

CHINA, BETTER PREPARED FOR THE POST-COVID WORLD

There Are Good Reasons Why The Pandemic Is Unlikely To End Beijing's Ambitious Power Outreach, A Point India Must Note.

Several weeks before the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, India's Minister for External Affairs, S. Jaishankar, had observed (at a lecture) that "what defines power and determines national standing is also no longer the same... Technology, connectivity and trade are at the heart of the new contestations...." The Minister could never have imagined that within a few weeks, his prediction would be overtaken by a tectonic shift in the global situation thanks to a virus and a pandemic.

The Minister did mention a point about "known unknowns", but what he could hardly have anticipated is how radical the changes would be, thanks to the phenomenon of "unknown unknowns". Within the span of a few weeks, following the Minister's dissertation, pronounced unpredictability created an unprecedented situation. Seldom have so many lives been lost across continents in a single tragic event.

Deep economic impact

By now, India has surpassed China with regard to the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases, and has moved past the figure of 100,000 cases. What distinguishes the present pandemic from earlier ones is its economic impact, which is perhaps even more threatening than the human costs involved. In the case of India, all forecasts have had to be shredded. Job losses have been massive, specially in urban areas. India's exports in the month of April, for instance, were the worst in the past 30 years. The harrowing plight of India's migrant workers and the images of hungry, aimless, dispossessed migrant worker families trudging along the highways of the nation have seared the conscience of the nation. It could well have been equated to China's May Fourth Movement (1919), except that, unlike in the case of China, the event has yet to catalyze the nation.

Well before this, India had been witnessing a persistent economic downward slide. The pandemic could, thus, not have come at a more inopportune moment. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's announcement of a ₹20-lakh crore stimulus package was, hence, timely even though economists now believe that in real terms it amounts to around 2% of GDP rather than 10% as the government makes out. Finding resources for even this stimulus package will, however, not be easy. The Centre's finances are not in the best of health. It has already had to resort to a second tranche of \$1 billion loan from the World Bank to support COVID-19 relief measures. The finances of States are, to say the least, in a perilous state. Questions are, thus, bound to be raised as to whether adequate funds would be forthcoming for relief purposes.

Package is more a mosaic

Following the Prime Minister's announcement, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has provided several details of the stimulus package. Most critics affirm that it has been a financial stimulus at best, and much less likely to provide the much needed stimulus to the economy. Among the more important items are: providing a stimulus to Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) through a ₹3-lakh crore loan scheme; helping other stressed business sectors such as non-banking financial companies, or NBFCs, power distribution companies and the real estate industry; provisioning of free food grains to migrant workers for the next two months; provisioning of a ₹1-lakh crore subsidy to agricultural cooperative societies; hiking the allocation for the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, or MGNREGS, by ₹40,000 crore; extension of credit facilities to street vendors; interest subvention for small businesses, etc.

A valid criticism is that the patchwork of stimulus packages reveals a disjointed mosaic of ideas and thoughts. Also, that these would be more relevant to a Budget discussion than a stimulus package. In the list of items mentioned as part of the stimulus package are aspects such as throwing open of defence production and coal sectors to the private sector, references to opening up of defence and aerospace for private companies, support to budgetary provisions for domestic defence

procurement, bringing out a negative import list of weapons and military platforms, etc. Many are, hence, viewing the stimulus package as a panic reaction to an increasingly difficult situation rather than a deliberate plan of action. It is indeed difficult to see how in the absence of a proper and well designed plan, a patchwork of stimulus packages would enable India to return to growth rates of 7% to 8%.

China's calibrated moves

In the extant circumstances, comparisons with China have, hence, become inevitable. China may not have anticipated the latest COVID-19 pandemic, but since its early recovery, China has followed a calibrated approach — one that stems from a policy of deliberate strategic progression conceived over the years. It may be worthwhile to understand the facts so as to underscore the gap that currently exists between China and India.

Almost five years ago, China's President, Xi Jinping, had floated the idea of "a Community of Common Destiny of Mankind", in the course of an address to the UN General Assembly (2015). In this, he outlined China's viewpoint on aspects such as economic globalization and the information technology revolution. The Belt and Road Initiative — which encompasses policy, infrastructure, trade, financial, and people-to-people connectivity, and, implicitly also, security ties — was an adjunct to it. The 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (2017), thereafter, gave its imprimatur, considering it essential to enable China to achieve pre-eminence status within the global order. Ever since, China has embarked on not only attaining economic and technological progress but also in defining how power would be determined in the new globalized era through devising new international norms in many emerging domains such as cyber, space, artificial intelligence, etc.

Setting the standards

China also set about rewriting international rules, premised not so much on governing where global goods are made, but on setting standards that define production, exchange and consumption. China Standards 2035 plans to set new standards with regard to the Industrial Internet of Things (IIoT) and define next generation information technology and biotechnology infrastructure. China is hoping, thereby, to reap the "early bird" advantage, even as other industrial nations struggle to recover from the devastation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Internationalization of Chinese standards would provide China a clear advantage by providing it an opportunity to set the standards in emerging industries such as high-end equipment manufacturing, unmanned vehicles, new materials, cybersecurity and the like. This would enable it gain a dominant position in the global economy.

It is important to understand the implications of all this, when shrill voices are being heard that the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to end China's ambitious power outreach, and that countries such as India would be the beneficiaries. The converse may actually turn out to be true, given that China has, for years, adopted a policy of gaining a strategic advantage not only in military matters but also in economic and technical areas. This must not be lost sight of.

India must plan well

Mounting an effective challenge to China at this time would require a well-conceived and carefully calibrated plan of action by India. As of now, this is not evident. India and China will certainly emerge from the pandemic more diminished than previously, but to varying extents. Each country will, no doubt, suffer an economic setback, but while both nations would be among the very few that would still have a positive growth rate in the near future (1% in the case of China and 1.8% in the case of India, according to the International Monetary Fund) — given the size of China's economy, it does not translate into a massive shift in India's favour.

Admittedly, there is a great deal of talk of companies demitting China at this time, partly due to the pandemic and partly due to other reasons. India would more than welcome some of the

entities exiting China, but there are no “green shoots” to suggest that such a shift has, or is, about to take place. Many alternatives are available to these companies and it would be excessively optimistic on our part to hold on to the belief that India is the only alternative choice for most of them.

Meanings of Difficult Words:

1. **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.
2. **unlikely** (adjective) – not likely, improbable, questionable, doubtful.
3. **ambitious** (adjective) – determined, committed, motivated, aspiring, hoping, striving.
4. **outreach** (noun) – the level of reaching out/ activity/effort; involvement.
5. **advent** (noun) – arrival, appearance, emergence.
6. **standing** (noun) – status, ranking, position, reputation, stature.
7. **at the heart of** (phrase) – the most important part of.
8. **contestation** (noun) – discussion, exchange of views, discourse.
9. **tectonic** (adjective) – very important, significant, substantial, considerable, big, major (change or shift or development that will have a strong, global impact all over the place).
10. **thanks to** (phrase) – as a result of, owing to, due to, because of.
11. **anticipate** (verb) – expect, foresee, predict.
12. **radical** (adjective) – unusual, uncommon, different, atypical, distinctive.
13. **phenomenon** (noun) – occurrence, event, happening.
14. **span** (noun) – period, time, duration.
15. **pronounced** (adjective) – noticeable, marked, strong, conspicuous, striking.
16. **unprecedented** (adjective) – not done or experienced before.
17. **seldom** (adverb) – hardly, rarely, almost never.
18. **by now** (phrase) – at the time in the near past.
19. **surpass** (verb) – be greater than, exceed, outdo/eclipse.
20. **with regard to** (phrase) – in respect of, concerning, with reference to, in connection with.
21. **distinguish** (verb) – differentiate, separate, set apart, make different.
22. **perhaps** (adverb) – maybe, possibly.
23. **forecast** (noun) – prediction, indication, projection, speculation, calculation (of future events or trends).
24. **shred** (verb) – tear something into small pieces.
25. **harrowing** (adjective) – (extremely) distressing, disturbing, upsetting.
26. **plight** (noun) – difficult situation, trouble/difficulty, quandary.
27. **dispossessed** (adjective) – deprived (of property), impoverished, homeless.
28. **trudge** (verb) – walk heavily, walk slowly (due to harsh conditions).
29. **sear** (verb) – distress, grieve, sadden, upset.
30. **conscience** (noun) – moral sense; morals, beliefs, values/ethics, principles.
31. **equate** (verb) – be equivalent, amount to, correspond.
32. **May Fourth Movement** (noun) – a landmark student protest in China against colonialism and imperialism. On May 4, 1919, students poured into the public spaces of Beijing and other cities, directing their rage against not only the Western powers and Japan, but against their own government, which had proven ineffective in resisting Western imperialism. Several thousand students, men and women gathered in front of Tiananmen Square (The Gate of Heavenly Peace), a massive entryway to the Forbidden City (a palace complex in central Beijing), which had been the home of China’s imperial rulers. Out of this search/protest emerged the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), formed in 1921.
33. **dissertation** (noun) – a long piece of writing on a particular subject (mostly written & submitted at the end of a

- doctorate); thesis, treatise, study; appraisal, assessment.
34. **catalyse** (verb) – to cause/accelerate some action/process.
 35. **persistent** (adjective) – continuous, non-stop, unending.
 36. **slide** (noun) – fall, decline, slump/tumble.
 37. **stimulus package** (noun) – an attempt by the government to boost economic growth and save their country from a financial crisis by involving tax cuts, lowering interest rates and increasing government spending.
 38. **amount to** (verb) – add up to, come to, be equivalent/equal to.
 39. **make out** (phrasal verb) – claim, assert, affirm, declare (publicly).
 40. **in the best of health** (phrase) – very healthy.
 41. **resort to** (verb) – use, utilize, turn to, have recourse to.
 42. **tranche** (noun) – part, section, portion (of something, particularly money).
 43. **the least** (determiner) – slightest, smallest, minimum, littlest.
 44. **perilous** (adjective) – dangerous, risky, precarious, insecure, life-threatening.
 45. **bound to** (adjective) – certain/sure, very likely, guaranteed.
 46. **forthcoming** (adjective) – impending, coming, approaching, nearing.
 47. **mosaic** (noun) – mixed bag, mixture/patchwork, collection of diverse elements.
 48. **critic** (noun) – observer, pundit, expert.
 49. **at best** (phrase) – simply, merely, only.
 50. **stimulus** (noun) – impetus, boost, incentive, fillip.
 51. **stressed** (adjective) – (of a sector) distressed, troubled, suffering (in debt).
 52. **non-banking financial company (NBFC)** (noun) – a company incorporated under the Companies Act 2013 or 1956 which is engaged in the business of loans and advances, acquisition of stocks, equities, debt etc issued by the government or any local authority. The main objective of this type of a company is to accept deposits under any scheme or manner.
 53. **inopportune** (adjective) – inappropriate, inconvenient, unfavourable, disadvantageous.
 54. **provision** (noun) – supplying, providing, giving.
 55. **subsidy** (noun) – also called as subvention; a financial contribution granted to help an industry or business, mostly given by a government, in order to keep the price of service/goods at a low level.
 56. **interest subvention** (noun) – it means a subsidy offered on interest rates.
 57. **patchwork** (noun) – mixture, mixed bag, collection of elements.
 58. **disjointed** (adjective) – disordered, mixed up, fragmented.
 59. **throw open** (phrasal verb) – make something accessible/attainable suddenly & fully.
 60. **open up** (phrasal verb) – make available (to create/start developing new opportunities).
 61. **provisions** (noun) – arrangements, resources.
 62. **procurement** (noun) – collection, acquiring, purchase.
 63. **deliberate** (adjective) – carefully calculated, thought-out, measured; intentional, purposeful.
 64. **indeed** (adverb) – in fact, actually, undeniably.
 65. **calibrated** (adjective) – carefully assessed/analysed.
 66. **extant** (adjective) – present, existent, existing.
 67. **circumstance** (noun) – situation, conditions, state of affairs.
 68. **inevitable** (adjective) – unavoidable, sure to happen, unpreventable.
 69. **stem from** (phrasal verb) – originate from, arise/come from, emanate from.
 70. **progression** (noun) – development, progress, advancement.
 71. **conceive** (verb) – think up, devise, originate.
 72. **worthwhile** (adjective) – valuable, helpful, useful.
 73. **underscore** (verb) – underline, emphasize, highlight.
 74. **float** (verb) – suggest, put forward, propose (an idea).
 75. **in the course of** (phrase) – during (the particular period/activity).

76. **address** (noun) – speak, talk, discourse.
77. **globalisation** (noun) – the process of making the trade of goods and services equivalent in all nations (Courtesy: VOA Learning English).
78. **encompass** (verb) – include, subsume, incorporate.
79. **implicitly** (adverb) – indirectly, tacitly, in a implied/hinted way.
80. **adjunct** (noun) – supplement, addition, extra, complement.
81. **imprimatur** (noun) – authorization, approval, seal of approval, endorsement.
82. **pre-eminence** (noun) – superiority, supremacy, predominance.
83. **world/global order** (noun) – an international-relations term describing the distribution of power among world powers.
84. **embark on** (phrasal verb) – start, begin, initiate/commence.
85. **artificial intelligence (AI)** (noun) – an area of computer science that deals with giving machines the ability to seem like they have human intelligence (Courtesy: VOA Learning English).
86. **set about** (phrasal verb) – begin something with full of energy or determination.
87. **premise on** (verb) – base on (something).
88. **internet of things** (noun) – IoT is simply the network of interconnected things/ devices which are embedded with sensors, software, network connectivity and necessary electronics that enables them to collect and exchange data making them responsive.
89. **reap** (verb) – receive, obtain, realize; get.
90. **early bird** (phrase as modifier) – the earlier you enter/act/arrive, the more chances you have to win/get something.
91. **devastation** (noun) – destruction, damage, havoc/wreckage.
92. **internationalisation** (noun) – the action/ process of making something to become international.
93. **cybersecurity** (noun) – the protection of internet-connected systems, including hardware, software and data, from cyber attacks.
94. **the like** (noun) – equivalent (things).
95. **implications** (noun) – consequence/outcome, ramification, repercussion.
96. **shrill** (adjective) – high-pitched, strident, loud, piercing.
97. **converse** (noun) – opposite, reverse, contrary.
98. **turn out** (phrasal verb) – transpire, emerge; happen/occur.
99. **given** (preposition) – considering, taking into account, bearing in mind.
100. **lose sight of** (phrase) – pay no attention to, fail to consider, be lax about.
101. **mount** (verb) – increase, grow, escalate.
102. **well-conceived** (adjective) – well thought out.
103. **setback** (noun) – problem, difficulty, issue.
104. **admittedly** (adverb) – actually, truly/ verily, indeed.
105. **demit** (verb) – get out of, leave, pull out of.
106. **green shoots** (noun) – signs of economic recovery or positive data (during an economic slowdown/recession).
107. **excessively** (adverb) – unduly, unnecessarily, unreasonably.
108. **optimistic** (adjective) – positive, confident, hopeful.
109. **hold on to** (phrasal verb) – keep, retain, keep possession of, not give away.