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INDIA

Scripting independent India's pharma industry journey from non-existent to a world leader

Going forward, emphasis should be on creating industry-academia linkage to promote R&D activities and effort should be made to upgrade pharmacy courses and skilling of new talent.

Sudarshan Jain | August 15, 2021 13:05:30 IST



The COVID-19 pandemic presented an extraordinary challenge to public health and highlighted the need for better healthcare systems.

"In the midst of every crisis lies opportunity"

The **COVID-19** pandemic resulted in a humanitarian crisis of enormous magnitude. It presented an extraordinary challenge to public health and highlighted the need for better healthcare systems.

While it posed several new challenges, it also presented the industry with new opportunities. Supplying medicines to more than 200 countries in the fight against Covid, India met 62 percent of the global vaccines demand.

As the pandemic crippled economies and healthcare systems around the globe, India held an enviable position. We supported several countries including the US, UK, Maldives, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Myanmar, among others in the fight against COVID 19. We supplied close to **150 nations with medicines**, 82 of them as grants from India.

The Indian pharmaceutical industry, thus, emerged as a dependable partner and demonstrated tremendous commitment towards patients across countries by ensuring an uninterrupted supply of medicines.

Glimpse into the Indian Pharma Industry: Growth Story

From being non-existent in the 1960s, the Indian pharma industry today is a \$42 billion industry and supplies over 60 percent of the global vaccine demand. It fulfils 40 percent of generic demand in the US, 25 percent of all medicine in the UK and exports \$22 billion worth of medicines to the world. This significant contribution became possible because of various initiatives at the policy and entrepreneur levels. To reach this stage, the industry witnessed four distinct water-shed moments.

- Firstly, the **Indian Patents Act, 1970**. It made provision for process patent and prohibited for patenting of end-product enabling manufacturers to develop alternative processes for proprietary products that already existed in the market. This helped the Indian pharma industry to flourish.
- This was followed by **The Drug Policy, 1978** along with the **Price Control Order, 1979** which provided the foundation of the **National Drugs Authority** and intended to maximize production of bulk drugs locally providing leadership to public sector undertaking. This reduced dependence on imports and encouraged the local industry. The policy had a future of 'Production of bulk drugs by high technology' which forced International & Indian companies to produce newer bulk drugs with an intention of marketing formulation from basic starting materials that were either available locally or produced utilizing the local materials.
- The **Hatch-Waxman Act, 1984**, although is a legislation enacted in the US, it paved way for the proliferation of generic medicines and also helped the Indian generic industry. Propelling India towards market liberalisation, the launch of the **Economic Reforms in 1991** synergised Indian industry with the world economy. It ended the era of 'License Raj' and allowed domestic players to operate freely.
- At the same time, the World Trade Organization (WTO) and its agreement on Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) came into existence that led to fundamental changes in the country's patent regime. The amended patents Act in India, which is TRIPS compliant, has sought to balance pharmaceutical innovation and affordability of access to medicines in the public interest.

Looking into the Future

The pharma industry is poised for growth and can contribute significantly to the country's 'Make and Discover in India' vision and achieve the USD ~120-130 billion by 2030.

As we look at enhancing Indian pharma's role from generics to new drug formulations, biologics, and incremental innovations, certain steps will make a big difference to reach the mark of the world's largest and most reliable drug supplier. The following steps can be undertaken:

- Raising the product from branded generics to complex generics and new chemical entities.
- Widen the global reach with a stable and predictable pricing policy.
- Emphasis on creating industry-academia linkage for promotion of R&D activities.
- Upgrade pharmacy courses,
- Skilling of new talent with the changing needs of the industry with time.

The aspiration of creating an industry of US\$120-130 billion would mean that India will be #1 in the world in terms of volume and among the top three countries in value.

The author is the Secretary-General of the Indian Pharmaceutical Alliance

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Afghanistan crisis: Air India says it cannot operate flights as airspace over country shut

Air India's AI 126 Chicago to Delhi-bound flight was also diverted to Gulf airspace due to the closure of Afghan airspace

Asian News International | August 16, 2021 15:01:14 IST

Firstpost.

Representational Image. News18

New Delhi: Amidst the ongoing turmoil in Afghanistan, Air India's flight scheduled to Kabul on Monday will not be able to operate as Afghanistan has closed its airspace, the national carrier informed on Monday.

"Due to the closure of Afghanistan airspace, flights cannot go there," Air India said.

The airline had a scheduled flight for Kabul from Delhi at 8.30 am in the morning on Monday but was rescheduled to 12.30 pm. Meanwhile, Air India's AI 126 Chicago to Delhi-bound flight has also been diverted to Gulf airspace due to the closure of Afghan airspace.

Flight operations from around the world are affected at Kabul's Hamid Karzai International (HKL) airport due to the ongoing turmoil in Afghanistan.

Air India operates one flight per day to Kabul and the airline has advance booking for that. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA) and Air India are in touch and continuously monitoring the situation in Afghanistan.

Earlier, Captain T Praveen Keerthi, General Secretary of Air India Pilots Association (ICPA), had written a letter to Civil Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia regarding the evacuation of Indians and others from Kabul (Afghanistan).

Taliban terrorists are assuming control of the Afghan capital of Kabul and have taken control of the presidential palace after the country's president Ashraf Ghani fled to Tajikistan. Reports suggest that the movement will soon proclaim the re-establishment of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid on Sunday said that the Taliban have been asked to enter the capital city of Kabul.

Updated Date: August 16, 2021 15:01:14 IST

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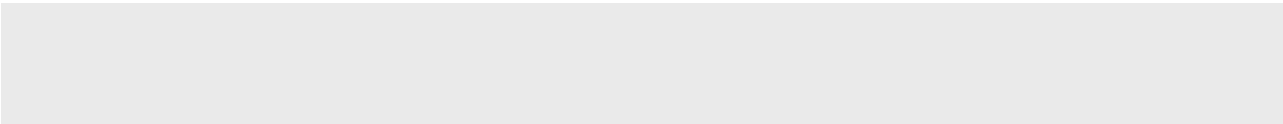
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Pegasus row: 'Nothing to hide', expert committee to probe all claims, Centre tells Supreme Court

The government told a bench headed by Chief Justice NV Ramana that this issue is 'highly technical' and expertise was needed to examine the aspects

Press Trust of India | August 16, 2021 14:35:44 IST

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Representational Image. Reuters

New Delhi: The Centre on Monday told the Supreme Court that there is "nothing to hide" in the Pegasus snooping allegations and it will constitute a committee of eminent experts to examine all the aspects.

The government told a bench headed by Chief Justice NV Ramana that this issue is "highly technical" and expertise was needed to examine the aspects.

"There is nothing to hide. It needs examination by committee of experts. This is a highly technical issue. We will appoint eminent neutral experts from the field," Solicitor General Tushar Mehta told the bench, which also comprised justices Surya Kant and Aniruddha Bose.

Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for senior journalists N Ram and Sashi Kumar who have filed a plea seeking probe into the snooping allegations, said the affidavit filed by the Centre does not say whether the government or its agencies had used the spyware.

"We do not want the government, which might have used Pegasus or its agency might have used it, to set up a committee on its own," Sibal said during the hearing which is going on.

Earlier in the day, the Centre filed an affidavit in the top court and said that a batch of petitions seeking an independent probe into the Pegasus snooping allegations are based on "conjectures and surmises" or on other unsubstantiated media reports.

In its affidavit, the government said its position on the alleged Pegasus snooping has already been clarified in Parliament by IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw.

"A bare perusal of the captioned petition and other connected petitions makes it clear that the same are based on conjectures and surmises or on other unsubstantiated media reports or incomplete or uncorroborated material," the affidavit said.

With a view to dispel any wrong narrative spread by certain vested interests and with an object of examining the issues raised, it said, the government will constitute a committee of experts.

On August 10, the top court had taken exception to "parallel proceedings and debates" on social media on the snooping row by some petitioners and said that there must be some discipline and they must have "some faith in the system".

The apex court is hearing a batch of pleas, including the one filed by the Editors Guild of India, seeking independent probe into the alleged Pegasus snooping matter.

They are related to reports of alleged snooping by government agencies on eminent citizens, politicians and scribes by using Israeli firm NSO's spyware Pegasus.

An international media consortium has reported that over 300 verified Indian mobile phone numbers were on the list of potential targets for surveillance using Pegasus spyware.

Earlier, during the hearing of the matter, the top court had said that allegations of Pegasus related snooping are "serious in nature" if reports on them are correct.

It had also asked the petitioners whether they had made any efforts to file a criminal complaint on this.

Editors Guild of India has sought in its plea that a special investigation team be set up to conduct a probe into reported surveillance of journalists and others.

Updated Date: August 16, 2021 14:35:44 IST

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After fall of Kabul, what Taliban's victory means for India and the world

America's withdrawal from Afghanistan comes at a time when it is preparing for a deeper contestation against the power of emerging superpower China

Praveen Swami | August 16, 2021 14:28:47 IST

Firstpost.

A. US Black Hawk military helicopter flies over the city of Kabul, Afghanistan on Sunday. AP

Almost in the blink of an eye, Afghanistan changed this week. The worst price is going to be paid by young Afghans who grew up in the wake of 9/11: for all the corruption and inefficiency of the Government, the decades since have seen historically unprecedented gains in education, employment and incomes. Women—often denied an education under the Taliban, and subjected to horrific human rights violations—were the biggest beneficiaries. Now, their hopes and dreams have disintegrated.

The people of Afghanistan, though, aren't going to be the only ones to feel the impact. How did this come about? And what does the rebirth of the Taliban's Islamic Emirate going to mean for India, the region, and the rest of the world?

1. *Was the triumph of the Taliban an intelligence failure?*

Less than a week ago, United States officials were predicting Kabul would hold out for at least four weeks. Before that, they were saying it would take months for the Taliban to conquer major Afghan cities. And before that, they were claiming the Taliban just couldn't overwhelm Afghanistan. Experts have noted that these assessments either represent a spectacular intelligence failure—or were a wilful lie, to facilitate American withdrawal.

The truth is no one should have been surprised. Ever since 2014, when the United States and its allies ended combat operations—although they continued using air power—the Taliban steadily seized incrementally greater tracts of rural territory. The Afghan army's 215 Corps, stationed in Helmand, had almost collapsed in 2017—forcing the United States to send in troops, ostensibly on a “training” mission.

Slowly, the Taliban took isolated rural districts and surrounded the major cities. This summer, after the United States began pulling out its last troops, and reduced airstrikes against the Taliban, the process dramatically accelerated.

2. Did the Afghan military give up without a fight?

Although the official count of Afghan government forces come to almost 3,50,000, over half of that was made up of poorly disciplined, ill-trained and often corrupt militia and police groups. The actual army was only 1,85,000 strong, only some 60 percent of them combat troops. To protect the country's cities and towns—linked by an at-best tenuous road network—the army had to be scattered amidst over 10,000 small outposts and checkpoints.

The Taliban, by contrast, could concentrate their estimated 60,000 core troops and 90,000 militia on hit-and-run operations.

As long as the Afghan military had the backing of airpower, it could offset some of these disadvantages. But hasty United States withdrawal left the tiny Afghan Air Force without the mostly-American contractors who maintained its fleet.

Secondly, the Afghan armed forces just didn't have any means to hit the Taliban's logistics bases and training hubs across the border, in Pakistan. It didn't even have troops to guard the border and choke off infiltration. Consider the numbers: India commits over 3,20,000 Army soldiers to Jammu and Kashmir, one-third the size of Afghanistan.

Thirdly, the Afghan military suffered from corruption, inefficiency and waste. In some cases, officers pocketed money meant for their men. There was large-scale profiteering in contracts—often in collusion, official investigations have noted, with United States contractors and military personnel.

3. What is the rebirth of the Taliban's Islamic Emirate going to mean for India?

In the short term, the fallout probably won't be huge: even though India's borders, on the map, extend to Afghanistan, Pakistan-occupied Kashmir in fact lies in between the two countries, which provides something of a geographical cushion. In recent years, Pakistan has scaled back cross-border infiltration by terrorist groups—not because of Afghanistan, but because it fears war, which its economy is ill-poised to face. As long as Pakistan keeps the jihadi tap shut, things in Kashmir will remain stable.

The future, though, isn't quite so certain.

First, successive United Nations reports have said groups like the Jaish-e-Muhammad and Lashkar-e-Taiba are operating alongside the Taliban. In the future, these groups could expand their training facilities and bases in Afghanistan, expanding their lethality and reach.

The Taliban, despite promises, also continues to harbour Al Qaeda. Its main fighting arm, the Haqqani Network, has close links with a wing of the Islamic State which has trained Indian nationals and even used them for suicide attacks.

Finally, the triumph of the Taliban will inspire jihadists across the region, just as the Mujahideen victory against the Soviet Union did a generation ago.

4. Will the rise of the Taliban destabilise the region?

Almost certainly. The Taliban's fighting forces in northern Afghanistan include Uzbek and Tajik nationals, who have been involved in Islamist insurgencies in Central Asia. The Taliban has ties to jihadists from Xinjiang, in China. It also includes within its rank large numbers of jihadists with viciously anti-Shi'a beliefs. To make things worse, the Taliban has close links with narcotics traffickers and other criminal cartels.

Even Pakistan has reason to worry. The Taliban has close ties to the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, which has waged a bitter insurgency against Pakistan and continues to stage terrorist attacks in Pakistan's Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa. The TTP has also targeted Chinese interests in Pakistan.

Islamabad has been the Taliban's patron-in-chief—but now the Taliban has got what it wants, it will likely try to leverage its links with the TTP to gain more decision-making autonomy.

The regional powers—Iran, Russia, China and Pakistan—embraced the Taliban, with the common goal of evicting the United States from the region, and securing their interests. How long this alliance will sustain itself, though, is anyone's guess.

5. Does India still have any cards to play?

Ever since 9/11, India has invested some \$2 billion in aid to Afghanistan—no great amount, it's true, compared to the over \$2 trillion the United States sank in, but no small change,

either given that even America's spending on governance and development was just about

China, given that even America's spending on governance and development was just about \$36 bn. The major investments include the Salma Dam, in western Afghanistan, the Delaram-Zaranj highway, and Afghanistan's—now useless—Parliament building.

Some of those investments, like investments made in the Chabahar port in Iran, the hub of a trade route that freed Afghanistan from the chokehold of Karachi, may provide New Delhi with a degree of leverage. The Taliban, for obvious reasons, won't want to be completely dependent on Pakistan.

For now, though, New Delhi is isolated. In the build-up to 9/11, India funded the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance, but could only do so because it had an alliance with Iran and Russia. Today, those countries are on the other side. Even then, India failed to stop the victory of the Taliban; only 9/11 did that. It also earned the terrorist organisation's ire, which reflected itself in the Taliban's support for the terrorists who hijacked an Indian Airlines flight to Kandahar.

Now, New Delhi's wisest course of action might be to sit on the sidelines, and watch the match—until an opportunity presents itself.

6. What does this mean for America's role in the world?

America's withdrawal from Afghanistan comes at a time when it is preparing for a deeper contestation against the power of emerging superpower China. Indeed, one of the arguments made in favour of withdrawal from Afghanistan was that it would free up resources for this far more important—from an American point of view—strategic contest.

For smaller countries in Asia who are weighing their options, though, the lessons from Afghanistan won't be heartening. Is the United States really be willing to protect allies in trouble, some will be asking? Are the commitments it makes credible? Does it have the stomach for a fight?

The bottom line is that there's diminishing support within the United States for open-ended military commitments overseas—and there's likely to be even less in the future. This generation of young Americans is the first, in a century, to face the prospect of being poorer, in real terms, than its parent. Young Americans face historically unprecedented levels of debt.

Even though the United States remains the world's preeminent economic and technological power, it's going to be much more inward-looking than in the past.

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