Taiwan's COVID-19 Strategy and WHO

What is the issue?

- With nations having a tough fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, here is how Taiwan has appreciably contained the spread and handled the outbreak.
- [Notably, Taiwan is not a member of the World Health Organisation (WHO).]

What was Taiwan's COVID-19 strategy?

- It is 17 years since Taiwan was hit hard by the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) outbreak of 2003.
- Given this history, Taiwan has been in a state of constant readiness to the threat of emerging infectious diseases.
- When information on COVID-19 outbreak was first confirmed on December 31, 2019, Taiwan began implementing onboard quarantine of direct flights from Wuhan that very same day.
- On January 2, 2020, Taiwan established a response team for the disease.
- It activated the Central Epidemic Command Center (CECC) on January 20 as a level 3 government entity.
- This was upgraded to level 2 and level 1 on January 23 and February 27, respectively.
- The CECC effectively integrates resources from various ministries and invest itself fully in the containment of the epidemic.
- Taiwan undertook rigorous testing. As of April 9, it had tested a total of 42,315 persons showing 380 confirmed cases.
- Despite its proximity to China, Taiwan ranked 123 among 183 countries in terms of confirmed cases per million people.

What were the specific measures?

- **Quarantine** - Taiwan has implemented dynamic plans concerning border quarantine measures.
- These included onboard quarantine, fever screening, health declarations.
- A 14-day home quarantine for passengers arriving from nations it has listed under the Level 3 Warning was part of the plan.
- **Monitoring and Support** - Taiwan has established an electronic system for entry quarantine.
- This allows passengers with a local mobile phone number to fill in health

- information using a mobile phone.
- A health declaration pass will then be sent to them as a text message.
- This is connected to the community care support management system.
- The system, in turn, allows government agencies to provide care services and medical assistance.
- The travel history of individuals is now stored on the National Health Insurance (NHI) card to alert physicians to possible cases and prevent community transmission.
- For those undergoing home quarantine or isolation, the government is working with telecom operators to allow GPS tracking of their locations.
- Quarantine offenders are subject to fines or mandatory placement according to relevant laws and regulations.

- **Testing** - Taiwan has increased its laboratory testing capacity.
- It expanded the scope of its surveillance and inspections based on trends of the disease.
- It also retested people with higher risk who had already tested negative.
- Meanwhile, it has designated 50 regional hospitals and medical centres and 167 community hospitals and clinics to create a tiered system for testing.
- **Precaution** - The above hospitals and clinics are also required to set up special wards or areas.
- In principle, COVID-19 patients are isolated and treated individually in these wards and areas to prevent nosocomial infections.
- [A nosocomial infection refers to a hospital-acquired infection (HAI).]
- Moreover, Taiwan has banned the export of surgical masks since January 24, 2020.
- It arranged for masks, and expanded domestic mask production to more effectively allocate masks.
- It launched a name-based rationing system for mask purchases at NHI-contracted pharmacies and local public health agencies.
- An ordering system for masks was brought in which allows people to order online and pick up masks at convenience stores.

Why is a connected global effort crucial?

- Infectious diseases know no borders.
- Pandemics can spread rapidly around the world because of the ease of international transportation.
- Among the most salient examples are:

i. the Spanish flu of 1918
ii. the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) outbreak of 2003
iii. the H1N1 influenza of 2009

- Intermittently, serious regional epidemics have also occurred.
- These include the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) in 2012, Ebola in West Africa in 2014, and the Zika virus in Central and South America in 2015-16.
- Certainly, global health security requires the efforts of every person to ensure an optimal response to public health threats and challenges.
- Taiwan, though not a member of WHO, cannot stand alone and must be included in the fight against such threats and challenges.

Can Taiwan rightfully claim this?

- Taiwan has long been excluded from WHO due to political considerations.
- But Taiwan has fulfilled its responsibilities as a global citizen.
- It has abided by the International Health Regulations 2005 (IHR 2005) in notifying WHO of confirmed COVID-19 cases.
- It has also communicated with other countries on confirmed cases, travel and contact histories, and border control measures.
- Taiwan has uploaded the genetic sequence of COVID-19 to the Global Initiative on Sharing All Influenza Data (GISAID) Initiative.

How will Taiwan's inclusion help?

- Taiwan could now share much with the world given its renowned public health experience and system, the NHI, etc.
- Its ability to perform rapid testing as well as research and manufacture vaccines and drugs against COVID-19 has much to offer.
- It can also share its methods for analysing the virus.
- If WHO's mission is to ensure the highest attainable standard of health for every person, then WHO needs Taiwan just as Taiwan needs WHO.

Source: The Hindu