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## Current Affairs for UPSC IAS Exam – 22 April 2020

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### SAARC COUNTRIES UNITE TO COMBAT COVID-19

*Focus:*

*GS-II International Relations, Prelims*

#### ***Why in news?***

The unprecedented coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis has united the SAARC countries as they adopted international travel bans, enforced strict lockdowns, announced special



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economic packages, set up a joint fund and banned all religious gatherings to battle the pandemic, earning them a praise from the World Bank for their quick response.

Throughout South

Asia, the countries have responded proactively to the daunting challenge with India taking the lead by pledging USD 10 million toward a COVID-19 emergency fund

Subsequently, Nepal

and Afghanistan pledged USD 1 million each; Maldives committed USD 200,000; Bhutan USD 100,000; Bangladesh USD 1.5 million; Sri Lanka USD 5 million and Pakistan pledged USD 3 million to the fund.

**SAARC**

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## SOUTH ASIAN ASSOCIATION FOR REGIONAL COOPERATION (SAARC)



Together the SAARC countries form

21%

Of the World Population

3%

Of the World's Area

3.8%

Of the Global Economy

5 broad spheres which SAARC countries agreed to cooperate on:



Development of human resources



Transport



Meteorology, science, technology, & telecommunications



Rural and agricultural development



Population and health-related activities



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- The South Asian Association for Regional



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Cooperation (SAARC) is the regional intergovernmental organization and geopolitical union of states in South Asia

- Its member states are **Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.**
- SAARC comprises 3% of the world's area, 21% of the world's population and 3.8% (US\$2.9 trillion) of the global economy, as of 2015.
- SAARC was founded in Dhaka on 8 December 1985.
- Its secretariat is based in Kathmandu, Nepal.
- The organization promotes development of economic and regional integration.
- It launched the South Asian Free Trade Area in 2006.
- SAARC maintains permanent diplomatic relations at the United Nations as an observer and has developed links with multilateral entities, including the European Union.

### ***Political Issues in SAARC***

- Lasting peace and prosperity in South Asia have been elusive because of the various ongoing conflicts in the region.
- Political dialogue is often conducted on the margins of SAARC meetings which have refrained from interfering in the internal matters of its member states.
- During the 12th and 13th SAARC summits, extreme emphasis was laid upon greater cooperation between the SAARC members to fight terrorism.
- The 19th SAARC summit scheduled to be held in Pakistan was called off as India, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Afghanistan decided to boycott it.
- It was for the first time that four countries boycotted a SAARC summit, leading to its cancellation.

### ***India's issues with SAARC***

- SAARC's future hangs in thread as Pakistan's recalcitrance to act on terrorism has been a deal breaker.
- Connectivity with Afghanistan has been hampered due to lack of Pakistan's cordial support.



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- Air freight corridor cannot be sustainable in long term and also it will be unable to achieve the full potential of Indo- Afghan trade potentials.
  - Chabahar port might fall prey to US-Iran escalations.
  - Regular meetings need to happen, if this group has to become a driver in global economic setup.

## **SAARC Disaster Management Centre**

- South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Disaster Management Centre (SDMC-IU) has been set up at Gujarat Institute of Disaster Management (GIDM) Campus, Gandhinagar, Gujarat, India.
- Eight Member States, i.e., Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka are expected to be served by the SDMC (IU).
- It is entrusted with the responsibility of serving Member States by providing policy advice, technical support on system development, capacity building services and training for holistic management of disaster risk in the SAARC region.
- The centre also facilitates exchange of information and expertise for effective and efficient management of disaster risk.

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## **BEIJING NAMES ISLANDS IN DISPUTED SOUTH CHINA SEA**

*Focus:*

*GS-I Geography, GS-II International Relations, Prelims*

**Why  
in news?**

China on Tuesday  
(Apr 21) defended its naming of 80 islands and other geographical features in



the South China Sea in a move likely to anger neighbours as the country asserts its territorial claims.

## Details



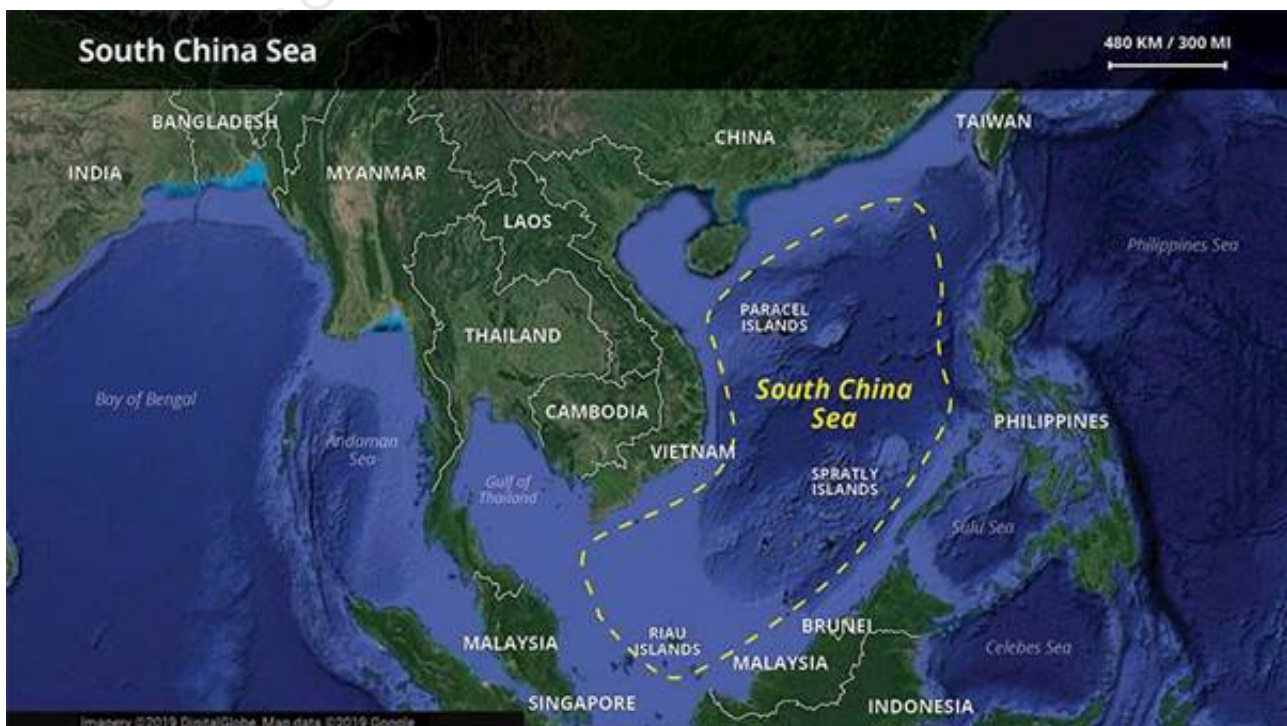
- A joint announcement of the names on Sunday from the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Ministry of Civil Affairs came a day after China established new administrative districts for the contested **Spratly and Paracel island chains**.
- The notice listed the Chinese names and coordinates of 80 islands, reefs, seamounts, shoals and ridges, 55 of them submerged in water.
- China last released such a list in 1983 when it named 287 geographical features across the disputed waterway.
- Beijing has repeatedly asserted its sovereignty in the sea despite rival claims by Vietnam, Taiwan, Malaysia and other nations.

## Criticism of China's move and views of other countries



- No state can claim sovereignty over underwater features unless they are within 12 nautical miles of land. So, it can be claimed that China is ignorant of this or deliberately trying to overturn international law.
- China has ratified the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) which is very clear on what states can and cannot claim as territory. Yet China seems to be going against UNCLOS by asserting sovereignty in very faraway places.
- In recent years, Beijing has stepped up its territorial claims in the South China Sea by building artificial islands and a heavy military presence, making it a flashpoint for geopolitical tensions.
- Vietnam claimed the move "seriously violated" its territorial sovereignty in the area.
- The United States warned China not to take advantage of the coronavirus pandemic to assert itself in the South China Sea.

### ***Where is South China Sea?***



- The South China Sea is a marginal sea that is part of the Pacific Ocean that extends from the Strait of



Malacca in the southwest, to the Strait of Taiwan in the northeast.

- The littoral countries of the South China Sea are China, Taiwan, Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia, Singapore, Cambodia, Thailand, and Vietnam.

## ***Significance of South China Sea as a Geopolitical Water Body***

### **Major crude oil trade flows in the South China Sea (2016)**

total 15.0 million barrels per day



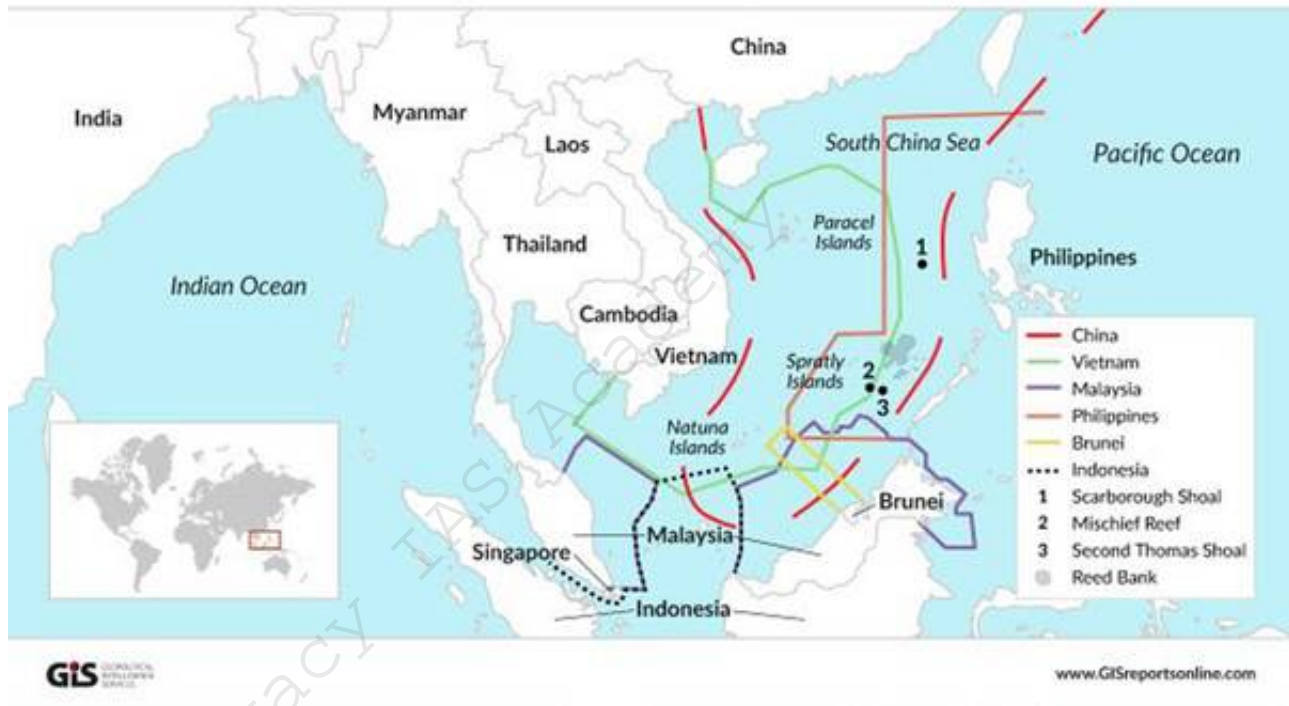
- It is the connecting link between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. (Strait of Malacca)
- The South China Sea is a busy international waterway, one of the main arteries of global trade worth more than \$5 trillion and is growing year on year. According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) one-third of the global shipping passes through it.
- South China Sea has one-third of the entire world's marine biodiversity and has significant fisheries as a huge contributor to food security in the region.
- Oil and gas reserves beneath the South China Sea are also believed to exist
- It is a rich source of hydrocarbons and natural resources.
- It contains numerous shoals, reefs, atolls and islands. The Paracel Islands, the Spratly Islands and the Scarborough Shoal are the most important.





## Dispute in the South China Sea

A tangled web in the South China Sea



- The South China Sea is an area of growing conflicts due to territorial claims by different countries.
- With respect to the Spratly Islands, different geographic features are reportedly occupied by claimants such as Taiwan, Vietnam, the Philippines, China, and Malaysia.
- The Paracels Islands are claimed by China, Vietnam, and Taiwan.

## PAKISTAN REMOVES THOUSANDS OF NAMES FROM TERRORIST WATCH LIST



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*Focus:*

*GS-II International Relations, Prelims*

## **Why in news?**

Pakistan is reported to have removed around 1,800 terrorists from its watch list, including that of the 2008 Mumbai attack mastermind and LeT operations commander Zaki-ur-Rehman Lakhvi, ahead of a new round of assessments by the global anti-money-laundering watchdog FATF.

The so-called proscribed persons list, which is maintained by Pakistan's National Counter Terrorism Authority or NACTA, is intended in part to help financial institutions avoid doing business with or processing transactions of suspected terrorists.

## **Background**

- Pakistan is working to implement an action plan that has been mutually agreed to with the Paris-based The Financial Action Task Force (FATF), part of which involves demonstrating effective implementation of targeted financial sanctions.
- Currently placed on the FATF's 'grey list', Pakistan has been scrambling in recent months to avoid being added to a list of countries deemed non-compliant with anti-money laundering and terrorist financing regulations, a measure that officials here fear could hurt its economy, which is already under severe strain.
- It is possible that these removals are part of Pakistan's action plan to implement the FATF recommendations.

## **What is FATF?**



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- Financial Action Task Force on Money Laundering
  - Is an intergovernmental organization founded in 1989 on the initiative of the G7 to develop policies to combat money laundering
  - In 2001 its mandate expanded to include terrorism financing.
  - It monitors progress in implementing the FATF Recommendations through "peer reviews" ("mutual evaluations") of member countries
  - The FATF Secretariat is housed at the OECD headquarters in Paris.
  - The objectives of the FATF are to set standards and promote effective implementation of legal, regulatory and operational measures for combating money laundering, terrorist financing and other related threats to the integrity of the international financial system.
  - The FATF is, therefore, a "policy-making body" which works to generate the necessary political will to bring about national legislative and regulatory reforms in these areas
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## **GLOBAL HUNGER COULD DOUBLE DUE TO COVID-19**

*Focus:*

*GS-III Disaster Management, Prelims*

### ***Why in news?***

The number of people facing acute food insecurity could nearly double this year to 265 million, due to the economic fallout of COVID-19, the United Nations' World Food Programme (WFP) said on 21<sup>st</sup> April 2020.

The impact of lost tourism revenues, falling remittances and travel and other restrictions linked to the coronavirus pandemic are expected to leave some 130 million people acutely hungry this year, adding to around 135 million already in that category.



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## **World Food Programme (WFP)**

- The World Food Programme (WFP) is the food assistance branch of the **United Nations**.
- It is the world's largest humanitarian organization addressing hunger and promoting food security.
- The WFP works to help people who cannot produce or obtain enough food for themselves and their families.
- It strives to eradicate hunger and malnutrition, with the ultimate goal in mind of eliminating the need for food aid itself.
- It pursues a vision of the world in which every man, woman and child has access at all times to the food needed for an active and healthy life.
- The WFP operations are funded by voluntary donations from world governments, corporations and private donors.
- WFP food aid is also directed to fight micronutrient deficiencies, reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, and combat disease, including HIV and AIDS.

### **The objectives that the WFP hopes to achieve are to:**

1. "Save lives and protect livelihoods in emergencies"
2. "Support food security and nutrition and (re)build livelihoods in fragile settings and following emergencies"
3. "Reduce risk and enable people, communities and countries to meet their own food and nutrition needs"
4. "Reduce under-nutrition and break the inter-generational cycle of hunger"
5. "Zero Hunger in 2030"



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# TRIBAL TRADITION COMES IN HANDY DURING COVID-19

*Focus: GS-I Indian Society, Prelims*

### **Why in news?**

- Now almost every day some members of Jagruti, a social organisation, are reliving a local tribal tradition to trim each other's hair at Daringbadi in Odisha's Kandhamal district. Through it they are avoiding visit to barbers that may lead to spread of COVID-19 infection.
- Unlike other parts of Odisha, tribals of Kandhamal never had a special sect of barbers for hair grooming.
- But in urban centres such as Berhampur in adjoining Ganjam district, people have started calling up barbers to their homes for haircuts. And a barber moves from house to house, which can be a major medium of spread of coronavirus. Luckily no COVID-19 case has been reported yet from Ganjam or Kandhamal district. =
- Activists of Jagruti have decided to continue the practice of giving haircuts to each other till the COVID-19 threat goes away.

### **Details of tribes in Odisha**

- The Kondha or Kandha is the largest tribe of the Odisha state in terms of population.
- The Santals - inhabit the Mayurbhanj district.
- The Ho people -inhabit Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar, Jajpur, Balasore, Bhadrak, Sambalpur, Jharsuguda,



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Sonepur, Deogarh, Dhenkanal, Anugul, Jharsuguda, Sundergarh, Kandhamal districts.

- The Saura, are found mainly in the undivided Ganjam and Puri district.
- The Bonda, are known as 'the Naked People' and they live in Malkangiri district formerly part of undivided Koraput.

## ***Scheduled Tribes***

- The term "Scheduled Tribes" refers to specific indigenous peoples whose status is acknowledged to some formal degree by national legislation.
- For much of the period of British rule in the Indian subcontinent, they were known as the Depressed Classes.
- Scheduled Tribes comprise about 8.6% of India's population according to 2011 census.
- Since the independence of India, the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes were given Reservation status, guaranteeing political representation.
- The Constitution lays down the general principles of positive discrimination for SCs and STs.

## ***Constitutional Provisions regarding Scheduled Tribes***

- Article 46 of the Constitution provides that the State shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the society and in particular, of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation.
- Reservation in educational institution has been provided in Article 15(4) while reservation in posts and services has been provided in Article 16(4), 16(4A) and 16(4B) of the Constitution.
- Article 23 which prohibits traffic in human beings and beggar and other similar forms of forced labour has a special significance for Scheduled Tribes. In pursuance of this Article, Parliament has enacted the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976.



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Similarly, Article 24 which prohibits employment of Children below the age of 14 years in any factory or mine or in any other hazards activity is also significant for Scheduled Tribes as a substantial portion of child labour engaged in these jobs belong to Scheduled Tribes.

- Article 243D provides reservation of Seats for Scheduled Tribes in Panchayats.
- Article 330 provides reservation of seats for Scheduled Tribes in the House of the People.
- Article 332 provides reservation of seats for Scheduled Tribes in Legislative Assemblies of the States.
- Article 334 provides that reservation of seats for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the Lok Sabha and the State Vidhan Sabhas (and the representation of the Anglo-Indian Community in the Lok Sabha and the State Vidhan Sabhas by nomination) would continue up to January, 2020.
- Other specific safeguards have been provided in Article 244 read with the provisions contained in Fifth and Sixth Schedule to the Constitution.

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## DRUG FOR SEPSIS TO BE TESTED FOR COVID-19

*Focus:*

*GS-III Science and Technology*

### **Why in news?**

Sepsivac, a drug jointly developed by the Ahmedabad-based Cadilla Pharmaceuticals and the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), will be tested in 50 COVID-19 patients. Results from a human trial are expected in the next two months.

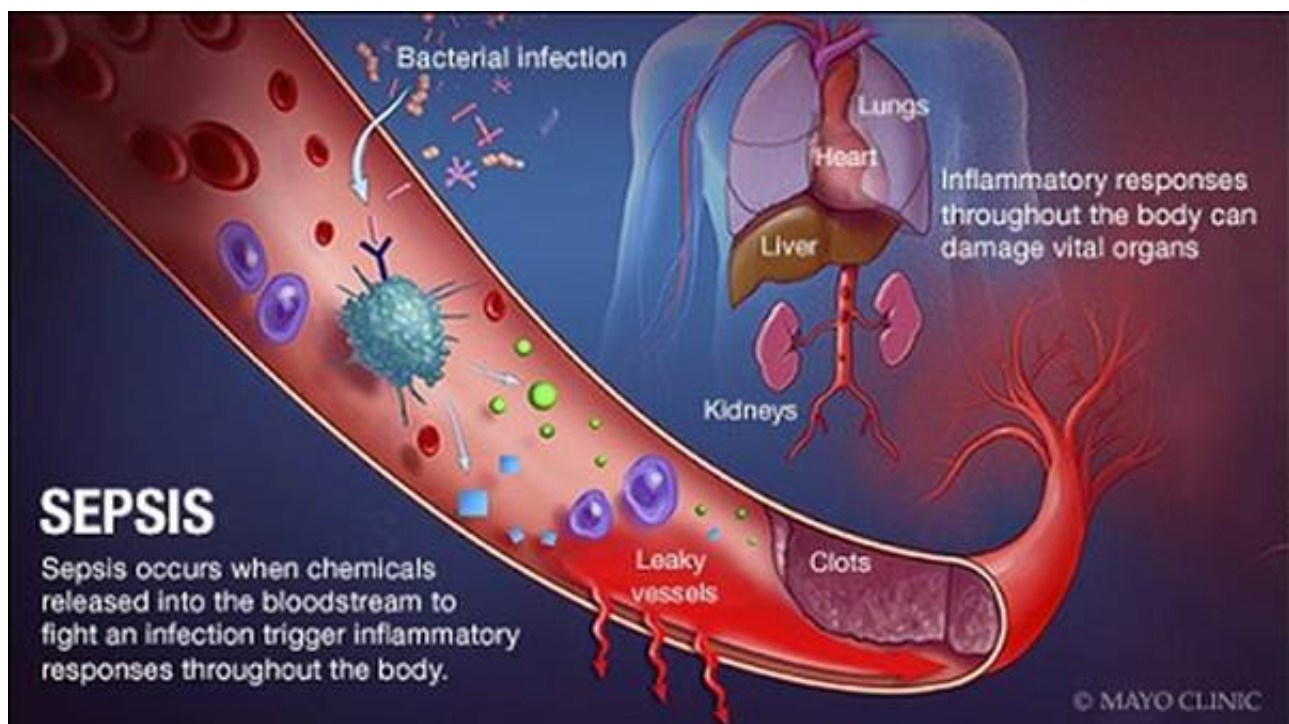
### **What**



## is Sepsivac and can it be used for COVID-19?

- Sepsivac was originally developed for treating sepsis by a class of pathogens called gram negative bacteria, that are known to cause life-threatening infections.
- Given the similarities in the immune-system response in critically ill COVID-19 patients, it is theorised, the therapy could stimulate a benign response.
- A large quantity of cytokines, chemicals signaling the presence of an infection, are produced in the early stages of the body's response against an infection to stimulate the production of antibodies.
- However, cytokines also cause inflammation of organs and can be counter-productive in protecting the body.
- Keeping them in check is the goal of so-called immuno-modulators, or medicines like Sepsivac.
- The United States and Australia are also going to start testing the efficacy of the BCG, or tuberculosis vaccine, that also employs a different strain of mycobacterium, in health care workers at the frontline of treating COVID-19 patients.

## What is Sepsis?







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- Sepsis is a potentially life-threatening condition caused by the body's response to an infection.
  - The body normally releases chemicals into the bloodstream to fight an infection.
  - Sepsis occurs when the body's response to these chemicals is out of balance, triggering changes that can damage multiple organ systems.

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