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Weekly Editorial Analysis (WEA)

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1. National Register of Citizens (NRC)

Historical Background

- 1948: There were **no restrictions on the movements of persons from India to Pakistan** or vice versa even after Partition till July 19, 1948, when '**Influx from West Pakistan (Control) Ordinance, 1948**' came into existence.
- Later, the **Constitution of India formalised this as the cut-off date that entitled the Right to citizenship** of certain migrants from Pakistan.
- 1951: The **first-ever NRC of India was published in Assam** based on Census Report of 1951 containing 80 lakh citizens.
- 1955: The **Citizenship Act** came into force that codified rules for Indian citizenship by birth, descent and registration.
- 1964: The Centre issued the **Foreigners' Tribunal Order under the Foreigners' Act, 1964**.
- 1964-1965: **Influx of refugees from East Pakistan** due to disturbances in that country.
- 1971: Fresh influx due to riot and war in East Pakistan. Bangladesh comes into existence.
- 1979: **Anti-foreigners' movement started in Assam in 1979**.
- 1980: **All Assam Students' Union (AASU)** submitted the first memorandum **demanding updating of NRC** to Centre on January 18, 1980.
- **1985**: Assam Accord signed by Prime Minister **Rajiv Gandhi** on the midnight of August 14. It stated, among other clauses, that **foreigners who came to Assam on or after March 25, 1971 shall be expelled**.
- 2003: The Citizenship (Amendment) Act was introduced. Among other changes to the 1955 law, it said **anyone born in India between 1950-1987 is an Indian citizen**. Anyone born **between 1987-2003 is a citizen provided one of the parents is Indian**. Anyone born in India since 2004 is a citizen provided one of the parents is Indian and other is not an 'illegal immigrant' at the time.
- 2013: **Supreme Court directs Centre, state to begin the process for updating NRC**. NRC State Coordinator's office set up.
- 2015: Updation of NRC process begins.
- 2016: The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) introduced the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill. It proposed to **facilitate citizenship for non- Muslim minorities from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh**.
- 2017: On December 31 midnight, Draft NRC published with names of **1.9 crore** of total 3.29 crore applicants.
- 2018: Another Draft NRC published, **40 lakh** of 2.9 crore people excluded on July 30.
- 2019: Publication of **Additional Draft Exclusion List** of 1,02,462 was released on July 26.
- 2019: Final NRC released on **August 31** excluded over **19 lakh people**

What is NRC

- The NRC is a list of people who can prove that they came to **Assam before 24 March 1971**, a day before India's neighbouring country Bangladesh declared independence from Pakistan.

How those excluded from NRC can back up their claims for inclusion?

- Those excluded from NRC will have to prove that they or their ancestors were living in Assam on or before March 24, 1971. Also, anyone who participated in the **electoral rolls up to March 24, 1971, or who are descendants of any such citizens**, are eligible for inclusion in the updated NRC. Besides, the original **documents such as birth certificates** and land records - as long as these were issued before the cutoff date, would also be admissible as a proof of citizenship.

Impact

- NRC is expected to **deter future migrants from Bangladesh** from entering Assam illegally.
- Likely to **put an end to speculations about the actual number of illegal migrants in Assam** in particular and the country in general.
- provide **respite to all those Bengali speaking** people in Assam who have been, hitherto, suspected as being Bangladeshis
- Provide **employment** to local peoples

Challenges

- Flawed Process - People who found themselves on the first list that was released on January 1, 2018, didn't find their names in the second. Even the **family of a former President** (Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed) **did not mention on the list.**
- Large number of people being excluded from the list, it will be very difficult to physically verify all of them
- Uncertainty about the future of those left out from the list
- It will jeopardise relations with Dhaka. Such an attempt can damage bilateral relations
- Since such 'non citizens' can resort to judicial relief to substantiate their citizenship claim, it can lead to **overburdening of judiciary** which already reels under large number of pending cases.
- **Large scale detention camps** - which is an **unlikely option for a civilised democracy like India.**
- The Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019
 - ✓ It seeks to amend the Citizenship Act, 1955.



KEY FEATURES

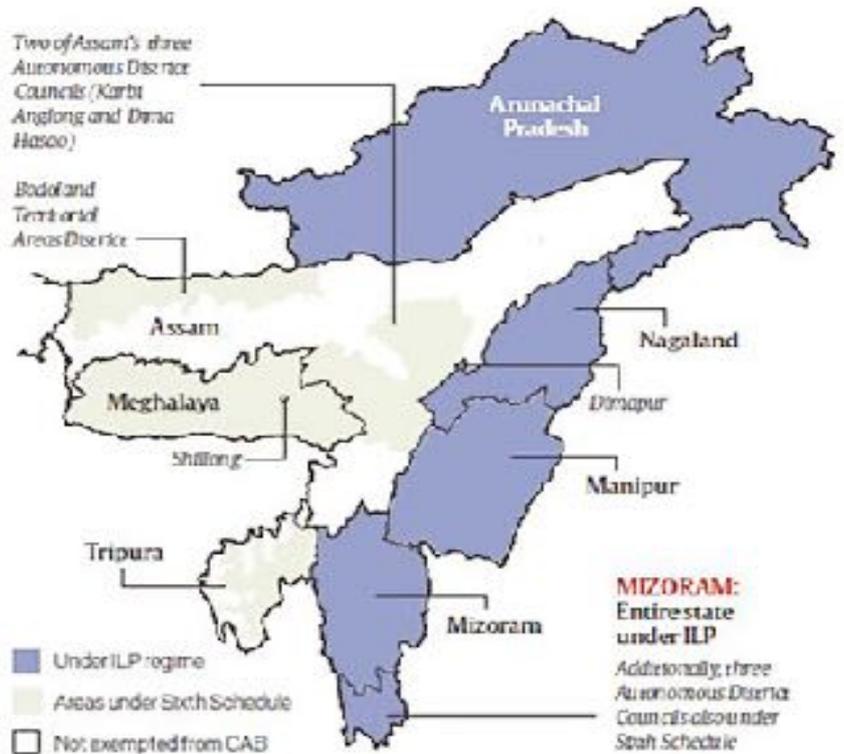
- Bill grants citizenship to Hindus, Sikhs, Christians, Jains, Buddhists & Parsis from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan who moved to India before Dec 31, 2014**
- Reduces duration of residency from 11 years to 5 years**

States with ILPs and areas under Sixth Schedule in north-east exempt from new law

Authorises govt to cancel registration of OCI cardholders in case of violation of provisions of Citizenship Act or any other law

Inner Line permit

- Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation Act 1873.
- Framed by Britishers to restrict entry in certain designated areas.
- It was done to **protect the Crown's interest** in certain states by preventing "British subjects" (Indians) from trading within these regions.
- In 1950, the term '**British subjects**' was replaced with '**Citizens of India**'. This was done to **protect the indigenous tribal communities** of these states from exploitation.
- The Inner Line Permit is an extension of the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation Act 1873
- ILP is a document **required by non-natives** to visit or stay in a state that is protected under the ILP system.



ARUNACHAL PRADESH: Entire state under ILP regime
NAGALAND: Entire state under ILP regime
TRIPURA: Sixth Schedule covers 70% of geographical area
MEGHALAYA: Almost entire state covered under Sixth Schedule, except a part of Shillong
ASSAM: 3 Autonomous District Councils under Sixth Schedule
MANIPUR: Entire state under ILP regime

- Issued by the concerned state government and can be availed both by applying online or in person.
- At present, four Northeastern states are covered, namely, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Manipur and Nagaland.
- Nagaland government has extended the Inner Line Permit (ILP) system to the district of Dimapur.

Sixth schedule areas

- Established **Autonomous District Councils (ADC)** in four northeastern states, namely Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram. These ADCs envisage protecting and preserving tribal culture

Objective of ADC

- Belief that relationship to the land is the basis of tribal or indigenous identity.
- The culture and identity of indigenous people can be preserved by ensuring their control over land and natural resources, as these factors to a large extent determine the lifestyle and culture of the indigenous people.

<p>MEGHALAYA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council ● Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council ● Garo Hills Autonomous District Council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mara Autonomous District Council
<p>MIZORAM</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Chakma Autonomous District Council ● Lai Autonomous District Council 	<p>TRIPURA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council
	<p>ASSAM</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Dima Hasao Autonomous Council ● Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council ● Bodoland Territorial Council

Foreigners tribunal

- Govt brought in the Foreigners (Tribunals) Order in 1964

Composition

- **Advocates not below the age of 35 years of age with at least 7 years of practice** (or) Retired Judicial Officers from the Assam Judicial Service (or) **Retired IAS** of ACS Officers (not below the rank of Secretary/Addl. Secretary) having experience in quasi-judicial works.

Amendment to Foreigners (Tribunals) Order

- The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) **empowered district magistrates in all States and Union Territories** to set up tribunals (quasi-judicial bodies) to decide whether a person staying illegally in India is a foreigner or not.
- Earlier, the powers to constitute tribunals were vested only with the Centre.
- It also empowers individuals to approach the Tribunals.
- Earlier, only the State administration could move the Tribunal against a suspect

National Register of Citizens

EXCLUDED FROM NRC?

Legal options you can explore

Aug 31
Final list of Assam's residents

Section 8 of the **Schedule to the Citizenship** (Registration of Citizens and Issue of National Identity Cards) Rules, 2003 empowers you to appeal against the exclusion

Where to appeal
The Foreigners' Tribunals (FTs)
Deadline: 120 days (By 31 Dec, 2019)
Cases to be disposed of within **6 months**

Challenge FT's decision

In High Court

In Supreme Court

SC decision to be final

Source: News Reports

Help at hand
Assam govt has **announced legal aid to 'bonafide' citizens** through District Legal Services Authorities (DLSA)
Political parties and NCOs have also **volunteered to help**

Non-inclusion of a person's name in the final list of National Register of Citizens (NRC) does not by itself amount to him or her being declared a foreigner"
Union Home Ministry

creative

2. A multipolarity, scripted by the middle powers (16April)

- The acrimony between the United States and Chinese delegations at the Anchorage conclave on March 19, followed by U.S. President **Joe Biden referring to Russian President Vladimir Putin as a “killer”** and Mr. Putin’s sharp riposte, and **Mr. Biden’s reluctance to rejoin the nuclear agreement with Iran, are positions** which make it clear that in respect of three crucial relationships, namely China, Russia and Iran, **Mr. Biden is following in the footsteps of his much-reviled predecessor, Donald Trump**

Free, open, resilient and inclusive” Indo-Pacific region.

- **Mr. Biden has also extended his firm backing for another of Trump’s priorities: the “Indo-Pacific”** as an area of strategic significance for the U.S. and the associated alignment that gives shape and substance to this geopolitical concept – the **Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, or Quad for short.**
- On March 12, Mr. Biden convened an **online summit meeting of the four Quad members**, namely, the U.S., Japan, Australia and India, at which the leaders affirmed their commitment to a “free, open, resilient and inclusive” Indo-Pacific region.

New Cold War

- It is clear that the **U.S. continues to view China as its principal adversary** on the world stage and that it will use the Quad to challenge China in the Indo-Pacific, possibly as part of a “new Cold War”.
- This new Cold War was given concrete shape during the Trump presidency

Indo-pacific Vs Eurassia

- U.S. animosity has encouraged China and Russia to solidify their relations.
- Besides significantly expanding their bilateral ties, the two countries have agreed to harmonise their visions under the **Eurasian Economic Union sponsored by Russia and China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).**
- This idea has now been subsumed under the ‘Greater Eurasian Partnership’ to which both are committed.
- **Both have condemned the Quad** for “undermining global strategic stability”.
- Thus, the **new Cold War is now being reflected in a new geopolitical binary – the Indo-Pacific versus Eurasia.**

Middle powers (Japan, Iran, Turkey and India)

- Have the **capacity to project power regionally, build alliances**, and support (or disrupt) the strategies of international powers pursuing their interests in the region.
- **Japan and India are deeply entrenched in the Quad** and have substantial security ties with the U.S.
- **Iran, on the other hand found strategic comfort with the Sino- Russian alliance.**
- **Turkey, a NATO member, has found its interests better-served by Russia and China rather than the U.S. and its European allies.**

Japan-USA-China

- Japan has an ongoing territorial dispute with China relating to the Senkaku islands in the East China Sea.
- Thus, the security treaty of 1951 with the U.S. has been crucial for Japan's interests.
- But there is more to Sino-Japanese relations: in 2019, 24% of Japanese imports came from China, while 19% of its exports went to China, affirming the adage: Japan depends too much on the U.S. for its security and too much on China for its prosperity
- Shinzo Abe has instilled in Japan greater self-confidence so that it can reduce its security-dependence on the U.S. and pursue an independent role in the Indo-Pacific.
- Hence its \$200 billion 'Partnership for Quality Infrastructure' that funds infrastructure projects in Asia and Africa, though Japan is also willing to work on BRI projects on a selective basis.
- But these are early days and it remains unclear whether Japan will explore the wide oceans or confine its strategic interests to the East China Sea.

India-China-USA

- India's ties with China have been caught in a vicious circle: as threats from China at the border and intrusions in its South Asian neighbourhood and the Indian Ocean became sharper, it moved closer to the U.S.
- It is likely that India's expanding defence ties with the U.S. from 2016, consisting of massive defence purchases and agreements on inter-operability and intelligence-sharing and frequent military exercises, as also the elevation of the **Quad to ministerial level in September 2019, signalled to China that India was now irreversibly in the U.S. camp.**
- With the border stand-off at Ladakh, China is perhaps reminding India that its security interests demand close engagement with China rather than a deepening alignment with its global rival.

Limits of QUAD

- China has a point: while the Quad has made India a valuable partner for the U.S. in the west Pacific, **neither the U.S. nor the Quad can address the challenges it faces at its 3,500-kilometre land border with China**

Turkey

- **Steady distancing from its western partners and increasing geopolitical, military and economic alignment with Russia and China.**
- But Turkey still wishes to **keep its ties with the U.S. intact**, and retain the freedom to make choices.
- Its **"New Asia" initiative**, for instance, involves **strengthening of east-west logistical and economic connectivity backed by western powers and China.**

New Cold War

- It is clear that the U.S. continues to view China as its principal adversary on the world stage and that it will use the Quad to challenge China in the Indo-Pacific, possibly as part of a "new Cold War".
- This new Cold War was given concrete shape during the Trump presidency

Hostility for Russia

- The U.S.'s hostility for Russia goes back to the latter's war with Ukraine and the occupation of Crimea in 2014, followed by allegations of Russian cyber-interference in the U.S. presidential elections of 2016. Mr. Biden continues this hostility for Russia.

Multipolarity

- The four middle powers, whose choice of alignment will impart a political and military binary to world order, are reluctant to make this a reality.
- While Cold War advocates in home capitals and in the U.S. will continue to promote ever-tighter alliances, these nations could find salvation in "strategic autonomy" – defined by flexible partnerships, with freedom to shape alliances to suit specific interests at different times.
- These four middle powers will thus make multipolarity, rather than a new Cold War, the defining characteristic of the emerging global order.

Senkaku/Diaoyu islands

- The dispute island had historical complexity. A map of the world which was charted in 1863 says that originally, the island was belonged to the group of Chinese Diaoyu islands.
- However, the Empire of Japan unilaterally registered the island as their territory during the Sino-Japanese War in 1895.
- The island was under the mandatory administration of the U.S. after the Second World War, and Japan has controlled it since 1972.



Agreement

- For decades, China and Japan have agreed with a tacit agreement to keep the islands dispute quiet. "Japan agreed not to carry out any new construction or let anyone land on the islands; China agreed to delay assertion of any claim to the islands and not let the dispute interfere with trade and political relations".

3. On the trail of the second wave's dynamics

- The rapid ascent of the **second wave of COVID-19 in India from the third week of February, a major source of concern** for the general public, the government, health administrators and the medical profession, needs to be carefully interpreted.
- Earlier, we concluded that at the **end of the first wave, 60% of the population had been infected** (828 million).
- According to a **recent Indian Council of Medical Research report**, the **reinfection rate in India is 4.5% – out of 828 million initially infected, 37.26 million are susceptible to reinfection**

R Value

- The R value of the initial 'variant' of the virus of the **first wave** was **2-3**, meaning, one infected person would infect 2-3 others
- Second wave has a higher R value – we guess it may have **doubled, ≥ 4** .

Herd Immunity

- The herd immunity level required to **bring the numbers down to end the second wave** (herd immunity threshold) would be about **75%-80%, in contrast to 60% for the first wave**.

Vaccination

- Our current pace of vaccination (**only 1% of the population has completed two doses so far**) and the two week interval required after the second dose of the vaccine to confer sufficient immunity to decelerate the second wave, indicate that vaccination may not decelerate the second wave in India.
- However, we **hope that the elderly and vulnerable, who were prioritised** for vaccination, will have reduced mortality.

Concerns of Variant

- The faster-spreading **U.K. variant was involved in the second wave in Punjab**; judging by the tempo of spread, either this variant, **other known variants and possibly faster-spreading Indian variants are responsible for the second wave in the country**
- **Vaccine hesitancy, policy hesitancy and fast-spreading virus mutants all added to the tempo of the second wave**. We let our guard down too early – a costly error.
- A larger number of symptomatic infections in youngsters in the second wave may be attributable to their **higher mobility and premature opening up of schools and colleges** in the face of highly infectious variants.

The strategy ahead

Focus on Golden rules

- We should insist on the **golden rules of mask wearing, cough etiquette, maintaining physical distance**, hand-hygiene and avoiding crowds, and pursue an aggressive vaccination drive to contain the situation without imposing a lockdown, which will hurt the recovering economy and lead to untold public misery.

Vaccine pre-requisite for Vulnerable people

- Travel curbs for fully vaccinated individuals are being **lifted in the United States**.
- In India, **vaccination can be made a pre-requisite for those who come in contact with large numbers of vulnerable people** (for example, teachers).
- Vaccination at offices (started in Tamil Nadu) and persuading staff in the **Indian Railways to get vaccinated quickly** are innovative steps in the right direction.
- If vaccination is a pre-condition for entry into crowded public places and use of public transport, those who use these facilities will feel safe and the **public will accept vaccination readily**.
- **Mobile vaccination** vans can cover inaccessible rural pockets and reach people unable to reach vaccination centres.

Penalty

- anyone found **without a mask in public may be given a mask and charged for it**. If all public figures **wear masks** in all their public appearances, citizens will get a clear and effective message.

mRNA Vaccine

- • The mRNA vaccines, which appear to offer greater protection against new variants and other vaccines in the pipeline to cover variants of concern need to be mass produced, tested and commissioned quickly to benefit everyone.

4. How can India contain the second wave?

Challenges

Curb interstate travel

- we can **only make that decision when we know how much these new variants have spread**
- If New variant have already spread sufficiently, restricting inter-State travel would be pointless now. So, we need data. Apart from that we need to worry about closed spaces; masking; the intensity of religious and political events, which we need to maybe forbid altogether

Variation in Number of cases across states

- We are not doing enough genomic surveillance. Even now **we don't know how much Maharashtra has changed** between March 24 and today.
- We know that this variant in Maharashtra has quickly spread to at least 10 States or so. **But how those numbers have changed and how much of the spike is in response to that variant we don't know.**

COVID-19 responses getting second priority over elections

- If there is a newer variant in circulation, every State is at risk. Some are at higher risk than others depending on when the variant entered the State.
- **Inefficient testing, especially an inefficient syndromic approach**, and review and monitoring of COVID-19 responses getting second priority over elections are definitely the reasons why we might have missed it

Are we carrying out contact tracing and isolating those people who have been found positive in institutional facilities?

- There are too many generals and few soldiers. **No additional manpower has been granted**; we have not used the opportunity to step up preparedness but **we want the same people to be tackling the second wave, which is more infectious.**
- We need to have a **complete relook at the way health manpower** is managed in this country.

Are States really prepared to handle the potentially huge inflow of patients to hospitals?

- There are inter-regional and intra-regional disparities in health system access and delivery.
- If you look at Maharashtra, the distribution of hospitals and healthcare workers in Mumbai is different compared to other districts. That's why those districts face a greater strain on their health system compared to Mumbai.
- In Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, there is a very poor distribution of health system capacity both in terms of infrastructure and human resources.

What can be done to increase vaccine uptake? Is there vaccine hesitancy?

- **Vaccine hesitancy has now decreased.**
- There are **genuine vaccine shortages in multiple States** which have seen a huge uptick in cases.

Role of private health facility in Vaccination

- For nearly four or five decades now, it is the **public health sector which has been the main player in vaccination** programmes.
- So, if we are expecting the **private health system to outsmart the public health system** in coverage of vaccines just for COVID-19, that's a **wrong assumption.**
- The kind of cold chain system in the government system is far superior.
- But if there are **more vaccines, and people want to pay for these vaccines**, then the public health system cannot get to it. That's where the strength of the private health system is.

5. The secrecy around deaths after vaccination-15 April

- Despite four successive lockdowns, COVID-19 cases and deaths kept mounting day by day till mid-September last year. Since January 16, 2021, we have two vaccines under emergency use authorisation, now being given to all those aged 45 and above.

No thorough investigation

- The **common man relies on a responsible and responsive government to safeguard** him against any vaccine-induced harm, including an unfortunate death.
- Although 180 deaths out of the 617 severe and serious adverse events up to end March were supposed to have followed COVID-19 vaccination, **no case of serious AEFI, including death, has been attributed to the COVID-19 vaccine.**

- ‘There is **no link to vaccination**’ is the quick response by authorities **even before a systematic investigation, including a post-mortem examination, is completed.**

Lack of Data

- A line list of **less than 15 deaths are visible to the public on the Ministry of Health website.**
- The **time of death or the period of gap** between the vaccination and death is **not mentioned.**
- Some deaths are not even fully documented. Knowing the time line pattern of deaths after vaccination is important

Case of Covishield

- Media reports indicate that **many deaths after taking AstraZeneca’s Covishield** occurred due to **cardiac arrest, cerebral venous thrombosis, and stroke.**
- Deaths in Germany and Norway were also due to clots or thrombus formation following a jab of AstraZeneca’s vaccine.
- **Ireland, Denmark and Iceland are among the countries which have suspended AstraZeneca’s vaccine**

India

- In India, National AEFI Committee, and member of the COVID-19 National Task Force, said that **“in 38 out of 71 post-mortem reports received so far, a causal link to the vaccine has not been established.**
- All the events so far are **coincidental.**
- That means that **many cardiac arrests and strokes would have occurred in any case in the population without vaccination.**
- Mere coincidence is not an easy verdict to pronounce unless investigations are thoroughly completed
- So also **nine deaths after 20 million people getting the vaccine in Europe and the U.K. should not cause concern** if it is not associated with the vaccine.
- But if **there is an association, the death becomes preventable.**
- That is why the deaths became a serious issue for the European Medicines Agency (EMA).

Concerns raised

- Several doctors of global professional standing signed a protest letter & concerned that **there has been and there continues to be inadequate scrutiny of the possible causes of illness or death** under these circumstances, and especially so in the **absence of post-mortem examinations.**
- **Bleeding disorders might occur in the wake of this novel type** of Diffused Intravascular Coagulation (DIC) syndrome including profuse bleedings and haemorrhagic stroke.
- According to doctors approval of the COVID-19 vaccines by the EMA, was **“premature and reckless.**

- **Science and welfare of humanity must prevail above political mileage.** A discerning public will recognise the humility of a responsible caring government in admitting its **dilemma based on the adverse events from the field versus wider benefits from mass vaccination.**
- That **honesty and transparency on AEFI alone can gain the confidence of the people** in taking a calculated risk of continuing with a controversial vaccine.
- The mist of **vaccine hesitancy will melt away quickly by the warm light of truth**, if only it is shared.

6. Designing a resolute COVID-19 response

- There are several differences from the pandemic which we experienced in 2020, both in its spread and in our response

Spread in 2020

- The virus affected **relatively small numbers** by March 2020, by the time the lockdown was announced.
- The **long nationwide lockdown** gave governments across the land time to strengthen the health system capacity, **streamline administrative coordination**, power up procurement and production processes for essential equipment and supplies, **educate people on the dangers posed by the virus** and advise personal protection measures that needed to be adopted.
- **Large cities and neighbouring districts were more affected**, with urban crowding and mobility driving the transmission.
- **Rural areas and less developed States were mostly protected.**

Spread in 2021

- This time, the pandemic has resurfaced in a **fully open society.**
- There was **unrestricted movement, markets were crowded**, domestic and international travel was brisk, election campaigns were boisterously run for local bodies and assemblies, **religious gatherings** received state support and cricket matches were celebrated as a joyful advertisement of return to normalcy as rest of the world was still struggling with the pandemic.

Importance of decentralisation

- Decentralise the response to district level.
- Knowledge of existing and evolving local conditions matters, for the design and the delivery of an effective response.
- **Local data gathering and analysis provide real time intelligence for rapid response.**
- Local community **networks are important channels** for information dissemination and for partnering the administration in implementation.

Need effective planning

- We need **consultative policymaking at the national level, inter-departmental planning at the State level.**
- **Data-driven decentralised** decision making for situation adaptive implementation at the district level.

- The **district collector must coordinate health-care services** across all facilities in the district and be empowered to commandeer hospitals, hotels and transport facilities as needed.

Large number of testing is not an ultimate solution

- **Testing numbers** are again being projected as the best measure of an efficient and effective response. **This is incorrect.**
- While **tests are indeed an important component of the strategy, we cannot test asymptotically infected persons** and mildly symptomatic persons who do not report themselves. These constitute a **very large number** at any time, as we know from antibody surveys.
- We **cannot randomly and repeatedly test large proportions of the population** to detect virus presence in such potentially infective persons.

Importance of Mask

- **Masks**, if worn well and regularly in public and even in indoor gatherings, will **greatly reduce risk** of transmission from any infected person, known or unknown.
- Even the **more infectious variants will be blocked by effective masks**, even where physical distancing is not possible.

Need to ban public gathering

- **Crowding, whether indoor or outdoor**, offers the virus an opportunity to seed itself among many exposed persons who then carry it elsewhere to perpetuate the chain of transmission.
- There should be a **ban on large gatherings, for at least the next eight weeks**. Travel restrictions too must be imposed during this period.

Limits of RT-PCR

- A single RT-PCR test can **miss between 30%-40% cases**, due to **limitations posed by swab collection, transport efficiency and laboratory competency** apart from testing too early or too late during the infection when a replicating virus is not detectable.

Focus on Household surveillance

- We need to **detect possible cases through household surveillance of symptomatic individuals by primary health-care teams** supported by citizen volunteers.
- All suspect cases and household contacts must be tested.
- Positive cases must be isolated and provided home or hospital care depending on severity.
- **Symptomatic but negative persons and household contacts should be re-tested three to five days later** but wear masks and observe distance even at home till the re-test result too is negative and the infected person has recovered.

Genomic analyses & contact tracing

- Genomic analyses must be performed in at least 5% of test positive samples.
- Contact tracing, for persons from whom the case may have acquired the infection and to whom the case may have passed it on, needs to be conducted with **speed and efficiency**.

- Local networks help in early case detection and contact tracing.

Recognising value and limitations of Vaccine

- Speed up vaccine rollout, recognising value and limitations. The **benefit of currently available vaccines is to provide protection against severe disease, not infection per se.**
- This information must be clearly conveyed to the public, politicians and the media so that **wrong expectations of complete protection against infection do not lead to laxity in behaviour** or an outcry of vaccine failure.
- Given this objective, **available vaccines must be prioritised for vulnerable persons.**
- Initially, the aim must be to **immunise all persons above 35 years of age and all younger persons with at-risk health disorders.**
- We must get more vaccines quickly into the supply chain by incentivising greater production volumes of already approved vaccines
- We must train more vaccinators for delivery closer to home, stepping up daily administration rates at more centres

Social support is key

- **Involve people, not just instruct.**
- Citizen engagement is critical for a successful pandemic response.
- **Formal and informal networks that exist at the local level must be activated** and supported to educate people and motivate them for adopting COVID-19-appropriate behaviours, symptom reporting, providing contact information and registering for vaccination, while providing social support to affected families.
- **Masks can be produced at the State or district level**, for free distribution to households by community-based organisations.
- **District authorities must identify vulnerable persons and families** who may suffer hardships due to loss of income, shelter or incur high health-care costs. Proactive support must be provided from public financing, as state policy, even as **philanthropy is mobilised to supplement.**
- **Children must be supported for education at home** or in the neighbourhood, through voluntary agencies, to overcome the digital divide of online teaching.
- **Social solidarity must become the soul** of our pandemic response.

7. Through a backchannel, steps forward (12 April)

- The absence of evidence, they say, is not the evidence of absence. More than a month after India-Pakistan border commanders agreed to strictly observe all agreements between the two countries, the absence of official acceptance of a backchannel seems far outweighed by indicators that there is, in fact, such a channel in place, approved by the Prime Ministers of both countries.

Several clues

- For many, the statement issued by the **Director Generals of Military Operations** on February 25 was the first clue.

- The fact that it was a **joint statement and employed terms like the resolution of “core issues”** indicated both coordination at a diplomatic level and high-level political approval.
- **Scheduling of the much-delayed Indus Water Treaty talks, the granting of sports visas, and the salutary messages between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan, strengthened rumours of a backchannel.**
- These stand out after a particularly recriminatory period in India-Pakistan ties that followed the **2019 Pulwama attack, the Balakot strikes and capture of an Indian pilot thereafter, and the government’s decision on Jammu and Kashmir.**
- More recently, the **lack of any references to Pakistan in electoral speeches by Mr. Modi** and his Cabinet during the ongoing Assembly elections as well as the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA)’s decision not to criticise the obvious U-turn by Mr. Khan on trade are seen as more such clues.

History of Backchannels

Rajiv Gandhi period

- Channel for peace talks began in 1988 supported by **Jordanian Crown Prince Hassan.**
- However, the **death of Pakistan’s general** ended the process without any solution.

Atal Bihari period

- During the Kargil War, PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee employed a back-channel interlocutor to finalize a ceasefire agreement.

PM Modi Period

- In 2016, **six former Pakistani High Commissioners** travelled to Delhi for a **Track-II consultation** with nine former Indian High Commissioners

Track 1 Diplomacy

- It involves Official discussions typically involving high-level political and military leaders and focusing on cease-fires, peace talks, and treaties and other agreements.
- Here Heads of states meet to discuss issues and release joint statements etc.

Track 2 Diplomacy

- Unofficial dialogue and problem-solving activities aimed at building relationships
- Various academic, religious, and NGO leaders participate

Track 1.5 Diplomacy

- In this official and non-official actors work together to resolve conflicts.

Track 3 Diplomacy

- People-to-people diplomacy undertaken by individuals and private groups.

Need for back-channel process

- **Afghanistan peace deal negotiation** and Taliban issue need collaboration
- Weakening of Pakistan’s economic condition due to **FATF pressure**

- For India, a stand-off with the **Chinese Army** at the Line of Actual Control in Ladakh and the possibility of a two-front war situation

8. Navigation with permission (13 April)

- On April 7, the U.S.'s 7th Fleet Destroyer, the USS John Paul Jones, conducted a 'Freedom of Navigation Operation' 130 nautical miles west of the Lakshadweep Islands inside India's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).
- Not only was this exercise **conducted without requesting India's consent**, but the U.S. 7th Fleet noted in its press release that India's requirement of prior consent is "inconsistent with international law
- India asserted that the **UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)** "**does not authorize other States to carry out in the Exclusive Economic Zone** and on the continental shelf, military exercises or manoeuvres, in particular those involving the use of weapons or explosives, without the consent of the coastal state
- India is a party to the UNCLOS while the U.S. is not.
- As per the UNCLOS, **EEZ is an area adjacent to the territorial waters of a coastal state where the sovereign coastal state has rights and duties relating to management of natural resources; establishment and use of artificial islands, installations and structures; marine scientific research; and protection of the marine environment.**

Article 87 (UNCLOS)

- The **high seas are open to all States, whether coastal or land-locked.**
- Freedom of the high seas is exercised under the conditions laid down by this Convention and by other rules of international law.
- It comprises both for coastal and land-locked States:
 - ✓ freedom of navigation;
 - ✓ freedom of overflight;
 - ✓ freedom to lay submarine cables and pipelines
 - ✓ freedom to construct artificial islands and other installations permitted under international law
 - ✓ freedom of fishing, subject to the conditions laid down in-section
 - ✓ freedom of scientific research
- These **freedoms shall be exercised by all States with due regard for the interests of other States** in their exercise of the freedom of the high seas, and also with due regard for the rights under this Convention with respect to activities in the Area.

Article 58 (1)

- In the exclusive economic zone, all States, whether coastal or land-locked, enjoy, subject to the relevant provisions of this Convention, the freedoms referred to in article 87 of navigation and overflight and of the laying of submarine cables and pipelines, and other internationally law ful uses of the sea related to these freedoms, such as those associated with the operation of ships, aircraft and submarine cables and pipelines, and compatible with the other provisions of this Convention

Article 58 (3)

- In exercising their rights and performing their duties under this Convention in the exclusive economic zone, **States shall have due regard to the rights and duties of the coastal State and shall comply with the laws and regulations adopted by the coastal State** in accordance with the provisions of this Convention and other rules of international law in so far as they are not incompatible with this Part.

9. Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act

- In India, voluntarily terminating a pregnancy is considered a criminal offence under the Indian Penal Code, 1860 (IPC).
- The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971 was enacted as an **exception to the IPC**, to provide for the termination of certain pregnancies by registered medical practitioners.
- The Bill amends the Act to **increase the upper limit for termination from 20 to 24 weeks** for certain categories of women, and removes this limit in the case of substantial foetal abnormalities

MTP amendment 2020

- **Termination due to failure of contraceptive method or device**
- Under the Act a pregnancy may be **terminated up to 20 weeks** by a **married woman** in the case of **failure of contraceptive method or device**.
- Amendment **allows unmarried women** to also terminate a pregnancy for this reason.

Medical Boards

- **All state and union territory governments will constitute a Medical Board.**
- The Board will **decide if a pregnancy may be terminated after 24 weeks** due to substantial foetal abnormalities.
- Each Board will have a **gynaecologist, paediatrician, radiologist/sonologist**, and other members notified by the state government.

Privacy

- A registered **medical practitioner may only reveal the details of a woman whose pregnancy has been terminated** to a person authorised by law.
- **Violation is punishable** with imprisonment up to a year, a fine, or both.
- **Time limit and grounds for terminating a pregnancy**
 - ✓ The Act specifies the grounds for terminating a pregnancy and specifies the time limit for terminating a pregnancy.

Time since conception	Requirement for terminating pregnancy	
	MTP Act , 1971	MTP (Amendment) Bill, 2020
Up to 12 weeks	Advice of one doctor	Advice of one doctor
12 to 20 weeks	Advice of two doctors	Advice of one doctor
20 to 24 weeks	Not allowed	Two doctors for some categories of pregnant women
More than 24 weeks	Not allowed	Medical Board in case of substantial foetal abnormality
Any time during the pregnancy	One doctor, if immediately necessary to save pregnant woman's life	

Significance

- A number of **foetus abnormalities** are detected after the **20th week**, often turning a wanted pregnancy into an unwanted one. It helps to **terminate abnormal foetus**.
- It also **applies to unmarried women** and therefore, relaxes one of the regressive clauses of the 1971 Act, i.e., single women couldn't cite contraceptive failure as a reason for seeking an abortion
- It will **help the rape victims, ill and under-age women to terminate** the unwanted pregnancy lawfully.
- The move from “**married woman**” and “**her husband**” to “**woman**” and “**her partner**” is appreciable
- In the landmark judgment in **KS Puttaswamy v Union of India**, the Supreme Court **recognised women's constitutional right to make reproductive choices and the right to “abstain from procreating”** was read into the **right to privacy, dignity and bodily autonomy**.

Issues

Conditions for termination of pregnancies

- **Favour**-Terminating a pregnancy is the **choice of the pregnant woman**, and a part of her reproductive rights.
- **Against**-State has an **obligation to protect life**, and hence should provide for the protection of the foetus.

Medical Board

- For termination of pregnancy after **24 weeks only in cases where a Medical Board diagnoses substantial foetal abnormalities**
- In **remote areas access to the board by pregnant women is very difficult**

- Multiple examinations by board before allowing her to terminate her pregnancy. This is a **violation of right to privacy and right to live with dignity.**
- It allows certain categories of women to terminate their pregnancies between 20 and 24 weeks. The central government will notify these categories, However such categories not specified
- More liberal abortion law can further encourage preference for male child

10. BIMSTEC needs to reinvent itself

- The foreign ministers of BIMSTEC (the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) **met virtually on April 1.** That they made time to hold their 17th meeting is good news

BIMSTEC Vs Other groupings

- While most multilateral groupings from **G20 to ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) and SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation)** held their deliberations at the highest political level in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, **BIMSTEC leaders failed to do so.**

SAARC Vs BIMSTEC

- In contrast to a meeting of even **SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation)** leaders held at India's initiative a year ago, **BIMSTEC could not arrange its ministerial meeting until April 2021.** This is due as much to contextual factors as the diplomatic environment prevailing today

Push for BIMSTEC

- Established as a grouping of four nations – India, Thailand, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka – through the **Bangkok Declaration of 1997** to promote rapid economic development
- BIMSTEC was **expanded later to include three more countries – Myanmar, Nepal and Bhutan.**
- It moved at a **leisurely pace during its first 20 years with only three summits** held and a record of modest achievements.
- But it suddenly received special attention as New Delhi chose to treat it as a more practical instrument for regional cooperation over a **faltering SAARC.**
- The **BIMSTEC Leaders' Retreat, followed by their Outreach Summit with the BRICS leaders in Goa** in October 2016, drew considerable international limelight to the low-profile regional grouping.
- This also **opened up the path for its rejuvenation.**

The fourth leaders' summit, held in Kathmandu in August 2018

- Devised an ambitious plan for **institutional reform and renewal** that would encompass economic and security cooperation.
- It took the important decision to craft a charter to provide BIMSTEC with a **more formal and stronger foundation.**
- The **shared goal now is to head towards "a Peaceful, Prosperous and Sustainable Bay of Bengal Region".**

- At the **second swearing-in of the Modi government** in May 2019, the **leaders of BIMSTEC, not SAARC, were invited** as honoured guests.

Recent decisions

- Two and a half years after the Kathmandu Summit, the **grouping stands ready to move forward**.
- The foreign **ministers cleared the draft for the BIMSTEC charter**, recommending its early adoption.
- They endorsed the rationalisation of sectors and sub-sectors of activity, with each **member-state serving as a lead for the assigned areas of special interest**.
- The ministers also conveyed their support for the Master Plan for Transport Connectivity, which will be adopted at the next summit.
- Preparations have been completed for the signing of three agreements relating to **mutual legal assistance in criminal matters, cooperation between diplomatic academies, and the establishment of a technology transfer facility** in Colombo.

Need Comprehensive FTA

- What has been missing from recent deliberations is a reference to the lack of progress on the trade and economic dossier.
- A January 2018 study by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry had suggested that **BIMSTEC urgently needed a comprehensive Free Trade Agreement** to be a real game changer. Ideally it should cover trade in goods, services and investment; promote regulatory harmonisation; adopt policies that develop regional value chains; and eliminate non-tariff barriers.

Business communities

- Also **lacking was an effort to enthuse and engage the vibrant business communities** of these seven countries, and expand their dialogue, interactions and transactions.
- Over 20 rounds of negotiations to operationalise the **BIMSTEC Free Trade Area Framework Agreement, signed in 2004, are yet to bear fruit**.

Other areas

- In contrast, **much has been achieved in Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief and security**, including counterterrorism, cyber security, and coastal security cooperation.
- Further the **academic and strategic community has shown ample enthusiasm** through the BIMSTEC Network of Policy Think Tanks

Hurdles

- First, a strong BIMSTEC presupposes **cordial and tension-free bilateral relations among all its member-states**. This has not been the case, given the trajectory of **India-Nepal, India- Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh-Myanmar** ties in recent years.
- Second, **Both Kathmandu and Colombo want the SAARC summit revived**, even as they cooperate within BIMSTEC, with diluted zeal.
- Third, **China's decisive intrusion** in the South-Southeast Asian space has cast dark shadows.

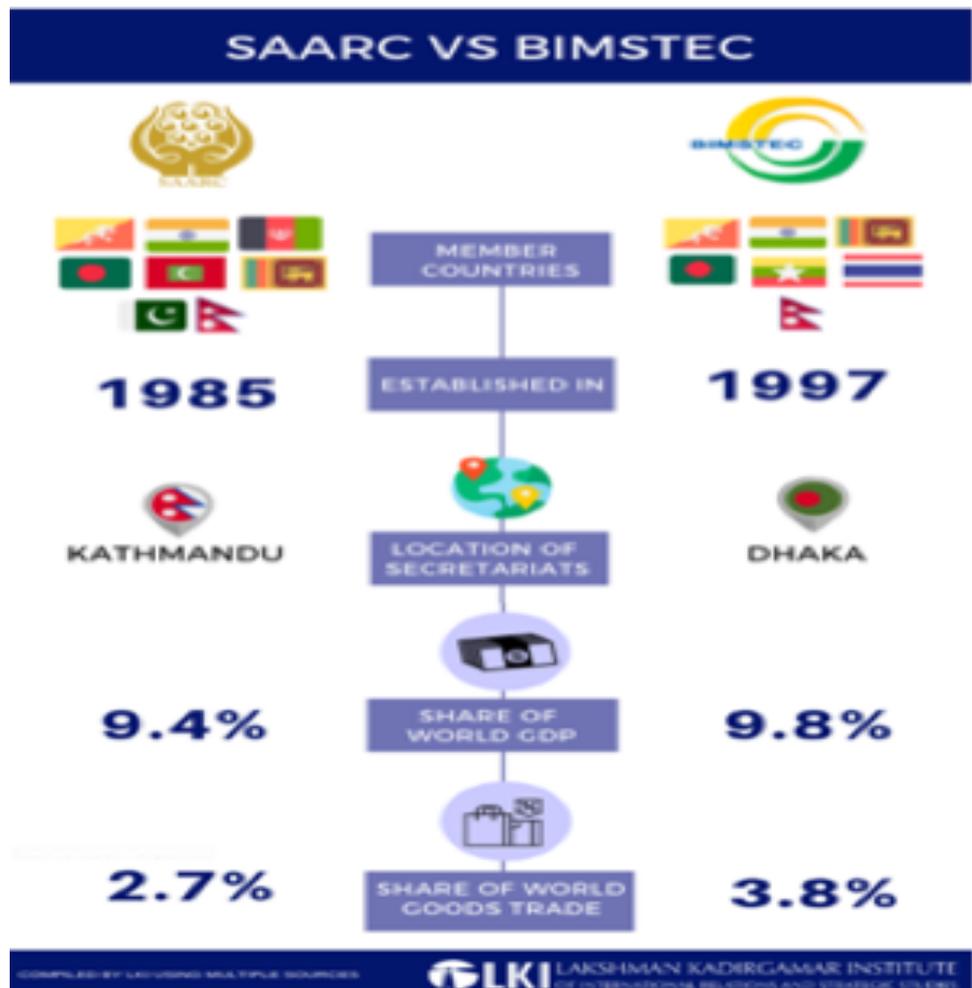
- Finally, the **military coup in Myanmar**, brutal crackdown of protesters and continuation of popular resistance resulting in a protracted impasse have produced a new set of challenges.

SAARC issues

- **Pakistan's opposition to regional integration** and its reliance on multilateral fora to raise bilateral disputes are the most visible obstacles to the proper functioning of SAARC.
- The **sense of insecurity vis-à-vis India**, coupled with the fact that the **majority community in most of India's neighbours is a minority in India**, has made **those countries domestically susceptible to anti-India mobilisation** and internationally desirous of external intervention in bilateral conflicts.
- In the **absence of tangible and achievable shared regional goals**, the SAARC countries lack an incentive to work together to overcome the aforementioned hurdles.
- **Lack of Trust in Indo-Pakistan relations:** After the deadly terror attack on the **Indian security forces at Uri** in 2016, India refused to engage with the SAARC
- **SAARC is a purely regional organisation, whereas BIMSTEC is interregional** and connects both South Asia and ASEAN. BIMSTEC provides SAARC countries a unique opportunity to connect with ASEAN

- SAARC comprises of eight member States

- ✓ Afghanistan
- ✓ Bangladesh
- ✓ Bhutan
- ✓ India
- ✓ Maldives
- ✓ Nepal
- ✓ Pakistan
- ✓ Sri Lanka



SOUTH ASIAN ASSOCIATION FOR REGIONAL COOPERATION (SAARC)

AFGHANISTAN, PAKISTAN, INDIA, NEPAL, BHUTAN, BANGLADESH, SRI LANKA, MALDIVES

SAARC Headquarters: Kathmandu, Nepal

The Association was founded on December 8, 1985

Together the SAARC countries form:

- 21%** Of the World Population
- 3%** Of the World's Area
- 3.8%** Of the Global Economy

5 broad spheres which SAARC countries agreed to cooperate on:

- Development of human resources
- Transport
- Health, science, technology & information
- Rural and agricultural development
- Population and health-related activities

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BIMSTEC

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

Stands for **The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation**

Founded in 1997 through **Bangkok Declaration**

7 MEMBER COUNTRIES

Importance of BIMSTEC

- Accounts for **22%** of the world's population
- Combined GDP of **\$2.7 trillion**
- One-fourth of the world's traded goods cross the Bay every year
- Six focus areas: trade, technology, energy, transport, tourism and fisheries

First summit held in **Thailand**

Sri Lanka is the **current Chair**

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