



News Analysis (20 Jul, 2020)

 drishtias.com/current-affairs-news-analysis-editorials/news-analysis/20-07-2020/print

3rd G20 FMCBG Meeting

Why in News

Recently India has virtually participated in the **3rd G20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors (FMCBG)** meeting under the **Presidency of Saudi Arabia**.

- It discussed the global economic outlook amid evolving **Covid-19 pandemic** crisis along with other **G20 finance track priorities** for the year 2020.
- The **First meeting was held in February 2020 at Riyadh, Saudi Arabia**.

Key Points

- **G20 Action Plan:** The importance and relevance of the G20 action plan was highlighted.
 - It was endorsed in response to Covid-19 in April 2020.
 - It has a list of collective commitments under the pillars of **Health Response, Economic Response, Strong and Sustainable Recovery and International Financial Coordination**, aimed at coordinating G20 efforts to fight the pandemic.
- **India's Response:**
 - India emphasised the need to **balance supply side and demand side measures** in response to Covid-19.
 - It also spoke about the **procyclicality of credit rating downgrades** by the rating agencies and its deterrent impact on policy options, particularly for **Emerging Market Economy (EMEs)**.
 - **Procyclic ratings** are stricter during an economic downturn than an expansion. As a result, firms receive **overly pessimistic ratings in a recession**, relative to during an expansion.
 - **International coordination required** in addressing the **spill-over effects of exit strategies** related to covid-19 lockdowns.
 - **Spillover effect** refers to the impact of unrelated events in one nation on the economies of other nations.

- **G20 Finance Track deliverables:** FMCBG discussed the developments on G20 Finance Track deliverables under the Saudi Arabian Presidency. **India** discussed **two such deliverables:**
 - First, **Enhancing access to opportunities for Women, Youth and Small Market Economies (SMEs)** and a **menu of policy options on access to opportunity.**
 - Second, **International Taxation agenda** and the **intended deliverable of formulating a solution** for addressing challenges related to **digital taxation.**
 - India said that the consensus based solution should be simple, inclusive and based on a robust economic impact assessment.
 - It is in line with the recent decision of the **United States Trade Representative (USTR)** to **initiate an investigation into taxes adopted** or under consideration by 10 nations, including India, on revenues of American digital service companies like Netflix, Airbnb etc.
 - **Digital taxation or Digital Services Taxes (DSTs)** are the adopted taxes on revenues that certain companies generate from providing certain digital services. E.g. digital multinationals like Google, Amazon and Apple etc.
 - In response to it the central government has stated that **it will not extend the deadline for payment of equalisation levy by non-resident e-commerce** players, even though a majority of them are yet to deposit the first installment of the tax.
 - The **equalization levy is aimed at taxing foreign companies** which have a significant local client base in India but are billing them through their offshore units, effectively escaping the country's tax system.

G-20

- The **G20** is an **informal group of 19 countries** and the **European Union**, with **representatives** of the **International Monetary Fund** and the **World Bank**.
 - The G20 membership comprises a mix of the world's largest advanced and emerging economies, representing about two-thirds of the world's population, 85% of global gross domestic product, 80% of global investment and over 75% of global trade.
- **Headquarter:** The **G20 operates as a forum** and not as an organisation. Therefore, it **does not have any permanent secretariat.**
- **Origin**
 - **1997-1999 Asian Financial Crisis:** This was a ministerial-level forum which emerged after G7 invited both developed and developing economies. The finance ministers and central bank governors began meeting in 1999.
 - Amid the 2008 Financial Crisis the world saw the need for a new consensus-building at the highest political level. It was decided that the G20 leaders would begin meeting once annually.

- **Members**

- The members of the G20 are **Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the European Union.**
- One nation holds the chair every year, known as the 'G20 Presidency'. **Saudia Arabia** is holding the 2020 chair.
- The 2021 summit will be held in **Italy.**

Source: PIB

China Crossed its 1960's LAC Claims

Why in News

According to the records of 1960 boundary talks, the Chinese troops have gone beyond China's own territorial claims at Pangong Tso Lake and Galwan Valley.

The records also raise questions on recent statements from Indian officials that China is not present anywhere on Indian territory.

Key Points

Official Records:

- The 1960's documents show that the Chinese claim over the **Pangong Tso Lake** was at near **Finger 8**, around 8 km east of where China now says the **Line of Actual Control (LAC)** is. Now the Chinese troops are at **Finger 4**.

The Fingers refer to mountain spurs on the bank of the Lake, and run from 1 to 8, west to east.



- The documents show that, in the **Galwan Valley**, the LAC ran east of the bend of the Galwan river, called the **Y-nallah**, which is now claimed by China.
 - The Y-nallah was the site of the recent clash between Indian and Chinese troops.
 - The clash took place following a dispute during the de-escalation process, triggered when the Chinese troops put up a tent near the bend.



Reason for Increased Claims:

- The Chinese are now likely interpreting their perception of the LAC in a manner that seeks **to redefine or maximise old claims** along new lines, as cartography and terrain knowledge have improved, which offer them **tactical advantage** and **more 'domination'** in key areas along the LAC.
- **Strengthening of India's border infrastructure** (e.g. construction of **Darbuk-Shyok-Daulat Beg Oldie road**) may also be the reason.

Source: TH

ICJ on Qatar Blockade

Why in News

Recently, the **International Court of Justice** (ICJ) refused an appeal by **Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates** (UAE) which challenged the authority of the **International Civil Aviation Organisation** (ICAO) to adjudicate on the legality of the **Qatar blockade**.

- ICJ is the top **United Nations** (UN) court and ICAO is the international aviation agency of the UN.
- UAE, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Qatar are located in the **Persian Gulf Region** and are the members of the **Gulf Cooperation Council** (GCC).



Key Points

- **Qatar Blockade:**
 - In **June 2017**, Qatar's neighbouring Arab nations of Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain and Egypt **shut off shipping routes and air space with Qatar** for its **alleged support for terrorism** and its **ties with Iran**.
 - It severed their diplomatic and economic ties with Qatar.
 - However, **Qatar denied supporting Islamic extremism** and has openly **condemned its isolation** as a clear attack on its sovereignty.
 - All four neighbours issued a **13-point list of demands for Doha** (capital of Qatar) to comply with in order to restore erstwhile relations.
 - Some of the demands included Qatar closing down news outlets such as **Al-Jazeera**, end ties with radical Islamist groups like the **Muslim Brotherhood**, scale down ties with Shia-majority Iran and remove Turkish troops stationed in the country.
 - Since 2017, the **blockade of Qatar has included:**
 - Closing of its only land border with Saudi Arabia.
 - Stopping Qatari ships from entering ports anywhere in the Saudi coalition.
 - Blocking Qatari planes from flying in their airspace.
 - Expelling Qatari citizens from these countries as part of the measures.
- **Dispute at the ICJ:**
 - Qatar approached the ICAO, alleging that its rights of free passage under the **1944 Convention on Civil Aviation** were violated by the blockade.
 - Saudi Arabia and its allies argued that the **ICJ should have the authority** to settle the dispute instead of the ICAO because the **dispute goes beyond the aviation matters**.
 - In 2018, the **ICAO ruled against the Saudi coalition**, holding that it did have jurisdiction to hear the case and its ruling was **recently backed by the ICJ** too.
 - The blockade **still remains in force** and the ICAO is expected to **deliver its verdict in 2021**. The ruling will be in Qatar's favour and will be a major win for the country and its **national carrier, Qatar Airways**.

International Civil Aviation Organisation

- It was established by the **Convention on International Civil Aviation** which was signed on **7th December 1944 in Chicago**.
- It laid the foundation for the standards and procedures for peaceful global air navigation and established the core principles permitting international transport by air.
- **Objective:** To foster the planning and development of international air transport so as to ensure the safe and orderly growth of international civil aviation throughout the world.
- **India is among its 193 members.**
- **Headquarters:** Montreal, Canada.

Source: IE

Concern Over Imports of Small Arms

Why in News

Recently, the domestic small arms manufacturers have expressed their concern over continuing imports of small arms by the Government of India.

Key Points

- **No Big Orders for Domestic Manufactures:**

- In the last few years, several Indian companies have invested in the small arms segment. The government also opened up the ammunition sector to the private sector, given the large requirement of small arms.

The Government of India has opened up the **Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)** up to 74% and on a case to case basis it is even 100%.

- The Indian companies are capable of making small arms with over 50% indigenous content and can also match the price and timelines.
- However, in dearth of any major order, the **Indian companies** are now looking for smaller orders from police and **Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF)**.
- Further, Indian **companies** are also **not considered for deals through Fast Track Procurement (FTP)**, which is limited to foreign vendors currently.

- **Small Arms Import:**

- Recently, the Indian Army has ordered 72,400 **SIG-716 assault rifles** from Sig Sauer of the U.S.A for the second time.

The Army has been attempting to replace the indigenous **Indian National Small Arms System (INSAS) rifles** with a modern rifle.

- Earlier, in February 2019, the Defence Ministry procured 72,400 SIG-716 assault rifles from Sig Sauer of the U.S.A through Fast Track Procurement (FTP), most of which were for the Army.
- The remaining demand of over 7 lakh rifles was to be met through the licensed manufacture of **Russian AK-203 rifles** in India through a joint venture with the **Ordnance Factory Board (OFB)**. However, the final deal has been stuck over the issue of pricing.

- **Demand of Domestic Manufactures:**

They are asking to give domestic companies the same level playing field as foreign companies to showcase their products and support **Make in India**.

Way Forward

- By supporting its domestic manufactures, India can become the centre of excellence in the small arms sector. It will also reduce the import dependence of arms and ammunition.
- Promoting domestic manufacturing of small arms, is in line with the government's **Atma Nirbhar (self reliance) Bharat** push.
- Domestic manufacturing of arms will also create jobs for Indians.

Source: TH

RADT Vs RT-PCR

Why in News

Recently, New Delhi's **Covid-19** testing strategy has become controversial due to **the low level of RT-PCR** (Reverse Transcription Polymerase Chain Reaction) **re-testing in persons** tested negative in **RADT** (Rapid Antigen Detection Tests).

Using RADT **widely without following up with adequate retests contradicts Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) guidelines** on use of the RADT test.

Key Points

- **ICMR Guidelines:**
 - RADT ought to be used only in **containment zones, hotspots, hospital settings and laboratories** among those who manifested one or other symptoms of the disease, influenza-like illnesses.
 - People with **comorbidities who were asymptomatic** and high-risk contacts of those confirmed positive.
 - Those who tested 'negative' and whom **clinicians suspected** to be harbouring the disease ought to be **definitely tested sequentially by RT-PCR** to rule out infection and **higher chances of false negatives**.
 - Those who test positive don't need a re-test and must be considered positive.
- **Testing in New Delhi:**
 - From 18th June - 16th July, it has conducted 3,05,820 RADT. Of these, 2,85,225 tests came 'negative' and out of them only, 1,670 were chosen for re-test by RT-PCR and 262 of these were confirmed positive.
 - Only **1 in 200 of those who tested negative in an antigen** test to detect possible coronavirus cases **were re-tested**, which is against the given guidelines of ICMR.
 - Of those re-tested with **RT-PCR, around 15% tested positive**, which is higher than the **RADT positive results i.e. 6%**.
- **Arguments for Low Re-tests:**
 - Re-testing everyone would defeat the purpose of having another (rapid antigen) test.
 - The RT-PCR test takes a minimum of 2-5 hours including the time taken for sample transportation. This **limits the widespread use of the test** and also impedes quick augmentation of testing capacity in various containment zones and hospital settings.

In **RADT, the maximum duration** for interpreting a positive or negative test is **30 minutes**, thus a **quicker complement to the standard RT-PCR** tests.
- **Arguments Against:**
 - The consequence of **indiscriminately deploying antigen tests** would mean expanding the number of tests and presenting a lower positivity rate while not necessarily being able to **reliably establish the extent of the spread** of the coronavirus in the population.
 - A low level of re-testing with RT-PCR in persons who are testing antigen negative will **underestimate the cases** and make the **tracking inaccurate**.

RADT

- It is a test on swabbed nasal samples that detects antigens (foreign substances that induce an immune response in the body) that are found on or within the SARS-CoV-2 virus.
- It is a **point-of-care test**, performed outside the conventional laboratory setting, and is used to quickly obtain a diagnostic result.
- Like RT-PCR, the rapid antigen detection test too seeks to detect the virus rather than the **antibodies** produced by the body.
 - While the mechanism is different, the **most significant difference between the two is time.**
 - As the ICMR has pointed out, the **RT-PCR** test takes a minimum of **2-5 hours** including the time taken for sample transportation..
 - In a reliable **rapid antigen detection test**, the maximum duration for interpreting a positive or negative test is **30 minutes.**

RT-PCR Test

- **Kary Mullis**, the American biochemist invented the PCR technique. He was awarded the **Nobel Prize** for Chemistry in 1993.
- Under this, **copies of a segment of DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid)** are created using an enzyme called Polymerase.

The 'chain reaction' signifies how the DNA fragments are copied, exponentially — one is copied into two, the two are copied into four, and so on.
- A fluorescent **DNA binding dye called the “probe” is added to DNA**, which shows the presence of the virus on a **fluorometer.**
- However, coronavirus is made of **RNA (ribonucleic acid).**
- Therefore to detect coronavirus, **RNA is converted into DNA** using a technique called reverse transcription.

A 'reverse transcriptase' enzyme converts the RNA into DNA.
- Copies of the DNA are then made and amplified.

Source: TH

Winter Rise in Covid-19 Cases

Why in News

According to a recent study, “**The Covid-19 Spread in India and Its Dependence on Temperature and Relative Humidity**”, the spread of **Covid-19** may pick up the pace during peak monsoon and winter with a fall in the temperature.

- The study was conducted by the **School of Earth, Ocean and Climate Sciences** of the **IIT, Bhubaneswar** and the Department of Microbiology of the **AIIMS, Bhubaneswar.**
- It took into **account the pattern of the coronavirus outbreak and the number of such cases** in all of the states between April and June 2020.

Key Points

- The respiratory viral **pandemics** of the 21st century (**SARS in 2003, Swine Flu in 2009**) have revealed that **seasonality** in environmental factors plays an important role in the dynamics of their spread.
- Researchers tried to observe the state-level relationship between **environmental factors** such as **temperature, relative humidity, specific humidity and solar radiation** on the Covid-19 spread over the Indian region.
 - The **rainfall, decrease in temperatures and cooling of the atmosphere** coupled with progression towards winter may environmentally favour the spread of Covid-19 in the country.
- **Temperature and relative humidity have a significant impact** on the **disease growth rate and doubling time** and the **rise in temperatures leads to a decline** in the transmission of the virus.
- **Correlation with Covid-19:**
 - A one-degree-Celsius rise in temperature leads to a 0.99% decrease in cases and increases the doubling time by 1.13 days, implying a slowdown of the virus spread.
 - An increase of 10% in relative humidity tends to decrease the growth rate and doubling time of coronavirus cases by 1.18 days.
- The study also carried out an **analysis of the impact of solar radiation on the spread of Covid-19.**
 - A **higher surface-reaching solar radiation leads to a reduction** in the number of infections and an **increase in the doubling time of cases**, similar to that of temperatures.
 - The **mean difference of as high as seven degrees Celsius between summer and winter** points to a possibility for greater potential spread of Covid-19 in winter.
- **Challenge:**

The progression of the season towards **monsoon, post-monsoon, and after that winter** with a continuous reduction in temperature will prove a significant **challenge for health workers and policymakers** attempting to enforce mitigation and control measures.

Way Forward

- Policymakers should take **targeted decisions** that may also include environmental information to slow the spread.
- The actual spread will eventually depend on human intervention, such as strict enforcement of universal masking, physical distancing and improved hand hygiene and possible commencement of herd immunity.

Source: TH

National Disaster Response Fund

Why in News

The Central Government has allowed **contributions from any person or institution** in the **National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF)** as per Section **46(1)(b) of the Disaster Management (DM) Act, 2005**.

Key Points

- **Formation:**
 - National Calamity Contingency Fund (NCCF) was renamed as National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF) with the enactment of the Disaster Management Act in 2005.
 - It is defined in Section **46 of the Disaster Management Act, 2005 (DM Act)**.
 - It is placed in the “**Public Account**” of Government of India under “**reserve funds not bearing interest**”.
 - **Public Accounts:** It was constituted **under Article 266 (2)** of the Constitution. It accounts for flows for those transactions where the **government is merely acting as a banker** eg. **provident funds, small savings** etc. These funds do not belong to the government and have to be paid back at some time.
 - Expenditures from it are not required to be approved by the Parliament.
- **Role:**
 - It is **managed by the Central Government** for meeting the expenses for **emergency response, relief and rehabilitation** due to any threatening disaster situation or disaster.
 - It supplements the **State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF)** in case of a disaster of severe nature, provided adequate funds are not available in the SDRF.
 - SDRF is the **primary fund available with the State governments** for responses to notified disasters to meet expenditure for providing immediate relief.
 - The Centre contributes 75% of the SDRF allocation for general category States and Union Territories, and 90% for special category States/UTs (northeast States, Sikkim, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, and Jammu & Kashmir).
- **Financing:** Financed through the **levy of a cess on certain items**, chargeable to excise and customs duty, and approved annually through the **Finance Bill**.
 - Currently, a **National Calamity Contingent Duty (NCCD)** is levied to finance the NDRF and additional budgetary support is provided as and when necessary.
 - NCCD is levied in the case of goods specified in the Seventh Schedule (goods manufactured or produced).
- **Monitoring: Department of Agriculture and Cooperation** under the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmer Welfare monitors relief activities for calamities associated with **drought, hailstorms, pest attacks and cold wave/frost** while **rest of the natural calamities** are monitored by the **Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)**.
Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) audits the accounts of NDRF.

Source: TH

National Award for Excellence in Forestry

Why in News

- The **National Award of Excellence for Outstanding Research in Forestry for the year 2019** has been awarded to Kannan C S Warriar, a scientist at **Institute of Forest Genetics and Tree Breeding (IFGTB)**.
- This award is conferred by the **Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education (ICFRE)**.

ICFRE is an apex body in the national forestry research system. ICFRE was recently declared as the **Centre for Excellence** in addressing issues related to **land degradation** by the Prime Minister.

Key Points

- The award has been awarded to Kannan C S Warriar for releasing **three salt-tolerant productive clones of *Casuarina*** that are suitable for **salt-affected soils**, for the first time in the country.
- India has 6.73 million hectares of salt affected land and is also the largest producer of *Casuarina* in the world which makes the production of these clones a significant achievement.

Casuarina

- *Casuarina*, also known as **kattadi and savukku**, is a plant genus with over 17 species with *Casuarina equisetifolia* being introduced in India in the 19th century.
- They have a role in **nitrogen fixation** in symbiotic association with bacteria Frankia.
- They provide fuel wood, pulp for paper making and of late is a preferred choice for biomass-based power generation.
- They are also used at construction sites for scaffolding.
- They are used as shelterbelts in coastal areas and windbreaks for protecting agricultural crops and banana plantations.
- They also play a key role in reclaiming mined areas and afforesting nutrient-poor sites.

Warriar has also done extensive work on the **conservation of endangered sacred groves** in Alappuzha district of Kerala.

Sacred Groves

- Sacred groves are **communally protected forests** which usually have a significant **religious connotation** for the protecting community.
- In India, there are over a lakh sacred groves across different states called by different names like ***Kaavu* in Malayalam, *Koyil kaadu* in Tamil, *Orans* in Rajasthan, *Devara kaadu* in Karnataka, and *Sernas* in Madhya Pradesh.**
- Many **rare and endemic species**, and **species having medicinal and economic value** can be found here, thus making them Biodiversity Hotspots. They house gene pools of some critically endangered plant species.
- They are often associated with religious beliefs and felling of trees in sacred groves is considered taboo.
- Sacred groves have been legally protected under ‘**community reserves**’ in the **Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Act, 2002**.

- Some **common threats** to Sacred Groves are:
 - **Disappearance** of the **traditional belief systems**, which were fundamental to the concept of sacred groves.
 - The **transformation** of the primitive forms of nature worship into formal temple worship.
 - **Rapid urbanization** and developmental interventions such as roads, railways tracks, dams including commercial forestry.
 - Invasion by **exotic weeds**.
 - Pressures due to **increasing livestock** and fuelwood collection.

Source: TOI

BlackRock Android Malware

Why in News

Recently, a security firm has alerted about a **new malware called BlackRock** which targets social, communication, and dating apps.

Key Points

- BlackRock is a **banking Trojan** and said to be an enhanced version of existing **Xerxes malware** which itself is a variant of the **LokiBot Android trojan**.
 - A **trojan** is any type of malicious program disguised as a legitimate one. Often, they are designed to steal sensitive information (login credentials, account numbers, financial information, credit card information, and the like) from users.
 - Banking trojans are a specific kind of trojan malware. Once installed onto a client machine, banking trojans use a variety of techniques to create botnets, steal credentials, inject malicious code into browsers, or steal money.
- **Functioning:** It collects user information by abusing the Accessibility Service of Android and overlaying a fake screen on top of a genuine app. It uses Android DPC (Device Policy Controller) to provide access to other permissions.
- **Concerns:**
 - It surfaces as a **google update**.
 - The malware is said to have the design to overlay attacks, send, spam, and steal SMS messages as well as lock the victim in the launcher activity. It can also **act as a keylogger** (i.e. track the keys struck on a keyboard), which essentially could help a hacker to acquire financial information.
 - Despite being a banking Trojan, BlackRock is said to **target non-financial apps**.
It targets a total of 337 apps, which is significantly higher than any of the already known malicious code.
 - It **makes antivirus applications useless**.

Source: IE

Bathynomus raksasa: Isopod Species

Why in News

Recently, scientists have reported the **discovery of the first super giant isopod species in the eastern Indian Ocean** named '*Bathynomus raksasa*'.

- It has been described as the '**cockroach of the sea**'.
- A team of researchers from Singapore discovered it while exploring waters of the Indian Ocean **in Bantan**, off the southern coast of West Java in **Indonesia** in **2018**.

Key Points



- **Super Giant Isopod:** The *Bathynomus raksasa* is a super giant isopod in the genus *Bathynomus*.
 - Isopods are **marine invertebrates** (animals without backbones) that belong to the greater crustacean group of animals, which also includes crabs and shrimp.
 - They live in many different types of habitat, from mountains and deserts to the deep sea.
 - **Isopods that reach 50 cm are referred to as supergiants.** The largest isopod species are from the genus *Bathynomus*.
- **Features:**
 - It has **14 legs** but uses these only to crawl along the bed of oceans in search of food.
 - It measures around **50 cm in length**, which is big for isopods, which normally do not grow beyond 33 cm.
 - The only member of the isopod species that **exceeds the raksasa in size** is the *Bathynomus giganteus*, which is commonly found in the deep waters of the western Atlantic Ocean.
 - As a **scavenger**, it eats the remains of dead marine animals, such as whales and fish, but can also go for long periods without food, a trait that it shares with the cockroach.
- **Significance:**
 - It is the first recorded species of the genus *Bathynomus* from Indonesia.
 - It is the **sixth 'supergiant' species** from the Indo-West Pacific, and is one of the largest known members of the genus *Bathynomus*.
 - It's discovery will contribute towards increasing knowledge about the deep sea.

Source: IE
