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- The World Health Assembly, in May 2020, in cognisance of the obstacles to equitable access to COVID-19 technologies such as vaccines, diagnostics, medicines, PPE kits and machines,
- WHO has warned nations that hoard possible Covid-19 vaccines while excluding others would deepen the pandemic.
- The alternative to arrest vaccine nationalism is global collaboration, is done through the WHO-backed COVAX Facility mechanism.

Role of WTO

- The WTO has a role in getting pharma firms and countries to treat vaccines and life-saving medicines as a public good.
- If it is a public good, governments must step in to regulate its development, innovation, manufacture, sale, and supply ultimately to the public.
- Through the Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property, the Agreement on (TRIPS) and the Doha Ministerial Conference declaration 2001, the WTO made provisions for compulsory licensing.
- WTO can wield influence on member-nations to forgo trade profits for a humanitarian cause.



VACCINE NATIONALISM

Introduction:

- As the novel coronavirus vaccine is still a few months away, several wealthier countries like Britain, France, Germany and the US have entered into pre-purchase agreements with Covid-19 vaccine manufacturers, a development that has come to be known as "vaccine nationalism".
- There are fears that such advance agreements will make the initial few vaccines unaffordable and inaccessible to everyone apart from the rich countries.
- Similar situation happened in 2009 during the H1N1 flu pandemic.

INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE/
ROLE OF WTO

TRENDS IN
VACCINATION

WAY FORWARD

- Sharing finite supplies strategically and globally is actually in each country's national interest.
- Need to have a multilateral or global approach to vaccine deployment and distribution, rather than a more nationalistic approach.
- It is important to ensure that people around the world have access in an equitable way.
- That framework has to be accepted by the global community without dispute.
- GAVI, was in existence during the pre-COVID-19 period to ensure the pooled procurement and equitable supply of life-saving vaccines to low- and middleincome countries.
- India must play a major role in manufacturing and scaling of vaccines.

- In a liberalised economy, there is a shocking silence in the global market trying to do business out of human suffering.
- Business lies in selling technologies around COVID-19, the diagnostics, drugs and vaccine candidates.
- The advance purchase agreements that some countries have negotiated with pharmaceutical companies exemplify adverse trends.
- The United States has booked more than 800 million doses.
- The UK has an agreement with six of the leading vaccine developers.
- Such vaccine nationalism undermines equitable access to vaccines.

Concerns / Challenges

- Even though vaccine nationalism runs against global public health principles, there are no provisions in international laws that prevent pre-purchase agreements.
- The major drawback of vaccine nationalism is that it puts countries with fewer resources and bargaining power at a disadvantage.
- If countries with a large number of cases lag in obtaining the vaccine, the disease will continue to disrupt global supply chains

