



In debt crisis, Sri Lanka turns to China

Beijing nod for \$500 million loan as pandemic hits tourism revenue

•The Sri Lankan government is likely to once again turn to China for help with debt repayment, as it did in 2014, even as its request to India for a postponement of its debt repayment has been hanging fire for the last four months. After a conversation between Chinese President Xi Jinping and President Rajapaksa on May 13, Beijing has already approved an additional \$500 million loan from its development bank to help counter the impact of the pandemic.

•Even prior to the coronavirus pandemic, Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa had asked India for a debt deferment during a visit to Delhi in February, as he had confirmed in an interview to The Hindu . In April, the Central Bank of Sri Lanka sought a \$400 million currency swap with the RBI under the SAARC facility and again in May, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa sought a “special” \$1.1 billion currency swap facility from Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who had called him to discuss the responses to the pandemic and bilateral cooperation.

•The situation could get more difficult for Colombo, as Japan’s International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has put on hold funding for a proposed light rail transit system, local media reported, because of concerns over the island nation’s rising debt. Sri Lanka’s total foreign debt is approximately \$55 billion, which accounts for nearly 80% of its GDP, according to last year’s official figures. Of that, China and the Asian Development bank each hold about 14%, Japan accounts for 12%, the World Bank holds 11%, while India holds about 2%.

•When asked about talks on the moratorium, Chinese Embassy officials in Colombo confirmed that the two countries are working together on the financial cooperation “via different channels and mechanisms”.

•“More practical progress will be drawn in coming weeks,” spokesperson at the Chinese Embassy Luo Chong told The Hindu .

Regional distress

•Other countries in the region are also now seeking debt repayments. On Friday, Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan spoke to President Rajapaksa about joining a ‘Global Initiative on Debt Relief’ to mitigate the economic impact of the pandemic, a press release from the Pakistani High Commission in Colombo said.

•In the Maldives, President Solih’s government is talking to all its bilateral partners and international agencies. “ We would also be seeking help from India, one of our closest friends,” Presidential spokesperson Ibrahim Hood told The Hindu .

•According to government sources, Maldives has very “small loans” from India, which prefers a more project-driven, development aid programme. In comparison the Maldives owes China a sum of nearly \$1.5 billion, including \$600 million from government-to-government, which could necessitate a shift from the Solih government’s earlier tough stand on what it called the Chinese “debt trap” due to the Belt and Road Initiative projects. Reports suggest that China has now agreed to a partial repayment, to reduce the dues this year from \$100 million to \$75 million, a development New Delhi will watch closely.

Why is there a stress on randomised controlled trials?

What due process must be followed in the appraisal of any drug, especially those for COVID-19?

•The story so far: On June 23, the claim by Patanjali Ayurved [Haridwar, Uttarakhand] that its preparations, ‘Coronil’ and ‘Swasari’, would cure COVID-19 in only seven days, was met with robust disbelief in some quarters, even as it hogged media space soon after the announcement. Ramdev, the yoga guru, and who is associated with the company, claimed that a randomised controlled trial (RCT) among COVID-19 positive patients had proved favourable results. The government, through the Ministry of AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy) responding a short while later, told the company to stop advertising the drug as a cure for COVID-19, pointing out that it would attract provisions of Drugs and Magic Remedies (Objectionable Advertisements) Act, 1954

What has the government said?

•The Ministry, in a statement (<https://bit.ly/2Zgbfco>), said the details of the study were not known to it and it has asked Patanjali Ayurved “to provide at the earliest details of the name and composition of the medicines being claimed for COVID treatment; site(s)/hospital(s), where the research study was conducted for COVID-19; protocol, sample size, Institutional Ethics Committee clearance, CTRI registration and results data of the study (ies) and stop advertising/publicizing such claims till the issue is duly examined”. The Ministry has also “requested the State Licensing Authority of the Uttarakhand government to provide copies of the licence and product approval details of the Ayurvedic medicines being claimed for the treatment of COVID-19”.

•It is learnt from media reports on the yet-to-be published RCT conducted on behalf of the company, that 100 patients who had tested positive were given the medicine (five dropped out midway). The clinical trial tested the drug on 45 people and another 50 were given a placebo. The claim was that 69% (31 persons) of those on the drug tested negative on the third day, and 25 of those on the placebo arm of the trial had also tested negative.

What is the place of RCTs place in clinical trials?

•As per definition, a randomised controlled trial, or RCT, is a study in which people are allocated at random, entirely by chance, to receive one of several clinical interventions. One of these interventions is the standard of comparison or control. The control may be standard practice/treatment options, a placebo (a drug without an active substance, or a ‘sugar pill’), or no intervention at all. The idea is to measure and compare the outcomes against the control after the participants receive the treatment.

•Prof. Madhukar Pai, director, McGill Global Health Programs, McGill University, Canada, teaching an online course on epidemiology for journalists with Suno India portal, explains that RCTs are based on multiple factors, including type of interventions being evaluated, and number of participants. In single-blind trials, the participants, or the investigators do not know who is assigned what; in double-blind trials, both participants and investigators do not know; and triple and quadruple-blind trials, where three or four of the relevant groups are not aware of the treatment assignment.

Is an RCT a good tool to employ during the throes of an epidemic? Why do we need RCTs?

•“No other design can get us close to the ‘counterfactual’ comparison we need to see if an intervention is causally linked to a particular outcome,” says Prof. Pai.

•Nancy Cartwright, writing in one of the Springer journals, in October 2009

(<https://rdcu.be/b5hbx>), argues that RCTs are widely taken as the gold standard for establishing causal conclusions.

- S.P. Kalantri, professor of medicine, Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Medical Sciences, Sevagram, Maharashtra, answers this question with a resounding yes. He says, “We need studies that get data that we can trust.” This means, clear and robust evidence about benefits and risks. A good RCT (for COVID-19) should enrol enough numbers, define clinical endpoints, including mortality and morbidity, also whether intubation was needed and days of stay in hospital. He adds: The hurry, hype and marketing for drugs (Ayurveda and Favipiravir) even before results were published were ‘just not science’.

- “The priority is to have safe, efficacious drugs that can be used in the real world setting,” he explains. “We get the best evidence from an RCT, while other strategies have huge limitations. The problem with simple descriptive studies, for instance, is that there are no comparisons.”

- In well-designed RCTs, researchers, after random assignment of participants, assess whether randomisation was done sufficiently to eliminate the influence of confounding factors, and avoid selection bias. Researchers follow the groups over days, weeks, years and observe major clinical end points. In the end, all other things being equal, it will be possible to measure what benefit a particular group X got, in comparison to Y group. It is possible to estimate if there were any differences between the two groups, say, in mortality, and if this was because of strategic effect of the cause, or due to pure chance. RCTs remove the impact of chance in cause and effect relationships, says Dr. Kalantri.

- But ethically, an RCT can only be employed when researchers think/hope that the interventions will offer benefits. Participants can be enrolled in a randomised controlled trial that is expected to leave them better off. The dexamethasone study where mortality was reduced by a third, is a classic example here.

- The Solidarity and RECOVERY (or Randomised Evaluation of COVID-19 thERapY) trials are examples of large-scale RCTs done with multiple partners at many locations, bang in the middle of an epidemic. They have already been instrumental in setting the standard of care — for instance, hydroxychloroquine was hyped up as a drug but studies conclusively proved no ameliorative effect in using it. The Remdesivir study, on the other hand, showed some improvement in reducing intensive care unit stay, while there was no great impact on mortality, says Dr. Kalantri.

What is the future?

- Strident science should be the basis of any interventions in therapeutics or vaccinology, experts emphasise. The over 200 projects in the pipeline, listed in the

Clinical Trials Registry of India, might produce results over time, but as in the case of Patanjali Ayurved, the regulator's immediate and scientific response to unpublished claims will be essential, they urge.

How will the U.S. visa ban impact India?

Why was the White House proclamation made? Will the Trump administration's move affect the IT services industry adversely?

•The story so far: On June 22, the White House made a proclamation halting the processing and issuance of non-immigrant work visas of several types, with the stated aim of this sweeping policy being to stop foreign workers snagging American jobs, especially at a time of deep economic distress brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. The order by the Donald Trump administration includes the H-1B visa for skilled workers, a large proportion of which goes to Indian nationals, dependents of the H-1B who are seeking the H4 visa, the H-2B visa issued to seasonal workers in the landscaping and hospitality industries, the L-1 visa for intra-company transfers and their dependents on the L-2 visa, and the J-1 visa for students on work-study summer programmes and related occupations. The important questions on this latest policy shift by Mr. Trump on immigration relate to whether it will muddy the waters of the U.S.India relationship by adversely impacting Indian IT services exported to the U.S., and whether it has the potential to shore up the flagging U.S. economy and open up more jobs for U.S. persons, or whether it will fail in that goal and yet yield dividends in terms of campaign strategy for the U.S. presidential election on November 3, 2020.

Why is the Trump administration tightening the screws on its immigration policy?

•It had earlier instituted a ban on visitors from certain Muslim-majority countries and periodically engaged in rhetoric on building a wall to stop undocumented workers from entering the U.S. from across its southern border. On April 21, the White House announced a 60-day halt in legal migration — effectively a ban on “green card” issuance. The gaping hole in this policy was the fact that the number of jobs purportedly saved from immigrants for U.S. persons was relatively small compared to the number of jobs going to foreign nationals who enter the U.S. on non-immigrant visas. Unemployment claims filed since the novel coronavirus pandemic hit the U.S. economy in March have crossed 40 million. Analysts argued that out of the million or so green cards that the U.S. issues annually, approximately only 358,000 would likely be impacted by the pause in immigration processing.

•It appears that the Trump administration has been seized of this fallacy in its immigration policy in this regard, and the proclamation of June 22 is likely to have been a remedial measure to bring non-immigrant work visas under the purview of the

ban. The reasoning offered by the White House is that the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has “significantly disrupted Americans’ livelihoods”, to the extent that the overall unemployment rate in the country nearly quadrupled between February and May 2020 to a little over 13%.

To what extent is the motive behind the visa ban political?

- Despite the stated reasoning for the work visa ban, which is to protect U.S. persons from loss of livelihoods to foreign nationals, it is still unclear that tangible economic benefits of this sort can be achieved at this juncture. The reason is that the latest restrictions do not apply to visa-holders who are already within the U.S., or those who are outside the country and have already been issued valid visas. Given that the ban will remain in force until the end of the 2020 calendar year, this implies that U.S. firms or others with U.S. operations who rely on skilled foreign nationals working in the U.S. will be unable to make new hires as long as the ban stands. How many firms are likely to do any hiring at this economically depressed time? How many will do so before the end of the calendar year? If we assume, as we safely can, that the answer is “negligibly few”, then it is hard to see the Trump White House’s policy as anything other than a campaign tactic.

What further policies do we expect on the visa ban?

- If indeed these moves have been made keeping in mind the imperatives of the 2020 Republican presidential campaign, then that would be signalled by Mr. Trump seeking, in the months ahead, to build political capital in the name of the “America First” mantra — a foregone conclusion given his outspokenness on the subject to date.

- The proclamation supplies hints on the likely tenor of this policy plank of Mr. Trump’s administration. It noted that between February and April of 2020, “more than 20 million U.S. workers lost their jobs in key industries where employers are currently requesting H-1B and L workers to fill positions”, noting that similar or higher numbers could be found in the other visa categories included in the proclamation.

- Yet, in the first instance, it is not his Democratic rival in the election, former Vice President Joe Biden, who will play spoiler to Mr. Trump’s visa ban plans. It is the backlash from America Inc., the employers of likely millions of non-immigrant foreign workers, from Wall Street to Silicon Valley, that could bring his dreams crashing to the ground, and fast.

- Google CEO Sundar Pichai wasted little time in responding to Mr. Trump’s latest visa proclamation tweeting, “Immigration has contributed immensely to America’s economic success, making it a global leader in tech, and also Google the company it is today. Disappointed by today’s proclamation — we’ll continue to stand with immigrants and work to expand opportunity for all.”

- Elon Musk, SpaceX founder and Tesla CEO, and Apple CEO Tim Cook, posted similar messages on social media.

- As more captains of industry chime in, the momentum of lobbying behind closed doors, and lawsuits filed by civil liberties groups, to either get the ban revoked or to strengthen Mr. Biden's hand will likely build up fast. Corporate America, already hit by the economic downturn since the pandemic struck, can hardly afford to accept even more losses as the President undermines the base of their work force.

Will Indian corporations be hit?

- The prospects of Indian IT majors building up their order books as they limp back through an economic recovery in India are, in the interim, likely to be seriously undermined by this move. What is more, this may come at a crucial inflection point for the Indian economy, even as restrictions on the movement of people and goods slowly lift after India passes its peak viral case numbers, thus leading to a knock-on effect from IT to other sectors.

- India's IT services exports to the U.S., which depend significantly on the H-1B visa, have been an important constituent element of bilateral economic trade. U.S. imports of services from India were an estimated \$29.6 billion in 2018, 4.9% more than in 2017, and 134% greater than 2008 levels, according to the U.S. Trade Representative. The major services exports from India to the U.S. are in the telecommunications, computer and information services, research and development, and travel sectors.

- Until now, the U.S. issued 85,000 H-1B visas annually, of which 20,000 went to graduate students and 65,000 to private sector applicants, and Indian nationals would garner approximately 70% of these. Now the Migration Policy Institute has been cited predicting that up to 219,000 workers would be blocked as a result of Mr. Trump's proclamation.

What is the Indian government saying?

- Its response has so far been muted, limited to highlighting the importance of highly skilled Indian professionals to imparting a competitive edge to the U.S. economy.

- Nevertheless, that the high-skilled non-immigrant visa ban is a double-edged sword is amply demonstrated by the fact that the unemployment rate in the "Professional and Business Services" super-sector, which includes IT services, unemployment actually dropped between April and May 2020, and there remained almost 950,000 job openings in this sector nationwide despite the sharp hike in overall unemployment filings.

•If there is one assumption of the Trump administration’s immigration policies that is most likely to fail, it is that there are sufficient numbers of U.S. persons with the requisite skill set to perform the jobs that Mr. Trump is “protecting” for them.

S. China Sea rights should be rooted in UN treaty: ASEAN

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Bloc strengthens assertions vis-a-vis China’s claims

- Southeast Asian leaders said a 1982 UN oceans treaty should be the basis of sovereign rights and entitlements in the South China Sea, in one of their strongest remarks opposing China’s claim to virtually the entire disputed waters on historical grounds.
- The leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations took the position in a statement issued by Vietnam on Saturday on behalf of the 10-nation bloc. ASEAN leaders held their annual summit by video on Friday, with the COVID-19 pandemic and the long-raging territorial disputes high on the agenda. “We reaffirmed that the 1982 UNCLOS is the basis for determining maritime entitlements, sovereign rights, jurisdiction and legitimate interests over maritime zones,” the ASEAN statement said.
- The leaders were referring to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, a 1982 international agreement that defines the rights of nations to the world’s oceans.
- Three Southeast Asian diplomats told that it marked a significant strengthening of the regional bloc’s assertion of the rule of law in a disputed region that has long been regarded as an Asian flashpoint. While it has criticised aggressive behaviour in the disputed waters, ASEAN has never castigated China by name in its post-summit communiqués.
- As ASEAN’s leader this year, Vietnam oversaw the drafting of the “chairman’s statement”. Vietnam has been one of the most vocal critics of China’s actions in the disputed waters.

Black hole merges with unusual compact object

This could be the lightest black hole or heaviest neutron star

- The LIGO Scientific and VIRGO Collaborations (LSC) have detected an unusual compact object whose mass falls in between that of a typical black hole and a neutron star. The absence of accompanying electromagnetic signatures such as flashes of light are compatible with both. This puzzling event was registered by the LIGO and VIRGO

detectors on August 14, 2019. The work has been published in The Astrophysical Journal Letters.

- Since the first ever detection of gravitational wave signals emerging from the coalescing of binary black holes in 2015, the LIGO and VIRGO detectors have detected mergers of pairs of black holes, pairs of neutron stars and black hole-neutron star duo. From this experience and from the predictions of theory, the present merger detected on August 14, 2019, only posed a puzzle.

Inference from signal

- Looking at the signal waveform, it appeared that the primary object in this merger had a mass of about 23.2 times that of the Sun and the smaller, secondary object had a mass of about 2.6 times the solar mass. The pair joined to form a large black hole of mass

25.6 times the Sun's mass, having radiated away 0.2 solar masses.

- This is unusual on many counts. For one thing, the mass ratio was approximately 1:9. This is the largest disparity in masses that has been observed till now between members of the coalescing pair. While at 23.2 solar masses, the primary is clearly a black hole, the calculated mass of the secondary object puts it in a dubious spot. It is too light to be a black hole and too heavy to be a neutron star, as far as observations go.

- “Theoretically, both the maximum mass of neutron star and minimum mass of a black hole will depend on the complex physics at the core of a neutron star, details of supernova explosion a star undergoes at the end of its stellar evolution and so on,” says K. G. Arun from Chennai Mathematical Institute, one of the authors of the paper, in an email to The Hindu. “Further, the current observational uncertainties cannot confirm or rule out whether there is a ‘mass gap’ between the maximum mass of the neutron star and the minimum mass of a black hole.”

Topic of discussion

- There is not much information about the lighter object except for the mass. “Due to the mass asymmetry, it becomes very difficult to detect any signatures of neutron star ‘tides’ which could have given us insights about the star. So one may be able to invoke exotic possibilities,” says Prof. Arun. “It is going to be a very active topic of discussion in the astrophysics community in the coming days,” he adds.

When the Indian Ocean's ancient climate patterns return

Formations like the El Niño of the Pacific Ocean could emerge

•About 19,000-21,000 years ago, ice-sheets covered North America and Eurasia, and sea-levels were much lower, with Adam's Bridge exposed so that the Indian subcontinent and Sri Lanka were contiguous. This period, the peak of ice age conditions, is called the Last Glacial Maximum. Researchers analysed simulations of this past climate and predicted that the ongoing climate change could reawaken an ancient climate pattern of the Indian Ocean.

•They find that this could be similar to the El Niño phenomenon of the Pacific Ocean bringing more frequent and devastating floods and drought to several densely populated countries around the Indian Ocean region. If current warming trends continue, this new Indian Ocean El Niño could emerge as early as 2050. The results were published in Science Advances.

Study on shells

•By studying microscopic zooplankton called foraminifera, the team had published a paper in 2019 which first found evidence from the past of an Indian Ocean El Niño. Foraminifera build a calcium carbonate shell, and studying these can tell us about the properties of the water in which they lived. The team measured multiple individual shells of foraminifera from ocean sediment cores and was able to reconstruct the sea surface temperature conditions of the past.

•“In the previous paper, we argued for the existence of an ‘Indian Ocean El Niño’ during the Last Glacial Maximum. We suggest that the Indian Ocean has the capacity to harbour much larger climate variability than observed during the last few decades or a century,” writes co-author Kaustubh Thirumalai, from the Department of Geosciences at the University of Arizona in an email to The Hindu. “In this paper, we argue that this climate variability in the Indian Ocean can arise under increased greenhouse gas forcing of global climate change.”

Lessons to learn

•He explains that there are many lessons to be learnt from this cooler period about our warmer future, “even though the Last Glacial Maximum consisted of vastly different conditions compared to where the world is headed... For example, global sea-level is rising and glacial ice is melting today whereas the opposite was true for the Last Glacial Maximum”

•Prof. Thirumalai adds: “As it is, under present-day conditions, changes in the Indian Ocean Dipole and the El Niño–Southern Oscillation strongly affect Indian Monsoon variability from year to year. If the hypothesised ‘equatorial mode’ emerges in the near future, it will pose another source of uncertainty in rainfall prediction and will likely amplify swings in monsoon rainfall.”

- The paper adds that it could bring more frequent droughts to East Africa and southern India and increased rainfall over Indonesia. The team warns that further work is needed to accurately assess this new mode, particularly under lower-emission scenarios and also taking into account past climatic states other than the Last Glacial Maximum.

FATF | On the warpath against terror financing

The Paris-based organisation, with 39 member-countries, regularly reviews the conduct of nations in stopping terror-related transactions worldwide

- In October 2001, in the wake of the 9/11 terror attacks in the U.S., the plenary session of a little-known global organisation based in Paris working on money laundering and white collar crimes, the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), met in Washington DC to discuss a radical shift in its goals. It was already very clear to U.S. investigators that the attacks pointed to a terror network around the world from Germany to Karachi, Dubai to London and Kabul, and each thread had to be tracked down through a financial transaction made. More importantly, if the world were to actually fight “global terror”, it would need to not only “follow the money” trail but also hold countries that allowed terrorists safe haven and financial assistance to account.

- “The FATF, the leading international body in the global fight against money laundering, will provide its expertise and energy to the related battle against the financing of terrorism,” said Ms. Clarie Lo, the then President of FATF, announcing the shift. The FATF plenary then adopted an eight-point amendment to its charter that added Combating the Financing of Terrorism (CFT) to its tasks on Anti-Money Laundering (AML/CFT).

- On September 28, 2001, the UN Security Council had also passed a new resolution (UNSC 1373), which added to a previous 1999 resolution (UNSC 1267), which barred links to any group or individual connected to the Taliban or al-Qaeda. The lists that the UNSC then approved, of hundreds of designated terrorists, soon became one of the important tasks for the FATF, and the reason it is frequently in the news, including most recently this week, when it held its quarterly plenary session to discuss the listings of several countries on its radar, including Pakistan.

Technical prism

- The FATF is not a part of the UN system, but it functions out of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development headquarters in Paris, since it was started in 1989 after a decision by members of the G-7 and the European Commission. The FATF runs differently from other multilateral agencies, as its primary focus is on reviewing all actions through a “technical” not a political prism, and frowns upon countries bringing bilateral issues to the forum.

- It is not an enforcement agency itself, but a task force composed of 39 member governments who fund the FATF and agree on its mandate. This means that FATF depends on voluntary implementation of its reports by member countries. Also, meetings of the group are carried out behind closed doors, and deliberations are not publicised. In the past, the FATF has penalised countries that have disclosed the contents of its meetings.
- Decisions are made by the grouping on a consensus basis, as they conduct reviews of countries on AML/CFT parameters (called “Mutual evaluations”), and then either clear them, or use a “colour coded” reference for them, placing countries in the “increased monitoring” category or the “grey list”, or the “high risk jurisdictions” or “call for action” category, as the “blacklist” is formally known.
- At present, only Iran and North Korea are on the blacklist, while 18 countries, including Pakistan, Syria, Yemen, Iceland, Jamaica and Mauritius, are on the grey list.
- India became an observer in the grouping in 2006, and was inducted as a full member in 2010. It has faced three rounds of mutual evaluations and cleared them, and faces the fourth round next year. However, it is Pakistan’s performance at the FATF that most often makes news, as Pakistan has been kept on the group’s radar since 2008, with one stint on the grey list from 2012-2015, and another beginning June 2018. Presently, it has until October 2019 to show that it is making progress on the FATF’s report, that gave it a gruelling 27-point action plan to fulfil, or face a blacklisting, which means severe financial restrictions, a downgrading by credit agencies, and most significantly, possible loan cuts by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Although the Pakistani government, which has sent ministerial-level delegations to each meeting of the FATF to ensure it is let off penalties, says it has now cleared 14 of the 27 points on the list, and has “partially” fulfilled 11 of the remainder, it is still being held strongly to account by the FATF statements, including one particularly stern statement in 2019 that said, “All deadlines given to Pakistan to check terror-funding ended; it failed to complete its action plan in line with agreed timeline.”
- What is significant is that while Pakistan has clearly disregarded warnings from India, the U.S. and other countries to crackdown on a number of cross-border terror groups that exist on its soil (such as Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT), Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), the Taliban, al-Qaeda, Haqqani network, etc), it remains eager to avoid the FATF strictures. Government officials in Delhi say the difference is heartening, given India’s long and sometimes lone battle over the past few decades in holding Pakistan to account for cross-border terror activities, including in Jammu and Kashmir, the IC-814 hijacking, 2008 Mumbai attacks, the Pathankot airbase attack in 2015, Uri Army base in 2016, and many others.
- As a result, in the last few years, while Pakistan has been on the FATF’s watch list, governments in Islamabad have gone to some length to demonstrate their compliance

with the FATF demands: changing terror laws to include all UN Security Council-designated individuals and organisations, to show progress in the prosecution of leaders of LeT and JeM, including the re-arrest of Mumbai attacks mastermind Hafiz Saeed last year, as well as tightening all banking mechanisms to show that it has frozen funding to all these groups.

India's persistence

- Clearly much of it is lip-service, and much more remains to be done, but New Delhi, which sends a team comprising officials from the Ministry of External Affairs, the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Finance Ministry to assist with the Indian delegation in Paris during FATF sessions, has some reason to persist with its efforts in bringing evidence it has on Pakistan's terror links to the world body.
- "Unlike others, the FATF follows a principle of ostracism against members who don't comply with its strictures. The impact is amplified if the global banking system then scales up its diligence of each transaction flowing in and out of the jurisdiction named," explained an official aware of the FATF's workings. "It works despite the fact that none of this is based on any law or covenant."

Decision making

- Officials say the fact that decisions are taken by consensus in the 39-member group, where any three members can exercise a "veto" on an action, has ensured that the FATF doesn't at present suffer from the same polarisation that has virtually paralysed the UNSC. While there are differences between the two main blocs at the UNSC — the U.S., the U.K., France, and Russia, China — at the FATF as well, the entire grouping's view is made to count.
- This is not to mean the organisation isn't affected by geopolitical trends.
- The U.S. and other countries have been able to ensure that Iran and North Korea remain on the FATF blacklist, while others are able to avoid the tag as they are able to enlist the political support of enough other countries like China, Russia and Turkey.
- With the U.S. striking a deal with the Taliban this year, and efforts to take it off the UN listing, the global body may change the focus of its reviews in jurisdictions that have engaged with the Taliban in the past. It also remains to be seen how the FATF responds to new-age challenges to the global counter-terror and anti-money laundering regime:
including bitcoins and cyber currencies, illegal trafficking of wildlife as a source of funding, use of artificial intelligence in terror attacks and biowarfare as part of the wider challenge of the coronavirus pandemic.

•For India, however, its focus at the FATF on countering cross-border terror will be a priority for the foreseeable future.

Why is there a controversy over a film project on the protagonist of 1921 Malabar Rebellion?

Why is there a controversy in Kerala over a new film project on the protagonist of an uprising against the British?

•The story so far: Malayalam film director Aashiq Abu, on June 22, announced a new film project, Variyamkunnan, on Variyamkunnath Kunhamed Haji, the main protagonist of the Malabar Rebellion of 1921 who was executed by the British. Soon, three more directors, Ibrahim Vengara, P.T. Kunju Muhammed and Ali Akbar, announced their own films on the same historic figure. The announcement of Abu, a Left supporter, sparked a controversy, with Sangh Parivar outfits calling on actor Prithviraj Sukumaran, who is playing the role of Haji, not to accept the role in the film, Variyamkunnan. Akbar, a supporter of the Sangh Parivar, has declared that he will portray the 'real face' of the rebellion. A historical event that occurred a century ago suddenly seems to have acquired contemporary relevance.

Why has Aashiq Abu's film project announcement led to protests?

•Unlike in 1988 when the late I.V. Sasi directed 1921, a Malayalam movie based on the rebellion, political and communal polarisation in Kerala today has led to protests on social media. Amid criticism of Sangh Parivar leaders and attacks in the social media, Prithviraj wrote on his Facebook page that Haji "stood up against an empire that ruled a quarter of the world". The Hindu Aikya Vedi announced a year-long campaign to counter attempts to "glorify" Haji and other leaders who it said were responsible for atrocities against Hindus in southern parts of the erstwhile Malabar district of Kerala.

Why does the rebellion still stoke passions?

•The Malabar Rebellion (also called the Mappila or Moplah Rebellion by the British) broke out in the southern taluks of Malabar in August 1921. By the time the government troops captured Haji in January 1922, the rebellion had fizzled out. It largely took the shape of guerrilla-type attacks on janmis (feudal landlords, who were mostly upper caste Hindus) and the police and troops.

•Mappilas had been among the victims of oppressive agrarian relations protected by the British. But the political mobilisation of Muslims in the region in the aftermath of the launch of the Khilafat agitation and Gandhi's non-cooperation struggle served as an opportunity for an extremist section to invoke a religious idiom to express their suffering, while working for a change in the oppressive system of administration. There were excesses on both sides — rebels and government troops. Incidents of

murder, looting and forced conversion led many to discredit the uprising as a manifestation of religious bigotry. Moderate Khilafat leaders lamented that the rebellion had alienated the Hindu sympathy.

How did Kunhamed Haji emerge as the leader?

•Haji, who was one of the three most important rebel leaders, was the face of the rebellion. British officers viewed him as the “most murderous”. Born in 1866 in a family with relatives involved in one of the Mappila “outbreaks” or “outrages” in the 19th century, he was familiar with the commemoration of shaheeds (martyrs) who fought against the tyranny of landlords and their helpers, mostly upper caste Hindus in the region. There were several such outbreaks in the region during the 19th and early 20th centuries. The main actors of the outbreaks were individuals on suicide missions. The Khilafat movement launched in 1919 provided a fresh stimulus to the grievances of

Mappilas. Now their sense of local injustice was sought to be linked with the panIslamic sentiments created in the aftermath of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire that rendered the Ottoman caliphate irrelevant. Haji was among those in the Malabar region inspired by the zeal of the agitation. During the rebellion, he led many attacks on individuals, including Muslims, who had been loyal to the British. Some contemporary accounts, however, deny that he favoured conversion of Hindus.

What was the impact of the protests?

•The rebellion of Mappilas inspired by religious ideology and a conception of an alternative system of administration — a Khilafat government — dealt a blow to the nationalist movement in Malabar. The fanaticism of rebels, foregrounded by the British, fostered communal rift and enmity towards the Congress.

•The exaggerated accounts of the rebellion engendered a counter campaign in other parts of the country against ‘fanaticism’ of Muslims. That said, the traumatic experience of the uprising also persuaded educated sections of the Muslim community in Malabar to chalk out ways to save the community from what they saw as a pathetic situation. The community’s stagnation was attributed to religious orthodoxy and ignorance. The thrust of the post-rebellion Muslim reform movement in Malabar was a rigorous campaign against orthodoxy.