



The G7 and India

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(Mains GS 2 : Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting the Indian interests)

Context:

At the invitation of UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will participate virtually in the Outreach Sessions of the G7 Summit on June 12 and 13.

What is G7?

- The Group of 7 (G7) is an informal group of seven advanced economies i.e. the United States, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the United Kingdom, the heads of which hold an annual summit with European Union and other invitees.
- Together the member countries represent 40% of global GDP and 10% of the world's population.
- Unlike other bodies such as NATO, the G7 has no legal existence, permanent secretariat or official members.
- It also has no binding impact on policy and all decisions and commitments made at G7 meetings need to be ratified independently by governing bodies of member states.
- The UK holds the G7 presidency for 2021 and is organised at the Carbis Bay Hotel in Cornwall
- The UK currently holds the presidency and has invited India, along with Australia, South Korea and South Africa, as guest countries for the Summit, which will witness a hybrid of physical and virtual participation.

This year Agenda of G7:

- The theme is 'Build Back Better', and the UK has outlined four priority areas for its presidency.

- These priority areas are leading the global recovery from coronavirus while strengthening resilience against future pandemics; promoting future prosperity by championing free and fair trade; tackling climate change and preserving the planet's biodiversity; and championing shared values and open societies.
- The leaders are expected to exchange views on the way forward on global recovery from the pandemic with a focus on health and climate change.

How often has India attended G7:

- Since 2014, this is the second time the Prime Minister will be participating in a G7 meeting.
- India had been invited by the G7 French presidency in 2019 to the Biarritz Summit as a "Goodwill Partner" and Prime Minister Modi participated in the sessions on 'Climate, Biodiversity and Oceans' and 'Digital Transformation'.
- During Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's tenure, India attended the G8 Summit five times.
- In March 2014, Russia was indefinitely suspended following the annexation of Crimea, reducing G8 to G7.
- While the UK has invited India this year, the US under President Donald Trump had extended an invitation in May last year.
- Calling the G7 a "very outdated group", Trump had said he would like to include India, Australia, South Korea and Russia in the grouping of the largest advanced economies.
- Trump had suggested that G7 be called "G10 or G11".

What should one watch out for?

- This will be President Biden's first visit to Europe, where he will signal his key message "America is back".
- He met British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, Queen Elizabeth II and other allies at the Summit.
- He will continue on to a NATO conclave in Brussels on June 14, before his conversation with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Geneva two days later.
- Biden earlier held the first summit of leaders of the "Quad" — Australia, India, Japan and the US.
- This was aimed at increasing vaccine production and aligning their positions toward Beijing.
- Ahead of G7, Biden announced a major initiative to vaccinate the world against Covid-19: the US would donate 500 million Pfizer-BioNTech doses, with "no strings attached."
- The Summit is also expected to announce one billion doses of Covid vaccines to poor and middle-income countries as part of a campaign to "vaccinate the world" by the end of 2022.

What happened at the Biden-Johnson meeting?

- The two leaders signed a new version of the 80-year-old Atlantic Charter, as they confront Russia and China.
- The new charter will focus on cyberattacks, Covid-19 and its impact on the global economy, and climate change.
- This signals the importance given to global partnerships, a shift from Trump's America First policy.

Why is the Biden-Putin meeting important?

- US-Russia relations are going through a rough patch and the venue of the Biden-Putin meeting is Geneva.
- Washington's intelligence apparatus believes that Putin authorised operations in 2020 directly aimed at manipulating the elections and hurting Biden's chances of becoming the President
- The Biden administration has put sanctions against Russia for a hack and jailing of opposition leader Alexei Navalny.
- The key element that is prompting Washington to engage with Moscow is to contain the damage in their bilateral ties, as the US wants to focus on its strategic rival, China.

What's in it for India?

- India has long called for reforming global institutions and groupings to reflect modern-day geopolitical realities.
- Trump's offer to expand G7 fitted into New Delhi's idea of being part of the global high table.
- With an assertive China round the corner, the US is calling all like-minded countries to partner in dealing with Beijing.
- If Biden and Johnson want to work towards constituting a global alliance of 10-11 countries, it will be an important signal.
- As India faces a massive shortage of vaccines, New Delhi will be watching the allocation to be announced by the US President.
- Last week, the US had said that it will distribute vaccines to India as part of its "strategy for global vaccine sharing", days after External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar met key officials in the administration in Washington DC.
- This means India is likely to get vaccines from the US — both directly as well as through COVAX.
- Washington's rapprochement with Moscow will leave New Delhi extremely relieved as the US can then focus on China.
- While that is easier said than done, weaning Russia away from Beijing could be a game-changer in current geopolitics.

Conclusion:

- The G7 has been criticised for being outdated and ineffective in recent decades due to its exclusion of two of the world's largest economies in India and China.
- But the G7 Summit has been the birthplace for several global initiatives
- Thus, in the time of Covid-19 and vaccine shortage, India will effectively argue for global vaccine supply.