ISRO Spy Case - Nambi Narayanan

Why in news?

The Supreme Court has recently noted that former ISRO scientist Nambi Narayanan was a victim of false allegations of espionage by the Kerala police.

What is the ISRO spy scandal case?

- A Maldivian woman was arrested in India in 1994 and was suspected to sell secrets from ISRO scientists to Pakistan.
- Three scientists were arrested on charges of sharing official secrets on space technology and launch missions.
- Mr. Narayanan was one of the three arrested by the Kerala Police in November, 1994.
- He was the director of cryogenic engine technology at Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO).
- The police accused him of passing on documents and drawings of ISRO to Pakistan.
- This was in relation with Vikas engine technology (Indian version of France's Viking engine), cryogenic engine technology and PSLV flight data/drawings.
- Soon, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) took over the probe from the police.
- The CBI, in 1996, recommended closure of the case, citing complete lack of evidence.
- It also pointed to the grave lapses in the police probe which used questionable methods and proceeded on nothing but suspicion.
- Ever since the proceedings were dropped, Mr. Narayanan has fought to bring his accusers to justice.

What is the recent court order?

- The court observed that the former ISRO scientist was "unnecessarily arrested and harassed".
- The court ordered the State of Kerala to pay him Rs. 50 lakh.
- This is to compensate for the "mental cruelty" he suffered and the loss of his fundamental right to live with dignity and self-respect.
- It also ordered the appointment of a three-member committee under, Justice D.K. Jain to find "ways and means" to bring before justice the erring officials.

What is the significance?

- The ‘ISRO espionage case’ is a black mark in the history of police investigation in the country.
- The attitude of the Kerala government had been contentious as it had been unsympathetic to the demand for action against its errant police officers.
- It opposed the CBI’s closure report and also made an attempt to revive the investigation by its own police.
- The court's order thus comes as recognition for Mr. Narayanan's battle for the restoration of his honour and dignity.
- The order has also reaffirmed the principle that compensation is a remedy for the violation of human rights.
- This would set a precedent for those arrested for heinous offences and acquitted after long years in prison.

Source: The Hindu

