Ransomware

Why in news?

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- New Virus, Ransomware becoming a global threat in day-to-day computer handling.
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- The phenomenon that users of computers and researchers in cyber security were witness to from, May 13 has raised many questions of vulnerability.
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What is the operation of the Ransomware?

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- It is a type of malicious software **designed to block access to a computer system until a sum of money is paid.**
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- The intrusion was a phishing attack, persuading a user to open a mail sent by a motivated intruder, appears to be from a genuine and authorised source, and the result of a malware (WannaCrypt 2.0) assembled not at one place but in several centres across the globe.
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- The ransom demanded in each instance was $300 to be paid in Bit coin — a digital currency which renders the beneficiary anonymous and is difficult to locate.
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- One rough estimate is that the ransom-seekers **will eventually net $1 billion,** and that they have already received about $33,000.
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What is the origin of Ransom ware?

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- The malware was possibly stolen from a stockpile of weapons which **the National Security Agency (NSA)** had built up over the years as a counter-offensive to cyber-attacks on the US and its allies by nations such as Russia, China and North Korea.
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- Shadow Brokers (whose exact identity is yet to be unravelled) had started posting online certain tools they had stolen from the NSA 'armoury'.
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- It revives memories of **Stuxnet,** a worm that both the US and Israel used against Iran's nuclear programme more than five years ago.
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- While there is no corroboration to the charge levelled against the NSA, it is interesting that a few former intelligence officers have taken the stand that the tools used in the latest episode were indeed from **the NSA's 'Tailored Access Operations' unit.**
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What are the annoying aspects of the threat?

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- There are two aspects to the outrageous attack that are worrisome.
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- The first is that the holes in the older version of Windows were known to Microsoft, but **it did not do much to patch them up,** except for customers who paid to remove the deficiencies.
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- The other theory is that customers who were aware of the risk **did not bother to act** because of the costs involved and the problems related to adapting to upgrades.
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- Either way, this was a lesson to be learnt by both software manufacturers and users.
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What is the way forward?

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- The final question is whether anything can be done to predict or prevent a similar attack, repeated appeal not to open attachments received from

unknown sources has fallen on deaf ears.
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- The only way is to minimise damage through encryption of vital, if not all the data in the hardware or system.
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- The speed of the attack was somewhat curtailed by counter-measures. But we still have to keep our fingers crossed for there is no knowing if the aggressors have more tools in their possession to cause further damage.
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- The good news for us is that there are no reports of any major intrusion into computers or systems in India.
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Source: Business Line

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