

## THE SWARM: ON LOCUST ATTACK

### The locusts in western parts add a new dimension to other disasters facing India

Just last week, eastern India was battered by one of the most powerful cyclones in decades and now, even as hundreds of lives are lost every day to the coronavirus, another danger lurks on the nation's west. A burgeoning locust swarm in Rajasthan, Gujarat and even parts of Madhya Pradesh threatens to amplify into an agrarian disaster. The desert locust, as a species, is the bane of agriculture. Monitoring and tackling periodic outbreaks of the marauding insects are among the objectives of the Locust Warning Organization (LWO) in Jodhpur. There were 13 locust upsurges from 1964 to 1997, and after 2010 there was "no large scale breeding" reported. Once a significant outbreak starts, it lasts for about two years, and then there is a quietus for about eight years. LWO officials say that the swarm building up is potentially the "worst in decades".

It is a testimony to its devastating potential that an arcane piece of legislation, The East Punjab Agricultural Pests, Diseases and Noxious Weeds Act, 1949, has a provision whereby a District Collector can "...call upon any male person not below the age of 14 years resident in the district to render all possible assistance ..." and there is potential imprisonment for failure to abide by the law. Antiquated as it may sound, it is a reminder that humanity's oldest blights — plague, pestilence — will never truly be eliminated. The breeding locusts which threaten farming are an indirect fallout of the warming Indian Ocean, as some meteorologists suggest. Last year, there were fears that the monsoon may fall short because of an El Niño, or warming of the Equatorial Pacific. However there was an extreme flip. By July it was evident that a positive Indian Ocean Dipole, or relatively higher temperature in the western Indian Ocean, was in the works. This led to record-breaking rainfall in India — then a cause for cheer — as well as in eastern Africa. But moist African deserts precipitated locust breeding and favourable rain-bearing winds aided their transport towards India. On the other hand, coronavirus quarantines meant that routine coordination activities involving India, Pakistan and Afghanistan regarding spraying pesticides were halted. While it is some comfort that there is now limited standing crop in India, forecasts are for good rains in Rajasthan, and, paradoxically, conducive conditions for locust breeding during the sowing season. A less highlighted aspect of global warming is that it may link disparate disasters — floods, pandemics and pestilence — amplifying the potency of each. Improved science and technology is only making it clearer that man's follies transcend borders. This makes it necessary to abandon any territorial blame game and focus on policies that will ensure an equitable, sustainable future.

#### Meanings of Difficult Words :

- ❖ **swarm** (noun) – a large group of flying insects.
- ❖ **locust** (noun) – locusts are crop-eating insects (short-horned grasshoppers) that travel in large swarms. The desert locust is a species of locust and it is considered the most destructive migratory pest in the world and a single swarm covering 1 square kilometre can contain up to 80 million locusts. The desert locusts are feeding and breeding in agricultural fields.
- ❖ **dimension** (noun) – aspect, feature, side, element.
- ❖ **batter** (verb) – damage, spoil, impair/ruin.
- ❖ **decade** (noun) – a period of ten years.
- ❖ **lurk** (verb) – be remain hidden, but poses as a danger; wait quietly to ambush (attack) something.
- ❖ **burgeoning** (adjective) – growing, increasing, expanding, mushrooming rapidly.
- ❖ **amplify** (verb) – intensify, magnify/raise, escalate.
- ❖ **agrarian** (adjective) – relating to cultivating/farming.
- ❖ **species** (noun) – a group/breed/family of living organisms (animals & plants) with the individual having the same quality & can breed.
- ❖ **bane** (noun) – burden, curse, scourge.
- ❖ **periodic** (adjective) – regular, periodical, recurrent, recurring.
- ❖ **outbreak** (noun) – sudden appearance /occurrence, outburst, flare-up.
- ❖ **marauding** (adjective) – devastating; to go around & cause damage; It generally means raiding, looting, hunting (to roam

- around to steal goods & cause damage to the people.
- ❖ **objective** (noun) – aim, intention, purpose.
  - ❖ **upsurge** (noun) – sudden increase or rise of something.
  - ❖ **breeding** (noun) – reproduction, reproducing, multiplying.
  - ❖ **last** (verb) – continue, go on, remain, exist.
  - ❖ **quietus** (noun) – (something that has a peaceful) conclusion/end/dissolution.
  - ❖ **building up** (noun) – development, formation, beginning/starting.
  - ❖ **potentially** (adverb) – possibly, probably, conceivably.
  - ❖ **testimony** (noun) – evidence, proof, attestation/witness.
  - ❖ **devastating** (adjective) – destructive, ruinous, disastrous, catastrophic.
  - ❖ **potential** (noun) – possibilities, potentiality, capability.
  - ❖ **arcane** (adjective) – mysterious, secret, hidden, concealed, covert.
  - ❖ **noxious** (adjective) – harmful, dangerous, damaging, destructive.
  - ❖ **weed** (noun) – an unwanted & valueless plant growing wild in fields of crops/plants and affecting the growth of cultivated crops/plants.
  - ❖ **provision** (noun) – term, clause, requirement/ condition.
  - ❖ **whereby** (adverb) – by which.
  - ❖ **call upon** (phrasal verb) – ask formally, demand (to do something).
  - ❖ **render** (verb) – give, provide, furnish.
  - ❖ **imprisonment** (noun) – incarceration, custody, confinement.
  - ❖ **abide by** (verb) – conform to, adhere to, comply with.
  - ❖ **antiquated** (adjective) – outdated, old-fashioned, obsolete.
  - ❖ **sound** (verb) – seem, appear, look.
  - ❖ **humanity** (noun) – humankind, the human race, people.
  - ❖ **blight** (noun) – affliction, scourge, bane, curse.
  - ❖ **plague** (noun) – a contagious disease.
  - ❖ **pestilence** (noun) – deadly epidemic/pandemic disease.
  - ❖ **fallout** (noun) – adverse results; after-effects, repercussions.
  - ❖ **meteorologist** (noun) – weatherman, weather forecaster.
  - ❖ **fall short of** (phrase) – be deficient, be inadequate, be insufficient.
  - ❖ **El Nino** (noun) – abnormal warming (of the Equatorial East of the Pacific that lies closer to the Americas). **La Niña** means abnormal cooling.
  - ❖ **flip** (noun) – a somersault (turning over 360 deg) in the air.
  - ❖ **Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD)** (noun) – it is defined by the difference in the sea surface temperature between the two equatorial areas of the Indian Ocean – a western pole near the Arabian Sea (in western Indian Ocean) and an eastern pole closer to the Bay of Bengal (in eastern Indian Ocean). The IOD affects the climate of Southeast Asia, Australia and other countries across the Indian Ocean.
  - ❖ **relatively** (adverb) – comparatively, to a certain extent, somewhat.
  - ❖ **in the works** (phrase) – ongoing, happening, occurring.
  - ❖ **cause for cheer** (phrase) – reason to be cheerful.
  - ❖ **moist** (adjective) – humid, damp, wet, rainy.
  - ❖ **precipitate** (verb) – bring about, cause something (suddenly).
  - ❖ **rain-bearing** (adjective) – (of air) bringing rain.
  - ❖ **aid** (verb) – help, assist, support.
  - ❖ **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.
  - ❖ **halt** (verb) – stop, end, cease, terminate.
  - ❖ **standing crop** (noun) – a growing & uncut crop. (In ecology, standing crop is the total amount of biomass (living matter/ living material) present in an ecosystem at a particular time).
  - ❖ **paradoxically** (adverb) – contradictorily, inconsistently, incongruously.

- ❖ **conductive** (adjective) – helpful, favourable, beneficial/advantageous.
  - ❖ **sowing** (noun) – an act of seeding a plant or crop.
  - ❖ **highlight** (verb) – underline, underscore, emphasize, call attention to.
  - ❖ **global warming** (noun) – it is the unusually rapid increase in Earth’s average surface temperature over the past century primarily due to the greenhouse gases released as people burn fossil fuels.
  - ❖ **disparate** (adjective) – contrasting, different, dissimilar.
  - ❖ **pandemic** (noun) – the worldwide spread of a new disease; The illness spreads
  - ❖ **potency** (noun) – strength, power.
  - ❖ **folly** (noun) – foolishness, stupidity, madness, irresponsibility, thoughtlessness.
  - ❖ **transcend** (verb) – go beyond, rise above, cut across.
  - ❖ **territorial** (adjective) – localized, zonal.
  - ❖ **equitable** (adjective) – fair, impartial.
  - ❖ **sustainable** (adjective) – reasonable, sensible, well founded (without disturbing the balance of nature and then without exhausting all of natural resources).
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## RISING TIDE: ON RETURN OF PROTESTS IN HONG KONG

### China’s effort to tighten grip on Hong Kong with tough laws may not help its cause

Protests and violence returned to Hong Kong on May 24. In scenes that became all-too-familiar through much of last year, police used water cannons, tear gas, and pepper spray, as a protest march descended into clashes between protesters and riot police. The weekend’s march had originally been planned ahead of a debate in Hong Kong’s Legislative Council (LegCo) on a new national anthem bill, which would punish anyone who insulted China’s anthem with up to three years in prison. The protest assumed significance when two days before the march, China’s central government stunned Hong Kong’s pro-democracy parties by tabling a new national security bill, as the National People’s Congress met in Beijing. The bill, expected to be passed when the NPC’s annual session ends on Thursday, urges Hong Kong’s legislature to pass national security laws “as soon as possible”. Else, the bill leaves open the possibility that Beijing could bypass LegCo, declaring that the NPC is “authorized to draft laws” on security for Hong Kong. What has concerned pro-democracy activists in Hong Kong is a new provision for China’s national security organs to “set up institutions” in the Special Administrative Region.

Under the Basic Law that has governed Hong Kong since 1997, the SAR has a high degree of autonomy “to enjoy executive, legislative and independent judicial power, including that of final adjudication”; only defence and foreign affairs are to be handled by Beijing. Article 23 of the law requires Hong Kong to pass national security legislation, but the law makes clear it is Hong Kong’s legislature that enjoys the power to make and repeal laws — the bedrock of the “one country, two systems” model. In 2003, a national security bill allowing the shutting down of seditious newspapers and carrying out warrantless searches was withdrawn after protests. Beijing now argues that last year’s protests, blamed on “external forces”, underlined the need for a new law to curb “acts of secession and subversion”. The timing of the move may reveal its motivations. Hong Kong’s legislative elections are in September and the pro-Beijing camp fears losing control of LegCo, even if its unusual rules have stacked it with pro-Beijing lawmakers. Only half of the 70 seats are directly elected; the rest are nominated. Yet such is the rising tide of support for pro-democracy parties that Beijing worries it could lose the two-thirds majority needed for any amendments to the Basic Law. The pro-democracy camp swept November’s district council elections, seen as a referendum on the youth-driven protests. A record 70% turnout won the pro-democracy candidates 390 of 452 seats. The elections demonstrated that public support for full democracy is growing. The new piece of legislation is aimed at tightening Beijing’s grip over Hong Kong, but it may well end up having the opposite effect. Hong Kong cannot be won without its people.

**Meanings of Difficult Words :**

- ❖ **tide** (noun) – movement; trend, tendency, course of events.
- ❖ **grip** (noun) – control, power, hold.
- ❖ **cause** (noun) – motive, purpose.
- ❖ **all-too** (phrase) – used to highlight something which is (much) more than expected.
- ❖ **descend** (verb) – worsen, get worse.
- ❖ **The National Anthem Bill** (noun) – In 2017, China's top legislative body – the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPCSC) – adopted the National Anthem Bill which makes insulting "March of the Volunteers" a crime. It requires China's "March of the Volunteers" to be taught in schools and sung by organisations, and imposes jail terms up to three years or fines on those who disrespect it. (The "March of the Volunteers" is the national anthem of the People's Republic of China).
- ❖ **assume** (verb) – acquire, take on, adopt, come to have.
- ❖ **significance** (noun) – seriousness, importance.
- ❖ **stun** (verb) – shock, stagger, astound.
- ❖ **table** (verb) – submit, put forward, introduce.
- ❖ **National Security Bill (for Hong Kong)** (noun) – a draft by the Chinese Legislature under which it will write a new national security law for Hong Kong that would prohibit "acts of political secession (separation from a federation), subversion (overthrow/undermining government), sedition (illegal rebellion against government) that seriously threaten national security and foreign intervention".
- ❖ **urge** (verb) – try to persuade, encourage, push, pressure.
- ❖ **leave open the possibility of** (phrase) – to allow for the possibility of something.
- ❖ **bypass** (verb) – avoid, keep out of, dodge, circumvent, get round.
- ❖ **authorise** (verb) – approve, endorse, permit/allow.
- ❖ **provision** (noun) – term, clause, requirement/condition.
- ❖ **organ** (noun) – department, organization.
- ❖ **set up** (phrasal verb) – establish, start, begin.
- ❖ **Special Administrative Region** (noun) – a region in China that has a high level of autonomy. There are two SAR's in China, Hong Kong and Macau.
- ❖ **Basic Law (Hong Kong)** (noun) – The "one country, two systems" principle is enshrined in a document called the *Basic Law – Hong Kong's* mini constitution. That came into effect on 1 July 1997, the day British rule ended and the territory was returned to China. That agreement is only valid for 50 years.
- ❖ **autonomy** (noun) – self-rule, independence, freedom.
- ❖ **the executive** (noun) – the executive is a branch of government which enforces the law as written by the legislature and interpreted by the judiciary.
- ❖ **adjudication** (noun) – an official judgement.
- ❖ **make clear** (phrase) – explain, clarify, elucidate.
- ❖ **repeal** (verb) – revoke, abrogate, cancel/void.
- ❖ **bedrock** (noun) – core, basis/base, foundation.
- ❖ **shutdown** (noun) – closure of a (complete) system; closing down, winding up.
- ❖ **sedition** (adjective) – provocative, agitational; dissident/insurgent.
- ❖ **carry out** (phrasal verb) – conduct, perform, execute.
- ❖ **warrantless** (adjective) – without legal authorization.
- ❖ **underline** (verb) – underscore, emphasize, highlight.
- ❖ **stack** (verb) – arrange (to gain an unfair advantage).
- ❖ **swept** past participle of **sweep** (verb) – to win a contest completely.
- ❖ **referendum** (noun) – public vote; a direct vote in which people cast ballots to decide on a specific issue or policy.
- ❖ **turnout** (noun) – attendance, output.
- ❖ **end up** (phrasal verb) – finish up, turn up, come (to an end).