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(Online)

Indian Army successfully test-fires advanced Block-III version of Brahmos cruise missile

The test firing of the block-III version of the missile demonstrated the weapon's unmatched lethality of hitting the centre of a designated target with "bull's eye"

The Indian Army, adding another feather to its cap, successfully test-fired an advanced version of the Brahmos land-attack cruise missile in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands on Tuesday. “The test firing of the block-III version of the missile demonstrated the weapon’s unmatched lethality of hitting the centre of a designated target with “bull’s eye” precision,” a senior Army official was quoted as saying by news agency PTI.

While describing more about the test fire, he added, the supersonic cruise missile successfully hit the land-based target with desired precision in a “top attack configuration”. This test fire has matched all the parameter of the canonical textbook, involving high level and complex manoeuvring by the missile.

On April 22, the Indian Navy had conducted its first test-firing of the sea-to-land attack version of its advanced supersonic cruise missile Brahmos. The Brahmos missile is developed by a joint-venture between Russia’s Mashinostroyeniya and India’s Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).

Business Standard

Wed, 03 May, 2017

Arun Jaitley strengthens NSG, hands over DRDO-developed detection devices

Jaitley also handed over to NSG an equipment called 'OTL-300'

Defence Minister Arun Jaitley on Monday handed over a number of devices developed by the DRDO to National Security Guard (NSG), Delhi Police and National Disaster Response Force (NDRF).

The devices handed over to NDRF included 'E-Nasika', a hand-held equipment which is capable of rapid detection of chemical agents well below their toxic limits.

Jaitley also handed over to NSG an equipment called 'OTL-300'. It can instantly detect partially camouflaged optical elements, such as telescopes, binoculars and night vision devices.

The 'OTL-300' was given to Delhi Police also. Another portable equipment, capable of remotely identifying explosives, was handed over to P S Purohit, additional director in Intelligence Bureau.



The Tribune
VOICE OF THE PEOPLE

Wed, 03 May, 2017

Chinook base in Chandigarh

By Vijay Mohan

The US-made Chinook heavy-lift helicopters being acquired by the Indian Air Force will be based at the Chandigarh Air Force Station, for which new facilities are being established. India had signed a deal with the US in September 2015 for 15 CH-47 Chinook helicopters, with an option for another four machines. These are expected to start arriving in 2018. The deal includes 22 AH-64 Apache attack helicopters.

“A certain number of Chinooks will be based in Chandigarh,” a senior IAF officer said. “Two hangars and a maintenance bay along with associated technical and logistics facilities are to be set up here for the purpose,” he said. The work is estimated to cost Rs 150 crore, sources said.

Chandigarh will be the third airbase in the Western Air Command to house new aircraft. The IAF has earmarked the Sarsawa airbase near Saharanpur in Uttar Pradesh for the first squadron of French Rafale fighters, while the Bhisiana airbase near Bathinda in Punjab will house Netra, the new indigenous airborne early warning and control aircraft.

Chinooks, which have a payload capacity of around 10 tonnes will provide a much-needed fillip to the IAF vertical heavy-lift capability. This role was earlier being fulfilled by the Soviet-era Mi-26 helicopters, also based at Chandigarh.

The IAF had four Mi-26s, but at present is left with just one serviceable machine. Chinooks will airlift artillery, vehicles, road construction and engineer equipment as well as troops and supplies to mountainous sectors in the north and North-East.

Chandigarh is no stranger to the Chinook. Three of them belonging to the British Royal Air Force had been airlifted here from the United Kingdom for onward move to Nepal for flood relief operations in 2015. After being re-assembled and test-flown here, they spent a few days before being recalled home.

THE ASIAN AGE

Wed, 03 May, 2017

Army chief Bipin Rawat visits LoC, boosts soldiers' morale

Day after Pak forces behead jawans, Gen. Rawat tells Armymen that entire nation stands behind them.

Srinagar: Army chief General Bipin Rawat who is on a two-day tour of Kashmir valley on Tuesday visited the Line of Control (LoC) to review the situation during interaction with local commanders and troops. Gen. Rawat had arrived in Srinagar on Monday, hours after two jawans were killed and their bodies mutilated in a “well coordinated act” by Pakistan Army and the Border Action Team (BAT) along the LoC in Poonch sector.

A defence spokesman here said that accompanied by the Udhampur-based Northern Command and Srinagar-based 15 (Chinar) Corps GOC-in-Chiefs, the Army chief was during his visit to the frontier briefed by formation commanders on the security situation along the de facto border and measures instituted to strengthen the security posture besides overall operational and logistical preparedness.

“The Army chief impressed upon all to remain vigilant and thwart any misadventure from across especially now as the summer sets in,” the spokesman said.

He added that during his interaction with troops, Gen. Rawat reassured them that the entire nation “stood behind its soldiers in their brave endeavours to safeguard country’s sovereignty and integrity and maintain peace in the valley”.

On Monday, the Army chief had visited Panzgam garrison in Kupwara district where three soldiers including a captain were killed in a militant attack last week.

He was briefed by the officers on the April 27 incident during which two militants were also killed in the Army’s retaliatory fire. Later in the evening, he was briefed by the Chinar Corps Commander on the prevailing situation in Kashmir at a meeting held in Srinagar’s Badami Bagh Cantonment.

As per a statement issued by the Chinar Corps, the Army chief appreciated the synergy being shown amongst all security agencies and complimented the troops for undertaking operations with firmness and resolve.

Gen. Rawat also visited the Army’s 92-Base Hospital here to enquire about the health of soldiers recuperating and wished them all a speedy recovery.

Indian Army weighs fitting reply to LoC beheading. Here are its options

By Ajai Shukla

The options: attacks by ground forces on Pak posts, strikes by aircraft, missiles or artillery guns

The army has begun weighing its options to retaliate against Pakistani forces on the Line of Control (LoC), after their troops, employing jihadi extremists, killed and beheaded two Indian soldiers near Poonch on Monday, top generals said.

Business Standard learns the incident took place when an Indian patrol of 8-10 soldiers was checking the border fence, a perilous task involving physically moving along the fence, very close to the LoC, to check that it has not been cut or its electronic sensors damaged.

According to the modus operandi of Pakistani troops on forward LoC posts, the exposed patrol first came under intense fire from automatic weapons, which Pakistani soldiers had stealthily deployed in temporary positions, just across the LoC.

With two Indian jawans injured in the firing, a “border action team (BAT)”, comprising *jihadi* fighters, darted across the LoC to the border fence. Covered by the Pakistan army’s firing, the *jihadis* killed the two jawans, beheaded them, and returned to their side of the LoC, bearing the heads as trophies.

The employment of a BAT is a well-rehearsed Pakistani tactic that creates deniability by using jihadis to cross into the Indian side. If any *jihadis* are killed or captured, the Pakistan army disowns it as an infiltration attempt. Regular soldiers remain on their side of the LoC, firing on Indian posts and patrols to cover the BAT’s move. A range of retaliatory measures are being weighed by India’s generals, including attacks by ground forces on Pakistani posts, or strikes by aircraft, missiles or massed artillery guns.

Army vice-chief, Lieutenant General Sarath Chand, on Tuesday said, “*Humko kya karna hai woh hum yahaan bataana nahin chahte hain. Apni karyavahi hum apne aap karenge*, at a time and place of our choice” (I don’t want to give out here what we intend to do. We will take action at a time and place of our choice).

On Monday, army’s director-general of military operations (DGMO) Lieutenant General A K Bhatt warned of retaliation during a phone call to his Pakistani counterpart. A defence ministry release stated: “The DGMO of the Indian Army conveyed that such a dastardly and inhuman act is beyond any norms of civility and merits unequivocal condemnation and response.”

Defence Minister Arun Jaitley also sounded a warning on Monday, “The country has full confidence and faith in our armed forces, which will react appropriately to this inhuman act. The sacrifice of these soldiers will not go in vain.”

However, army sources emphatically rejected Indian media claims — by *India Today TV* and *Dainik Jagran* newspaper — the Indian Army had already visited retribution; killing ten Pakistani soldiers in an attack. Last September, the Indian Army had retaliated to a jihadi strike on an army post near Uri with multiple cross-LoC “surgical strikes” that are believed to have killed several jihadi fighters and a handful of Pakistani soldiers. After another attack in November, the Indian Army secretly moved 155 millimetre Bofors guns into forward firing positions, destroying two Pakistani posts in a massed fire assault.

Even so, senior generals admit there are limitations on how much, and how often, Pakistani posts on the LoC can be punished, even in retaliating to an inhuman violation that involved mutilating Indian soldiers.

Inadequate punishment fails to deter Pakistani violations, while an excess could set off a cycle of escalation that could spiral out of control. Moreover, the Indian military does not have a tri-service plan for immediate

retaliation to such incidents. This would involve pre-selecting Pakistan Army or jihadi targets, earmarking the aircraft, missiles, guns or Special Forces to hit them and devising defensive measures for the inevitable Pakistani retaliation. In what might be an unlinked development, the army on Tuesday test-fired a Brahmos land-to-land missile, demonstrating what an official release described as “the weapon’s unmatched lethality of hitting the centre of a designated target with ‘bull’s eye’ precision.” The Brahmos would be an important component of any concerted Indian cross-LoC strike capability.



Wed, 03 May, 2017

Compensate IAF pilot rendered ‘unfit’ after MiG crash, says HC

New Delhi: The Delhi high court directed the Centre and Hindustan Aeronautical Limited (HAL) on Tuesday to compensate a serving Indian Air Force officer who was rendered unfit for flying after a MiG-21 crash in 2005, with ₹ 5 lakh and ₹ 50 lakh, respectively, saying officers of the armed forces could not be put to “more risk than they had bargained for”.

The Russian-origin fighter aircraft has often been referred to as the “flying coffin” and “widowmaker” due to its poor safety.

Wing commander Sanjeet Singh Kaila had moved the high court in 2013 seeking a direction to the government and HAL to issue a formal apology for a manufacturing defect and faulty workmanship in the MiG-21 aircraft which he was flying in 2005, that allegedly led to the crash.

A bench of Justice S Ravindra Bhat and Justice Deepa Sharma said on Tuesday, putting the officers of the armed forces above what is “expected to be normal risk” is against the fundamental right to life especially the right to work in a safe environment guaranteed under the Constitution. The bench added that HAL is liable to compensate the officer for “exposing him to more than reasonable risk”. It was the first time a crash survivor from the IAF sued the government seeking redressal against the violation of his fundamental right to life.

The officer, represented by advocate Bharat S Kumar, had alleged in his plea that a reply to his RTI on the findings of the Court of Inquiry (COI) instituted after the crash revealed that it was caused due to poor workmanship and a manufacturing defect allegedly caused by HAL.

He submitted that the intent behind the petition was to ensure that “HAL is made accountable and aware of the ramifications of their actions impacting the security of this country.”

Wing commander Kaila also stated that despite giving representation to the government in 2012 seeking financial compensation, he has received nothing.

The officer was posted at Air Force Station Nal in Rajasthan as a Squadron Leader in 2005.



Wed, 03 May, 2017

CRPF soldiers are the real Gandhians with guns

To support security forces on the field, a comprehensive strategy for solving the Maoist issue is necessary

On April 24, 25 CRPF soldiers were killed by the Maoists in the Chintagufa-Burkapal area of Sukma district in Chhattisgarh. Their guns were looted, bodies were mutilated, and the Maoists tried to plant an IED inside one of the bodies. Bastar is an undeclared warzone with the term ‘security forces’ is used for the state police, the district reserve group (a force made of local youth and surrendered Naxals) and the CAPF (BSF, ITBP, CRPF), fighting side by side. But in the recent past, those killed in the conflict are almost always from the CRPF. In Bastar, CRPF serves alongside the state police. They have little control over the location of their camps. Their deployment is irrational, making them easy targets . There is a failure of intelligence sharing

between the forces. With severe shortage of equipment, they are facing the guerillas of the fourth most deadly terrorist organization in the world, according to the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism. Still CRPF is giving them a tough fight, which they should be proud of.

Historically, CRPF has been the force that has held India together. They are deployed in almost every challenging situation that India has faced. From Kashmir to Bastar, it is the CRPF, which receives bullets, grenades, IEDs, stones and abuses. There are several incidents where the CRPF men were hit and did not retaliate out of the concern for civilians.

The Maoists have, in their latest press note, appealed to the soldiers to leave the forces and join them, claiming soldiers are not their class enemies. If that is so, why do they spread fake propaganda stories of exploitation? They have replaced the earlier enemy figure of landlords and moneylenders with that of a CRPF soldier. In the past four or five years, the Maoists are only targeting the CRPF.

The reason for this is because the CRPF are the first ones to enter many villages in Bastar with the message of democracy. Thanks to the protection they provide, even the most interior areas in Bastar now have roads and bridges. The CRPF are the check against the inhuman atrocities of Maoists, who have now crossed all limits.

To support the forces, a comprehensive strategy for solving the Maoist issue is necessary. Formalisation of the unified command against the Maoists is required. Improving inter-agency coordination and access to integrated intelligence will help. They should also have better coordination with various development bodies in their area of operation. The CRPF has the potential to free Bastar of Maoist violence. They are the real Gandhians with guns, and are the reason for India being a flourishing democracy. Amit Kataria is Collector, Bastar. Syed Areeb Ahmad is PMRDF Fellow, Bastar.



Wed, 03 May, 2017

Pakistan has closed the door on talks

Beheading soldiers reveals Rawalpindi's designs to exacerbate unrest in the Kashmir Valley

When a soldier is beheaded or his body mutilated, the concomitant public outrage forecloses the option of dialogue. Not that talks were about to open between India and Pakistan. It's just that the signal from across the border is that Islamabad, nay Rawalpindi, is mighty pleased with the way things are flaring up on our side of Kashmir.

The anatomy of the latest conflagration on the Line of Control is no different from past incidents: Pakistani troops fired on two Indian forward posts on the LoC while their Border Action Team comprising terrorists and army regulars assaulted our patrol between the posts. The bodies of our soldiers killed in action were mutilated by attackers from across the border.

India is capable of and will avenge the assault. But the dastardly adventure reveals the mind of Pakistan's army brass operating out of the Rawalpindi-based General Headquarters. They are the one who control Islamabad's India policy.

It was no coincidence, therefore, that a day before the May 1 mutilation episode, Pakistan's chief of army staff (COAS) Qamar Javed Bajwa reaffirmed support for what he called the "political struggle of Kashmiris' right to self-determination."

The general made the statement while on a visit to the LoC. Simply deciphered, his message to elements in the Valley was: The Pakistan army is one with them in their fight against Indian security forces.

The brutal, headline-seeking treatment of our soldiers delivered on that resolve — serving also the other purpose of triggering in mainland India a clamour for tougher military action against Kashmiri protestors with inbuilt risks of accidental, unintended or provoked excesses. That indeed is the external dimension of the internal security crisis in Kashmir. The ostensible Pakistani game is to exacerbate the ongoing unrest towards

realising its delusional Mukti Bahini moment in the Valley. Or at least push things to where they were in the early 1990s.

That was a time when Islamabad would lecture New Delhi on building the right climate for bilateral engagement. “Propitious climate for talks” was the phrase it hurled at then Indian foreign secretary JN Dixit at the failed discussions in the first week of 1994.

So India needs to counter-strategise. For now, the Narendra Modi regime isn’t inclined to open talks — internally or bilaterally — till terror remains the instrument of State policy of Rawalpindi-Islamabad. The same was unequivocally conveyed to Jammu and Kashmir CM Mehbooba Mufti and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who saw a role for himself in the multilateral approach he advocated on Kashmir.

Television clips of schoolchildren including girls taking to streets against troops had lately prompted saner civil society voices to advocate dialogue to cool things down. Among them was former external affairs minister Yashwant Sinha, who led a Track-2 initiative in the restive State.

It’s that element of sanity the Pakistani atrocity on the LoC sought to kill or discredit by mauling dead soldiers. The incident is another shot in the arm for the hawks and a blow for peaceniks. Waging peace never looked an idea so impossible in our increasingly jingoistic milieu.

The ‘appropriate’ response our army has promised to avenge Pakistan’s “un-soldierly act” might come sooner than later. Given that the talks between Directors General of Military Operation (DGMO) weren’t to our satisfaction, the retributive strike will be par for the course.

When bilateralism fails or is abandoned, retaliation is the answer, not third party arbitration or intervention that Islamabad or the likes of Erdogan are prone to propose. The leader from Turkey is unaware perhaps that India doesn’t even recognise the United Nations Military Observers’ Group on India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP) that could have played the referee.

The UMOGIP is allowed a “holiday posting” in India because the UNSC resolutions (39 and 47 of 1948) under which it was constituted haven’t since been amended.

From the Indian standpoint, the military observers’ mandate became fruituous post1971 when the UN brokered ceasefire line became the bilaterally negotiated Line of Control (LoC). That position is strengthened by the letter and spirit of the 1972 Shimla Accord the sum of which is that all pending India-Pakistan disputes will be addressed bilaterally. Be that as it may, Kashmir looks destined for a long summer of discontent—and crossborder attrition. Rawalpindi’s aggressive posturing could be on the nudging of Beijing that has heightened its stakes in PoK with the ambitious China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. It’s unhappy as much with the paradigm change in India’s Balochistan policy and the Modi dispensation’s refusal to keep the Dalai Lama from visiting Arunachal.



Wed, 03 May, 2017

Trump meeting with Kim comes with conditions: WH

We've got to see their provocative behaviour ratcheted down immediately, says press secretary

US President Donald Trump is willing to meet North Korean leader Kim JongUn “under the right circumstances”, the White House has said asserting that Pyongyang needs to meet a lot of conditions for such a meeting between the two leaders to take place. “There's a lot of things that go along with that, and that's the key thing.” “Under the right circumstances” was, I believe, the phrase he used. I think that is something in keeping with our consistent with the policy expressed by Secretary of State Rex Tillerson as well,” White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer told reporters at his daily news conference yesterday.

“We've got to see their provocative behaviour ratcheted down immediately. There's a lot of conditions that I think would have to happen with respect to its behaviour and to show signs of good faith,” Spicer said when asked about Trump's statement in an interview that he is willing to meet the North Korean leader.

“Clearly, conditions are not there right now, but I think the President has made it clear, as Secretary Tillerson had the other day, that if the conditions, if the circumstances present themselves we'll be prepared to, but they're clearly not at this time,” Spicer said. Spicer stressed the right circumstances for a meeting between the two leaders does not exist right now. “If North Korea continues down a degree of provocative behaviour, then those circumstances will never be there,” he said.

“We want to hold out the possibility that if North Korea were ever serious about completely dismantling its nuclear capability and taking away the threat that they pose both to the region and to us that there is always going to be a possibility of that occurring. That possibility is not there at this time,” Spicer said. Trump, he said, understands the threat North Korea poses. “Having someone with the potential nuclear capability to strike another country and potentially our country as some point in the future is something the President takes very seriously,” he said. “So the idea that he is doing everything diplomatically, economically, and militarily to consider every way to prevent that threat from taking on the US is something” he added.

The White House spokesman also defended the decision of the US President to meet his Philippines counterpart Rodrigo Duterte. “I think there's an economic piece to this, as well. That's part of the reason that I think the President wants to meet with him,” he said. “I'm not going to get ahead of their discussions. I would suggest that there are multifaceted ways and areas in which not just the Philippines but other countries in the region can help play a role both economically, diplomatically, and otherwise to help deter the threat that they pose,” Spicer said. The meeting with the Philippines President is also an opportunity to work with countries in that region that can help play a role in diplomatically and economically isolating North Korea.

“And, frankly, the national interest of the United States, the safety of our people and the safety of people in the region are the number-one priorities of the President,” he said. Spicer refuted allegations that by meeting his counterpart from Philippines, Trump is ignoring human rights concerns. “The number-one concern of this President is to make sure that we do everything we can to protect our people, and specifically, to economically and diplomatically isolate North Korea,” he said. “I think when you look at what he is doing in terms of building that coalition of countries in that region to do it, I think this is hopefully going to tell you every single thing that's in his brief, but he's well aware of -- when he speaks with a leader, he gets briefed on a lot about their -- what they're doing, what they've done,” Spicer said.

THE ASIAN AGE

Wed, 03 May, 2017

China demands immediate halt to missile shield		
Beijing, May 2: China demanded on Tuesday an immediate halt to a controversial US missile shield, just hours after Washington announced that the defence system was now operational in South Korea.	wake of a string of North Korean missile tests.	ly take necessary measures to uphold our interests,” foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said.
Washington and Seoul agreed to the Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (Thaad) battery deployment in July in the	But its deployment has infuriated China, which fears it will weaken its own ballistic missile capabilities and says it upsets the regional security balance. “We oppose the deployment of the Thaad system in (South Korea) and urge relevant sides to immediately stop the deployment. We will firm-	The foreign ministry, however, expressed support for Mr Trump's comment that he would be “honoured” to meet Kim Jong-Un under the right conditions. — Reuters

THE ASIAN AGE

Wed, 03 May, 2017

North goes berserk over US supersonic bombers

Seoul/ Beijing, May 2: North Korea accused the United States on Tuesday of pushing the Korean peninsula to the brink of nuclear war after a pair of strategic US bombers flew training drills with the South Korean and Japanese air forces in another show of strength.

The two supersonic B-1B Lancer bombers were deployed amid rising tensions over North Korea's pursuit of its nuclear and missile programmes in

defiance of UN sanctions and pressure from the United States.

The flight of the two bombers on Monday came as his CIA director landed in South Korea for talks.

South Korean defence ministry spokesman Moon Sang-gyun said in Seoul that Monday's joint drill was conducted to deter provocations by the North.

North Korea said the bombers conducted "a nuclear bomb dropping drill against major objects"

in its territory at a time when Trump and "other US warmongers are crying out for making a preemptive nuclear strike" on the North. "The reckless military provocation is pushing the situation on the Korean peninsula closer to the brink of nuclear war," the official KCNA news agency said on Tuesday. — *Reuters*

THE ASIAN AGE

Wed, 03 May, 2017

THAAD NOW OPERATIONAL IN SOUTH KOREA



US missile defence system Thaad at a golf course in Seongju, South Korea, on Tuesday.

— AFP

Washington, May 1: A controversial missile defence system whose deployment has angered China is now operational in South Korea, a US defence official said on Tuesday.

Washington and Seoul agreed to the Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (Thaad) battery deployment in July after a string of North Korean missile tests.

"It has reached initial intercept capability," the official said on condition of anonymity.

This initial capability would be augmented later this year as other components arrive, officials said.

The Thaad system, which has been installed on a former golf course in the southern county of Seongju, is designed to intercept and destroy short and medium-range ballistic missiles during their final phase of flight.

The Thaad deployment comes as tension soars on the Korean peninsula following a series of missile launches by the North and warnings from the administration of US President Donald Trump that military action is an "option on the table".

— AFP

Spacesuits crunch

Nasa is running low on spacesuits and might not have a replacement for many years. The agency is quickly running low on the kit, which is absolutely necessary for any future space travel.

And its plans to make a next generation space suit are going too slowly, according to a new report from the agency's Office of Inspector General. A lack of a formal plan and destinations for travel have held back development, according to the report. Nasa has also had funding for such work slashed, leaving it without the resources to develop new suits.

Nasa is left with only 11 of the 18 original suits that include life-supporting backpacks. That might not be enough to carry it through until the station's retirement in 2024, let alone a possible extension until 2028, the report stated. And already, astronauts have been experiencing problems with suits. One of those was almost fatal, when an astronaut almost drowned after the cooling system in his backpack leaked into the helmet and flooded it with water. That was one of 3,400 mostly minor incidents with the suits, some of which have also included astronauts feeling burning or stinging in their hands and eyes during spacewalks.

As the spacewalking suits age, "Nasa must deal with a dwindling number of flight-ready spacesuits and with mitigating risks related to their design and maintenance", the report said. Nasa needs a formal plan, especially if it hopes to test a new suit before the space station ends operation in 2024, the report concluded. It also needs to compare the cost of maintaining the current crop of suits with developing new ones. Nasa's next spacewalk is set for 12 May. Veteran spacewalker Peggy Whitson will venture outside with newcomer Jack Fischer.



Institute to tap gut microbes for drugs

By Jacob Koshy

Chandigarh IMTECH leans on growing interest in microbiome

Building on a growing, global scientific interest in the human microbiome — the colony of bacteria and microscopic forms that live in the gut, skin and other organs of the body — the CSIR-Institute of Microbial Technology, Chandigarh (IMTech), is working on a programme to tap its vast collection of microbial samples and develop therapeutic products or drugs.

The human body is estimated to have about 35 trillion cells, and about two to three times as many microbial organisms. Most of them live in the gastrointestinal tract, which is home to around 3,000-4,000 species of bacteria, not including viruses and other life forms. Some are harmful and many, not.

The global probiotics (or beneficial bacteria) industry has already started using certain species of bacteria as healing or curative agents. Mother Dairy, Amul, Danone Yakult, and Nestle India are among the leading producers of probiotic functional foods and beverages in India. Their foods use lactobacilli and bifidobacteria to make yoghurt, curd, and several dietary supplements.

Burgeoning evidence

On the other hand, burgeoning evidence suggests that atherosclerosis, obesity, intestinal problems, and many psychological disorders lead to distinct changes in the composition of bacteria in the gut. Restoring balance or teasing out how the by-products of these organisms lead to chemical changes that cause disease, is at the heart of research.

In 2016, IMTech researchers reported in the *Frontiers of Immunology* how drugs used to treat tuberculosis changed the gut microbial profile in mice. This led them to posit that “microbial therapy could help people suffering from TB.”

IMTech has a library of about 40,000 microbial cell cultures (not all of them relevant to humans) of varied provenance. According to Anil Koul, Director, IMTech, their research programme aims to find out what combinations of bacterial species can be used for potential therapeutics.

“We have scanned genomes before, and have a lot of expertise. But now we are looking at industry and research collaborations to see how these bacteria can be combined in effective ways,” he said in an interview.



Wed, 03 May, 2017

New IT rules to beef up Aadhaar

By Vikas Dhoot

Official promises end to security fears

To address privacy and security concerns over Aadhaar, the Centre is in the process of educating government agencies that sensitive data must not be made public, and is drafting amendments to the Information Technology (IT) Act to strengthen provisions for data protection and security.

Apart from privacy issues, the new IT law will quell security concerns related to digital payments, Aruna Sundararajan, Secretary, Union Electronics and Information Technology Ministry, told *The Hindu*. Her comments assume significance as Aadhaar’s original architect and former Infosys CEO, Nandan Nilekani, recently mooted the need for strong data protection and privacy laws to ensure citizen data in the Unique Identification (UID) database was not misused.

Plugging data leakage - Close to 135 million Aadhaar numbers and 100 million bank account numbers could have leaked from official portals dealing with government programmes of pensions and rural employment, according to a report by the Centre for Internet and Society (CIS) published on Monday. With Aadhaar being used to authenticate and authorise transactions, the financial risks presented by the disclosure of such data are greatly exacerbated, it said.

“Actually, Aadhaar has very strong privacy regulation built into it... But the area we are working on is enforcement,” Ms. Sundararajan said.

“People are not aware so a large number of government agencies are making available all this sensitive data. So now, the process is to educate them so that they become aware that Aadhaar data is not meant to be published like this freely,” she said.

“No Aadhaar data can be shared with anybody or be used for anything purpose other than for which it was collected. There are several limitations imposed by the Act,” she said.

As per the CIS report, the data in question has not been treated as confidential at all in several cases and the government agencies in question have, in fact, taken pains to publish them. “These are wilful and intentional instances of treating Aadhaar numbers and other personally identifiable information (PII) as publicly shareable data by the custodians of the data,” the CIS report noted.

Legal changes - “Some of the amendments we are bringing to the IT Act should take care of the rest of the (privacy and data protection) concerns relating to Aadhaar,” Ms. Sundararajan said. The key focus of these amendments being drafted, she said, is strengthening data protection provisions and security, particularly in relation to digital payments.