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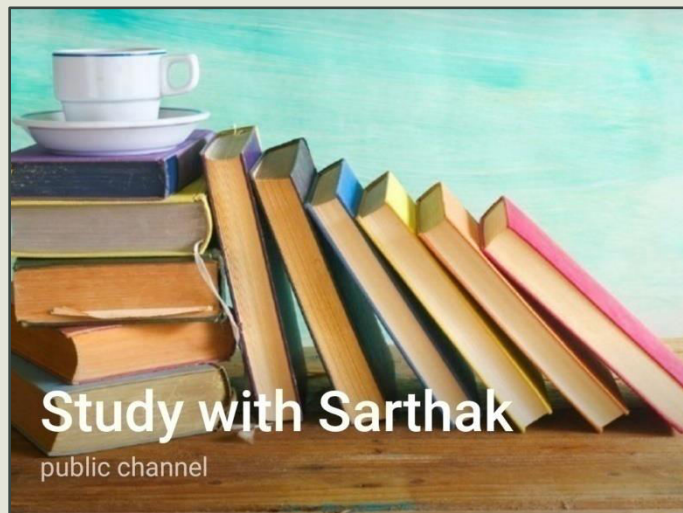
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DOWN TO EARTH ANALYSIS

November – Part II



Description

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Foggy Superstructure



Introduction

On October 26, President Ram Nath Kovind signed an ordinance to form the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) in National Capital Region (NCR) and Adjoining Areas.

The commission replaces 22 year old Environment Pollution (Prevention and Control) Authority (EPCA) and envisages to streamline the public participation, the inter-State cooperation, the expert involvement and persistent research and innovation.

CAQM is a statutory mechanism to improve identification, research and resolution of issues that impact air quality in NCR, Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan.



Commission for Air Quality Management

The commission, headed by **M M Kuttu**, former secretary to the ministry of petroleum and natural gas, includes **chief secretaries** of states in the National Capital region (NCR), independent **air pollution experts**, representatives from **nonprofits**, and **technical experts** from the Central Pollution Control Board, the **Indian Space Research Organisation** and the **NITI Aayog**.

Headquartered in Delhi, the commission will have powers to curb activities that **affect air quality**, prepare guidelines to **check air pollution** and **issue orders** to concerned individuals or authorities.



Commission for Air Quality Management

Failure to comply with the commission's orders will invite a **fine of up to Rs. 1 crore** or a jail term up to **five years** or both. The **National Green Tribunal** will hear appeals against the commission's orders.

The chairperson and the members of the commission are appointed on the recommendation of a **selection committee**, headed by the **environment minister**.

The selection committee includes the **cabinet secretary**, commerce and industries minister, road and transport minister and minister of science and technology.

Statutory Body

EPCA was criticised for merely functioning as an advisory body to the Supreme Court.

Consolidated Approach

It will coordinate with relevant state and central governments on the multi-sectoral planning

Significance

Removal of Ad-hocism

It will replace multitudes of committees, task forces, etc., having overlapping Mandate

Empowered Body

Rs. 1 crore fine or five years' imprisonment or both for violators.

Steps taken on recommendation of EPCA

Mandatory use of CNG for public transport in Delhi.

Ban on entry of pre-2006 manufactured trucks in Delhi and restriction on transit trucks from entering the city.

Closure of coal-based power plants in Delhi.

Clean fuel policy and the banning of dirty petcoke and furnace oil (leading to country-wide introduction of oxides of nitrogen and sulphur standards for industries).

Early introduction of Bharat Stage VI fuels.

Bus augmentation plan for Delhi.

Framing a parking policy as per the traffic demand.



Issues

Centralisation of Power

- The ordinance vests the commission with **great power** and its domain overlaps that of **different state bodies**.

Undermining Judicial Oversight

- Ordinances dissolve **all other committees** and authorities that were set up under **judicial and administrative orders**.
- There are apprehensions of **limiting the role of the judiciary** and creating a supra-centralised framework.

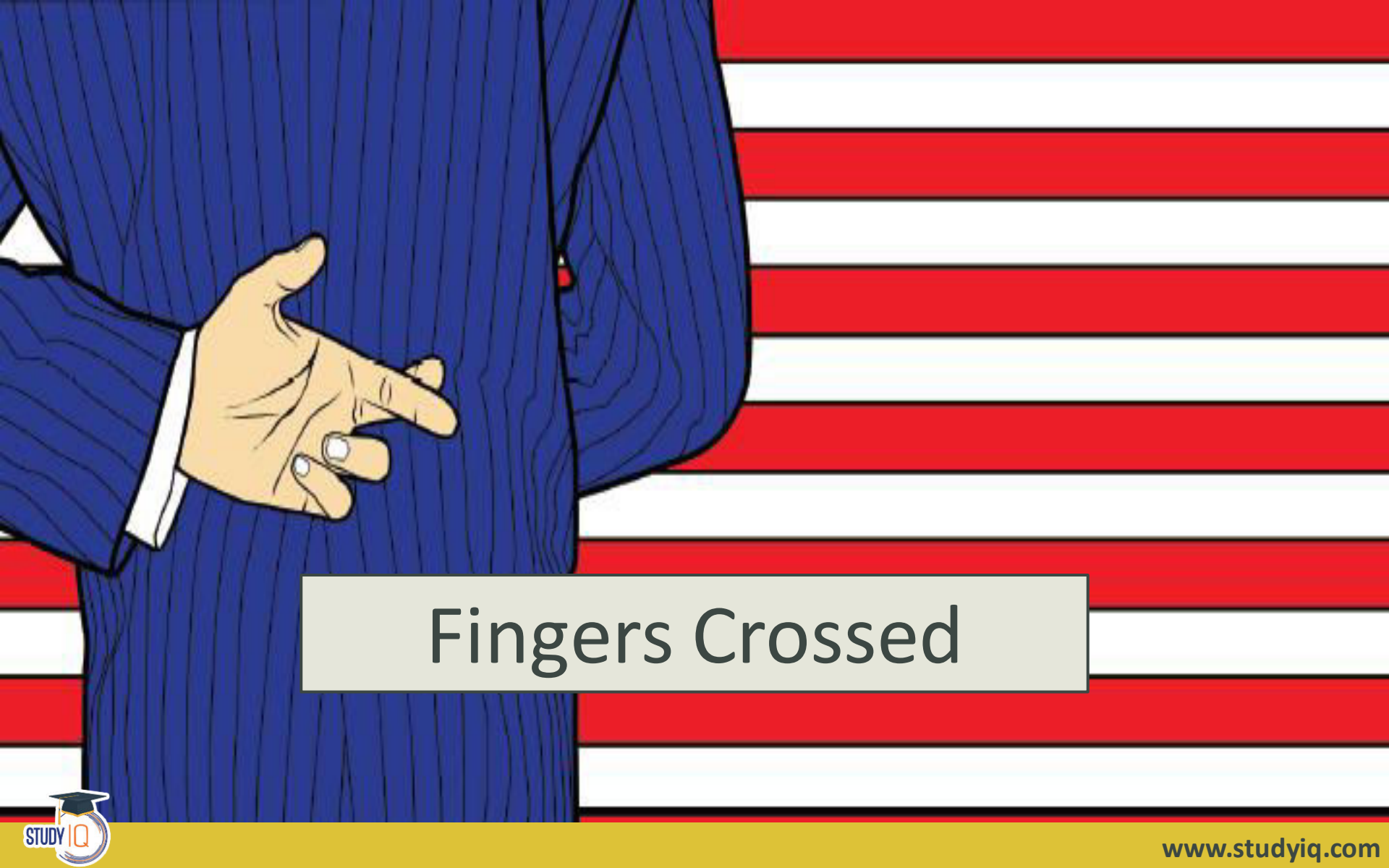
Way Forward

India has **sufficient legislative framework** in place to control environmental degradation but the main issue is the **implementation of laws.**

To justify the vision with which the new commission is created, it requires establishment of **vertical and horizontal accountability across the region.**

Also, special care is needed in the **post-covid-19 times** to ensure that **“ease of doing business”** policy do not subvert environmental governance and that there is a **green economic recovery strategy for the region.**





Fingers Crossed

Introduction

During his victory speech, **US President-elect Joe Biden** announced that **climate change** would be one of his **top priorities**, adding that Americans must “marshal the forces of science in the **battle to save our planet**”.

He has vowed to **rejoin the landmark the Paris Agreement** as soon as he assumes office.

In June last year, Biden had said that he had plans for a **\$1.7 trillion investment in a green recovery**, which would reduce US emissions by about 75 gigatonnes over the next 30 years.



US performance

The country is **set to miss its Paris commitment** to lower carbon emissions by **26-28 per cent below 2005 levels** through 2025.

In fact, the US is ranked **lowest on the Climate Change Performance Index**, published by Germanwatch, the New Climate Institute and the Climate Action Network in 2020.

Worse, in addition to being the **world's largest historical emitter**, the US is also currently the **largest per capita emitter** of greenhouse gases (GHG).

In fact, net US GHG emissions in 2019 were **higher than at the end of 2016**.



Challenges for Joe Biden

First, any push for climate action will require **Democrats take control of the US Senate.**

Second, in the four years he was president, Donald Trump **relaxed more than 150 climate-friendly regulations**—tailpipe emissions, endangered wildlife and rainforest protection among others.









Third, **hydraulic fracturing in the shale formation** to release gas—is a **contentious issue**. It is opposed by climate advocates for the volume of **water and toxic chemicals** consumed by the process and the **contamination threat** to drinking water sources. But Biden has historically been known for his **deep involvement in the shale oil boom** during the Obama years.



Then and now

How Joe Biden and Donald Trump differ on various climate issues



		Joe Biden	Donald Trump
Climate plan		\$2 trillion climate plan; targets Net Zero by 2050	Trump had no climate plan
Fossil fuels		Does not support a fracking ban, wants to end fossil fuel subsidies	Pushed policies to back the coal industry despite its imminent decline
Renewable energy		Committed to renewable energy; pledged 100% clean electricity by 2035	Claimed wind energy kills birds and solar energy "doesn't quite have it yet"
The Paris Agreement		Supported Obama in joining the Agreement in 2015; pledged to rejoin	Withdrew from the Paris Agreement
Environmental regulations		Wants to reinstate fuel efficiency standards; strengthen pollution laws	Rolled back over 150 climate-friendly regulations
Climate justice		Committed to giving 40% of climate investments to disadvantaged communities	No acknowledgement; denied relief funds to states suffering from climate disasters
Climate science		Pledged to listen to climate scientists	Denied climate change, scrubbed climate change from government websites
Green New Deal		Has not endorsed the Green New Deal, but drawn elements from it in his climate plan	Has not endorsed the Green New Deal, thinks it will kill millions of jobs

On Health Front

Biden has vowed to reverse Trump's decision to **withdraw from the World Health Organization**.

Trump had accused the UN agency of **conspiring with China** to downplay the infectiousness of the **novel coronavirus**.

Global health experts are counting on Biden to **restore and re-imagine the US' relationship** with the world's leading public health agency.



Way Forward

In **UNFCCC CoP-26 next year**, Biden will have the opportunity to steer the ship on course to some extent and also join other countries like **India and Japan** in setting a **Net Zero target**.

He could also use **trade deals and other international agreements** to pressure countries to **reduce their own GHG emissions**, drive clean energy technology or **limit deforestation**.



Checkmate Again?



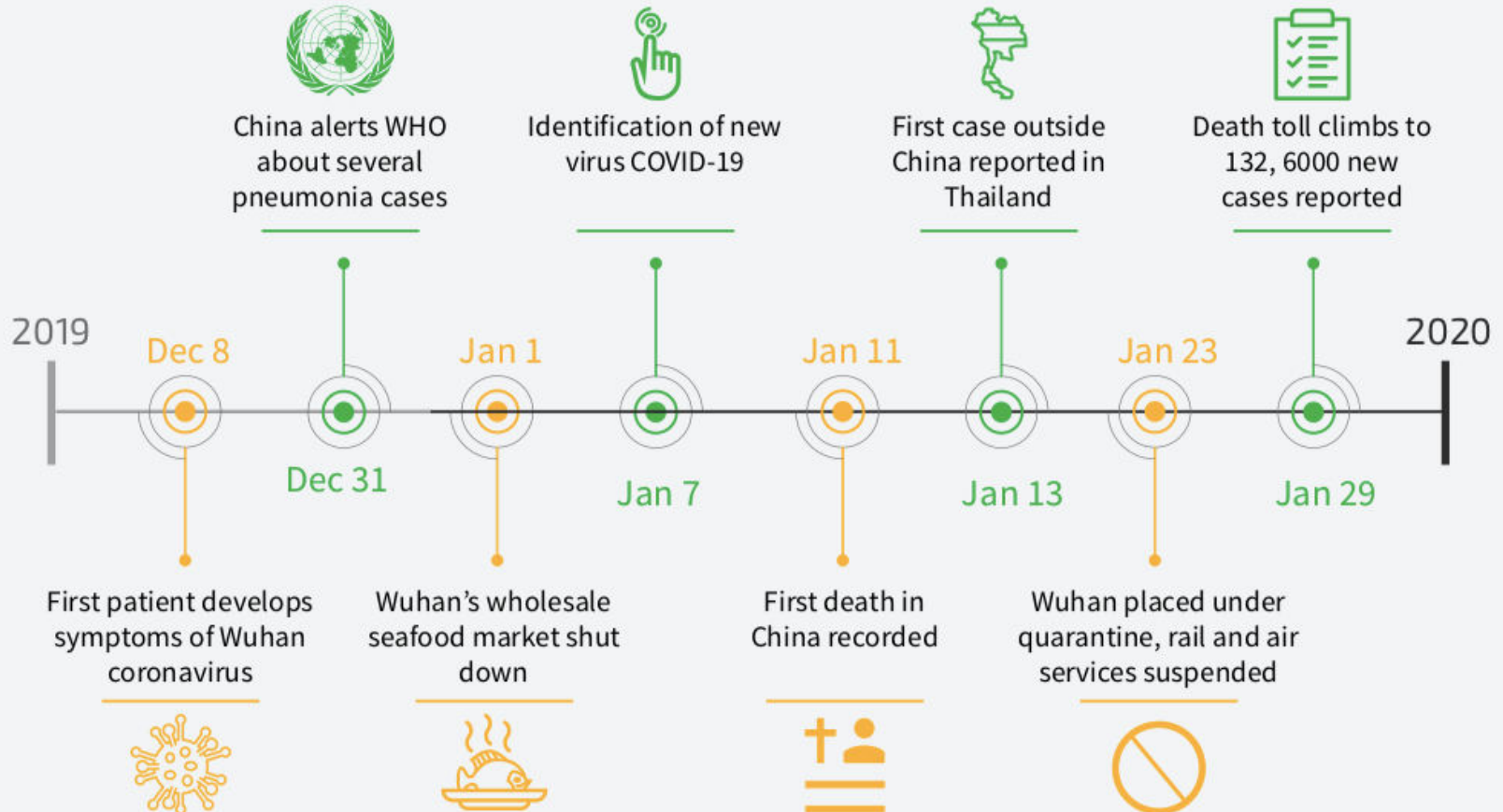
Introduction

While engaging in discussions on Covid-19 — vaccines, therapeutics, second or third waves, re-infection or re-opening the economy — we tend to overlook critical aspects, including where we went wrong, and what can be learnt from our mistakes to prepare for future pandemics.





Coronavirus Timeline: The Beginning



Concealment of Information

During the outbreak of the **Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS)**, China **took two months to disclose it** to the world by which time the infection had **spread to other countries**.

This time, when Chinese doctors spoke about an “**unknown pneumonia**” in November, they were **censored**.

It was only on **December 31, 2019**, the country informed the World Health Organization (WHO), and even then, Chinese authorities **ruled out person-to-person spread of infection**. That was a costly mistake.



Concealment of Information

As many as 4.3 million people had left Wuhan— the origin of the virus— between January 11 and January 23, when the city imposed a travel ban.

If China had imposed the ban a week earlier, it would have prevented 67 per cent of those who got infected by the Covid-19 virus. It was only in late January that human-to-human transmission was confirmed.

Italian officials said the first case in Italy was reported in February. But, Italian doctors say the first traceable case was detected on January 1.



Concealment of Information

WHO failed on a number of counts—

Delayed declaration of a global health emergency, the accusation of toeing the line of the Chinese establishment to an extent of even praising it over-the-board, criticising countries for travel bans and delayed advisory of the use of masks and social distancing.

Warning Signals

Outbreaks of **SARS** and the **Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS)**— both corona viruses—should have **forewarned us of a corona pandemic.**

But countries **always hid their skeletons.** China (SARS) and Saudi Arabia (MERS) tried more than **best to hide and conceal information.**

If SARS was not enough (which was thought to be stamped out), MERS definitely demonstrated that **we should have been working more urgently for corona outbreaks.**

What needs to be done?

As **WHO has faltered** — **reforming** it is our best choice rather than imagining a world without it.

While efforts to combat Covid-19 are on, its time to recall that **flu is one virus that has gone on to mutate**, thus badly impacting vaccine research.

Therefore, research initiatives to find a **universal flu vaccine** — which can fight **all current and upcoming strains** need to redouble with adequate funding.

Also, countries should work to strengthen their **medical ecosystem** and build resilient **trade network**.



Thank you 😊

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