

1. How do travel bans imposed by different countries in the light of COVID situation affect India's interests? Examine.**Approach**

The candidate needs to examine the impact of travel bans imposed by different countries on India's interests.

Introduction

More than a year into the COVID-19 pandemic, India is in the throes of a public health catastrophe. A second wave of infections has blindsided the country that until March seemed to have the coronavirus under control. As India grapples with its crisis, other countries have locked their borders to any visitors from the country, whose diaspora is the largest in the world.

Body

At least 10 countries including Italy, Germany, and Singapore have instituted new bans on flights to and from India. Other countries, including Australia, France, and the United Kingdom, have reduced flights or extended mandatory quarantines for travellers arriving from India. Here, **the impact of travel bans on India's interests can be seen from following points –**

- Tourism contributes about 10% of India's GDP and employs around 50 million people directly and indirectly. No matter how quickly India's crisis eases, the recent spike in infections and flight restrictions have slammed a travel industry that was already on the brink.
- Comprehensive issues including visitors, sportspersons, and others have been affected by these bans. For example, the 9,000-plus Aussies living and visiting in India are unable to return home, including cricket players who had come to participate in Indian Premier League matches.
- Indians form one of the largest diaspora in the world and in absence of free movement of people, there are many losses, including financial losses in terms of remittances.
- Further, according to the US embassy in New Delhi, the pandemic continues to limit the number of visas that embassies and consulates.
- Familial ties of Indians have also been affected where many expats, unable to travel back to India, are tweeting for help to attend to sick family members back home.
- Transportation charges for people have sky rocketed, for people who are exempted from the bans. For example, flights to USA have prices in the ranges of many lakhs, which is leading to fleecing of travellers.
- Inimical powers are using the situation to exploit Indians. For example, in March, China said it would allow Indian travellers only if they were

vaccinated with the made-in-China vaccine Sinovac, but that vaccine hasn't even been approved for use in India.

- Also, with USA announcing its decision to ban travel to India, many believe that several other countries are expected to tighten their borders for movement of people from India.

At the same time, it is important to understand the rationale of such travel bans, where –

- The driving force behind countries decision to ban travel from India is due to the potential for the India outbreak to knock the world back from what feels like a turning point in the pandemic where India is now recording nearly half of the world's new confirmed COVID-19 cases each day, and case counts appear to be levelling off or falling in countries like Brazil and the U.S., which are recording the second- and third-most new infections per day
- Further, such action was also taken by India earlier. For example, India and over 40 countries and territories including Germany, France, and Hong Kong imposed at least temporary flight bans in December 2020 after the U.K. reported that a new COVID-19 variant was rapidly spreading across the country. Most of the countries resumed flights to and from the U.K. in the days and weeks following their initial bans

Conclusion

Thus, though the travel ban will have adverse impact on India, we need to understand that it is temporary phenomenon due to a once in a century pandemic, of which India is facing a severe second wave but the world is also helping India through aid, medical equipment's, and other matters which are needed.

2. India has a glorious track record in helping the diaspora in distress. Do you agree? Substantiate with the help of suitable examples.

Approach

Candidates are expected to write about Indian diaspora, and highlight with suitable examples of India helping its diaspora in distress times.

Introduction

According to Global Migration Report 2020, India continues to be the largest country of origin of international migrants with a 17.5 million-strong diaspora across the world, and it received the highest remittance of \$78.6 billion from Indians living abroad.

Body

The volatility in West Asia together with rising Anti-globalization wave, there has been an increase in the incidents of suspected hate crimes against the Indian community makes India government help Indian diaspora in distress such as:

- Rising incidence of hate speech and crimes against Indian Diaspora by the locals due to racism, communalism emboldened by coming of nationalist and ultra nationalist governments to power in many countries.
- Sectarian crisis, increasing terrorist activities and war in the Middle East countries (Yemen, Oman, Libya, Syria etc.) leave our diaspora vulnerable to attacks.
- In 1990, India conducted largest ever citizen evacuation in Kuwait bringing 1.5 lakh stranded Indians back to safety by flight. It was done in a period of 59 days, from 13 August to 11 October 1990, involving almost five hundred flights.
- Indians living abroad filed over 60,000 complaints of harassment, sexual and physical abuse as well as other grievances with the country's missions over the past four years, while the most instances were reported in the Gulf and none in Pakistan, government data show.
- Indian missions have put in place a number of measures in recent years to address these situations, including appointment of welfare officers, 24X7 helplines, establishment of welfare development funds and financial assistance to Indian women duped by their NRI husbands.
- Sushma Swaraj's interaction with the diaspora on social media, while she was the External Affairs Minister, established her as someone who can be reached in distress with just the click of a mouse.
- The Indian Community Welfare Fund (ICWF), set up in 2009, is aimed at assisting Overseas Indian nationals in times of distress and emergency in the 'most deserving cases' on a 'means tested basis'. ICWF has also been a critical support in emergency evacuation of Indian nationals from conflict zones, countries affected by natural disasters and other challenging situations. In view of its immense utility, ICWF stands extended to all Indian Missions and Posts abroad.
- Indian government has also started Madad Portal to take timely and speedy action on grievances addressed by people living abroad.
- For example Hundreds of distressed Indian students, stuck in the Philippines, are seeking help in pandemic time There are nearly 1,000 Indian students at present in Manila who were picked by EAM officials in quick time.
- 'Operation Rahat' was launched by Indian Armed Forces to evacuate more than 4,000 Indian citizens and other foreign nationals from Yemen during the 2015 military intervention by Saudi Arabia and its allies.
- Under mission Vande Bharat India's massive evacuation programme triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic has brought back over 6.7 million from abroad.
- Social media tools have made it easy and inexpensive for Indian Diaspora to stay in touch with government and friends back home. It is time that the

Indian government leveraged this strong bond for the greater good of the nation.

Conclusion

Indian diaspora can provide the requisite strategic impulse, which makes it all the more important to unlock India's potential. There is a need for a strategic diaspora evacuation policy from conflict zones in a world where crises materialise without warnings and give very little reaction time for governments.

3. What is the mandate of the World Health Organisation (WHO)? Assess the role played by WHO during the global COVID pandemic.

Approach

Question is straight forward. Candidate can give the mandate of WHO and assess the role played by the organisation in handling of the pandemic, criticism it faced for downplaying the threat.

Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO) is a specialized agency of the United Nations responsible for international public health. The WHO Constitution, which establishes the agency's governing structure and principles, states its main objective as "the attainment by all peoples of the highest possible level of health".

Body

Mandate of WHO

- The WHO's broad mandate includes advocating for universal healthcare, monitoring public health risks, coordinating responses to health emergencies, and promoting human health and well-being.
- WHO provides technical assistance to countries, sets international health standards and guidelines, and collects data on global health issues through the World Health survey.
- WHO's flagship publication, the World Health Report, provides expert assessments of global health topics and health statistics on all nations. The WHO also serves as a forum for summits and discussions on health issues.
- The WHO has played a leading role in several public health achievements, most notably the eradication of smallpox, the near-eradication of polio, and the development of an Ebola vaccine. Its current priorities include communicable diseases, particularly HIV/AIDS, Ebola, COVID-19, malaria and tuberculosis; non-communicable diseases such as heart disease and cancer; healthy diet, nutrition, and food security; occupational health; and substance abuse.

Role played by WHO during covid-19 pandemic

- While organizing the global response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the WHO has been criticized for praising China's public health response to the crisis while seeking to maintain a "diplomatic balancing act" between the United States and China.
- The WHO faced criticism from the United States' Trump administration while "guiding the world in how to tackle the deadly" COVID-19 pandemic. United States President Donald Trump pledged to halt United States funding to the WHO while reviewing its role in "severely mismanaging and covering up the spread of the coronavirus."
- The WHO has spearheaded several initiatives like the COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund to raise money for the pandemic response, the UN COVID-19 Supply Chain Task Force, and the solidarity trial for investigating potential treatment options for the disease. The WHO's COVAX vaccine-sharing program aims to distribute 2 billion doses of COVID-19 vaccine for free or at a reduced cost by the end of 2021, and has begun distributing them.
- WHO releases daily situation reports and holds press conferences for updating the media about the pandemic. WHO has shipped more than two million items of personal protective equipment and one million diagnostic test kits to over 120 countries.
- Safe Hands Challenge, a campaign launched by WHO urges everyone to wash their hands regularly saw participation from celebrities. WHO has active presence on all social media channels, where they work to counter misinformation.

Criticism

- Critics charge the organization with being "too close to Beijing". Initial concerns included the observation that while the WHO relies upon data provided and filtered by member states, China has had a "historical aversion to transparency and sensitivity to international criticism". In early January, some WHO officials had internal discussions of insufficient information and significant delays in information provided by the Chinese government.
- The WHO has been criticized for not stating that the COVID-19 outbreak was a pandemic until significantly after it had already clearly become one. Also WHO denied initially human to human transmission of the virus, allowing it to spread.

Conclusion

WHO is an important international organisation in the times of crisis to coordinate with various countries and helping them out with the strategies to fight the pandemic. With the big mandate of investigation, research and information dissemination about the once in a century crisis, WHO failed to act make china accountable. Initiatives like COVAX will benefit the lower income countries making access to vaccines more equitable, in this respect, the role of WHO is important. WHO will have to work for increasing transparency in its functioning and be more vigil to contain the outbreak of next pandemic.

4. Where does India stand in its struggle to find a permanent place in the UNSC? What will be the benefits of a permanent UNSC membership? Discuss.

Approach

Since the question is asking you to discuss, it necessitates a debate where you have to support your view with strong examples.

Introduction

The UN Security Council, with its exceptional role in the UN in preserving international peace and security, has always been of significance for India right since its founding years. India has been elected for seven terms for a two-year non-permanent member seat, and for 8th Term as Non-Permanent UNSC Member this year.

Body

WHERE DOES INDIA STAND IN ITS STRUGGLE TO FIND A PERMANENT PLACE IN THE UNSC

- The Indian tryst for permanent membership of Security Council flows broadly from a mix of, three streams, viz., India's historic association with the UN system, India's intrinsic value and place in contemporary international politics and its role as the leader of developing countries.
- India is the founding member of the UN. Also, since its independence and even before that, India has been an active participant in all initiatives undertaken by the UN like Millennium Development Goals, sustainable development goals and various UN summits, including on climate change.
- India being the largest democracy and second-most populous country (soon to become most populous) in the world, are the primary reasons for India to be granted permanent membership in UNSC. India is also a nuclear weapon state.
- India is the undisputed leader of the Third world countries, as reflected by its leadership role in Non-Aligned Movement and G-77 grouping. Therefore, India's inclusion in UNSC will strengthen India's stature as a 'moralistic force' for the developing states and help in making UNSC more democratic.

THE BENEFITS OF A PERMANENT UNSC MEMBERSHIP

- Permanent seat in the UNSC would provide India with the much-needed leverage to expand its geo-political and geo-economic clout globally.
- Inclusion of India into UNSC will help in transforming its status from being a responsible stakeholder' (following international norms) along with becoming a global rule-maker.
- Indian presence at the Security Council would ensure Indian interests are not sacrificed at the altar of great power politics.

Conclusion

India has been acknowledged as a rising power by most of the states. Also, there is a pressing need to democratize multilateral fora, starting from the United Nation system itself. In this context, India is making a legitimate claim for its rightful place in the changing architecture of global governance, including the UN Security Council.

5. What are your views on the issue of cancelling patents for COVID vaccines? Will it set a wrong precedent? Critically comment.

Approach:

As the directive is critically comment students are expected to write both positive and negative aspects of the issue mentioned in the question and then arrive at well balanced forward looking and logical conclusion.

Introduction:

Medicines are incredibly expensive to develop. Most experimental drugs fail at some point during what can be years of laboratory, animal and finally human testing. Averaging in the cost of all those flops, it typically costs more than \$1 billion to bring a drug from discovery to regulatory approval. Without the prospect of years of sales without competition, that work is all the more risky. The IP waiver might open up space for production of Covid vaccines with emergency use authorisations (EUA) — such as those developed by Pfizer, Moderna, AstraZeneca, Novavax, Johnson & Johnson and Bharat Biotech — on a larger scale in middle-income countries.

Body:

- **Monopoly of Drug Companies:** At present, only drug companies which own patents are authorised to manufacture Covid vaccines. A lifting of patents will allow the formula to be shared with other companies.
- **Vaccine Cost:** Once the formula is shared, any company which possesses the required technology and infrastructure can produce vaccines. This will lead to cheaper and more generic versions of Covid vaccines and will be a big step in overcoming vaccine shortage.
- **Inequitable Distribution of Vaccines:** This has opened up a glaring gap between developing and wealthier countries now. The countries having surplus doses of vaccines have already vaccinated a considerable percentage of their population and are returning to normalcy. Whereas, the poorer nations continue to face shortages, have overburdened healthcare systems and hundreds dying daily.
- **Against the Interests of the World:** The longer Covid circulates in developing nations, there is a greater chance of more vaccine-resistant, deadly mutations of the virus emerging.

Cancelling patents will set a wrong precedent-

- Disincentive Pharmaceutical Companies: Lifting of patents would be a huge deterrent to investing heavily on vaccine development during pandemics in the future.
- Vaccine Quality and Safety may get compromised: Lifting of patents would be a compromise on control of safety and quality standards for vaccine manufacturing.
- Aside from the prestige they confer, pharmaceutical companies provide millions of jobs that pay very well, pay taxes on their income and provide new medicines that can save or improve lives. Drug makers and their trade groups spend millions every year lobbying governments to maintain the status quo on patents.
- Companies must constantly raise money from venture capital firms and other investors to fund early research until they can get their medicine approved or, more often, get a big drug maker to help fund the research and buy rights to that drug or the entire start-up. Without the prospect of a big payday for the new drug, it would be much harder to attract the crucial early money.

However cancelling patents will go a long way in helping countries through following ways-

- This will lead to cheaper and more generic versions of Covid vaccines. It will also mean two things — vaccines will be more affordable and this will be a big step in overcoming vaccine shortage.
- At a time when many people across India are struggling to get vaccines and shortages are being reported from many states, there is a unanimous agreement on the fact that there is a need to scale up production. An important talking point in recent times has also been the need to have more equitable distribution of the vaccine doses available.
- An Oxfam International report published in March this year states that during a survey of 77 epidemiologists from 28 countries, carried out by The People’s Vaccine Alliance, two-thirds warned that mutations could render current COVID vaccines ineffective in a year or less. “Unless we vaccinate the world, we leave the playing field open to more and more mutations, which could churn out variants that could evade our current vaccines and require booster shots to deal with them... We all have self-interest in ensuring that everyone around the world, no matter where they live has access to Covid-19 vaccines,”
- Human rights bodies and advocacy groups have also been at the forefront of the demand to waive patents and make vaccines more readily available to end the pandemic. For instance, in Australia, more than 700 medical officials and academics signed a letter, supported by Medicine Sans Frontiers and the Public Health Association of Australia, calling on the federal government to throw its support behind the intellectual property waiver proposal.
- Apart from politicians, civil society members, human rights bodies and health professionals, pharmaceutical companies that have the required infrastructure to produce millions of vaccines if patents are waived have been also raising the demand.

Conclusion:

Waiving IP protections alone isn't enough to make vaccines available around the world. The countries must work with each other to expand manufacturing capabilities and support international vaccines. It's important for both Indian manufacturers and the government to address concerns of patent holders to make sure that India's vaccination drive is not compromised in any way.

