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India and China prepare for fresh talks

- As the stand-off along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh entered the 17th week, India and China are preparing for another round of military talks in an attempt to resolve the tensions, a defence source said.
- Both sides agreed to hold the next round of military talks. Discussions are under way on the issue but dates have not been fixed yet. Even the level at which the talks would be held has not been fixed yet.
- It could be either at the Corps Commander level or at the Major General level.
- This follows the diplomatic-level talks at the Joint Secretary level last week of the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination (WMCC) on India-China Border Affairs.
- Following the WMCC talks, over the weekend Defence Minister Rajnath Singh reviewed the situation with National Security Adviser Ajit Doval, Chief of the Defence Staff Gen. Bipin Rawat and the three service chiefs.

Five rounds so far:

- So far, five rounds of Corps Commander-level talks have been held but there has been little progress on the ground to restore status quo ante of pre-May positions beyond the initial steps taken for disengagement and de-escalation.
- The last round of military talks were on August 8 at the Major General level at Daulat Beg Oldie (DBO), specially to discuss the strategic **Depsang plains** where China has undertaken massive build-up of forces on its side of the LAC, and PLA troops have also been blocking Indian Army patrols from reaching the patrolling points.
- Depsang Plains and **Pangong Tso** remain major areas of concern with Chinese troops continuing to occupy the ridgelines of Finger 4, about 8 km inside from Finger 8, up to which India's claim extends. There has been no change in situation on the ground.



DRDO lists 108 defence items for Indian firms

- A list of 108 military subsystems and components has been identified for development by the Indian industry and the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) will provide support for the process, the Defence Ministry said on Monday.
- The development of the subsystems and components would be done over the next couple of years. The DRDO has been partnering with industry for many years, including the development of full systems like the **Advanced Towed Artillery Gun System (ATAGS)** and **Pinaka rocket launchers**, among others.
- The present industry base for the DRDO consists of 1,800 Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) along with Defence Public Sector Undertakings (DPSUs), ordnance factories and large-scale industries. The DRDO already offers its technologies to industry for manufacture at a nominal cost and has been providing free access to its patents.

Negative import list:

- The announcement follows the 101 items on the negative import list issued by the Defence Ministry on August 9, which have to be domestically procured in a phased manner.
- This was part of a series of measures announced by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in May to promote domestic defence manufacturing as part of the “**Atmanirbhar Bharat**” initiative.
- These include the negative import list, separate budgetary allocation for domestic procurements, indigenisation of spares and components and raising the FDI cap in defence through automatic route from 49% to 74%.
- Separately, the Godrej group said in a statement that it had partnered with Ordnance Factory Chandrapur (OFC) in Maharashtra to conceptualise and develop an indigenous automated assembly line for production of Pinaka Rockets at a new facility that was inaugurated early this month.



Value Added Information

About Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO):

- DRDO works under the administrative control of Ministry of Defence, Government of India.
- It is working to establish world class science and technology base for India and provides our Defence Services decisive edge by equipping them with internationally competitive systems and solutions.

Genesis & Growth:

- DRDO was established in 1958 after combining Technical Development Establishment (TDEs) of the Indian Army and the Directorate of Technical Development & Production (DTDP) with the Defence Science Organisation (DSO).
- Starting with 10 laboratories, DRDO has now grown to a network of 52 laboratories which are deeply engaged in developing defence technologies covering various disciplines, like aeronautics, armaments, electronics, combat vehicles, engineering systems, instrumentation, missiles, advanced computing and simulation, special materials, naval systems, life sciences, training, information systems and agriculture.
- Presently, the Organisation is backed by over 5000 scientists and about 25,000 other scientific, technical and supporting personnel.
- Several major projects for the development of missiles, armaments, light combat aircrafts, radars, electronic warfare systems etc are on hand and significant achievements have already been made in several such technologies.

Mission:

- Design, develop and lead to production state-of-the-art sensors, weapon systems, platforms and allied equipment for our Defence Services.
- Provide technological solutions to the Services to optimise combat effectiveness and to promote well-being of the troops.
- Develop infrastructure and committed quality manpower and build strong indigenous technology base.



Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme (IGMDP):

- IGMDP was brain child of renowned scientist Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam.
- It was intended to attain self-sufficiency in the field of missile technology.
- After keeping in mind the requirements of various types of missiles by the defense forces, the program recognized the need to develop five missile systems.
- The IGMDP formally got the approval of Indian government on July 26, 1983.
- It brought together the country's scientific community, academic institutions, R&D laboratories, industries and the three defence services in giving shape to the strategic, indigenous missile systems.

The missiles developed under IGMDP are:

1. Short-range surface-to-surface ballistic missile – **Prithvi**
 2. Intermediate-range surface-to-surface ballistic missile – **Agni**
 3. Short-range low-level surface-to-air missile – **Trishul**
 4. Medium-range surface-to-air missile – **Akash**
 5. Third generation anti-tank missile – **Nag**
- The Agni, which was initially conceived as a technology demonstrator project in the form of a re-entry vehicle, was later upgraded to a ballistic missile with different ranges. Dr. Kalam played a major role in the development and operationalisation of Agni and Prithvi missiles.
 - After achieving the goal of making India self-reliant in missile technology, DRDO on January 8, 2008, formally announced successful completion of IGMDP.

DNA Bill can be misused, flags draft report

- The Bill that proposes DNA sampling and profiling of citizens accused of crime or reported missing and storing their unique genetic information for administrative purposes has some alarming provisions that could be misused



for caste or community-based profiling, a draft report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Science and Technology has flagged.

- The committee, headed by Congress leader Jairam Ramesh, met on Monday, but for want of quorum, the draft report, which has been circulated among the members, was not finalised.
- **The DNA Technology (Use and Application) Regulation Act, 2019**, has been in the works for 15 years now. Nearly 60 countries have enacted similar legislation, with the U.S. bringing in a law as far back as in 1994.
- The committee, in its draft report, pointed out that DNA profiles can reveal extremely sensitive information of an individual such as pedigree, skin colour, behaviour, illness, health status and susceptibility to diseases.

Key findings of the report:

- Under the provisions of the Bill, access to such intrusive information can be misused to specifically target individuals and their families with their own genetic data. This is particularly worrying as it could even be used to incorrectly link a particular caste/community to criminal activities.
- The report also red-flagged disregard to an individual's privacy and other safeguards. The Bill proposes to store DNA profiles of suspects, undertrials, victims and their relatives for future investigations.
- While there is a good case for a DNA database of convicts, so that repeat offenders may be easily identified, there is no legal or moral justification for a database with DNA of the other categories as noted above, given the high potential for misuse.
- In the Bill, if a person is arrested for an offence that carries punishment up to seven years, investigation authorities must take the person's written consent before taking the DNA sample. But this consent is only "perfunctory".
- The Bill refers to consent in several provisions, but in each of those, a magistrate can easily override consent, thereby in effect, making consent perfunctory. There is also no guidance in the Bill on the grounds and reasons when the magistrate can override consent, which could become a fatal flaw.



'Consider online NEET from next year'

- The Supreme Court on Monday asked the Medical Council of India (MCI) to consider providing an online option for taking the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance (NEET) from next year.
- "If Joint Entrance Examination [JEE] is allowed online, why not NEET? It is the same **National Testing Agency (NTA)** conducting both exams. Why can't you think of something next year... You can think about it," Justice L. Nageswara Rao, heading a three-judge Bench, orally addressed MCI counsel Gaurav Sharma during the virtual court hearing.
- But the court refused to order authorities to set up exam centres abroad or have the NEET held online this year to facilitate candidates abroad, especially those in West Asia.
- The entrance exam is fixed for September 13.

Value Added Information

National Testing Agency (NTA):

About National Testing Agency:

- National Testing Agency (NTA) was established as a Society registered under the **Indian Societies Registration Act, 1860**.
- It is an **autonomous** and **self-sustained testing organization** to conduct entrance examinations for admission/fellowship in **higher educational institutions**.

Objectives:

- To conduct **efficient, transparent** and **international standards tests** in order to assess the competency of candidates for admission and recruitment purposes.

Functions:

- To **identify partner institutions** with adequate infrastructure from the existing schools and higher education institutions which would facilitate the **conduct of online examinations** without adversely impacting their academic routine.



- To create a **question bank** for all subjects using modern techniques.
- To establish a **strong R&D culture** as well as a pool of experts in different aspects of testing.
- To provide **training and advisory services** to the institutions in India.
- To **collaborate with international organizations** like ETS (Educational Testing Services).
- To undertake **any other examination** that is **entrusted to it by the Ministries/Departments** of Government of India/State Governments.
- To **undertake the reforms** and training of school boards as well as other bodies where the testing standards should be comparable with the entrance examinations.

Governance:

- NTA is chaired by an **eminent educationist** appointed by the **Ministry of Human Resource Development**.
- The **Chief Executive Officer (CEO)** will be the Director-General to be appointed by the Government.
- There will be a **Board of Governors** comprising members from user institutions.

Significance:

- Establishment of a specialized testing body like NTA has **relieved the agencies such as CBSE, AICTE** of their responsibilities of conducting Entrance examinations.
- Examinations are conducted by NTA in the **online mode at least twice a year**, in order to give enough opportunities to candidates and to bring out the best in them.
- In order to **increase the accessibility** and meet the requirements of the rural students, it will locate centers at **sub-district and district level**.
- National Testing Agency (NTA) has launched a '**mobile app**' and **Test Practice Centres (TPC's)** through which students can practice or take mock tests on their own computers or smartphones.



Guwahati gets India's 'longest' river ropeway

- India's 'longest' passenger ropeway across a river was unveiled in Guwahati on Monday, almost a year after it was completed.
- The 1.82-km bi-cable jig-back ropeway connects a forest campus near the Kamrup (Metro) Deputy Commissioner's office in the city on the southern bank of the Brahmaputra and a hillock behind the DouL Govinda temple in north Guwahati on the other.
- The ropeway passes over the mid-river Peacock Island that houses Umananda, a medieval Shiva temple.

China launches warship for Pakistan Navy

- China has launched first of the four advanced naval warships it is building for Pakistan, amid deepening defence ties between the two all-weather allies.
- The launching ceremony for the first warship was held at the Hudong Zhonghua Shipyard in Shanghai on Sunday.

Type-054 class frigate:

- Pakistan-China defence ties turn a new chapter with the launch of the first ship of **Type-054 class frigate**, Pakistan's state-run APP news agency reported.
- The Type-054 class, equipped with the latest surface, subsurface, anti-air weapons, combat management system, and sensors, will be one of the technologically advanced surface platforms of the Pakistan Navy fleet.
- Pakistan signed a contract with the China Shipbuilding Trading Company Ltd. (CSTC) for the delivery of two Type-054 A/P frigates in 2017. Last year, the Chinese official media reported that China would build four advanced frigates for Pakistan Navy.
- The launching of the ship coincided with the second strategic dialogue between Foreign Minister of China Wang Yi and his Pakistani counterpart Shah Mahmood Qureshi at the Chinese holiday resort of Hainan on August 21.