

2. Biological Weapons Convention- International Relation

EAM Jaishankar warns of rising bioterrorism threat, calls for stronger global biosecurity framework at BWC's 50th anniversary conference. Marking 50 years of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) at the 2025 New Delhi conference, India called for stronger global biosecurity to counter the rising threat of bioterrorism by non-state actors. While the BWC bans the development and stockpiling of biological weapons, it lacks a verification mechanism, prompting India to enforce strict domestic controls like the WMD Act, 2005 and the SCOMET list.

Context- India's Stand on Global Biosecurity

Event- An international conference was held in New Delhi in 2025 to mark the 50th Anniversary of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC).

India's Position- India reiterated the urgent need for stronger global biosecurity measures. Called for a more resilient BWC to handle modern threats.

Key Warning- External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar highlighted that the global community is currently **unprepared** to counter bioterrorism. The threat is specifically high from non-state actors (terrorist groups, etc.) rather than just traditional state warfare.

Bioterrorism

Definition- The intentional release of biological agents or toxins for the purpose of harming or killing humans, animals, or plants.

Objective- The intent is usually to intimidate or coerce a government or civilian population to further specific political or social objectives.

Historical Example- The 2001 Anthrax letter attacks in the United States, which utilized fatal bacterial spores.

About the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC)

General Details

Formal Title- *"The Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction."*

Nature of Treaty- It is a legally binding international treaty.

Scope- It prohibits the use, development, production, acquisition, stockpiling, and transfer of biological and toxin weapons.

Historical Significance- It is the first multilateral disarmament treaty to ban an entire category of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD).

Timeline

Opened for Signature- April 1972.

Entered into Force- March 1975.

Membership- Achieved near-universal membership with 189 States Parties.

India's Participation- India was an early adopter. Signed- 1973. Ratified- 1974.

Evolution of Regulations (Comparison)

Feature	1925 Geneva Protocol	Biological Weapons Convention (BWC)
Scope of Restriction	Restricted only the USE of biological weapons in war.	Extends restrictions to development, production, stockpiling, and possession.
Completeness	Considered incomplete as countries could still hoard weapons.	Comprehensive ban seeking total disarmament of this category.

Relationship	Predecessor to BWC.	Complements and strengthens the 1925 Protocol.
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Key Provisions of the BWC

Absolute Prohibition– States Parties pledge never, under any circumstances, to develop, produce, stockpile, acquire, or retain biological or toxin weapons.

Destruction Obligations– States are mandated to ensure that all existing stocks of biological weapons are either destroyed or permanently diverted to peaceful purposes (e.g., vaccine research).

Ban on Transfer and Assistance– States undertake a commitment not to transfer weapons to others. They must not assist, encourage, or induce any other actor to manufacture or acquire biological weapons.

Compliance and Enforcement Mechanisms

Cooperation Provisions– The Convention encourages states to solve problems regarding implementation through bilateral or multilateral cooperation.

Role of the UN Security Council (UNSC)– If a State Party suspects a violation, they may lodge a request with the UN Security Council. All States are obligated to cooperate with investigations initiated by the UNSC.

Review Conferences– Held approximately every five years to review the operation of the Convention and update implementation strategies.

Critical Shortcoming (The "Lack of Verification")– The BWC does not have a dedicated implementation or verification body (unlike the chemical weapons regime which has the OPCW). This lack of a watchdog allows for potential violations to occur without robust oversight.

Measures Taken by India to Implement BWC

India has enacted specific domestic laws to align with international BWC obligations–

1989 Rules on Hazardous and Genetically Engineered Organisms– Regulates the handling and activities involving microorganisms and genetically engineered materials to prevent accidental release or misuse.

Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) Act, 2005– Provides a unified legal basis to criminalize unlawful activities related to WMDs. Specifically targets the manufacture, transport, acquisition, or transfer of biological, chemical, or nuclear weapons.

SCOMET List (Special Chemicals, Organisms, Materials, Equipment, and Technologies)– Functions as India's national export control regime. Regulates "dual-use" items (items that can be used for both civilian and military/weapon purposes) to ensure they do not fall into the wrong hands.

Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC)– The apex body that oversees and approves research involving genetically modified organisms (GMOs), ensuring biosafety standards are met.

Source– <https://ddnews.gov.in/en/eam-jaishankar-warns-of-rising-bioterrorism-threat-calls-for-stronger-global-biosecurity-framework-at-bwcs-50th-anniversary-conference/>