been levelled in 2019. Finally, the Court also observed that the petitions are based on newspaper reports rather than any concrete evidence so far.

THE FUTURE OF TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENT

The Pegasus issue has once more brought to the forefront the role of technology and science in human advancement in general, and, as an instrument of statecraft and cyber-warfare in particular in this specific case. As the nature of the perceived enemy changes, so does the deployment of technology. The emerging threats to national security due to the nature of non-state actors operating within country's borders keep assuming new forms, and technology has become an integral part of sustaining the modern nation-state.

While ordinary citizens, politicians, journalists, activists,

businessmen and other elite of society have, since decades, potentially played an anti-national role in being on foreign payroll and transmitting sensitive information, this has become more magnified with the changing nature of technology at the disposal of people. Cyber progress has made such transmission of information much easier.

New internet-enabled digital communication platforms – such as WhatsApp, iMessage, Telegram, social media outlets and numerous other modes of cyber communication – have encryption features that can block government from accessing the information transmitted. While this is done ostensibly to protect the right to privacy, yet it may also include much that can be used for criminal purposes such as money-laundering, illegal activities, terrorism etc. Besides communication, there are other forms of technology at people's disposal that can, both, make lives materially advanced as well as aid in crime and perversion. For, technology is a double-edged sword.

It is for this reason that the governments have kept pace with technological progress by deploying technologies to keep ahead of potential illegal activities by its own citizens or by hidden enemies residing within national borders. Legally, the governments – India, EU, US, Australia etc. – have done this by forcing the big technology companies to relax their encryption features, follow laws of the land and relay sensitive information to the government of the day.

Tacitly or covertly, governments have done this by deploying new, ever-changing set of technological products that can enable advanced spying on transmission of information that can be illegal. Such spying, to put in a lay language, has existed since ages – for good or for bad – and only its forms have changed; for, without it, it would be impossible to govern with a strong hand, resulting in regime instability. In contemporary parlance, many epithets have been used in intellectual vocabulary to resist

such state power, and arguments have been advanced that the government often ‘weaponizes’ secretly obtained information to suppress dissent.

Regardless, in the age of information technology, where freely divulged data is easily available, governments can weaponize such information by obtaining data either through technology companies or by interception – the end result may be the same.

Furthermore, **arguably, it is not only the governments, but even technology companies that can ‘weaponize’ information** – not through direct coercion as used by state power, but by using the data for engineering preferences, behaviour and manipulating mass psychology, which is driving new-age consumerism and harming the collective psyche infinitely more than targeted interceptions by governments.

And, such targeted state-backed interceptions are – and have been – much more deeply-rooted than the superficial expose on a spyware like Pegasus suggests. Countries have always engaged in interception and its legitimacy has gone beyond certain limits of public outrage and inquiry. Numerous instances abound.

US is amongst the top-ranked countries in spying on its citizens with its controversial PRISM programme through which it spied on various governments all over the world including India and on its own citizens as revealed by Snowden leaks, while India also developed a similar sophisticated spying program – Central Monitoring System (CMS) and NETRA – during the UPA era. CMS was described as “the single window from where government arms such as the National Investigation Agency or the tax authorities will be able to monitor every byte of communication” (Grant 2013). In the wake of 2008 terrorist attacks, India especially accelerated internet communications interceptions, such as via Skype and others. India’s National Cyber Coordination Centre (NCCC) – reported during the UPA – gives government access to

all Internet accounts, including e-mails, blogs or social networking data.

China and Russia may not have their names among ‘leaked’ Pegasus’s clients, but use far more sophisticated technology – including behaviour-control technology – to keep their citizens under surveillance, with Russia even having a spying programme for minors. These are countries where free media, human rights and all other modern liberal constructions are virtually dead – without the use of a small software like Pegasus. Israel is a leader in all major forms of technology used for ends of domestic control and cross-border warfare.

There are numerous precedents of Pegasus-like technology currently being sold and bought by various countries – some unearthed and numerous secret. Non-governmental exposures have revealed various other precedents. Some examples include – An Israeli spyware called Candiru being sold to foreign governments with ‘victims’ observed in Palestine, Israel, Iran, Lebanon, Yemen, Spain, United Kingdom, Turkey, Armenia and Singapore; an Israeli group, Cyberbit, selling similar spyware; Germany’s FinFisher group sells similar spyware to Pegasus; Italian firm Hacking Team sells Pegasus-like spyware to numerous foreign governments etc. (Mishra 2021). **In Pegasus scandal itself, while Amnesty could disclose only names of 10 governments using the spyware, yet, the NSO group supplies to around 45 undisclosed countries (Mishra 2021). Indeed, the NSO group disclosed that, “The majority of our clients are Western democracies” (Asian News International 2021).**

This is not an issue which can be candidly disclosed in the Parliament or in the Supreme Court. It is clearly an issue where national security dimensions get involved, thereby outweighing the importance of the right to privacy, and sensitive national security information cannot become a subject of cheap, debatable public spectacle. Therefore, hypothetically, even if the

Indian government were using the Pegasus – which it has denied categorically – it is not the kind of issue that will either see a prolonged debate in details or a public disclosure, regardless of how much public noise and spectacle is created to sensationalize it.

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HIGHLIGHTS

COVID19 UPDATES

The Delta variant of COVID19 has now spread across the globe and many other variants of interest have been flagged by World Health Organization (WHO), against which vaccines may not be effective if these variants become dominant, such as the Mu variant. The trajectory of Delta in major developed countries has itself raised questions about the efficacy of m-RNA vaccines like Pfizer and Moderna.

A UK study consisting of a vast data set of 2,580,021 PCR tests between December 2020 and May 2021, analyzing both Alpha and Delta strains, concluded that while vaccines are effective against Delta after two doses, the protection they offer wanes with time. For example, in a case study, the Pfizer vaccine's effectiveness fell from 92% to 90%, 85% and 78% after 30, 60 and 90 days, respectively. The results also showed that fully vaccinated people carry a much higher viral load in case Delta, whereas in case of Alpha, they carry a much lower viral load (Sanderson, 2021). We have explored in the previous issue how numerous such studies have emerged recently that put a question mark on vaccine efficacy.

Demonstrable cases abound among the developed countries. In US, more than 1 lakh cases are reported everyday and the numbers of deaths and hospitalizations too have touched highs, despite the fact that 60% of the population is vaccinated. In Israel – one of the first countries to kickstart a thorough vaccination programme – with 78% of the people vaccinated, with Pfizer vaccine given to the majority, the new cases are amongst the highest in the world, with 650 new cases per million daily. Data from Israel showed that of the serious cases being admitted to hospital, around 60 per cent of patients were people who had been fully vaccinated (Gollom, 2021). The country is now rolling

out a fourth shot of COVID19 vaccine and booster shots in the hopes of bringing the pandemic under control.

Canada's story is also beginning to reveal chinks in the armour. The country is one of the most vaccinated countries in the world, with 77% of the population fully vaccinated. Yet, by the end of the month, it is predicted to witness its most severe COVID19 outbreak.

BENGAL CBI PROBE

On the directive of the Calcutta High Court, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has been asked to probe the matter of post-poll violence in West Bengal, with the rapes and murder of women and human rights violations led to a comprehensive report by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC). This report formed the basis of the High Court directive.

On the basis of its ongoing investigation, the CBI has filed chargesheet and conducted initial detentions and arrests on the basis of FIRs filed. The agency has so far filed 34 FIRs, and made three arrests – two in Nadia and one in North 24 Parganas. Six persons have also been detained by the CBI.

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“Let us break our chains, venerable as they are, but let it be in order to be free, — in the name of truth, not in the name of Europe. It would be a poor bargain to exchange our old Indian illuminations, however dark they may have grown to us, for a derivative European enlightenment or replace the superstitions of popular Hinduism by the superstitions of materialistic Science.

Our first necessity, if India is to survive and do her appointed work in the world, is that the youth of India should learn to think, — to think on all subjects, to think independently, fruitfully, going to the heart of things, not stopped by their surface, free of prejudgments, shearing sophism and prejudice asunder as with a sharp sword, smiting down obscurantism of all kinds as with the mace of Bhima. Let our brains no longer, like European infants, be swathed with swaddling clothes; let them recover the free and unbound motion of the gods; let them have not only the minuteness but the wide mastery and sovereignty natural to the intellect of Bharata and easily recoverable by it if it once accustoms itself to feel its own power and be convinced of its own worth. If it cannot entirely shake off past shackles, let it at least arise like the infant Krishna bound to the wain, and move forward dragging with it wain and all and shattering in its progress the twin trees, the twin obstacles to self-fulfilment, blind mediaeval prejudice and arrogant modern dogmatism. The old fixed foundations have been broken up, we are tossing in the waters of a great upheaval and change. It is no use clinging to the old ice-floes of the past, they will soon melt and leave their refugees struggling in perilous waters. It is no use landing ourselves in the infirm bog, neither sea nor good dry land, of a secondhand Europeanism. We shall only die there a miserable and unclean death. No, we must learn to swim and use that power to reach the good vessel of unchanging truth; we must land again on the eternal rock of ages.

Let us not, either, select at random, make a nameless hotchpotch and then triumphantly call it the assimilation of East and West. We must begin by accepting nothing on trust from any source whatsoever, by questioning everything and forming our own conclusions. We need not fear that we shall by that process cease to be Indians or fall into the danger of abandoning Hinduism. India can never cease to be India or Hinduism to be Hinduism, if we really think for ourselves. It is only if we allow Europe to think for us that India is in danger of becoming an ill-executed and foolish copy of Europe. ”

– Sri Aurobindo

(CWSA 12: 40-41)