



DAILY EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

TOPIC

**INDIA'S STAKES IN THE GLOBAL
PANDEMIC AGREEMENT**

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Context

- Recently, India supported stronger global coordination while emphasising **equity, national sovereignty and resilient health systems** at the **UN High-Level Meeting (HLM)** on Pandemic Prevention, Preparedness and Response (PPPR), New York.

About Global Pandemic Governance Regime

- The COVID-19 pandemic exposed major weaknesses in global health governance i.e. unequal access to vaccines and therapeutics, fragile health systems, dependence on global supply chains and inadequate disease surveillance.
- The emerging regime seeks to institutionalise lessons from COVID-19 through two interconnected pillars:
 - ♦ **WHO Pandemic Agreement (PA)**: A legally binding international instrument negotiated under the WHO Constitution.
 - ♦ **UN Political Declaration on PPPR**: It provides political commitment and complements the WHO-led legal framework.
- The central challenge is to reconcile **global solidarity with national sovereignty**, particularly between the Global North and Global South.

WHO Pandemic Agreement (PA)

- It was adopted by the **World Health Assembly in May 2025**, with **124 countries voting in favour, none against and 11 abstaining**.
- It represents the **first major global legal framework** specifically designed to strengthen pandemic prevention, preparedness and response.
- Key Provisions:**
 - ♦ **One Health**: Integrating human, animal and environmental health.
 - ♦ Strengthening **surveillance, laboratories and health workforce**.
 - ♦ Greater cooperation on **technology, manufacturing and supply chains**.
 - ♦ Equitable access to **vaccines, diagnostics and therapeutics**.
 - ♦ Creation of a **Pathogen Access and Benefit-Sharing (PABS)** mechanism.
- However, the **Agreement's operationalisation** remains linked to negotiations on the **PABS annex**, which seeks to ensure that countries sharing pathogens and genetic information also receive fair and timely benefits such as vaccines, medicines and diagnostics.
- The **core North-South fault** line is clear i.e. developing countries seek **technology, financing and equitable access**, while many developed countries are cautious about binding obligations affecting intellectual property, technology transfer and national regulatory autonomy.

UN Political Declaration on PPPR

- The UN Declaration **complements the WHO Agreement** by providing a broader political commitment to pandemic prevention and preparedness.
- Its significance lies in strengthening:
 - ♦ resilient and equitable health systems;
 - ♦ international cooperation and surveillance;
 - ♦ health workforce and laboratory capacities;
 - ♦ One Health approaches;
 - ♦ access to medical countermeasures; and
 - ♦ pandemic financing and global coordination.

- Thus, the emerging regime attempts to move pandemic governance from **ad-hoc crisis response to institutionalised preparedness**.

India's Position: Solidarity with Sovereignty

- India supports international coordination but maintains that member-states need to retain primacy in designing policies according to their national circumstances.
- It has emphasised that **'global solidarity must be demonstrated through action'**, particularly through equitable access to vaccines, drugs and therapeutics.
- India has highlighted **global public goods**, including digital health infrastructure, laboratory networks and One Health capacities.
- This position bridges the North-South divide:
 - ♦ Developing countries demand **financing before accepting costly commitments**, such as extensive One Health surveillance.
 - ♦ Developed countries remain cautious about **binding technology-transfer and intellectual-property obligations**.
 - ♦ India seeks to build consensus without diluting national policy space.
- The **US rejection of the Declaration**, particularly over concerns regarding **PABS and the WHO's role**, illustrates the continuing sovereignty-versus-global-governance debate.

Why Does India Matters in Global Pandemic Governance?

- India occupies a unique position as both a **major pharmaceutical manufacturer and a developing country**.
- It is among the world's largest vaccine manufacturers by volume and played an important role in COVID-19 vaccine supply.
- However, several vaccine technologies and patents remain controlled by multinational pharmaceutical companies.
- India remains significantly dependent on imports of **Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (APIs)**.
- It requires advanced technologies for high-grade **PPE, medical devices and biotechnology**.
- Hence, India needs both **access to Global North technology** and the ability to provide technological support to the Global South.
- Its continental-scale health system also makes its experience in **digital health, laboratory networks and One Health** potentially valuable as global public goods.

Related Efforts & Initiatives by India

- **Global Initiative on Digital Health (GIDH)**: Launched during India's G20 Presidency in 2023 to promote interoperable digital-health systems.
- **National One Health Programme**: Promotes integrated surveillance of human, animal and environmental health.
- **PRET Initiative**: India participated in WHO's **Preparedness and Resilience For Emerging Threats (PRET)** initiative, strengthening preparedness for future pandemics.
- **Vaccine Diplomacy**: Vaccine Maitri demonstrated India's capacity to supply vaccines to developing countries.
- **G20 Health Diplomacy**: India placed health emergency preparedness, digital health and resilient health systems prominently on the G20 agenda.

Way Forward for India

- **Lead South-South Cooperation:** India should develop partnerships with Global South countries on **surveillance, One Health, laboratories and health-workforce strengthening**, creating practical solutions to sovereignty concerns.
- **Leverage Multilateral Platforms:** India should use the **G20, Partners for Multilateralism and other coalitions** to build consensus around equitable pandemic governance.
- **Strengthen Domestic Capacity:** Global leadership must rest on domestic resilience. India should reduce API dependence, expand biotechnology and medical-device manufacturing, strengthen genomic surveillance and improve regulatory capacity.
- **Champion Equitable PABS:** India should actively shape the PABS framework so that **pathogen sharing is matched by timely and affordable access to resulting vaccines, diagnostics and therapeutics**.
- **Institutionalise Global Public Goods:** India's digital-health architecture, laboratory networks and One Health capabilities should be developed as scalable models for developing countries.

Conclusion

- The emerging pandemic regime will succeed only when **sovereignty does not become isolation and solidarity does not become unfunded obligation**.
- India's strategic role is therefore to bridge the Global North and South and convert its domestic health capabilities into **global public goods**.
- An **equitable Pandemic Agreement** is not merely India's international responsibility, it is essential to India's own health security.

Daily Mains Practice Question

[Q] India's stakes in the WHO Pandemic Agreement extend beyond public health to encompass strategic autonomy, vaccine equity, pharmaceutical security and Global South leadership. Discuss.

Source: TH

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