

THE SPECTRE OF A POST-COVID-19 WORLD**The pandemic could not have come at a more difficult time; the global order could see major changes**

As COVID-19 spreads exponentially across the world, and the figures of those testing positive as also the numbers of deaths keep increasing in near-geometrical progression, profound uncertainty and extreme volatility are wreaking havoc of a kind seldom encountered previously. It might, hence, be wise to start thinking of what next, if at least to try and handle a situation created by the most serious pandemic in recent centuries.

- **China's pivotal role**

The problem with the novel coronavirus is that with the exception of China, which battled another coronavirus epidemic in 2003 — the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) epidemic — there is little available for most nations on which to base their assessment of what next. What is known is that China's growth rate has further plummeted, even as it was confronting an economic slowdown which had been in the works for some time. The consequences for the global economy of China ceasing to be the world's biggest exporter of manufactured goods are considerable, and with no country in a position to replace it, this development will precipitate a further economic downturn internationally.

It is not the intention here to minimise the human costs of the tragedy that has unfolded, and which is still unfolding, consequent on COVID-19. If China was the worst affected nation initially, the United States, Spain, Germany and Italy have since eclipsed China. Many other countries are today facing a serious plight, and few, if any, remedies are as yet available even as the human costs keep mounting. Still, it is important to think of what lies ahead.

The COVID-19 pandemic could not have come at a more difficult time. The world was already having to contend with an uncertain economic environment, with industries in turn facing newer challenges such as having to adjust to a shift from cost efficiencies to innovation and breakthrough improvements. Added to this were: a global slowdown, increasing political and policy uncertainties, alterations in social behaviour, new environmental norms, etc. Newly emerging economies, such as India, were even more affected by all this, than some of the older established ones.

- **Prognosis for India**

At one point, India was estimated to be among the 15 most affected economies by the COVID-19 epidemic, but as the pandemic has raged unchecked, all bets are off. An early estimate by the Asian Development Bank, soon after the epidemic was declared, was that it would cost the Indian economy \$29.9 billion. A recent industry estimate pegs the cost of the lockdown at around \$120 billion or 4% of India's GDP. The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) had at one point warned that the COVID-19 impact, and the existing stress in the financial sector, meant that India would require up to six months even after the entire course of the COVID-19 epidemic is over to restore normalcy and business continuity.

India has, no doubt, acted with speed in the wake of the pandemic and declared a lockdown early on. Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared the pandemic as a serious global crisis, and in the course of two national broadcasts in mid-March, announced a series of steps such as a one day 'peoples curfew' (on March 22) 'social distancing', the setting up of a COVID-19 Taskforce under the Finance Minister to come up with measures to mitigate the economic hardship engendered by the pandemic, and finally a three-week-long lockdown. Several precautionary measures based on

guidelines in vogue elsewhere in the world for preventing pandemics of this kind, have also been introduced including 'home isolation', 'home quarantine', etc.

The prognosis as to what lies ahead is indeed bleak. On the economic plane, according to most experts, a global recession seems inevitable. Uncertainty, panic and lockdown policies are expected to cause demand worldwide to decline in a precipitous way. This will inevitably lead to a vicious downward cycle, where companies close down, resulting in more lay-offs and a further drop in consumption. A precipitous decline in GDP would follow. To compensate for this loss, massive inflows of government funds would be needed, but most governments, India included, might find it difficult to find adequate resources for this purpose. Equally important, if not more so, is that such massive inflows of funds (if they are to be effective) should be here and now, and not later, by which time the situation may well have spiralled out of control. Global coordination was a must in the extant situation.

- **Pandemic as disrupter**

COVID-19 is, in turn, expected to bring about major changes in the global order. Some of these changes have, no doubt, been in the making for some time, but would get accelerated. As of now, though the U.S. is no longer the global power that it once was, it is hardly in retreat. It is, without doubt, increasingly disinclined to act as the world's gendarme, as instanced by its retreat from Afghanistan after a dubious accord with the Afghan Taliban, but this was not the end of the road as far as U.S. power was concerned.

Post COVID-19, however, and given that the U.S. is among the countries badly affected by this pandemic, together with existing uncertainties affecting its financial markets, the U.S. can be expected to step back even further — from one of assertion to neutrality in global affairs.

Already, U.S. command of the global commons has weakened. Meantime, China and Russia have strengthened their relationship, and improved their asymmetric capabilities. The challenge from China is becoming more obvious by the day — measured by purchasing power parity, the U.S. is not the largest economy in the world as of now. Even more daunting from a U.S. standpoint, and also representing a sea-change from the recent past, Russia has become far more economically and politically stable and an important power broker in West Asia. These shifts cannot but, and are likely to, have a direct impact on the liberal international order. It could, in turn, give a boost to authoritarian regimes and authoritarian trends.

- **Social concerns**

Moving away from the political and economic consequences of COVID-19 are other concerns arising from an extended lockdown, social distancing and isolation. Psychologists are even talking of an 'epidemic of despair' arising from a fear of unknown causes, resulting in serious anxiety and mental problems. Extended isolation, according to psychologists, can trigger a different kind of pandemic even leading to possible suicidal tendencies, fits of anger, depression, alcoholism and eccentric behavioural patterns.

Another fallout from the current epidemic might well be the extent to which inequality in incomes impact segments of the population, facing a common malaise. Countries lacking a comprehensive nationwide health system would find this an even more difficult situation to handle. Meantime, as the economy weakens, accompanied by job losses, those without high levels of skills would fall further behind.

This is evident to some extent already given recent reports of mass migration across the Indian landmass. Out of work migrant labour, unable to find new jobs since they lack the necessary skills,

are attempting to return to their normal habitat, bringing in their wake untold suffering and, perhaps even the spread of the virus. This has all the makings of a huge human tragedy. Existing curbs on their movement would further exacerbate the problem, and could even lead to a major law and order situation.

- **Digital factor**

One possible, and unexpected, aspect of the COVID-19 epidemic could be the thrust it could provide to 'digital authoritarianism'. China's authoritarian methods seem to have helped it to contain the spread of the virus — at least for the time being. Somewhat similar tactics are being employed by some other countries as well. In turn, leaders across many nations may find China's methods, and the embracing of technology to refashion authoritarianism for the modern age irresistible, and a standard to be adapted, even if they profess to be democratic. The rise of digital autocracies could lead to digital repression, and in the age of AI-powered surveillance, create a capacity for predictive control, or what is often referred to as 'social management'.

Meanings of Difficult Words:

- ❖ **spectre** (noun) – threat, menace, danger/peril.
- ❖ **COVID-19** (noun) – coronavirus disease 2019.
- ❖ **pandemic** (noun) – the worldwide spread of a new disease; The illness spreads around the world and typically affects a large number of people across a wide area.
- ❖ **world/global order** (noun) - an international-relations term describing the distribution of power among world powers.
- ❖ **exponentially** (adverb) – rapidly, quickly.
- ❖ **geometric progression** (GA) (noun) - it is also known as a geometric sequence; In Mathematics, it is a sequence such that any element after the first is obtained by multiplying the preceding element by a constant called the common ratio. For example, the sequence 2, 6, 18, 54, ... is a geometric progression with common ratio 3.
- ❖ **profound** (adjective) – deep, serious, difficult, intense.
- ❖ **uncertainty** (noun) – unpredictability, unreliability, riskiness/precariousness.
- ❖ **volatility** (noun) – fluctuation, inconsistency, unpredictability.
- ❖ **wreak havoc** (phrase) – cause/inflict a massive damage.
- ❖ **seldom** (adverb) – hardly, rarely, almost never.
- ❖ **pivotal** (adjective) – central, crucial, vital/critical.
- ❖ **novel coronavirus (nCoV) (SARS-CoV-2)** (noun) – a new strain (type/variety) coronavirus that has not been previously identified in humans.
- ❖ **with the exception of** (phrase) – except, excluding, not including.
- ❖ **coronavirus (CoV)**(noun) – a large family of viruses that cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases. Common signs of infection include respiratory symptoms, fever, cough, shortness of breath and breathing difficulties. In more severe cases, infection can cause pneumonia, severe acute respiratory syndrome, kidney failure and even death.
- ❖ **epidemic** (noun) – widespread disease/illness; outbreak, plague, scourge.
- ❖ **severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS)** (noun) – SARS coronavirus (SARS-CoV) is thought to be an animal virus from an asyet-uncertain animal reservoir, perhaps bats, that spread to other animals (civet cats). It is a viral (human-to-human transmission) that can cause severe respiratory illness or death.
- ❖ **plummet** (verb) – fall sharply/steeply, go down, drop.
- ❖ **confront** (verb) – tackle, deal with, grapple with, try to cope with.

- ❖ **slowdown** (noun) – economic decline, recession, slump/depression.
- ❖ **in the works** (phrase) - ongoing, happening, occurring.
- ❖ **consequence** (noun) – outcome, ramification, repercussion.
- ❖ **cease** (verb) – bring to an end/halt/stop, conclude, terminate.
- ❖ **considerable** (adjective) – significant, substantial, a lot of.
- ❖ **precipitate** (verb) - bring about, cause, give rise to, trigger.
- ❖ **downturn** (noun) – decline, setback, blow/upset (in economic activity).
- ❖ **unfold** (verb) – occur, happen, take place.
- ❖ **consequent** (adjective) – subsequent, following, resultant, ensuing.
- ❖ **eclipse** (verb) - outdo, surpass, overshadow.
- ❖ **plight** (noun) – difficult situation, trouble/difficulty, quandary.
- ❖ **remedy** (noun) – solution, answer, antidote/panacea.
- ❖ **mount** (verb) – increase, grow, escalate.
- ❖ **lie ahead** (phrasal verb) – be going to happen.
- ❖ **contend with** (phrasal verb) – cope with, face, grapple/deal with.
- ❖ **breakthrough** (adjective) – characterized by some progress (or) development.
- ❖ **prognosis** (noun) – forecast, prediction, projection.
- ❖ **unchecked** (adjective) – uncontrolled, unconstrained, unrestricted.
- ❖ **all bets are off** (phrase) - the outcome is unpredictable.
- ❖ **peg (at)** (verb) – fix, set, hold, limit (a price, rate, or amount) at a particular level.
- ❖ **lockdown** (noun) – an emergency protocol implemented by the authorities that prevents people from leaving from a place; An extended state of confinement/encirclement/isolation of a person by the authority.
- ❖ **stress** (noun) - strain, pressure, demand, burden; trouble, difficulty.
- ❖ **normalcy** (noun) – a normal condition; normality, regularity.
- ❖ **in the wake of** (phrase) - as a result of some event, especially an unpleasant one; aftermath, as a consequence of.
- ❖ **early on** (phrase) – at an initial stage (during the process).
- ❖ **in the course of** (phrase) – during (the particular period/activity).
- ❖ **curfew** (noun) – a rule which is instructing people to stay at home, typically at night.
- ❖ **social distancing** (noun) – a term means actively avoiding crowded public places, is a key element in decreasing the rapid spread of COVID-19. This is an effort intended to limit exposure by reducing face-to-face contact and preventing spread among people in community settings.
- ❖ **set up** (phrasal verb) – establish, start, begin.
- ❖ **task force** (noun) – unit, crew, outfit, section (mainly arranged for a task).
- ❖ **come up with** (phrasal verb) – produce, devise, propose.
- ❖ **mitigate** (verb) – reduce, lessen, decrease, make less severe.
- ❖ **hardship** (noun) – financial distress, trouble, misfortune, suffering.
- ❖ **engender** (verb) – cause, give rise to, bring about.
- ❖ **precautionary** (adjective) – preventive, safety, protective.
- ❖ **in vogue** (phrase) - in the current fashion or style.
- ❖ **of its kind** (phrase) – similar to what has been mentioned/told.
- ❖ **isolation** (noun) – a complete separation from others of a person known or reasonably believed to be infected with communicable diseases.

- ❖ **quarantine** (noun) – a process of separating out people, animals and things (such as plants) from others for a period of time in order to control/restrict the spread of a contagious disease; Quarantine is imposed to separate and restrict the movement of persons, who may have been exposed to infectious disease, but not yet known to be ill.
- ❖ **bleak** (adjective) – unpromising, unfavourable, disadvantageous.
- ❖ **recession** (noun) – economic decline, downturn, slump.
- ❖ **inevitable** (adjective) – unavoidable, sure to happen, unpreventable.
- ❖ **precipitous** (adjective) - sudden, unexpected, swift, abrupt.
- ❖ **inevitably** (adverb) – necessarily, unavoidably, definitely.
- ❖ **vicious** (adjective) – serious, dangerous, dreadful.
- ❖ **vicious cycle** (noun) – also known as a vicious circle; a chain of negative events reinforce themselves. The situation spirals in a downward loop, becoming increasingly worse with time. A situation in which the solution to one problem creates a chain of problems, each making it more difficult to solve the original one.
- ❖ **lay-off** (noun) – unemployment; dismissal, discharge, redundancy.
- ❖ **inflow** (noun) - a flow/movement of a large amount of money or something to a particular place.
- ❖ **more so** (phrase) - to a greater degree; to a greater extent.
- ❖ **here and now** (phrase) - now, at the moment, at present, right now.
- ❖ **spiral** (verb) – increase/rise rapidly, leap up, escalate.
- ❖ **extant** (adjective) – present, existent, existing/surviving.
- ❖ **in turn** (phrase) – in succession, successively, sequentially.
- ❖ **in the making** (phrase) – burgeoning, coming, growing, developing.
- ❖ **accelerate** (verb) – increase, rise/surge, speed up.
- ❖ **retreat** (noun) – withdrawal, pulling back, back down.
- ❖ **disinclined** (adjective) - reluctant, unwilling, unenthusiastic, unprepared
- ❖ **gendarme** (noun) - (in French meaning "armed people") a police/army officer.
- ❖ **dubious** (adjective) – suspicious, questionable, doubtful.
- ❖ **accord** (noun) - agreement, deal, contract.
- ❖ **the end of the road** (phrase) – a point in a situation beyond which something cannot continue.
- ❖ **as far as** (phrase) – to the degree/extent that.
- ❖ **step back** (phrasal verb) – withdraw, disengage, pull out/pull back.
- ❖ **assertion** (noun) – declaration, statement, affirmation (of opinion/belief).
- ❖ **neutrality** (noun) - fairness, lack of prejudice, objectivity, openmindedness.
- ❖ **affairs** (noun) – matters, activities, concerns.
- ❖ **commons** (noun) – common property; common interests; the body politic; the common people considered as a integral part of a political system.
- ❖ **asymmetric** (adjective) – unequal, differing, dissimilar; lopsided.
- ❖ **by the day** (phrase) - gradually.
- ❖ **parity** (noun) - uniformity, sameness, equality.
- ❖ **as of now** (phrase) – from this time on, in future, henceforth/from now on.
- ❖ **daunt** (verb) – intimidate, disconcert, demoralize, discourage.
- ❖ **standpoint** (noun) - point of view, opinion, attitude.
- ❖ **sea-change** (noun) - a significant change, transformation, evolution.
- ❖ **far more** (phrase) - a lot more, much more.

- ❖ **liberal** (adjective) - progressive, forward-thinking, enlightened, broadminded, reformist.
- ❖ **authoritarian** (adjective) – oppressive, dictatorial, totalitarian.
- ❖ **move away from** (phrasal verb) – change/alter one’s ideas/beliefs and so.
- ❖ **despair** (noun) – hopelessness, depression, distress.
- ❖ **trigger** (verb) – give rise to, cause, invoke, bring about.
- ❖ **fit** (noun) - an outburst of anger; a sudden unrestrained outbreak of intense emotion.
- ❖ **eccentric** (adjective) - abnormal, uncommon, strange.
- ❖ **fallout** (noun) – adverse results; after-effects, repercussions.
- ❖ **inequality** (noun) – imbalance, unevenness, disproportion, disparity.
- ❖ **malaise** (noun) – trouble, unease, unhappiness/depression.
- ❖ **accompany** (verb) – occur with, be present with, coincide with, coexist with.
- ❖ **fall behind** (phrasal verb) – lag behind, trail behind, fall back, fail to keep up with.
- ❖ **landmass** (noun) - continent; a large area of land.
- ❖ **habitat** (noun) – preferred surroundings; natural environment.
- ❖ **in someone's wake** (phrase) - used to say what is left behind by someone.
- ❖ **untold** (adjective) – undisclosed, unreported, suppressed, unmentioned, unending, never-ending.
- ❖ **makings** (noun) - qualities, characteristics, potential, promise, capacity.
- ❖ **curb** (noun) – restraint, restriction, control.
- ❖ **exacerbate** (verb) – make worse, worsen, aggravate, compound.
- ❖ **thrust** (noun) – driving force, motive force, impetus, momentum.
- ❖ **authoritarianism** (noun) – autocracy, fascism, totalitarianism/draconianism.
- ❖ **for the time being** (phrase) - for now, for the moment, for the present.
- ❖ **embracing** (noun) - approval, adoption, integration.
- ❖ **refashion** (verb) – improve, rectify, correct.
- ❖ **irresistible** (adjective) – fascinating, attractive, captivating.
- ❖ **profess** (verb) – state one’s faith in, affirm one’s allegiance to, acknowledge publicly.
- ❖ **autocracy** (noun) – absolute power, totalitarianism, dictatorship.
- ❖ **repression** (noun) – suppression, quelling, restraint.
- ❖ **artificial intelligence (AI)** (noun) – an area of computer science that deals with giving machines the ability to seem like they have human intelligence.
- ❖ **surveillance** (noun) – observation, scrutiny, inspection/examination.
