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Covid-19 Pandemic: Comparative Analysis of Initiatives and Response Measures of various Countries

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Abstract: Covid-19 pandemic is defining the global health crises of our time, impacting various economies universally. It is one of the most lethal pandemics that the world has witnessed, impacting over 4.11 million citizens and more than 2,82,000 fatalities as on 11th May, 2020. This paper aimed at analyzing the impact of Covid-19 over the various world economies and the initiatives taken to reduce the sufferings of the inhabitants. The paper also includes a global comparative analysis of few of the worst affected economies- Italy, United States of America &United Kingdom and throws light on the impact of COVID-19 on these economies and the initiatives taken by them to battle the situation . The paper concluded that the effects of the virus will be felt in all the sectors for a long period of time post COVID-19 phase and suggested some measures like more emphasis on Research, encouraging the use of locally produced goods, reducing the inter-state disparities to control the large scale migration, investing towards improvement of medical infrastructure etc. to reduce the sufferings and to be better prepared for future pandemics taking into account the current problems and difficulties faced by our economy.

I. INTRODUCTION

Over the past century, the world has witnessed several global pandemics. Signs and symptoms have remained unchanged over centuries. Beginning from the Sixth cholera (1910-1911) which originated from India and subsequently spread to other parts of the world to one of the deadliest flu outbreaks in the history i.e., Spanish Flu in the year 1918 caused by H1N1 virus which killed over 50 million people all over the globe. Other global pandemics which need a mention here are Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) of the year 2003 which affected 26 countries, Ebola outbreak that began in West Africa in early 2014 and finally Covid-19 which has already affected 187 countries all over the world. The COVID-19 pandemic is the defining global health crisis of our time. The disease has been massively spreading across countries since late last year. It rooted up when the first COVID case was confirmed in Wuhan, China. Although there is no evidence that from where and how did this pandemic originated but still the news of China's sea food market selling bats and other species and leak of virus from China's Lab are in the air. The disease led to 4,633 deaths and a total of 82,918 as positive in China. Since then the virus has been spreading from country to country affecting huge chunks of population and leading to deaths each day. COVID-19 is a virus that attacks upon the immune system of its victim making it weaker. Symptoms include dry cough, fever, headache, cold, joint pain, shortness of breathing etc. As on 11th May'20, more than 4.11 million cases have been reported across 187 countries and territories, resulting in more than 2,82,000 deaths. And in India a total of a 70,756 confirmed cases have been reported out of which 22,455 have been recovered (including 1 migration) and the death toll is at 2,293 in the country as on date. The virus is primarily spread between people during close contact, most often via small droplets produced during coughing, sneezing and talking. Recommended measures to prevent the disease include frequent hand washing, maintaining physical distance from others, quarantining, covering coughs and avoiding touching mouth and eyes frequently.

The novel coronavirus has 4 stages of transmission.

1) *Stage1*- is the first appearance of the disease through people with travel history to the affected places.
2) *Stage-2* is local transmission when the infected people spread the virus to others- close friends and family.
3) *Stage-3* is community transmission hen infections happen in public and the source cannot be traced.
4) *Stage-4* is when the disease actually becomes epidemic in a country such as it was in China, with large no. of infected and growing number of deaths with no end in sight.

According to WHO, there are no available vaccines to cure the disease, yet countries are racing to slow down the spread of virus by testing and treating, quarantining citizens, limiting travels, initiating lockdowns and social distancing. The virus entered in India on 30th Jan'20 and at present has led to a total of 67,152 active cases, 2,206 deaths and 20,917 recovered patients.

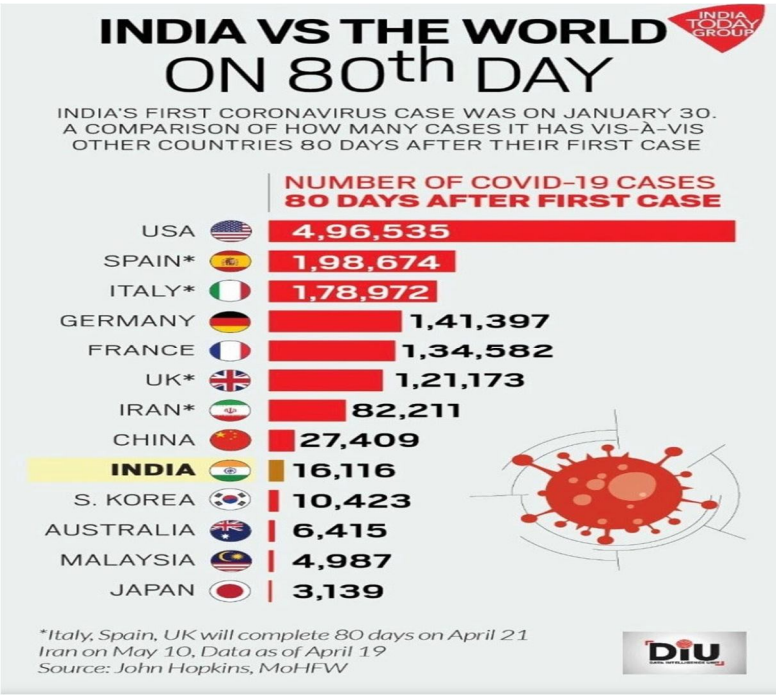
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The pandemic has emerged as a great challenge in front of the government to face and stop the spread of this virus. Countries like China and America have been impacted worst by it. It has emerged as a major challenge among the governments of the countries to look out for a solution to this pandemic. Doctors, nurses, police and other officials have come up as corona warriors to fight against the virus but still cases where public is not cooperating with these lifesavers have been reported. Incident of TabliquiJamat in Delhi has been initially one of the major causes of spreading the virus across India.

II. INITIATIVES & RESPONSE MEASURES AGAINST COVID-19 IN INDIAN CONTEXT

Management of the outbreak and reducing its impacts on the citizens have been a major challenge for the government these days. IMF has predicted a global recession worse than 2008 and called this period as 'humanity's darkest hour'. According to the analysis by India Today Data Intelligence Unit (DIU) of India's position in comparison with 12 key countries which have already seen 80 days of infection concluded that India has out-performed most developed nations in curbing the pandemic.



This is a resultant of a step-by-step model and also pro-active measures which have been taken up by the Indian Government. The Government has taken numerous steps and initiatives to combat the situation, some of which can be discussed as under:

Even before the first corona virus case was detected in India, many pro-active steps were already taken keeping in mind the situation at other countries. Firstly, Quarantine facilities to monitor the students who returned from Wuhan, China was set up on 31st January 2020 after encountering the first confirmed case of Covid-19 on 30th January 2020. By Mid March, seven more quarantine facilities were set up by Indian Defense Forces in different parts of the country. Also, the Indian Government notified the marks & hand-sanitizers as the 'essential commodities' till June 30. By this time, the government also suspended the visas except for some limited categories. On March 17, Maharashtra State government had shut down everything except the essential services and the Haryana Government mandated 'Work from home' for the firms in Gurugram.

Then, Janta Curfew, a voluntary 14 hours lockdown was observed in the country on 22nd March 2020 which marked the beginning of a long battle against the Corona virus. To further control it's spread, Indian Government announced lockdown in different phases as under:

1) *Phase 1:* From 25 March 2020 to 14 April 2020 (21 days)
2) *Phase 2:*The lockdown was extended from 15 April 2020 to 3 May 2020 (19 days) with conditional relaxations after 20th April in the areas where the spread had been contained
3) *Phase 3:* It was further extended from 4 May 2020 to 17 May 2020 (14 days). The entire nation was divided into three zones- Red, Green & Orange where the relaxations were applied accordingly.
4) *Phase 4:* From 18 May 2020 – 31 May 2020 (14 days) with additional relaxations was introduced

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Indian Government also introduced a Covid-19 tracking mobile application which was developed by National Informatics Centre by the name of Aarogya Setu on 2nd April 2020. The Central Government made the use of the mobile application mandatory for all employees in an order dated 29th April 2020.

The government in collaboration with some of the India's biggest consumer goods companies have opened Suraksha stores by converting the neighbourhood kirana stores into sanitised retail outlets selling the daily essentials. These stores are also registered on the government's Aarogya Setu App. The collaborated consumer goods companies will help the kirana staff to implement safety norms such as social distancing, sanitisation and will also be supplying them with sanitisers, masks and gloves.

Under the Pradhan Mantri Ujjawala Yojana, over 8 crore beneficiaries were entitled to a total of three 14.2 kg LPG cylinders for free between April to June 2020. The initiative was a part of the package announced by the Finance Minister to deal with the economic impact of the lockdown imposed to curb the spread of coronavirus.

In order to minimize the economic and social impacts of the lockdown, the Government has also introduced certain relief measures for the citizens such as the 18000 Crores tax refunds to individulas & businesses, the amount for collateral-free loan for women in self-help groups was raised to Rs. 20 laky, wages under MNREGA was hiked to Rs. 202 from Rs 182, Rs 1,400 crore was disbursed to about 2.82 crore old age people, widows and disabled people under the National Social Assistance Programme, financial support worth Rs 3,066 crore was provided to over 2 crore construction workers under the Building and Construction Workers' Fund, providing medical insurance cover of Rs 50 lakhs per person to health workers fighting the coronavirus pandemic and many more.

III. GLOBAL COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS:

A. Italy

Italy, a very popular tourist destination also joined the list of coronavirus-affected countries on 30 January when two COVID-19 positive cases were reported in Italy in the Chinese tourists. Coronavirus-infected at least 27 countries traced their origins to either Italy or Italians. As on 12th May 2020, total number of cases in Italy are 2,19,814 and total number of deaths caused by coronavirus are 30,739.

B. Reasons for High Number of Cases in Italy

The high number of coronavirus infected cases in Italy was due expanding air travel with China. Italy is the European nation which has the highest number of air connections with China after the air connections between the two countries had tripled earlier this year.

C. Coronavirus impact and Measures Adopted by Italy

The Italian government took various measures such as screening and suspending majority of community events during coronavirus outbreak, and later on announced closure of educational institutes and ensured hygiene/disinfection measures at airports. As preventive measure the Italian National Institute of Health recommended social distancing.

D. Italy Declared lock-down

The Italian government on 8th march announced lockdown in the affected regions in the northern part of the country to avoid spreading of virus across the nation. After two days, lockdown was extended to entire Italy. Italy was the first country that announced a nationwide lockdown after coronavirus outbreak. On 22 March, the country also ordered the closure of all non-strategic businesses until 03 April to avoid further spread.

E. Travel Restrictions by the Government

On 31st January Italy announced temporary closure of all kinds of air travel with China. Various Italian airlines started implementing preventive measures and also started asking for declaration forms to be filled by passengers travelling to affected countries.

F. Schools, Universities Closed

The Italian government cancelled all the sports events due to the emergency situation caused by the epidemic and also closed all the schools and universities across Italy.

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IV. UNITED STATES

As on 12th May, 2020 the total number of COVID-19 cases in USA are **13,79,508** and the death toll stands at **81,285**making the US one of the most affected countries with coronavirus. The first case of coronavirus in the US was confirmed on 21 January 2020 in Washington in a person who had a recent travel history to China.

A. Coronavirus Measures Adopted by the US

The US government also announced early measures to control transmission of covid-19 by restricting travel to and from infected countries, the US also approved coronavirus test kits. Various manufacturers such as General Motors were also started producing medical equipment such as ventilators.

B. Emergency bill

The US had passed an $8.3bn Emergency Coronavirus Response bill on 04 March to combat the spread. States received millions of dollars as an aid to tackle the coronavirus situation. On 13th March the US government declared COVID-19 as national emergency. The US senate also approved a $2.2tn bill to aid the US economy from the pandemic and also to buy emergency medical equipments. The US government also announced $174m for financial aid to help 64 countries who were at the risk of coronavirus pandemic.

C. Nation-wide Social Distancing

The US government imposed a nation-wide social distancing banning gatherings of more than ten people at a particular place, avoiding public places such as restaurants and bars and avoid non-essential travel. The social distancing rules were initially imposed for a period of 15 days but later on were extended to April 30.

D. Travel Restrictions

The US started public health entry screening at key airports, which handle the majority of travellers from China, on 17 January 2020. The US President signed a proclamation on 31 January banning the entry of all individuals from China or those who have transited through China 14 days prior to entry into the US.

E. Coronavirus Testing by the US

The US passed a bill on 13 March making coronavirus tests free for its residents. The CDC developed the (RT)-PCR diagnostic panel to be used for testing patient specimens for COVID-19.

V. UNITED KINGDOM

The UK Department of Health declared the coronavirus outbreak as a serious threat to Britain, because of the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases were rising globally. As on 12th May, 2020 the coronavirus cases in the UK are **223,060** and the death toll stands at **32,065**. UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson also tested positive for coronavirus on 27 March. The first cases of coronavirus in the UK were reported on 31 January 2020, in two members of the same family.

A. Testing for Coronavirus by the UK Government

Public Health England (PHE) started the novel coronavirus diagnostic test across the laboratories nationwide on 10 February. A laboratory request form E28 for coronavirus testing was provided to all the citizens. London had one laboratory where the diagnostic test can be performed and PHE planned to increase more.

B. Coronavirus Measures Adopted by the UK Government

The UK government was on high alert when coronavirus cases were increasing. Coronavirus was added to the list of notifiable diseases. The UK's major Airlines also began preventive measures by cancelling direct flights to and from China including flights from other affected countries. Screening for the covid-19 infection was in place at all major airports as well as medical staff were deployed at all airports.

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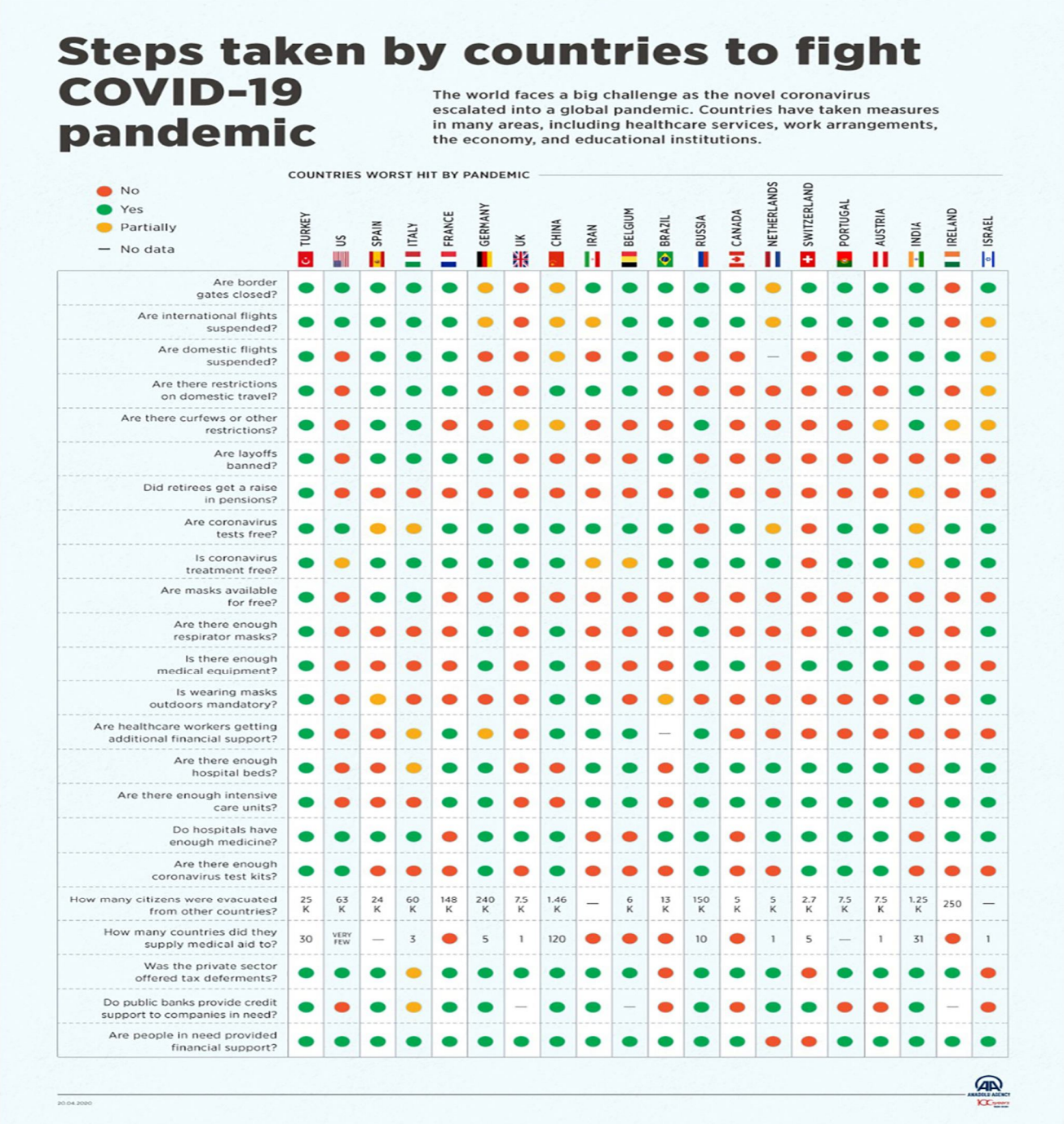
C. Lock-down Declared in the UK

The UK government had announced a nation-wide lock-down on 23 March to prevent Covid transmission. Except for essentials people were asked not to leave their homes. The lock-down is expected to be in place until June 2020 and can be further extended depending upon the situation.

D. Medical Supplies stock Retained

As a contingency measure UK Government advised companies to retain the existing stock of medical supplies for the future.

The above discussion was restricted to the initiatives taken up by the countries which were most affected by the virus. The initiatives taken up by other countries as on 20th April 2020 can be summarized using the picture below:



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VI. SUGGESTIONS

COVID-19 has impacted the lives of millions of people all over the globe and its impacts will be felt in all the sectors for a very long period of time post the current COVID-19 phase. Indian Government has so far been able to deal with the situation better than many other countries but there are certain sectors where we could have better planned & reduced the sufferings. Major lapses which have come to light relate to the following:

1) *Labour Unrest & Labour Migration:* More than the physical damage, the pandemic has resulted in a psychological damage of the labour class. It has proved to be worse than the episode of 1947 partition due to the lack of planning & implementation between the Central and State Governments. A 'National Policy for Labourer's should be implemented covering the aspects such as competitive wages, residential accommodation, medical facilities, insurance cover, availability of essential goods & services at reasonable prices etc. to the labour class.
2) *Lack of Emphasis on Research:* Research has been a neglected area for a long period of time for the Government. A proper allocation of funds should be made to encourage and strengthen our research initiatives.
3) *Growing Poverty Among Farmers:* Agriculture has been one of the worst affected sectors by the pandemic. The Government in order to extend help to the farmers should purchase the produce from the farmers at a reasonable prices or provide rent-free storage & warehousing facilities in order to stock their produce and at the same time, providing the amount equivalent to 50% of the produce to provide liquidity to the farmers.
4) *Dependence on Foreign Imports*: As suggested by the Government, the initiative of 'Vocal for Local' should be encouraged by the citizens of the entire nation as much as possible. Efforts should be made to produce the substitutes of the foreign products in order to reduce the imports. On the other hand, the products produced locally should meet the quality standards so as to compete in the international markets to encourage the exports.
5) *Large Scale Exodus Of Indian Talent To Abroad:* There has been a large scale exodus of Indian talented professionals to other countries. The movement of the skilled professionals to other nations should be regulated. These professionals contribute to the revenues of the other economies and also train the citizens of the other nations. This serves as a dual loss, in this case for India. Efforts should be made to provide a similar working environment & facilities to the working professionals in order to retain them.
6) *Disparity of Wages and other facilities for Labour Amongst the States:* There has been a large disparity in wages & other facilities available to the labour amongst the different states of the country for both skilled & unskilled workers. This has been one of the biggest reason for the migration of workers. The Government in order to control the migration can divide the entire country into 4 or 5 different zones and should standardize the wages & other incentives of the states belonging to a particular zone.
7) *Improvement of Healthcare Infrastructure and Management:* While observing the current state of Healthcare facilities in India we can clearly conclude that, to combat such epidemics in future our Country has to definitely work upon strengthening the Government infrastructure as well as should also work on building Public Private Partnerships as current healthcare infrastructure is unable to meet our large populations demand which is highly risky and unfavorable for India to fight against epidemics like Covid-19. In addition to this Make-in-India focus should also be initiated for medical equipments as today in this fight against coronavirus India and many other countries were dependent upon China for various medical supplies like ventilators, PPE, masks, diagnostic kits. Thus, we can say that as we are facing this humongous challenge of covid-19 and focusing upon sailing through with minimum damage to human lives, we can conclude that there are various opportunities which can be unravelled for improvement of the healthcare scenario in our country.

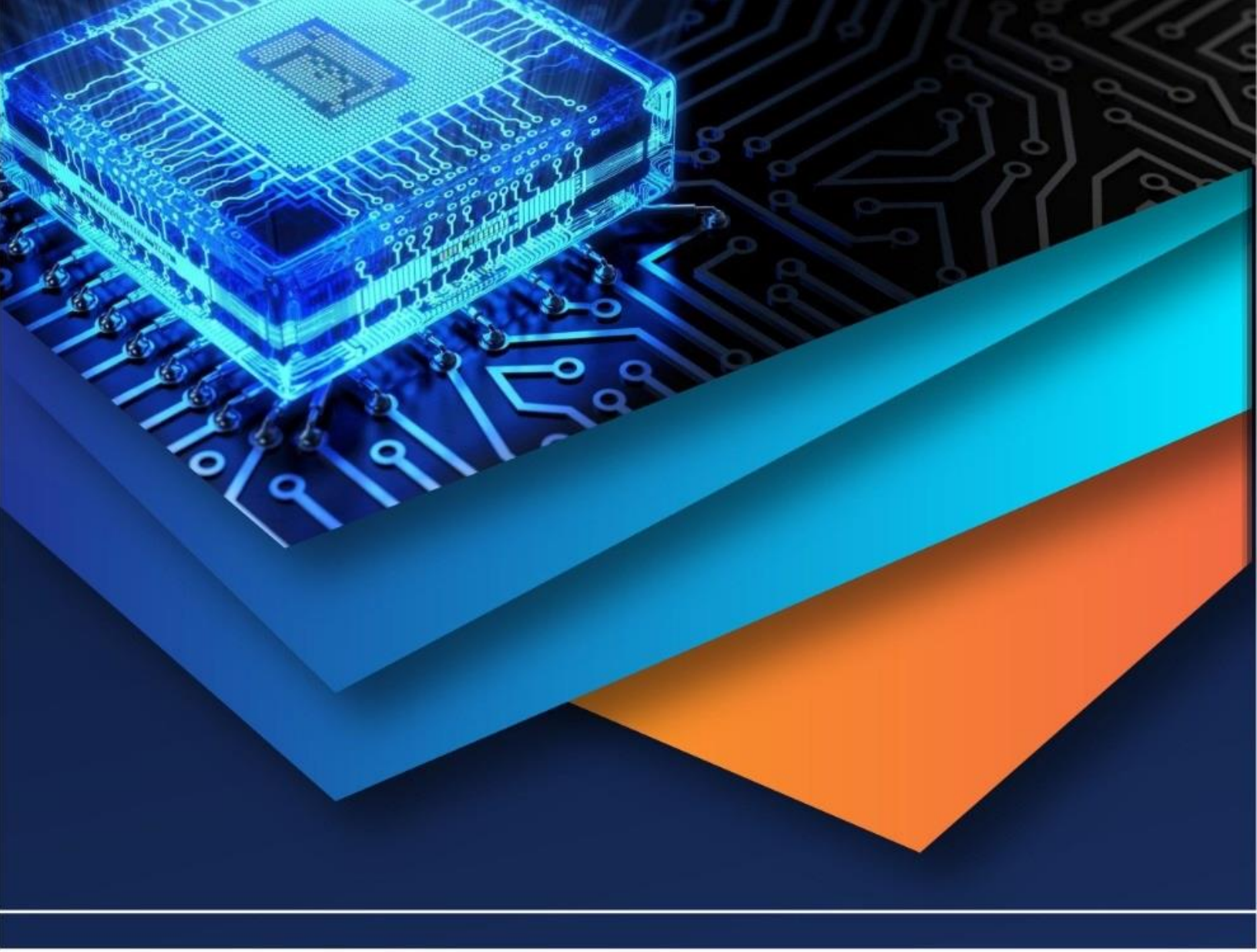
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