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MPs grill officials on DNA Bill

It seeks to create a data bank of suspects, missing persons

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A parliamentary panel headed by Congress leader Jairam Ramesh began hearing the contentious DNA Technology (Use and Application) Regulation Bill, 2019 with members grilling officials from the Department of Biotechnology on scope for violations of privacy in the proposed DNA data bank.

Renu Swarup, Secretary, Biotechnology Department, gave a presentation to the Standing Committee on Science and Technology on Thursday.

The Bill seeks to create a national data bank, and regional data banks which will have DNA samples of under-

11/11/19
trials, suspects, missing persons and unknown deceased persons. It has proposed DNA sampling and profiling of citizens accused of crime or reported missing, and storing their unique genetic information for administrative purposes.

A member told *The Hindu* that flagging the malware infection at the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant, an Opposition leader asked: "If the Kudankulam nuclear power plant can be infected with malware, then what is the guarantee that foreign governments won't try to hack into this sensitive data bank."

As per Ms. Swarup's presentation, the DNA regulato-

ry board will have members of the National Investigation Agency or Central Bureau of Investigation too. The reason for their inclusion has not been explained. Questions were also raised on what guarantee is there such a data base will not be misused at a later point. The members asked what is the definition of a suspect and pointed to the absence of a sunset clause to expunge DNA samples. "We have been given only three months to examine the hugely controversial and contentious Bill. We want to do the widest possible consultations before finalising the report," Mr. Ramesh said.