The Big Picture: India's Covid Pandemic Management

Why in News?

India is witnessing a surge in **Covid** cases during the second wave of pandemic.

- The country has adopted a five-fold strategy for tackling this recent surge in effective containment and management of Covid-19 pandemic.

Key Points

- **Strengthen the Efforts:** The Central Government has urged the state governments to strengthen their efforts to check the spread of the virus on a "war-footing".
  - It is also asserted that the country had much more resources to deal with the virus than before and the focus should be on micro-containment zones.
- **Arrival of New Vaccine:** There will be a third vaccine **Sputnik V** (developed by Russia), which will be available to India in next few weeks.
- **Less-Strict Restrictions by the Government:** The more calibrated measures of curbing the cases have been taken by the states such as **weekend curfews, night curfews, restrictions on various activities.**
  - The states haven't yet gone for complete lockdowns, considering the impacts on the economy as witnessed the previous year.
- **The Five-Fold Strategy:** There is an emphasis on the five-fold strategy of **Testing Tracing, Treatment, Covid-Appropriate Behaviour and Vaccination.**
  - **Testing:** Significantly increase testing in all districts with a minimum of 70% RT-PCR tests and use of rapid antigen tests as screening tests in densely populated areas as well as areas where fresh clusters are emerging.
  - **Tracing:** In a bid to break the chain of transmission, it is emphasised to ramp up effective and timely tracing, containment and surveillance activities.
  - **Treatment:** Effectively follow the protocol of clinical care, treatment and supported home/facility care.
  - **Covid-Appropriate Behaviour:** Strict enforcement of Covid-appropriate behaviour of wearing mask properly, hand sanitising and social distancing.
  - **Vaccination:** "Time-bound plan of 100% vaccination of eligible population groups, especially in the high focus districts.
- **ATM Policy of Maharashtra:** The situation of Maharashtra is grim due to the tsunami like rise in the cases.
  - The situation in cities in Mumbai, Pune are showing for the last few days, a situation of plateauing but other places like Nasik and Nagpur are badly affected.
  - The state has adopted an ATM policy:
    - **A= Access the cases.**
    - **T= Triage or transfer the patients** based on the risk profile, symptoms and the vulnerabilities of the individual.
    - **M= Managing them appropriately,** either at home, in institutional quarantine or in the hospitals.

Challenges Associated to Covid Management

- **Testing Issues:** The limitations of the **RT-PCR Test** need to be aware of as there are increasing reports of the false negative cases; the healthcare system needs to be cognizant of this.
- **Logistical and Operational Issues:** India still has a lot of logistical and operational issues that it needs to iron out often with vaccines.
    - The discussion of vaccines often ends up only on manufacturing but the equitable and proper distribution of the vaccines is as important as manufacturing them.
        - The centre and states need to work together so that what is available to the country, actually reaches out to its people.
- **Age Bars for Vaccination:** Limiting the facility of vaccination to a certain age group (currently for people above the age of 45) restricts and hence increases risks for a large share of the population.
    - People below the age of 45 even without any comorbidities are developing advanced symptoms of Covid too, like pneumonia.
- **Infrastructural Challenges:** Shortage of beds, oxygen cylinders, drugs, staff, ventilators are other major issues that obstruct the effective management of the pandemic.
- **Non-Adherence to Covid-Appropriate Behaviour:** The casual behaviour of people towards wearing masks, maintaining hygiene, social distancing and other such activities increases the risk of the transmission of the virus.
- **Spread of False Information:** Social media platforms play a major role in spreading information related to Covid-19, circulation of this false information is still quite successful at creating panic among people and hesitancy towards getting tested or vaccinated.

Way Forward

- **Triaging and Monitoring the Patients:** The healthcare system is stepping up in as many ways as possible but it is also very important to monitor and trace those people who actually need hospitalisation, oxygen support and other hospital facilities.
    - Moreover, monitoring the people remotely who are in isolation at home is also very important so they can receive the right advice and can be looked after well at home.
    - Treating the symptomatic people with the same care and precautions as the people who might have covid regardless of RT-PCR tests.
- **Vaccination:** India needs to expand the coverage of the currently eligible age group of people who can be vaccinated as the second wave of the pandemic is affecting the younger people as severely.
    - Besides the inclusion of Sputnik V as the third available vaccine, India should also focus on increasing the manufacturing capacity of its indigenously developed vaccines.
    - Moreover, India needs to beat the vaccine hesitancy and ensure that the most vulnerable people get vaccinated.
- **Imposing Restrictions:** Imposing complete or nationwide lockdowns and curfews shall be the last option to choose as the country has gone through the same conditions earlier and has faced consequences.
    - The poor and underprivileged section of the society, the migrant workers bear the worst brunt of that.
    - However, restrictions on social, religious and political gatherings shall be imposed.
- **Community Based Approach:** A proactive advocacy in the local languages of the people, through a very strong information education counselling campaign is the need of the hour.
    - Vaccines are there, but the very purpose of the vaccines is to prevent deaths and save lives and not cut down transmission.
    - All the standard measures we have at our disposal like masking, maintaining hygiene etc are as important today as they were when India did not have vaccines.
- **Genome-Mapping of the Virus:** India has some of the best genome labs in the world. It has to establish a better correlation among its labs and continue its genomic surveillance in order to prevent the situation from getting worse and developing new strains of the virus.

Conclusion

- The strategies to tackle the pandemic need to evolve with the evolving pandemic.
    - Increasing testing and tracing capabilities, lowering the load of the healthcare system; all

of us have to play our part and put efforts individually as well as in a community.
- There is no way the pandemic can be curbed with a lenient attitude towards the precautionary measures. Zero tolerance should be there towards non-adherence of the Covid-appropriate behaviour.
- A bit more coordinated effort is required from the centre and states towards the distribution end of the supply chain of vaccines.

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