

CoWIN vaccination data out, govt. denies breach

Union IT Ministry says breached data were previously stolen but not from CoWIN portal; Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In) set to investigate the issue and submit a report

Bindu Shajan Perappadan
NEW DELHI

After an alleged data leak of COVID vaccination beneficiaries, including several politicians, the Union Health Ministry on Monday said such reports were "without any basis and mischievous in nature". The CoWIN portal was completely safe with adequate safeguards for data privacy, it maintained.

Among those whose personal details were allegedly leaked are CoWIN chairman Ram Sewak Sarma (ID submitted for vaccination), senior BJP leader Meenakshi Lekhi and Congress general secretary K.C. Venugopal (location at which they got vaccinated), and Kerala Health Minister Veena George (the

In safe hands?

The CoWIN portal, according to the Health Ministry, has adequate safeguards for data privacy

Vaccinated beneficiary data for CoWIN app is available at three levels, as below:

■ **Beneficiary dashboard:**

A vaccinated person can have access data using registered mobile number with OTP authentication

■ **CoWIN authorised user:**

The vaccinator can access data of vaccinated beneficiaries using authentic login credentials, though CoWIN system logs every authorized access



■ **API based access:** Third-party apps with authorised access of CoWIN APIs can access data of beneficiaries through beneficiary OTP authentication

mode of registration).

As per reports, the data breach is possible if the mobile number of a person is entered – details such as the identification number of the document submitted

(Aadhaar, passport, PAN and so forth), gender, date of birth, and the centre where the vaccine was administered, are provided as reply in an instant by the messenger bot in question.

These details could be accessed even if the Aadhaar number was entered instead of the phone number. The passport numbers of those who had updated the CoWIN portal for travel abroad were also leaked.

'CoWIN still safe'

Rajeev Chandrasekhar, Union Minister of State for Electronics, and Information Technology, clarified that the data being accessed by the bot from a threat actor database seems to have been populated with previously breached data. "It does not appear that CoWIN app or database has been directly breached," he tweeted, adding that the database was other than CoWIN.

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Further, he tweeted that a Telegram Bot was throwing up CoWIN app details upon entry of phone numbers. "The national data governance policy has been finalised that will create a common framework of data storage, access and security across all of government," he said.

However, what is more worrying is the fact that CoWIN, which serves the functions of registration, appointment scheduling, identity verification, vaccination, and certification of each vaccinated member, has also been integrated in the Aarogya Setu and UMANG Apps.

UMANG (Unified Mobile Application for New-age Governance) is developed by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) and National e-Governance Division (NeGD) to drive mobile governance in India. UMANG provides a single platform for all Indian citizens to access pan India e-Gov services.

Internal exercise

The Union Health Ministry, however, said it requested the Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In) to investigate this issue and submit a report. In addition, an internal exercise has been initiated to review the existing security measures of CoWIN. "CERT-In, in its initial report, has pointed out that back-end database for the Telegram bot was not directly accessing the APIs of CoWIN database," the Ministry said.

The bot (a programme that behaves like a normal chat partner with additional functions) on Telegram is also giving details of individuals and several Opposition leaders' data including Rajya Sabha member Derek O'Brien, former Union Minister P. Chidambaram, Congress leaders Jairam Ramesh, Rajya Sabha Deputy Chairman Harivansh Narayan Singh, Rajya Sabha members Sushmita Dev, Abhishek Manu Singhvi, and Sanjay Raut, among others.

While there have been multiple questions about the leaks, health authorities have maintained that CoWIN has state-of-the-art secure infrastructure and has never faced a security breach and even maintained that the data of the citizens are safe. This is not the first time that such a leak has been reported. In June 2021, a hacker group named 'Dark Leak Market' claimed that it had the database of about 15 crore Indians who registered themselves on the CoWIN portal. Health authorities had rubbished the claims then.

Co-WIN App (Covid Vaccine Intelligence Network)

- The technology has been integral to India's fight against COVID-19 and the CoWIN platform was developed in no time, leveraging experience in

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developing and implementing large scale applications such as Aadhaar, UPI, GST, etc

- Co-WIN, a cloud-based IT platform, is supposed to handle minute details for India's Covid-19 immunisation programme, including registering beneficiaries, allocating vaccination centres, sending text messages with name of their vaccinator to beneficiaries and live monitoring of vials in cold storage.
- The Co-WIN platform is owned by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and was earlier the platform used for conducting Pulse Polio and other crucial immunisation programmes across the country.
- The same platform has been expanded for distribute Covid-19 vaccines and the Ministry of Electronics and IT along with the National Informatics Centre are handling the backend and the tech infrastructure for it.

Functions

- Monitoring and tracking – It enables monitoring the inoculation drive and tracking the listed beneficiaries for vaccination on a real-time basis.
- Thus, it also helps to counter proxy vaccinations

Whale shark sighted close to shore at Neelankarai

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Fishermen of Periya Neelankarai village spotted a lone whale shark off the coast for two days over the weekend.

On June 9, fishermen informed the TREE Foundation that they had noticed around 20 whale sharks at noon. Around 4 p.m., a lone whale shark was said to have been swimming

close to the shore. The Marine Mammal Conservation, Stranding and Rescue team from the foundation confirmed that it was indeed a juvenile whale shark (*Rhincodon typus*).

The next day a lone whale shark was again spotted close to shore at the same location. T.A. Pugalarasan, who with the TREE team, observed the shark for a while and went into the water to examine

it and found that it was not injured or entangled in ghost nets. "What makes this sighting special is that the whale shark was found around 50 to 100 metres from the shore as they are usually found much further into the sea," said Supraja Dharini, founder-chairperson, TREE. Whale sharks are listed as 'Endangered' in the International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List.



Whale sharks are listed as 'Endangered' in the International Union for Conservation of Nature Red List, TREE FOUNDATION

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India, UAE target \$100 bn in non-oil trade by 2030

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

India and the UAE on Monday set a target to increase the non-oil trade from the current \$48 billion to \$100 billion by 2030.

The goal to achieve \$100 billion in non-oil trade was set during the first meeting of the Joint Committee of India-UAE Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA).

"We have a mutually agreed (for a) target of \$100 billion in bilateral trade by 2030," Commerce



An India-UAE CEPA council will be set up, says Piyush Goyal.

and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal told reporters after the meeting.

The target of \$100 billion will not include the oil

Both the countries also agreed upon setting up certain sub-committees and councils

trade. It was also agreed to set up certain sub-committees and councils.

In the meeting, it was also decided to set up a new sub-committee to handle issues related to services trade. Mr. Goyal said an India-UAE CEPA council will be set up to further facilitate the implementation of the agreement.

Retail inflation cooled down to 4.25% in May

Cooling down

India's retail inflation decelerated to 4.25% in May from 4.7% in April. Retail inflation has been below RBI's upper threshold of 6% and is now closer to RBI's medium-term target of 4%



The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

India's retail inflation eased further in May to a 20-month low of 4.25%, from 4.7% in April, with price rise in food items faced by consumers moderating to 2.91%. This is the third successive month that inflation has remained below the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI's) upper tolerance limit of 6% after a prolonged streak above it.

Base effects from May 2022 when retail inflation was over 7% also played a

role in lowering the inflation rate this May. On a month-on-month basis, however, price levels continued to firm up, with the Consumer Price Index (CPI) rising 0.51% for the second successive month, while the Consumer Food Price Index (CFPI) ticked up 0.7%, compared to 0.6% in April.

Urban consumers faced slightly higher inflation at 4.27% than their rural counterparts (4.17%).

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+ Retail inflation cooled down to 4.25% in May

However, food inflation was lower in urban areas, easing significantly to 2.43% from 3.7% a month earlier. In comparison, rural food price rise moderation was less benign, cooling to 3.2% in May from 3.9% in April.

Among food items, vegetables and edible oils contributed the most to the cooling inflation pace, with prices falling 16% and 8.8% from May 2022 levels, respectively. At the same time, inflation in cereals (12.7%), pulses (6.6%), milk (8.91%) and spices (17.9%) remained areas of concern.

Key factors to watch

Economists said the delayed onset of the monsoon and the El Nino factor are key factors to watch to ascertain the trajectory of food prices and overall inflation. They expect inflation to average below the central bank's 4.6% projection in the first quarter of 2023-24 even if June's inflation print inches up.

Bank of Baroda chief economist Madan Sabnavis said 6%-plus inflation in household goods, personal care and health was a cause of some concern as it signals companies were still in the process of passing on higher input costs to consumers. While May's inflation print is an endorsement of the RBI Monetary Policy Committee decision to hold interest rates again this month, ICRA chief economist Aditi Nayar believes rate cuts are still distant.

ISRO, Norway and the 'Svalbard mission'

Tiki Rajwi

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

On November 20, 1997, a Rohini RH-300 Mk-II sounding rocket rose to the skies from Svalbard, Norway, operationalising a new rocket launching range there. The solid propellant-powered rocket was shipped from India for the launch, while four senior hands of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) were specially flown to Norway to make sure everything went off all right.

The resolve to deepen space sector ties between India and Norway following Norwegian Ambassador Hans Jacob Frydenlund's visit to the ISRO headquarters last week offers an occasion to recall

this challenging mission which took place 26 years ago at Ny-Alesund, Svalbard.

"The RH-300 Mk-II was given a new name by the NSC (Norwegian Space Centre): Isbjorn-I, which translates literally as 'Polar Bear-I.' If we love our royal Bengal tigers, they love their polar bears!", ISRO veterans P.V. Manoranjan Rao and P. Radhakrishnan have recalled in their 2012 book, '*A Brief History of Rocketry in ISRO*'.

On the technical side, the Norway mission presented unique challenges for ISRO. The Rohini rockets had till then flown only in the tropical hot and humid conditions in India. "The Svalbard archipelago, on the other hand, sits in the Arctic Ocean and tem-

The Norway mission in 1997 presented unique challenges for ISRO as the Rohini rockets had till then flown only in India

peratures were on the extremely low side," says Mr. Dathan, who was managing the solid propellant plant at VSSC back then. (Mr. Dathan later became Director, VSSC. He is presently Mentor (Science) to Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan).

ISRO had shipped the RH-300 Mk-II to Norway after qualifying it for arctic weather conditions. Renamed Isbjorn-I, it lifted off at 11:07 p.m. IST on November 20, 1997. The rocket, unfortunately, did not

achieve the predicted height, rising only up to 71 km. The reason was a strange one. To keep the ambient temperature at 18 degrees celsius, it was kept covered with a velostat shroud. The idea was that it would pierce through the cover during launch. Instead, the rocket dragged it along, and the increased drag resulted in a lower altitude.

Nevertheless, the Norwegian scientists seemed quite happy with the launch, for the data collected during the flight led to some new findings. "Well that is space science," notes '*A Brief History of Rocketry in ISRO*,' adding that the launch marked a new era of cooperation between the two countries in space research.

CM announces ₹75.95 crore special kuruvai package

Kuruvai crop cultivation is expected to cross five lakh acres this year thanks to the package; A total of ₹90 crore has been sanctioned for desilting channels in the delta region, says Stalin

The Hindu Bureau

SALEM

Chief Minister M.K. Stalin announced a ₹75.95 crore kuruvai package on Monday.

Addressing the media after opening the shutters of the Mettur dam for irrigation in the delta region, he said the special package included urea, D.A.P., potash, paddy seeds, power tillers and a subsidy for power weeders. Farmers should use water judiciously, he added.

"Due to the special package, kuruvai crop cultivation will cross five lakh acres this year. As of date, kuruvai paddy-sowing work has been completed on 1.06 lakh acres of land in the delta region using groundwater. This year, we sanctioned ₹90 crore for desilting channels in the delta region. I inspected the desilting work in Thanjavur with Ministers. Last year, since water was released from the Mettur dam much earlier than expected, kuruvai cultivation crossed 5.36 lakh acres and paddy production touched 12.76 lakh



M.K. Stalin showering petals to mark the release of water from the Mettur dam. E. LAKSHMI NARAYANAN

tonnes," Mr. Stalin said.

Responding to former Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami's charge that the DMK government was claiming credit for projects initiated by the AIADMK regime, Mr. Stalin listed the projects launched by the current government.

On Union Minister Amit Shah's comment that a Prime Minister should emerge from Tamil Nadu, Mr. Stalin said, "We do not know why Mr. Shah is angry with Prime Minister Narendra Modi. If they (the BJP) are thinking of making

a Tamilian a prime ministerial candidate, Governor Tamilisai Soundararajan and Union Minister L. Murugan may get a chance."

Noting that Mr. Shah had not responded to his challenge to list the BJP's achievements in Tamil Nadu in the past nine years, Mr. Stalin said, "I clearly said the BJP had not implemented any special projects in Tamil Nadu in the past nine years, and listed the projects brought in by the DMK-Congress alliance at the Centre (2004-14). Did Mr. Shah not read it or

did no one explain it to him?"

Earlier, Mr. Stalin opened the shutters of the Mettur dam. Initially, 3,000 cusecs was released from the dam and, by 4 p.m., it was increased to 10,000 cusecs. From July, the discharge would be increased to 16,000 cusecs. In August, 18,000 cusecs would be released. A total of 17.32 lakh acres of land, including 5.26 lakh acres of kuruvai crop, in 12 districts of the delta region would benefit from the water release, officials said.