Twenty since Pokran -II

What is the issue?

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- It has been 2 decades since Pokaran nuclear tests of 1998 (Pokran – II).
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- India has more or less achieved the envisioned strategic goals, but the road has not been smooth.
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Why did India go nuclear?

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- A future India with nuclear weapons, which would provide for a strategic and military leverage, was hotly discussed in the 1980s.
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- The primary idea was off-set conventional Chinese military superiority and neutralise its nuclear arsenal.
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- Hence, India conducted 5 nuclear tests at Pokhran over 2 days in May 1998.
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- While the envisioned purpose has largely been achieved presently, the road hasn’t been smooth as multiple sanctions and restrictions had to be overcome.
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What followed in the immediate aftermath?

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- **Reactions -** While several global powers reacted to Pokhran-II with fury, the permanent members of the UN Security Council were divided.
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- The US, China, and the UK were critical of India’s nuclear tests, but Russia

and France were not in favour of sanctions.
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- Other notable powers who joined the US in imposing sanctions were - Australia, Canada, Germany, Japan, and Sweden.
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- **Diplomacy -** The skilful diplomacy of Indian delegates and the political dispensation help India tide over the hostile international climate.
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- Soon, the high officials of the US had come to the realisation of the inevitability of India's nuclear pursuit (considering its neighbourhood).
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- Notably, India has fought wars with China and Pakistan and there were clear indications that developing nuclear deterrence was the only option for India.
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- India also declared that it would not be the first to use nuclear weapons – but asserted that its retaliation to a nuclear attack against it will be furious.
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- The implied that India's nuclear arsenal will become active only when it has been attacked with nuclear bomb (No First Use Policy).
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- **Normalisation -** By around 2000, almost all international ties of India had normalised, which was an informal acceptance of India's nuclear status.
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- Talks with the US began almost immediately after the 1998 tests, and the 2008 Indo-US nuclear deal can be called the comprehensive end of nuclear isolation.
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- India subsequently got the NSG waiver in September 2008, which was largely due to USA's lobbying among NSG members.
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- Hence, India posses a nuclear arsenal (and hasn't signed the NPT), but yet managed to gain entry into international civilian nuclear trade.
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What is India's current status?

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- India is now a member of three out of four multilateral export control regimes namely - MTCR, Wassenaar Arrangement, Australia Group.
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- It has been trying hard to gain entry into the "Nuclear Supplier's Group" (NSG), which the export control block for nuclear resources and technology.

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- The adherence to the non-proliferation regime (by own volition) has improved its international standing over the past two decades.
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- 20 years after Pokhran-II, India has demonstrated moral, political and legal standing to convey to the world that it plays by the rules.
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- India’s stand on issues like – “Paris Climate Accord, South China Sea dispute or counter-terrorism initiatives, also project it as a responsible power.
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Source: Indian Express

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