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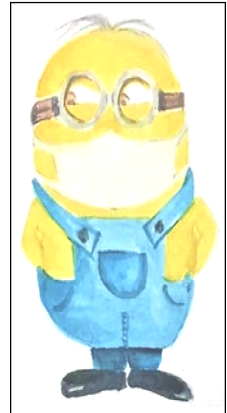
Experts Speak

ANALYSING THE IMPACTS OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Concept Note

COVID-19 (Coronavirus Disease 2019) did not discriminate anyone based on their economy, political affiliation, power equation, or social strata. The virus has touched every continent and almost all the countries and impacted the entire humanity. Starting from the Wuhan city of central China from the middle of November 2019, it spread so fast that by the time people realised its vulnerability it had already engulfed all. On 30 January 2020 it was termed as 'Public Health Emergency of International Concern' and on 11 March 2020, it was recognized as a 'Pandemic'.

The Experts Speak section of the journal attempts to bring to fore some pertinent social-economic-strategic as well as psychological impacts of the pandemic on the entire humanity. As the pandemic is still upswing and the entirety of its impact is yet to be fully visible, the discussion analyses some repercussions so far. **Professor Nigam Dave** and **Raviraj Dave** explains the cascading effects of COVID-19 across economic and social sectors of India. The authors prescribe for a better response mechanism to such crisis if ever arise in future through resilient leadership and collaboration across various sectors. A focused analysis is advanced by **Dr. Nausheen Nizami** on the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on India's macroeconomic sector - especially the macroeconomic constraints behind the fiscal and monetary stimulus packages announced by the Indian Government and the challenges that pose to the economy in mitigating such crisis. Dr Nizami points out that the biggest fiscal challenge amidst Covid-19 crisis for India is: how to effectively revive and accelerate the economic growth rate to above six per cent in the next two financial years. As she suggests, the current situation warrants for a comprehensive strategy of reviving all the industries in the primary, secondary and tertiary sector.



On the other hand, **Dr Arbind Sinha** examines the ground realities through the social lens by scrutinising the impacts of the pandemic on the lives people. Aptly the author argues that though it is not wrong that the pandemic has affected all layers of society, yet a minute study would reveal that it has a differential bearing on each section and sub-section of the society. The rural Indians, urban Indians, the labourers - though all have suffered enormously, the resilience of each strata is not same, therefore the impact is differential: different social strata have suffered differently. **Dr Sitakanta Mishra** takes the debate to the global level and argues that the geopolitical implications of COVID-19 pandemic are undoubtedly secondary compared to the global health and safety concerns; but in long-run, the upshot of the pandemic would be consequential for the global order in vogue. In the wake of pandemic, a global power vacuum has emerged given the fact that all major powers consumed with internal problems have become inward looking for fighting the pandemic. Dr Mishra argues that the upshot of the COVID-19 would certainly be consequential for the current world order; the world may gradually inch towards a new world order with new set of power equations and structural adjustments. He asserts that if the US and European powers remain absent in shaping a global unity to deal with the pandemic as they used to until now on other occasions, China and India may use the crisis as an opportunity to start setting new rules and initiate actions according to their global governance visions.

Lastly, **Gitanjali Sinha Roy** examines how the 'China threat' is a common factor in India-Japan strategic relations which is likely to strengthen in the atmosphere of COVID-19 pandemic. Chinese aggressiveness with respect to India and Japan is in fact propelling convergence of interests between New Delhi and Tokyo which would lead to greater collaboration among them, and also among their regional partners, culminating in an intra-Asian forum in future.

*The Post COVID-19 World Order**

Sitakanta Mishra

Undoubtedly, the type of world we lived during the pre-COVID-19 era would not hang on for long. During the last six months, indications of structural changes in the global power hierarchy can clearly be perceived. The world may gradually inch towards a new world order with new set of power equations and structural adjustments. Though there is no unanimity on the ushering of new world order post-pandemic, the upshot of the COVID-19 would certainly be consequential for the current world order which at first has started to reshape and will fully transform to its new *avatar* at once. When will it fully usher, and what would be the exact contours of the post-COVID-19 world order, is too early to conclude. But one must ponder if such a systemic alteration is to occur, some fracture in the global governance structure would too emerge. Has any irreparable fracture among the current global ruling elites emerged? Will the wrangling centered round the pandemic will prompt any fresh alignments and counter-alignments culminating in a new polarity at the global level?



The answers to these intriguing questions have been a matter of dyadic debate. Many foresee heralding of a new global order considering the unfolding power politics, especially between USA and China, and other actors like Russia, India and some European countries. While many scholars are not convinced that the shape of current global power hierarchy would swing in any significant

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manner. By connecting the socio-economic-strategic spats and crisis-time power play in the wake of the pandemic, this paper foresees a new world order is in the offing by identifying some broad pointers of the shift towards a new configuration, which may not be fully visible for next one or two years. Also, the assertion made here is that if the US and European powers remain absent in shaping a global unity as they used to until now, China and India may use the crisis as an opportunity to start setting new rules and initiate actions according to their global governance visions.

The Testing Time

At present, the geopolitical implications of COVID-19 pandemic are undoubtedly secondary compared to the global health and safety concerns; but in long-run, the upshot of the pandemic would be consequential for the global order in vogue. In the wake of pandemic, a global power vacuum has emerged given the fact that all major powers consumed with internal problems have become inward looking for fighting the pandemic.

All are aware of the fact that no nation is powerful enough to provide ‘crisis leadership’ globally at the moment. Does the absence of American leadership to deal the pandemic provide new opportunities for Moscow and Beijing? Will China assert global leadership aggressively as the United States falters; or the notion that ‘China as world leader’ just died given the massive negative impacts? Will America hatch a counter-strategy as it perceives Corona virus spread as a Chinese conspiracy against its pursuit of ‘Making America Great Again’?

Moreover, during this time of paucity in global leadership, will the world see arrival of a new super power leading the new world order? Will the United Nation Security Council (UNSC) arrive at a consensus to recompose the high table by accommodating a new influential power like India which willfully is shouldering the crisis-time leadership?

In a way, the COVID-19 pandemic is testing the legitimacy of the global order in vogue and the crisis leadership ability of its chief protagonists, especially America and other western powers. First, it is testing the agility of domestic governance of nation-states – the prime actors of international system; second, the relevance of global governance structures and institutions erected in the name of ‘lasting global peace and development’ in the post World War II period; and third, the ability and willingness of the existing ‘super powers’ to muster global response to a global crisis. So far, in all these respects, the current world order has faltered.

The idea that the democratic governance is best to cater to the last man seems hollow today. The global governance structure based on liberal-capitalist

framework nurtured by UN, IMF, World Bank, etc, has been a victim of power politics; nothing surprising today when China blocks UNSC discussion on the COVID-19 pandemic. More worrying is the shattering of the belief that a super power is one who is present in every corner of the world and willing to control the global outcomes, if possible singularly or multilaterally. Contrarily, the pandemic has brought to fore the global power vacuum, in as no superpower of our time can really control the state of affair in any part of the world today.

While America, the foremost superpower of the world, branded COVID-19 as “the Chinese virus,” an American company has filed USD 20 trillion lawsuits against the Chinese government for the creation and the release of the Corona virus as a bioweapon.¹ On the other hand, China which plans to connect every part of the world through belt-road connectivity, seals its own borders to most foreigners to stop a second wave of virus spread. The interconnected world is locked down to stop the spread of the pandemic which many view as the beginning of the retreat of globalisation or a reverse trend of global interdependence. Even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, some countries in Europe, and USA, have chosen to disassociate from regional integration and insulate their border respectively mainly to prevent large scale migration.

In addition, the global governance structure centred round the UN and Bretton Woods system has been under serious stress today, and has been subject to manipulation during the last few decades by their champions itself. The obstruction of the UNSC meeting to discuss the pandemic-related issue by China, and the WHO position regarding China’s dealing with the pandemic have renewed the longstanding debate about whether the world body is “sufficiently independent to allow it to fulfill its purpose.” These, and many such instances in the past give rise to a perception that the current global governance structure has become inept, therefore, warrant a complete overhaul.

Connecting the Spats and Fault-lines

Before a full bloom, a new system in the offing normally amalgamates some deep rooted spats and fault-lines to show the seeds of its arrival. It normally takes a while to build up to a precipitating stage and the outbreak of an event/crisis/war simply sparks its arrival. Apparently, during the last few decades, especially after 9/11, deep divisions are visible among the global governing elites over many global issues like non-proliferation, sovereignty, trade and interventions. The traditional alignments are fading and the international system seems to be moving towards a post-Western era. Gradually, the geostrategic pivot of the post-Cold War era has shifted from Europe to Asia and more

specifically to Indo-Pacific. In addition, the world is pondering if China will replace America soon in the global power hierarchy.

One wonders if the COVID-19 pandemic is just the beginning of the end of the current world order. There are many other indications of the unfolding new order. The sections that follow, identifies nine overlapping symptoms to help define the broad contours of the post-pandemic world order. All they are not likely to engulf the global sphere at once; rather their gradual unfolding would herald the historic moment “when the world changes permanently, when the balance of political and economic power shifts decisively, and when, for most people, in most countries, life is never quite the same again.”²

1. *An Alternative World Order in the Making:* Many would agree that China is crafting a new world order through establishing alternative global governance structures and alliance systems. This does not mean that the America-led world order in vogue is dead. What China seems laying down is a parallel global governance system “not to allow US monopoly to write the rules of international order.”³ The foundation of American world order in vogue is based on the Bretton Woods system, United Nations, and alliances crafted post-WWII, through which it could establish global hegemony and redefined the rules of global governance. China is a beneficiary of the “unilateral American military guarantee”⁴ and expanded liberal global order. But in the decades ahead Beijing is likely to marginalise the USA in many other spheres and with ascendance as a major global player, it will strive to reshape the world order as per its own design.

In the process, China will further insulate its own backyard from external intervention and at the same time ensure other regions of the world not being dominated by any other power. Also, it will enhance its power to reach every corner of the world at any point of time; in other words, it will acquire necessary capabilities to become a stakeholder in issues arising in every part of the world. China has embarked on the ‘strategic access’ method by building artificial islands, seaports connectivity, and alliances. China has already set out to build multilateral institutions, like Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India and China), New Development Bank (NDB), etc. by collaborating with like-minded countries, to carve alternative platforms for global governance.

Many observers opine that the COVID-19 pandemic might hamper China’s prospects as a superpower, and undermine the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party; they call it China’s ‘Chernobyl moment’;⁵ undoubtedly the pandemic is a dent in China’s growth trajectory, but Beijing is working to turn

it's early signs of success in controlling the pandemic into a larger narrative to broadcast to the rest of the world; this makes China an "essential player in a coming global recovery while airbrushing away its earlier mismanagement of the crisis."⁶ If China's claims to be believed, as the front runner in containing the pandemic, its "signature strength, efficiency and speed in this fight" has set "a new standard for the global efforts against the epidemic."⁷

At a time when no other global power could come forward to cater to Italy's urgent appeal for medical help, China publicly committed to sending ventilators, millions of masks, respirators, protective suits, and test kits. China has also dispatched medical teams and masks to Iran, and other supplies to Serbia, whose president dismissed European solidarity as "a fairy tale" and proclaimed that "the only country that can help us is China."⁸ Citing its "comprehensive strategic partnership" with Iran, Beijing sent flights and medical teams to help the country which witnessed more than 1,500 deaths. Likewise, Beijing sent masks and medical teams to Italy, whose leaders have launched a "Hug the Chinese" public relations campaign, with disastrous consequences. President Xi has made a suggestion to his Italian counterpart on building a "health Silk Road."⁹

Beijing's edge vis-a-vis any other major power in material assistance is high for the fact that much of the material required to face the virus is made in China, be it surgical masks, testing kits or gloves; to meet the spiked demand in all these material China through wartime-like industrial mobilisation has boosted these productions more than tenfold.¹⁰ China also produces roughly half of the N95 respirators critical for protecting health workers and produces vast majority of active pharmaceutical ingredients necessary to make antibiotics to deal with secondary infections from COVID-19.¹¹ One commentary in China's state media threatened that if China withheld drug ingredients, it could plunge the United States into "the mighty sea of coronavirus."¹²

It's ironic, only because China was the first country to deal with coronavirus, it is now ahead of most of the world in terms of containment and recovery, therefore will reap the benefits from first-mover status. Chinese workers are already returning to factories, while the United States and European economies are shutting down. When the world lies clueless on how to come out of the pandemic today, Beijing already has a plan for tomorrow. "In COVID-19, Beijing sees the chance to win. This time, China benefits from a near-peer strategic position. It also benefits from first-mover status."¹³ Like it or not, China is maneuvering for international leadership by turning the crisis into an opportunity—to increase the trust and the dependence of all countries around the world of 'Made in China' especially when the United States falters.¹⁴

Therefore, the view that the “Chinese Communist Party has done more damage to China’s prospects of becoming a global superpower than its most ardent detractors” is shortsighted; and the notion of “China is fit to compete with America for global leadership is dead” is incorrect.¹⁵

2. *Towards a Xenophobic World:* It is said that disease and prejudice go hand in hand. The post-pandemic world order will be coloured by hues of racism or xenophobia (or Sinophobia) for some time. The mysterious Corona lethal disease seems exacerbating racism and hatred specifically in social media.¹⁶ The social media is full of hatred for China and Chinese.. Conspiracy theories on how China wants to kill others are circulating on informal social media. Reportedly, in some places people with oriental or mongoloid features are now looked down upon as carriers of corona pathogen. The “Chinese residents in Asia and Asian people around the world have been treated with suspicion since the virus made international headlines.”¹⁷ The Chinese diaspora around the world are being targets of racial slurs. Anti-Asian racism and xenophobia have continued unabated elsewhere as well. Singaporeans and Vietnamese are reported to be the targets of xenophobia and racism related to coronavirus in the U.K.¹⁸ Reportedly, Canada’s Chinese community faced racist abuse in wake of coronavirus.¹⁹ “The coronavirus outbreak has taken a toll on Australia’s Chinese community, including a loss of trade at Chinese restaurants and stores as well as increased reports of racism.”²⁰ In USA, and especially in New York City, mishandling of Asians has been reported.²¹ In India there are reported cases of abuse of people with mongoloid features. These people are being denoted as ‘Corona’, and physically abused with a clear intention of socially discarding them.²²

Such sporadic incidents might be neutralised subsequently but for now some time onwards, the Chinese in Asia and Asians in the world especially with mongoloid features, will be subjected to additional health scrutiny or social seclusion while they are in transit.

3. *Authoritarianism Gaining Legitimacy:* Given the right wing political upsurge and consequent authoritarian political trend at the moment in various parts of the world, it would be safe to assume that the post-COVID-19 world order will be marked by relative decline of democracy along legitimacy of authoritarianism (read ‘benevolent despotism’). In the name of prompt implementation and containment of the pandemic, political authorities and administration machinery would use discretionary powers. Visibly “democracies being hampered by inherent inefficiency and political division” has been proved ineffective to deal crisis situations in comparison to the authoritarian systems. “China’s ... success

in coming to grips with the coronavirus pandemic as a strong case for authoritarian rule.”²³ The WHO called it “perhaps the most ambitious, agile and aggressive disease containment in history.”²⁴ As said by China’s Foreign Minister Wang Yi, “only in China under the leadership of President Xi there can be such effective measures to put this sudden and fast-spreading epidemic under control.”²⁵

Meanwhile, in other parts of the world, according to a host of media editorials, “Dictators are using the coronavirus to strengthen their grip on power”²⁶; “In coronavirus pandemic, authoritarians around the world see opportunity to crack down”;²⁷ “Authoritarianism in the Time of the Coronavirus.”²⁸ On the other hand, all democratic governments in the world would draw lessons from the successful handling of the pandemic by authoritarian regimes like China and may inculcate a bit of ‘benevolent despotism’ to their governance structures. This would be the beginning of gaining legitimacy for a new political system which can conveniently curtail civil liberty and democratic ideals in massive scale in the name of national emergency.

According to Florian Bieber, “Long before the virus hit, the world was already experiencing a decline of democracy. Since 2006, more countries have seen their democracies degrade than those that have improved. Last year, according to Freedom House, 64 countries became less democratic, and only 37 became more so.”²⁹ “The pandemic will strengthen the state and reinforce nationalism” further; “Governments of all types will adopt emergency measures to manage the crisis, and many will loath to relinquish these new powers when the crisis is over.”³⁰ “The trend towards centralised, authoritarian rule evident in many countries typified by China and Russia; this trend is coincided with the rise of right-wing nationalist-populist governments and parties in Europe. Some are now following China’s lead in attempting to weaponise the virus for political ends” opines Simon Tisdall in the Guardian.³¹ In essence, the post COVID-19 order will nurture “a world that is less open, less prosperous and less free.”³²

4. Cultural Superiority of the East: The post-pandemic world order will be coloured by the cultural superiority of the East according to SD Muni: “The positive fallout of Covid-19 is that it underlines cultural superiority of the East over the West by replacing hand shake with Namaste. It is also underlines the virtues of vegetarianism over wild and bizarre eating preferences.”³³ Undoubtedly, critics would point that COVID-19 is originated from the East itself; vegetarianism is practiced only by a minority of people in the East, and the Eastern culture is full of superstitions, so on and so forth. But nobody would disagree that for long the Eastern lifestyle, habits, and practices were considered inferior to the

Western practices; even the East emulated Western lifestyle madly in the name of modernity. Even if the entire Eastern cultural practices cannot be appreciated, many Indian lifestyle and cultural prescriptions for healthy life need to be praised. The Indian practices like Yoga, Ayurveda, Diya (small oil lamp), Kadha (an Ayurvedic drink made with herbs and spices usually boiled in water), etc. are likely to get wider acceptance in the world. This is not to discount or sideline other good cultural practices in other parts of East or West. The Eastern values that were viewed blatantly inferior vis-a-vis the West will no longer withstand.

Similarly, as Stephen Walt views, the pandemic response discourse “will also accelerate the shift in power and influence from West to East. The response in Europe and America has been slow and haphazard by comparison [with China, South Korea and Singapore], further tarnishing the aura of the western ‘brand’”³⁴ The traditional balance of power centred round Anglo-American narrative bound to shift to the East soon as both Europe and America will continue to face severe economic crisis.

Undoubtedly the economic impact of the pandemic is global and will be felt in every corner, but the inherent resilience of the Eastern economies and lifestyle will help the Eastern populace withstand the crisis at ease compared to the Western populace. Post-pandemic economic recovery of the East would be quicker than the West: given their market size and state protectionism policies, the Eastern economies would fare better in the subsequent decades. For China, “the virus has become a soft power tool to overtake its superpower rival, the US.”³⁵ China is reinforcing its credentials as a global leader by offering assistance to affected countries. India also seems to seize the opportunity to extend some leadership in the South Asian region as well as leading the G-20 to shape a concerted global pandemic response. *If the US and European powers remain absent in shaping a global unity as usual, China and India may take this crisis as an opportunity to start setting new rules and initiate actions according to their global governance designs.*

5. Retreat of Hyper-Globalisation: The post COVID-19 world will be a re-globalised world with a “retreat from this phase of hyper-globalisation, as citizens look to national governments to protect them and as states and firms seek to reduce future vulnerabilities.”³⁶ On one hand, the world may see “increased post-pandemic protectionism if, as some predict, countries attempt to limit future exposure to global threats.”³⁷ The economic globalisation that the world has embarked on long ago would continue for some time as economic dependency through the Bretton Woods system has strongly been entrenched. But physical mobility of men and groups has already experienced a stiff decline which is

likely to continue and physical world will remain disconnected physically for a long period to come.

Simultaneously, there would be re-globalisation of the world (Globalisation 2.0 as Robert Kaplan names it) which will be marked by emergence of “great-power blocs with their own burgeoning military and separate supply chains, about the rise of autocracies, and about social and class divides that have engendered nativism and populism, coupled with middle-class angst in Western democracies. In sum, it is a story about new and re-emerging global divisions”.³⁸ Robert Kaplan sees “the coronavirus pandemic as an economic and geopolitical shock”, “the historical marker between the first phase of globalisation and the second In sum, it is a story about new and re-emerging global divisions.”³⁹ The trade practices and supply chain system of the globalisation process in vogue will continue to work for a while, but likely to give way for the new parameters of the Globalisation 2.0 to entrench soon. The beginning of the end of the first phase of globalisation and onset of its second phase seems in progress. When the Globalisation 2.0 will be fully visible is a matter of conjecture, but the globalised world of this epoch will not endure.

6. Towards a Virtual Civilization: The post COVID-19 world will nurture a “virtual civilization”⁴⁰ as physical mobility of people is significantly curtailed and will remain so during the foreseeable future. Most nations would be reluctant to support and facilitate human migration anymore. It has been seen how many European and West Asian countries pushed back the migrants in the recent past. As far as control of the pandemic is concerned, the only effective method is ‘social distancing’ and restriction of movement. During such a situation, connectivity through virtual platforms or cyber domain is the only medium which has grown exponentially and is sustaining the globalised world.

As physical mass movement and interaction of human beings has come to a halt in the wake of the pandemic, the cyber world is experiencing corresponding overdrive. More innovations in virtual technology in future would herald a “virtual civilization” to flourish in the decades ahead. While social or physical distancing will be the ‘new normal’ or *nom de guerre*, virtual cohesion and capability will shape and drive the global discourse now onwards. But the world is likely to confront a new dilemma of how to make the virtual real, as it is prone to intense manipulation and disguise.

7. Crisis-Generated Alliances: The post-pandemic world will see shifting or formation of new alliances on the basis of crisis-time cooperation, and conspiracy theories involving the source of, and intention (if any) behind, the outbreak of COVID-19. While the conspiracy theories involving the virus origin

and spread are likely to worsen China-USA rift, the pandemic-time sympathy and collaboration will prompt strange alliance and counter-alliance formations elsewhere.

The Chinese version of the conspiracy theory, which Chinese social media abounds with conjecture, that the virus was engineered by the United States as an agent of biological warfare against China. A widely shared conspiracy theory says that American soldiers participating in the 2019 Military World Games in Wuhan deliberately shed the virus at the Seafood Market. On the other hand, the American version, accusing China of testing of biological weapons in its lab that got out of control, named it as the ‘Chinese virus’ or the ‘Wuhan virus’, and demanded accountability from China. The split between the two powers is wide open; which way it would escalate is a matter of introspection.

Meanwhile, global interdependence and the collective approach to address global problems, which the America-led world order propagated, seems impractical in the wake of the pandemic. As America itself is struggling within and is unable to lead in this time of global crisis, the unconditional support it used to receive from its European allies or NATO partners previously would not be available spontaneously anymore. China, on the other hand, reached out to the worst-affected countries in Europe enthusiastically, showcasing its strength and willingness to provide crisis-time leadership to the world. In other parts of the world, strange crisis-time partnership is evolving. For example, countries hitherto at odds each other, such as Iran and the UAE, are cooperating, at least temporarily. UAE has sent twice medical aid to Iran as coronavirus outbreak intensifies⁴¹ even though it conducted a major military exercise with USA on 23 March 2020 in the desert 125 miles southwest of Abu Dhabi.⁴² In Philippines, the pandemic crisis prompted a ceasefire with the Communist rebels.

Pandemics are recurring but the world’s strategy and leadership for dealing with them is woefully inadequate at the moment.⁴³ Logically, the world will soon see coalitions for fighting pandemic. The leading countries with advanced virology expertise will rally around to form a super-league to fight pandemics as it was the case to deal with terrorism. Consolidation of the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations⁴⁴ (already launched in Davos in 2017) is likely to be the new coalition hub for the global powers.

8. Global Bio-Defence Regime: The role of nuclear weapons and utility of nuclear deterrence will continue to remain at the centre-stage of global security discourse but within the prism of the new apprehension of biological warfare with the background of conspiracy theories about corona virus. While nuclear weapon states would be reluctant to discount the role of nuclear arsenal, building

of a permanent bio-defence force would be a national security imperative in the post COVID-19 global security discourse.

The ninth review Conference of the Biological Weapons Convention is scheduled for November 2021 where an assessment might be undertaken by state-parties on how the COVID-19 situation would be managed from the biological weapons standpoint.⁴⁵ Reinforcement of the biological convention with additional verification mechanism might be pressed upon the regime, or a new regime would take shape. Besides, the post-COVID-19 global discourse would press for a multilateral bio-defence regime with mandatory compliance mechanism to monitor national pandemic prevention policies, measures, and commitments.

9. The New Super Power India: History will remember the COVID-19 outbreak as an epoch changing event that shook the global balance of power. As visible, post-pandemic, the global power hierarchy will not remain the same and the redistribution of global power is unfolding. It would not be far-fetched to argue that there is enough scope for nations who have relatively resilient in fighting the pandemic and shouldered crisis responsibilities at the global level by extending valuable assistance. India has shown such leadership quality especially when there is a paucity of global leadership. It amply showcased its resolve and capability to shoulder global responsibility in time of crisis. It would be safe to vouch that India would be the fifth member of the UN Security Council (UNSC) replacing UK which has been plunged in the global power hierarchy long ago.

It is not to discount the enormity of the pandemic India is facing now. Owing to huge population and inadequate medical resources at its disposal, the days ahead will be tough for India. However, India has “managed to bring its domestic requirements and global responsibilities in sync”⁴⁶ during this difficult time as a responsible member of the comity of nations. When all other major powers have become inward looking while dealing with the pandemic, the world first time witnessed India’s activism despite its pressing domestic concerns. India’s message for the world is also that it is willing and prepared, within its limited resources and capabilities, to undertake responsibilities in preserving and promoting the global common good.⁴⁷ The initiatives New Delhi has shouldered so far “underline India’s commitment to become a credible global player”, says SD Muni.

When the paucity of global leadership is palpable across the world, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi called the SAARC conference on Covid-19 and suggested a coordinated response among the SAARC neighbours to combat

coronavirus at the regional level. The video conference of SAARC leaders, where Pakistan was also on board, welcomed Modi's proposal. Modi proposed the creation of a Covid-19 emergency fund with India making an initial contribution of \$10 million.⁴⁸ Modi also proposed setting up of 'rapid response teams' of doctors, specialists and arrange for testing equipment, besides imparting online training to emergency response staff so as to build capacity to fight such challenges across the region. "Modi's initiative came much before any other such regional initiative and drew a positive response not only from regional states but also from countries like the US and Russia as well as the World Health Organisation."⁴⁹

Prime Minister Modi also became the first global leader to call for a G20 summit via video conferencing to advance "a coordinated response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its human and economic implications." This was accepted by Saudi Arabia, the current chair of the G 20. In the Extraordinary Virtual G20 Leaders' Summit, Prime Minister Modi underscored "the need to put human beings at the centre of our vision of global prosperity and cooperation, freely and openly share the benefits of medical research and development, develop adaptive, responsive and humane health care systems, promote new crisis management protocols and procedures for an interconnected global village, strengthen and reform inter-governmental organisations like WHO and work together to reduce economic hardships resulting from COVID-19 particularly for the economically weak."⁵⁰ Moreover, he called on the leaders to help usher in a new globalisation, for the collective well-being of humankind and have multilateral focus on promoting the shared interests of humanity.

In addition, India has undertaken tangible humanitarian measures like evacuation of nationals, supply of medical resources and support teams, above all, moral support to the needy while managing huge challenges at home. While evacuating its own nationals stranded in parts of the world, India has also extended this support to nationals from Maldives, Myanmar, Bangladesh, China, US, Madagascar, Sri Lanka, Nepal, South Africa and Peru.⁵¹

Requests for emergency medical equipment from Bhutan and the Maldives have also been responded to by India. India provided 15 tonnes of medical supplies worth Rs. 2.11 crore to China on 26 February 2020⁵² for which China has expressed its appreciation.⁵³ India has exported 90t of medical protective equipment to Serbia under the guidance of UNDP. Most importantly, as part of India's measures to assist neighbouring countries in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, "six Navy ships have been kept ready and five medical teams are on standby by India for deployment to the Maldives, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh,

Nepal, Bhutan and Afghanistan when required”, the Ministry of Defence said in a statement.⁵⁴

India’s leadership in this time of global crisis is acknowledged and appreciated. The WHO has praised Prime Minister Modi’s initiatives to fight COVID-19 pandemic. Modi also had a telephonic conversation with US president Donald Trump. The two leaders agreed to put the full weight of the India-US partnership to fight the deadly Covid-19 disease.⁵⁵ Even Modi’s role and leadership is considered valuable by China when it “sought India’s support to counter US bid to lay COVID-19 blame on its door.” External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi had a telephonic conversation prior the virtual G20 summit. Wang Yi expressed hope that “India would oppose the comments made by the US President Donald Trump and other senior officials of his administration branding the Covid-19 as a ‘Chinese Virus’”.⁵⁶ All of these and many such leadership initiatives in the days ahead indicate that India has already arrived as a competent and reliable global power to co-shoulder global leadership.

The question which logically arises is whether India will fit in the unfolding post-pandemic world order? Will it collide or cooperate with the Chinese scheme of alternative order, or supplement its new leadership power to reinvigorate the outgoing America-led world order? The notion that the USA is the only conduit to the global powerdom strongly persists in India’s strategic calculations. Until now India has remained attached to, and integrating more with, the American global framework, even though Washington is still confused where to place India in its scheme. America has not been able to completely de-hyphenate India from Pakistan; it is not enthusiastic to facilitate India’s entry as permanent member of the UNSC. With the strong leadership and global vision of Narendra Modi, *India must look beyond the American framework, and both compete and cooperate with China, to help settle the post-pandemic world order to its advantage.*

Namaste to the New World Order

It would be highly unrealistic to smear the final shape of the new world order in the offing. No definite answer can be advanced on how soon it would emerge, and how distinct it would be from the order in vogue? Nevertheless, the COVID-19 pandemic appears to be shadowing, and simultaneously catalysing dynamics and events that are affecting the regional and global balance. In fact, wars, pandemics and large scale events accelerate redistribution of global power, hierarchy or systemic change. The pandemic has undoubtedly brought to fore the loopholes in the current global governance system, the weakness in supranational institutions, and vulnerabilities of the so-called ‘developed world’.

However, no black and white answer can be furnished to the question - what the post-pandemic world order would look like; who will be on the driving seat; what would be the global power equation; whose level will be up and whose will go down? But certainly there will be a post-pandemic world order, a departure from the past order, whose entire *carte du jour* may not be on the table soon, but definitely in a year or two from now - in which the health care paradigms, social safety nets for the most vulnerable sections, and crisis leadership mechanisms will have to be re-imagined and re-budgeted, because what would follow is a deep economic recession that likely to uproot the capitalist foundation on which the world relies until now.

Notes

- * The article is an amended version of the monograph published as *The Post-Pandemic World Order: The Nine Pointers*, IndrStra Global, 2020.
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