

To receive Daily news juice pdf on your WhatsApp, send name and city through WhatsApp on 75979-00000.

1. Concerns Surrounding Digi Yatra: An Overview

Unauthorized Facial Biometric Collection

During the peak holiday season in December 2023, reports surfaced regarding the unauthorized collection of facial biometrics at airport entry gates for the Digi Yatra app. Security personnel and private staff were found to be gathering this data without the knowledge or consent of passengers.

Complaints from Air Travelers

Passengers using various airports lodged complaints about the "coercive and deceptive" enrolment process for Digi Yatra. Complaints included allegations that CISF personnel at entry gates were scanning boarding passes and capturing photos without passengers' explicit consent, enrolling them in Digi Yatra without proper permission.

Digi Yatra: Objectives and Implementation

Digi Yatra, introduced by the Ministry of Civil Aviation in 2018, aims to facilitate paperless and seamless passenger movement through airport checkpoints. The initiative is voluntary and involves the use of a mobile app owned by the Digi Yatra Foundation consortium. Currently operational at 13 airports, the initiative is set to expand to 24 more airports in 2024.

Digi Yatra App and Enrollment Process

The Digi Yatra app, not government-owned, requires passengers to register with their name, mobile number, email address, and Aadhaar document. Passengers also upload a selfie for facial recognition. This information creates a Digi Yatra travel ID. At airports, passengers scan their boarding passes and undergo facial recognition, creating a data set used for seamless processing at subsequent checkpoints.

Privacy Concerns and Data Protection

Despite government assurances of decentralized data storage, concerns have been raised regarding data security and privacy. The Internet Freedom Foundation analyzed the Digi Yatra policy, revealing potential issues with compliance with the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023. The Act, passed in August 2023, lacks framed rules, and the Digi Yatra policy grants broad powers to exempt government agencies from compliance. The policy also allows security agencies access to passenger data based

on existing protocols, with the ability to adjust data purge settings based on security requirements.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: The Hindu

2. Muizzu asks India to withdraw troops by March 15: Why are Indian soldiers in Maldives?

Why in news?

Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu has asked India to withdraw its military personnel from his country by March 15. Maldives and India have set up a high-level core group to negotiate the withdrawal of troops. The group held its first meeting at the Foreign Ministry Headquarters in Male. The Indian government did not immediately confirm the media report or comment on it.

How many Indian troops are in the Maldives?

Contrary to what the 'India Out' rhetoric in Maldives may suggest, no large contingent of Indian soldiers is present on the archipelago. According to the latest government figures, there are 88 Indian military personnel in the Maldives.

Indian soldiers have been sent to the Maldives at various points for training Maldivian troops, in both combat and reconnaissance and rescue-aid operations. Yet, there is a strong fear among sections in the Maldives about Indian troops spreading across the island.

Why are India's troops in Maldives?

India and the Maldives have a long history of cooperation in a variety of areas, including defence. The one time India's soldiers entered the island for an actual military operation was in November 1988 — to thwart an attempted coup, at the request of the government of then President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom. In a quick operation, Indian troops managed to secure the President and capture the rebels. In the three decades since, Maldives has generally appreciated India's role in this episode.

The 'India Out' campaign began much later, sometime in 2020. The resentment had been building ever since Abdulla Yameen Abdul Gayoom of the Progressive Party (PPM), with a pro-China tilt, became president in 2013.

What are the five major factors behind the fear and suspicion?

1. One of the major triggers for this was the long-standing controversy over two Dhruv Advanced Light Helicopters (ALH) given by India to the Maldives in 2010 and in 2015, both of which were used for ocean search-and-rescue operations, maritime weather

surveillance and for airlifting patients between islands, and were based in Addu Atoll and at Hanimaadhoo.

According to the terms of bilateral agreements between the two countries, Indian officers had been sent to the Maldives to train the Maldives National Defence Force, under whose command these helicopters operate.

These helicopters were for humanitarian purposes only, but some in the anti-India constituency, particularly Yameen's party PPM, were trying to portray that by gifting these helicopters, India was creating military presence in the country because they were military choppers.

2. Another major cause of grievances within Maldives was the Solih government's perceived lack of transparency about its dealings with India.

3. Then there is the fact that Maldives does rely heavily on India for maritime security.

4. Maldives' new police academy, built with India's help and housing the National College of Policing and Law Enforcement is another issue. The opposition's [now in power] mistrust stems from the sheer size of the building and surrounding complex. One rumor making the rounds implies that the only reason the academy is so large is to house Indians associated with the academy and their families, supposedly rendering it an opportune place to bring more Indians into the country.

5. A fifth factor is the UTF Harbour Project agreement signed between India and the Maldives in February 2021, under which India was to develop and maintain a coastguard harbour and dockyard at Uthuru Thilafalhu, a strategically located atoll near the capital Malé.

Sections of Maldivian media had speculated that the UTF project would be turned into an Indian naval base. However, then Maldivian chief of defence forces had clarified even before the agreement was signed that while the Indian government had indicated it would provide grant assistance for the project, there were no plans of any Indian naval base in the country.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Bilateral Relations

Source: The Indian Express

3. Hydroxychloroquine: How a new study links the COVID 'cure' to 17,000 deaths

Why in news?

Researchers have linked hydroxychloroquine — an antimalarial drug that was briefly promoted by former US President Donald Trump and others as a “miracle” medicine for COVID-19 — to an increased mortality rate of up to 11%.

There was a great panic to find treatments for the respiratory disease during the first wave of the pandemic and, as is standard practice, pharmacologists looked at existing medicines to test whether any would help while we waited for a vaccine and the development of new drugs.

Even the World Health Organization looked at hydroxychloroquine as a potential COVID treatment.



Figure 1 Hydroxychloroquine, an antimalarial drug, was briefly used against COVID, but may have been lethal for some patients

The researchers writing in the open access journal *Biomedicine & Pharmacotherapy*, now say it is possible to link hydroxychloroquine to 17,000 deaths.

Hydroxychloroquine is generally safe, but “when you give it to a large number of healthy people preventively, the risk and effects need to be evaluated differently.”

Hydroxychloroquine, the ‘miracle cure’

“What do you have to lose? Take it,” said Trump, who hailed hydroxychloroquine as a “miracle cure”. And he was not alone. Many world leaders followed suit, sharply increasing the sale of the drug globally. Millions hoarded the drug for personal use. Many countries had recommended its frontline health care workers take it everyday as a preventative measure against COVID.

“[It] lowers your immune reaction. This is the reason why it was administered initially in early COVID-19 cases, to suppress the cytokine storm,” said Subarna Goswami, a

public health specialist from India, where hydroxychloroquine was officially distributed to health care workers as a prophylaxis — a treatment to prevent disease.

The reason: COVID was found to produce cytokine storms in patients — their immune systems overreacted to the infection — and that was fatal.

But hydroxychloroquine was not the solution. A somewhat blind hope in the drug came crashing down when the US Food and Drug Administration warned against its use and the WHO discontinued its hydroxychloroquine tests.

How did hydroxychloroquine affect COVID patients?

It is hard to say exactly how hydroxychloroquine affected COVID patients. But small-scale studies, for instance, had patients reporting cardiac discomfort or other side effects in the digestive system.

A lack of larger study groups at the time makes it difficult to pinpoint the precise cause of those effects — researchers say they don't know whether it was the hydroxychloroquine alone, something else, or a combination of factors.

Is hydroxychloroquine still used as a treatment?

Hydroxychloroquine has been used to treat malaria for decades. It works by reducing pain and inflammation. It is usually consumed for a short period of time, until a person is rid of the disease.

The drug is also used to treat autoimmune disorders, such as lupus. Its anti-inflammatory properties have shown it to reduce the need for higher doses of other lupus treatments.

Patients typically take a small dose of the drug over a long period, sometimes for the rest of their lives.

Most people do not experience side effects, but it sometimes causes stomach pain, digestive problems, such as nausea or diarrhea, dryness of skin or damage to the eyes after prolonged use.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Science & Technology

Source: The Hindu