

The Resurgent India

A Monthly National Review

April 2021



“Let us all work for the Greatness of India.”

– The Mother

The Resurgent India English monthly published and printed by Smt. Suman Sharma on behalf of The Resurgent India Trust Published at C/o J. N. Socketed Cement Pipes Pvt. Ltd., Village Bhamraula Post Bagwara, Kichha Road, Rudrapur (U.S Nagar)

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Printed at : Priyanka Printing Press, Hotel Krish Building, Janta Inter College Road, Udham Nagar, Rudrapur, Uttarakhand

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Successful Future

(Full of Promise and Joyful Surprises)

Botanical name: Gaillardia Pulchella

Common name: Indian blanket, Blanket flower, Fire-wheels

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A DECLARATION

We do not fight against any creed, any religion.

We do not fight against any form of government.

We do not fight against any social class.

We do not fight against any nation or civilisation.

We are fighting division, unconsciousness, ignorance, inertia and falsehood.

We are endeavouring to establish upon earth union, knowledge, consciousness, Truth, and we fight whatever opposes the advent of this new creation of Light, Peace, Truth and Love.

— The Mother

(Collected works of the Mother, Vol. 13, pp. 124-25)

THE SECOND WAVE OF COVID19 IN INDIA

“Medical Science has been more a curse to mankind than a blessing. It has broken the force of epidemics and unveiled a marvellous surgery; but, also, it has weakened the natural health of man and multiplied individual diseases; it has implanted fear and dependence in the mind and body; it has taught our health to repose not on natural soundness but a rickety and distasteful crutch compact from the mineral and vegetable kingdoms” – Sri Aurobindo (CWSA 12: 475).

Sri Aurobindo’s words perfectly capture the health crisis that is presently facing India and the world – especially India. India is going through a massive second wave of COVID19 coronavirus, and the failure – and perversity – of the commercial medical system stands more exposed than ever before.

The positivity rate of infections and the daily number of cases are at all-time high, as are the total number of deaths. Unlike the last year’s first wave of the virus, this wave is marked by the chaos of India’s healthcare system buckling under the pressure of patients and shortage of oxygen, ventilators and beds. Graveyards across various states are running out of cremation capacity. Psychologically, even though the government has resolutely refrained from announcing a lockdown, yet people are exhibiting great fear.

In the midst of all this, politics galore is also continuing. Petty politics and fake news is rampant. International media has also once again found its calling in pronouncing emphatic doomsday scenarios for India and bashing Narendra Modi,

conveniently ignoring the fact that second wave in developed countries like USA and UK were much worse despite the fact that they had a stringent lockdown going on.

In this unfolding scenario, the most critical point driven home – being missed by many – is that such collective health disasters are increasingly becoming commonplace and are likely to increase in the future. **The public and private healthcare systems, based on a foundation of utilitarianism, are being thoroughly exposed, and are crumbling – people who helplessly turn to them are increasingly disappointed and devastated by the resulting financial ruin and then the loss of the lives of their dear ones. Given the rising anti-microbial resistance¹ of our bodies, worsened lifestyles and the general mental and physical degradation, our collective capacity to deal with such viruses is severely hampered.** In this struggle for survival, it is now only the strengthening of body's natural defense in a fear-free mind that can help us in coping with such challenges.

MAPPING INDIA'S SECOND WAVE

India witnessed the spread of COVID19 virus in March 2020. The response of the government at the time was to go into a devastating and failed lockdown that not only induced fear, but also failed to curb the spread of the virus and broke the economy. The first wave of COVID19 took its own course and India's COVID19 cases peaked in mid-September 2020 at around 93,000 daily new cases and 5.2 million total cases.

¹ Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) occurs when bacteria, viruses, fungi and parasites change over time and no longer respond to medicines making infections harder to treat and increasing the risk of disease spread, severe illness and death (WHO, 2020).

Ever since then, India's graph of daily new cases has been flattening and coming down, with very minor variations.

However, from the end of February 2021 and especially since the first week of March, India's cases started picking up pace and by the end of March, they began to accelerate at an extremely sharp pace. Currently, India has more than 3 lakh daily new cases, and a daily death toll between 3000-4000 people.

The second wave has seen an unprecedented rise in cases, number of deaths as well as overwhelming of India's health infrastructure, due to issues like oxygen shortage. The mutated strain of the virus – which is undergoing several mutations as it travels through India's population – is becoming more infectious with every mutation.

RISE IN CASES AND VACCINATIONS

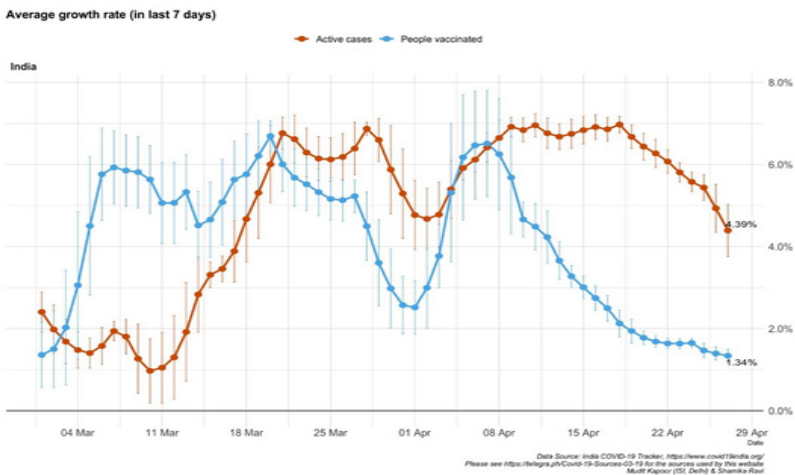
India's second wave has coincided with rise in vaccinations in the country. Two vaccines (manufactured in India) have been administered till now viz. Serum Institute's Covishield and Bharat Biotech's Covaxin. Recently, India gave approval to Russia's Sputnik vaccine too. India started vaccinations between January-February 2021.

In countries like Israel, where more than 50% of the population has been vaccinated, the case-load has drastically fallen. In US as well, the case-load is falling as the vaccinations are rising. The case of Russia is also similar.

In India, the rate of vaccination and coverage is still low (relative to the population). During trials, most COVID19 vaccines, world over, have shown efficacy ranging between 60% and 95%, but none offers 100% protection against the

virus.

Data from India shows that 0.02% of people contracted the virus after the first dose of Covishield vaccine, while 0.04% people contracted the virus after first dose of Covaxin vaccine. After second dose, 0.03% people contracted the virus in case of Covishield vaccine and 0.04% contracted it in case of Covaxin.



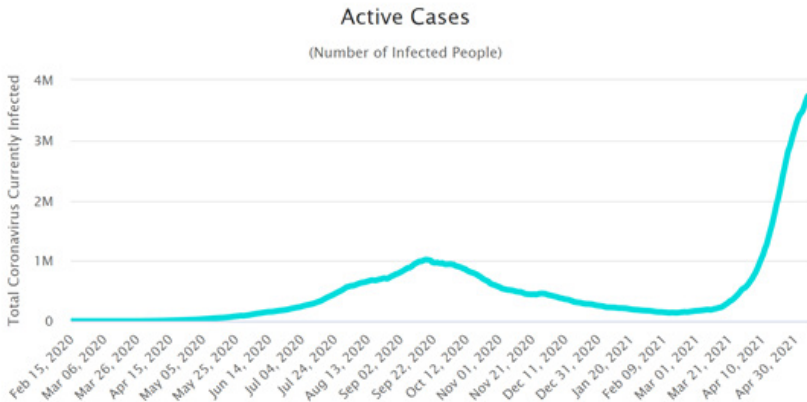
Source: Ravi (2021)

While the reported rate of infection after vaccinations is certainly low, what is more important is that **vaccines do not provide full protection against the virus**. This means that **as the number of vaccinated people rise, they may become asymptomatic carriers of the virus, transmitting it to others**. This may be one of the reasons contributing to the sudden spike in infections after the vaccinations started. However, whether vaccinations led to an increase

in cases cannot be established with certainty.

CURRENT SPREAD TRENDS:

The growth in active cases began to pick up pace after February. As of March 1st, the average daily rate of increase in cases (7-day average) was 2.4%. It has sharply accelerated since then. By March 20th, the average daily rate of increase in cases had gone up to 5.3%, and within the next eight days it was 6.4%. It began to decline in late April, going from 5.6% on April 26th to 3.5% on April 30th.



Source: World-o-meters

Due to decrease in growth rate of cases, India's graph of active cases has now begun to come down. However, commensurately, the rate of vaccination has also come down. As of May 3rd, India's average daily rate of vaccination is 0.14 per 100 people (7-day average). The share of India's population that is fully vaccinated (both doses) is 2.1%, as of now.

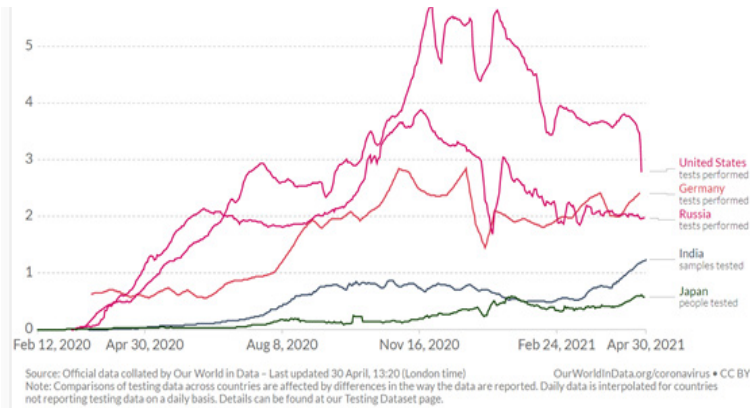
COMPARISON WITH OTHER COUNTRIES:

India presently has 13,316 cases per million and is ranked 78th in the world. Compared to India, US has 97,373 cases per million, while various other countries are also significantly ahead.

In terms of daily new confirmed cases per million people, India has 233.06 per million daily new cases. Argentina, Sweden and Turkey still have some of the highest daily new cases per million at 527.45, 540.42 and 612.36 per million, respectively, although their curves are either gradually flattening or going down.

It is important to note that testing rate is lower in India, as compared to various other countries. As of April 30th, India's testing rate was 1.24 tests per thousand people. In Canada, it is 3.43 tests per thousand people, in US it is 2.79 tests per thousand, although US's daily testing graph is sharply dipping. In India, daily testing is rapidly rising.

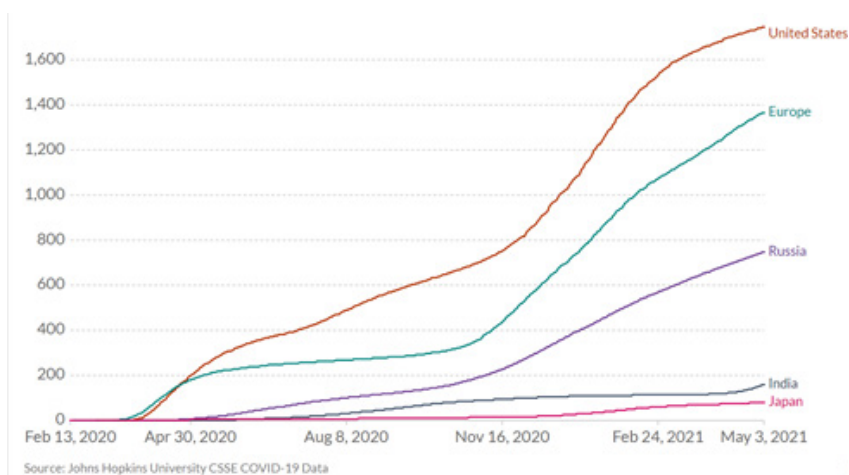
The graph below shows the daily number of tests done by select countries, per thousand people. As can be seen, testing rate of US and Japan has come down:



The US's testing has sharply come down, commensurate with their decline in cases. It is also evident that Japan has even lower testing rate than India.

Coming to the death rate, based on official reporting, India has a lower death rate vis-à-vis population than many other countries. India's total deaths per million is 161.1.

The graph below shows the cumulative deaths per million of select countries:



India's cumulative deaths per million continue to be lower than US, Russia and Europe.

With India's rate of infections going down, the situation is likely to stabilize further in the coming weeks.

THE KEY TAKEAWAY

Despite the relatively stable indicators of virus spread relative to India's population, the explosion in absolute numbers has formed an overall grim picture for the country.

With India's daily rise in absolute numbers is among the highest in the world, combined with oxygen crisis along with the mutated virus strain this time, the fear among people has been rampant. This has worsened the spread of the virus, as any kind of fear or anxiety naturally lowers the immunity of the body and leads to complications such as fall in oxygen levels.

The spread of this fear has been aided in no small measure by the manipulations of the health and media experts of the country. The undulated health crisis in the country has exposed the broken state of health sector under the present commercial system and brought home the fact that building the body's natural immunity is the only protection against the onslaught of such viruses, which are likely to intensify in the future.

But, in the present age of medical science and its exploits, we are far removed from our own natural immunity. As Sri Aurobindo says, **“Distrust of the curative power within us was our physical fall from Paradise. Medical Science and a bad heredity are the two angels of God who stand at the gates to forbid our return and reentry.”** (CWSA 12:477)

A DEEP ROT IN HEALTHCARE:

Healthcare is one area that has, in the recent years, become highly commercialized the world over. It inextricably affects questions of not only life and death, but also of our psychology and well-being. This sector has now become an unscrupulous business, where cold calculations and deception determine the running of the major part of this industry. Ironically, this worsening of the healthcare system has proceeded in tandem with the rise in advanced medical

technologies and procedures. In recent times, nowhere has this been more evident than in the case of the trajectory of the COVID19 pandemic in India.

The pandemic has revealed the distinct unholy nexus between hospitals, pharmacies and medical companies and bureaucracy that exploit every crisis to the hilt. Presently, the country has run out of oxygen, in no small part due to logistical and distributional problems. In various places (like Noida in UP), up to 200 beds in several hospitals were vacated after it was found that they had forcibly admitted non-critical patients. In many cases, it has emerged that hospitals are forcibly admitting patients who simply have symptoms and then later claiming that they have run out of bed capacity. UP government even warned that action will be taken against hospitals that raise false alarm about oxygen in order to spread fear so that they may charge very high fees from frightened well to do patients.

Other practices of the various pharmacies and hospitals have also been exposed. In many cases, despite having a stock of required drugs (like Remdesivir), hospitals often claim that they do not have it and force the patients to initially run from pillar to post and then buy them through the medical lobby's extended networks in lakhs of rupees. Individual care in some hospitals has started costing a lot which after much bargaining is reduced somewhat. The deaths of admitted patients go unexplained – much like during the last year. There is no accountability for what medicines and procedures are being administered and why.

The situation has come to such a stage that people are finally realizing that it has become a folly to visit hospitals. In

addition, there is also the aspect of suspect political intentions of the commercial medical lobbies. The Modi government is no great friend of the medical fraternity, having promoted in the past practices like Homeopathy, Ayurveda and Yoga (even for coronavirus) at an official level through various concrete initiatives, policies and programmes, even to the unprecedented extent of allowing Ayurvedic practitioners to perform surgeries under supervision. **These and other blows to the allopathic medical lobby have pitted the Indian Medical Association against the present government, with lakhs of doctors going on strike just a few months back.** Therefore, this antagonism and the political embroiling of the medical sector has exposed it even further. An IMA Vice-President referred to PM Modi as a ‘super-spreader’ of the virus recently, thereby betraying their own unprofessional biases.

A single virus has badly exposed the entire system, preying on the fear of the people. It is this fear and the deep-rooted extremes of commercialism that has made the situation appear much worse than it actually is, so much so that people are now generally afraid of going to the hospitals.

THE ONLY WAY OUT:

“The spirit within us is the only all-efficient doctor and submission of the body to it the one true panacea.” – Sri Aurobindo (CWSA 12, p. 476).

Under such conditions – which are much worse than the information coming out of the opaque system – people will gradually grasp that they are essentially on their own. **In the coming times, with various environmental and**

technological changes, the nature and incidence of such viruses is likely to increase. Body's resistance to antibiotics is already demonstrated, and the turn towards alternative treatment methods other than modern medicine may see a wider acceptance. This trend is already visible in the case of the present virus, where people are heavily relying on home remedies that have been found to be effective, world over. The exports of ingredients required for such remedies (such as turmeric and whole spices) from India has also increased since last year.

The coming times portend a struggle for survival in which only the body's natural defence can truly help, where remedies and concepts of modern medical sector are being proven as ineffective and the trust in modern medicine is on a wane. It is incorrect to assume that government intervention in public health can deal with issues beyond the mere superficial ones. At the most such intervention can only improve the logistics and management, but cannot guarantee quality of treatment or honesty of doctors or root out the worsening commercial spirit – the most impotent case of dishonesty. The deep-rooted failures can only be dealt with by reducing reliance on the corrupted modern medicine with its inability to deal with major emerging diseases and problems in the human body.

And, even this is not absolute; for, health is linked inevitably to psychology, which, in turn, is shaped by our consciousness. Mechanically building body's immunity may help to some extent but will not go very far without a corresponding change of consciousness. Thus, despite the advancement of science and technology, the crushing

force of circumstances seems to be taking us towards a time where much of this advancement becomes either useless or dangerous in the hands of a deteriorated consciousness. In the case of health, as Sri Aurobindo says, “The healthiest ages of mankind were those in which there were the fewest material remedies.” (CWSA 12: 475)

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TOWARDS AN ATMANIRBHAR BHARAT IN DEFENCE

Amongst the most important aspects constitutive of the power of the modern nation-state are its defensive and offensive capabilities. With the advancement in science and technology and with a changing, increasingly globalizing world order, this domain has grown into a burgeoning, professionalized industry. In the post-Industrial age, the rise in arms trade and the private expansion into the domain of defence have made commercial defence exchanges one of the core issues in making and unmaking alliances among countries.

India, in particular, being the second-largest importer of arms after Saudi Arabia, is a critical player in this world of global defence exchanges. It is now seriously attempting to indigenize its defence production as it realizes that the excessive dependence on other countries for its defence requirements is detrimental to its security and growth. However, the challenges of reforming a burgeoning defence sector – constituting one of the most serpentine and tricky sectors in India – overwhelmed by the bureaucratic obstructionism, are immense.

However, Modi government's 'Make in India' which started in 2014 and recently launched 'Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan' in 2020 have identified defence as one of the core sectors for accelerating domestic production. It is envisaged that India not only becomes self-reliant but also a net exporter of defence products by 2025.

DEFENCE SECTOR IN INDIA: A CHEQUERED TRAJECTORY THE POST-INDEPENDENCE COMPLACENCY

In the post-Independence period, India inherited a decent defence production base consisting of 18 ordnance factories, Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) and Mazagon Docks Limited (MDL) from the British. However, the Indian government failed to further build-up on it. India's domestic manufacturing capability remained severely hampered, especially for the first four decades after Independence.

The first few decades after the independence were marked by the dependence on legacy systems, limited domestic manufacturing by Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) and occasional procurement. In line with the socialistic thinking of the time, these early, mostly congress led, governments would often juxtapose defence allocation and people's welfare, and prioritize the latter. After the 1962 war, the then finance minister told the Parliament that it would not be prudent, "to provide for the paramount claims of defence by sacrificing the claims of development", and after the 1965 war, the Parliament was told that, "It has always been our policy to restrict expenditure on defence to the maximum extent possible so as to conserve all possible sources for securing the well-being of our people" (Cowshish, 2018). Thus, outside of the public sector, defence manufacturing could not take off.

As India's reliance on, and friendship with, the former Soviet Union grew stronger during the Cold War era, especially after the signing the Indo-Soviet Friendship Treaty in 1971, the indigenous manufacturing – an important part of Nehru's vision – saw increasing dilution. **While Soviet**

Union was able to fulfill India's defence requirements and granted the latter preferred defence products, making India's a large defence industry, yet, this arrangement disincentivized India from seriously pursuing indigenous manufacturing. For, licensed production does not involve substantial technological transfer and thus, does not set ground for indigenous production in true sense.

Defence Offsets and their Dilemmas

Defence Offsets are compensations that a buyer seeks from a seller for the purchase of goods/services. More than 130 nations incorporate offsets as a part of their defence imports. Offsets can be direct or indirect. Direct offsets on a product import can take many forms viz. co-production, component production, licensed production, FDI etc., while indirect offsets are those where benefits accrue in another sector of the economy. Besides direct offsets, India also has a more dominant form of hybrid offsets viz. compensation on defence import whose benefits may accrue on another defence product/equipment.

Besides other benefits, **offsets are critical to indigenous manufacturing as they may facilitate transfer of technological know-how, production processes etc. that may facilitate domestic production.** However, in practical, it doesn't quite work that way. **Offsets have a devious and complex history, with much scope of discretion, manipulation etc., thereby reducing their efficiency and prolonging the time for approvals.**

After the collapse of Soviet Union in 1991, the Indian

defence industry was in a serious problem. Not only did India not have any major partners other than the Soviet Union to meet its defence requirements, but also the entire supply chain of spare parts, designs under construction for indigenous products and servicing of defence products got hampered due to predominantly Soviet dependence.

POST-1991 INDIA'S RETHINK ON DEFENCE SECTOR

After the collapse of USSR, in 1991, the idea of self-reliance in defence production gained some acceptance. Accordingly, then a committee led by APJ Abdul Kalam (in 1992) advocated increasing the share of procurement from the indigenous sources from 30 per cent in 1992-93 to 70 per cent by 2005. However, the recommendations of this committee lay in cold storage until the Kargil War in 1999

A Robust Planning Process Sans Domestic Manufacturers:

Unlike the struggling nature of defence manufacturing, defence acquisitions have been a robust process, and is among the best planning processes in the world. India's import process is conducted with reference to a three-phase time period criterion viz. 15-year Long Term Integrated Perspective Plan (LTIPP), five-year Services Capital Acquisition Plan (SCAP) and two-year roll-on Annual Acquisition Plan (AAP). The focus is on acquiring the best possible defence equipment in the world. In this process, there is little compromise, and, both, DRDO and domestic manufacturers are ignored, for the sake of maximizing efficiency in national security objectives. The government has done little to incentivize domestic manufacturers to participate in this process.

shook us out of our stupor².

Post Kargil War, subsequently, the sector was opened to the private sector and even Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) was permitted in it up to 26 percent. Then in 2002, the first ever Defence Procurement Procedure (DPP) – which sought to streamline the process of defence procurement – was belatedly outlined. In 2005, India introduced the Defence Offset Policy in its DPP. Afterwards, in 2011, the Defence Production Policy was outlined.

Though the defence offsets in-principle must boost indigenous production, this did not happen in India, due to factors spanning lack to clarity, red-tapism, bureaucratic apathy and ministerial complacency. Successive offsets, over the years, failed to yield any benefits. Even the 2011 Defence Production Policy could not provide the needed boost, due to factors such as the apathy of Defence Research and Development Organization (DRDO), inferior product quality of Defence Public Sector Units (DPSU), lack of ambition to acquire original technology, among others.

India continued to be one of the world's biggest importers of defence equipment, with only 30% indigenous manufacturing and almost 70% reliance on foreign imports, and with one of the top ten defence budgets in the world. **The self-reliance index by Kalam committee (1992) had barely improved from 30% in 1992-93 to 36.4% in**

² Till then, India, after 1991, had started to seek technological know-how mainly for local production of important spare parts and for repairs, on a purely case-by-case basis, instead of making it a consistent policy. Some notable achievements included the 1998 India-Russia agreement to jointly produce a supersonic cruise missile, BrahMos.

2011-12, thereby showing the dismal state of domestic manufacturing. Exports, which are an important indicator of domestic manufacturing capabilities, also lagged considerably. **Prior to 2014, India did not even have a defence export promotion policy.**

**TOWARDS ‘ATMANIRBHARTA’ OR SELF-RELIANCE:
PURPOSEFUL AND CONCRETE TURNAROUND**

A concrete turnaround in the defence production and export policy – with tangible results – was seen in 2014 when the new government led by Narendra Modi came into power. The sector was sought to be re-energized with speed through the Modi government’s ‘Make in India’ initiative. And recently, the government’s emphasis on ‘Atmanirbhar Bharat’ in every sector, especially in defence, has further given a great encouragement to indigenous manufacturing.

The Modi government rapidly took up the issues of defence manufacturing and exports and formulated a defence export promotion policy as early as September 2014. Procurement from indigenous units also received a substantial boost. Presently, the public sector, comprising 41 ordnance factories and 9 defence PSUs, continue to be the major source of indigenous defence production in the country. The value of this production has gone up in recent times, from Rs 43,746.48 crore in 2013-14 to Rs 52,968.13 in 2015-16 (Cowshish, 2018). In the year 2020-21, the government spent 58% of the capital budget, on domestic purchases (Singh, 2021).

The Modi government has sought to actively provide space for private sector in defence manufacturing. Private companies like Larsen & Toubro, Tata Group, Mahindra

The 2018 Defence Production Policy has particularly given immense incentives to the private sector, especially the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). These include ease of doing business; pruning the list of items requiring industrial license for production; increasing the FDI cap under automatic route from the 49 to 74 percent for certain technologies; streamlining the offset policy to attract investment and facilitate the speedy and transparent execution of offsets; rationalising the taxation system to support domestic manufacturing; financial assistance for the development of two defence industry corridors; a corpus of Rs 1,000 crore to fund start-ups & R&D; mechanism to harness the potential of AI and Robotics for defence use; creating an Intellectual Property Cell in defence production department to for registration of intellectual property rights, and, possibility of setting up an “autonomous National Aeronautical Commission, in line with Nuclear and Space commissions.”

Defence Systems, Bharat Forge and around 6,000 Micro-Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are increasing their role in defence production.

POLICY-LEVEL BOOST

In 2016, a new Defence Procurement Procedure was promulgated, which not only gave a push to indigenous procurement and but also gave global companies incentives to ‘make in India’. And now a recent negative import list of 101 weapons systems has also greatly encouraged domestic producers. A second negative import list is also in the making and may feature systems like tanks and aircraft.

In 2018, a new Defence Production Policy 2018 was promulgated to replace the earlier one. The aim was

Planned Domestic Products and Weapons of Future

1. Astra BVR missile and the anti-drone system.

2. Quick Reaction Surface to Air Missile System (QRSAM), to protect armoured columns from aerial attacks.

3. Nag and Helina anti-tank missiles with an effective range of five km, to be launched from a modified infantry combat vehicle (called the Nag missile carrier or Namica) and the Dhruv advanced light helicopter, respectively.

4. Air Defence Fire Control Radar (ADFCR) that form a key part of a ground-based air defence system.

5. Rudram, which would be India's first anti-radiation missile and will be ready for induction into service by 2023 and boost the Indian Air Force's capabilities to knock out enemy radars and surveillance systems.

6. The Smart Anti-Airfield Weapon (SAAW), which is precision strike weapon that can be used to target enemy airfield assets, with a 100 km range.

7. Stand-off Anti-tank Missile (SANT), is expected to be mated to the IAF's Russian-origin Mi-35 attack helicopters to arm them with the capability to destroy enemy armour from an improved stand-off range.

8. Supersonic Missile-Assisted Release of Torpedo (SMART) to target submarines at long ranges, tested in 2020.

9. Nuclear-capable hypersonic Shaurya missile with a range of 750 km, tested in 2020.

10. India is also developing a new class of ultra-modern weapons that can travel six times faster than the speed of sound (Mach 6) and penetrate any missile defence.

11. In 2020, DRDO also carried out a successful flight test of the hypersonic technology demonstrator vehicle (HSTDV) for the first time. Only the United States, Russia and China have developed technologies to field fast-maneuvring hypersonic missiles that fly at lower altitudes and are extremely hard to track and intercept.

to promote the ‘Make in India’ initiative in the defence sector and create a world-class arms manufacturing base, fulfilling not only the larger goal of self-reliance but also the requirements of friendly foreign countries. Compared to the 2011 policy, it was a huge leap forward in terms of its clarity and vision. Full of incentives for domestic producers, it sought to place India “among the top five countries of the world in aerospace and defence industries.”

India has also come up with a draft Defence Production and Export Promotion Policy (DPEPP), 2020, in order to achieve its ambitious targets of indigenous defence export.

These are massive and concrete steps to domestic production

Value of Defence Equipment Exported by Defence Public Sector Undertakings (DPSUs)/Ordnance Factory Board in India (2011-2012 to 2015-2016-upto 30.09.2015, 2016-2017 to 2019-2020-upto 31.12.2019)	
Year	Value (Rs. in Crore)
2011-2012	512.48
2012-2013	446.75
2013-2014	686.27
2014-2015	994.04
2015-2016	2059.18
2016-2017	1521.91
2017-2018	4682.36
2018-2019	10745.77
<i>Source: Parliament of India; Ministry of Defence</i>	

and exports. **The far-reaching vision focuses on scaling domestic manufacturing to a level where India would join the club of superpowers like US, UK, Russia, China and France.**

This, however, is a massive task, given a weak domestic defence manufacturing base, and where even **for local production, the technology is mainly imported.** While the earlier governments were more focused on theories rather than practical implementation, things have begun to move in a concrete direction only under the present Modi government.

Regardless of the ambitious vision for defence production under Modi government and the progress made therein, the government has so far failed to address the endemic inefficiency and obstacles that have beset the public sector in defence viz. DRDO, DPSUs and ordnance factories, whose reform is essential if India is to move forward to become atmanirbhar in defence.

Despite these challenges and much friction, the government has steadily gone ahead.

THE IMPORTANCE OF POLITICAL WILL

The most important attribute underlying the Atmanirbhar Bharat in defence has been the political will of the government – something that was sorely missing during the UPA era. Due to huge piled-up pendency/permissions for approvals and ill-judged decisions, the UPA era, under a clueless AK Antony's Defence Ministership, has been rightly assessed as a lost decade for Indian military reforms. Even procurement was halted, considerably damaging combat

Key Indian Defence Export Successes under Modi Government:

- Export of offshore patrol vessel (OPV) to Mauritius in 2014 by the Garden Reach Shipbuilders.
- Export of helicopters to Nepal, Afghanistan, Mauritius, Seychelles, Namibia, Ecuador and Suriname by HAL.
- Export of structural work packages and avionics to major foreign original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) in Europe and the US by HAL.
- Supply of ammunition to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) by ordnance factories.
- Coastal Surveillance System for Maldives and Seychelles as well as Weapon Locating Radar for Armenia by Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL).
- BEL has also opened up marketing offices in six countries, and has proposed strategic alliances with global players like the Israel Aircraft Industries (IAI), for joint marketing of BEL products.
- DRDO-developed products like the Akash surface-to-air missile (SAM) are expected to achieve export success, with the government in December 2020 authorising the sale of such systems.
- As of December 2020, \$930.48 million out of \$4.3 billion of EXIM Bank Lines of Credit relate to procurement by other countries of indigenous defence equipment. These include landing ship tanks and training ships by Nigeria, interceptor boats by Comoros, and defence projects by Vietnam amounting to nearly \$500 million, among others. Countries like Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Mauritius, and Suriname have also used Lines of Credit to source domestically manufactured defence equipment in the recent past.
- In 2021, Philippines and India signed an Implementation Agreement for the procurement of defence equipment from India. This was a major boost despite the fact that the former found the import of India's Brahmos system extremely expensive. Brahmos is the first supersonic missile to enter service, capable of flying at the speed of Mach 2.8 (thrice the speed of sound) with a range of 290 km,

making it difficult to intercept Brahmos by advanced surface-to-air missiles while making it easier for Brahmos to neutralize advanced fighter jets like Chinese J20. Presently, efforts are on to increase the speed and range of Brahmos to hypersonic speed (Mach 5 and above) and 1500 km range. ASEAN nations, and countries from Middle East, South America and Africa have expressed interest in the BrahMos and Akash Missile system.

readiness of the forces. Worst, it was tainted by one scam after another. (Unnithan, 2014).

In 2019, the Modi government took the most significant military reform since Independence viz. the **creation of the post of Chief of Defence Staff (CDS)** who is tasked with defence reforms and creating a joint theatre command. More significantly, the CDS has been given a key role to check the civilian bureaucracy, for there have been long-standing complaints against the civilian bureaucracy and the defence secretary has been considerably disempowered – it is a development whose parallel is rare in other democratic countries.

In 2020, despite virulent opposition from labour unions, the government announced the **corporatization of ordinance factories** – which led to months’ long protests by labour unions. However, the decision was not taken back.

RECENT STRIDES IN DEFENCE PRODUCTION AND EXPORTS

In recent years, especially due to the business incentives given after 2014, results have begun to become visible. Even though India continues to remain the world’s second-largest arms importer, yet its imports have fallen and defence exports risen. India’s arms exports recorded the highest turnover of Rs. 2059 crore (\$317 million) only in 2015-16.

According to one set of data, between 2016 and 2019, India increased its defence exports by 700% (Times Now Digital, 2020). Rise in indigenous exports has been helped by rise in domestic production.

Value of Production of Defence DPSUs and OFBs (in crore)						
Name of DPSU	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
HAL	12693	14202	15867	16289	17273	17103
BEL	5794	6290	6127	6659	7782	9244
BEML	4077	2879	2814	2599	2740.01	2624
BDL	993	1177	1804	2770	4299.84	5011
GRSE	1294	1529	1611	1651.3	1706.6	928
GSL	676	507	509	569.5	725.96	1030
HSL	564	484	453	294.1	593.29	629
MDL	2524	2291	2865	3592.6	4121.6	3523
MIDHANI	496	537	572	640.04	678.7	696
OFB	12391	11975	11123	11364	13047	8400
Total	41502	41871	43745	46428.6	52968.13	49188
<i>Source: Ministry of Defence</i>						

India is now striving to actively be a part of the global supply chain of defence products. India's defence exports during 2015-20 grew at a cumulative annual growth rate (CAGR) of 35 percent viz. from around Rs 2,000 crore to Rs 9,000 crore. The 2018 policy has set the target of Rs 35,000 crore by 2025. In a major boost to the government's Atmanirbharta vision, India was ranked at the 19th position as a global arms exporter in 2020.

The shift towards private sector is also marked and concrete – nearly 20 years after the private sector was first allowed in defence in 2001. In 2019-20, over 85 percent of

export approvals were to private sector companies. As of 2020, nearly 500 industrial licenses (ILs) have been issued to about 300 private sector companies. Significantly, as of 2020, the share of domestic procurement in overall defence procurement was 60% - at about Rs. 70,000 crore (Roche, 2020).

The government is also focusing on enhancing the export potential of DPSUs and ordnance factories. They are supposed to attain export targets equivalent to 25 per cent of their sales, by 2025. In 2019-20, exports by the DPSUs and the ordnance factories were less than 2 percent of their revenues, revealing the scale of the challenge and Modi government's ultra-ambitious and fast-track vision.

The recent export and production achievements of India have been aided not only by domestic political effort and nationalistic outlook of the government, but also by its robust international diplomacy. India's entry into Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) in 2016 has played a major role in advancing Indian domestic capabilities and scaling up defence exports. These developments have made India into a desirable ally sought by countries like Japan, US, France and Australia in a renewed vigour of activity in the Indo-Pacific.

Exports to Indo-Pacific countries like Philippines, Vietnam and others are the concrete part of such an alliance, increasing even ASEAN countries' confidence in India. For decades, ASEAN has wanted India to play a larger role in the region, but to no avail due to India's cautious outlook. Changes are visible now, with the strong political will of the Indian government.

CONCLUSION

The trajectory of India's journey towards *atmanirbharta* in defence capabilities shows that the country has come a long way from treating defence as yet another public sector category to realizing the importance of becoming self-reliant. Under the Modi government, the country has gone a step further, emphasizing not only on self-reliance, but also on placing India within the league of select five or six countries that supply defence products to rest of the world.

As is evident from various policy pushes, the government has, since 2014, been setting ambitious targets, attempting to improve the efficiency of DPSUs while opening the sector to private companies. Available data bears out the results, especially in terms of the extremely sharp rise in India's defence exports – even though we are a long way from the targets laid out in Modi's government policies.

Since the COVID19 outbreak last year, the Atmanirbhar Bharat vision has especially been focused on defence. If the government continues at the present pace and increases its focus even more, India will easily be able to achieve many of its targets within the decade.

A rising and assertive India – for which capabilities in defence and infrastructure are crucial – is the need of the hour. Often democratic compulsions have prevented governments from undertaking the right decisions, with the democratic logic incentivizing the adoption of the lowest common denominator. Unlike countries like China which have a one-party authoritarian system, India is presently dealing with some of the worst side-effects of the Parliamentary system, where decisions taken in national

interest are perpetually under attack from various lobbies and perpetually need to be defended. Therefore, India is in the process of becoming resurgent by going through all these challenges, weeding out much poison in the process, even at the cost of short-term suffering.

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HIGHLIGHTS

US's NAVY FLEET'S INCURSION IN INDIA'S EXCLUSIVE ECONOMIC ZONE (EEZ)

Early this month, US Navy's Seventh Fleet conducted a Freedom of Navigation Operation (FONOP) in India's EEZ, raising many diplomatic and public eyebrows. The operation was conducted 130 nautical miles west of Lakshadweep Islands. A subsequent statement by the Fleet said that they had asserted 'navigational rights' in India's EEZ without intimating India, in order to uphold the international maritime law. The statement ended with the assertion that such navigational operations are 'not about one country, and neither are they about making any political statements.'

The FONOP has elicited predictable outrage from sections of Indian public, forcing India to issue a statement asserting the application of Indian laws within India's maritime EEZ. In turn, the US defended its actions. However, to keep the matter from escalating, the US issued a final reconciliatory statement.

To put the entire episode in perspective, while such FONOPs are extremely common in the age of rising maritime competition, the US has never issued a separate (and a particularly jarring and abrupt) statement emphasizing on a regular naval operation. In the past, US has crossed EEZs of its allies and of countries like China. However, the standalone statement issued on this operation – coming within days of a highly successful QUAD summit – has led to a diplomatic flutter.

From US's perspective, the US Navy has a new Standard

Operating Procedure (SOP) in place since December 2020. Subsequent to this SOP, it has issued nine statements challenging maritime claims of allies and adversaries of Russia, Japan, China, Vietnam, Philippines, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Maldives and India.

However, in these statements the wording that the fleet did not seek ‘prior consent or permission’ from the country figures only in case of India, China, Maldives and Sri Lanka. That this abrupt paraphrasing is missing from statements of allies like Japan and others has caused much consternation in India.

CLAIMS AND COUNTER-CLAIMS:

India ratified the United Nations Law of the Seas (UNCLOS) in 1994. However, the US has not ratified the same. Neither does the UNCLOS authorize any country to enforce the law. Therefore, US’s FONOPs amount to US arrogating to itself this role of an international monitor.

In 1945, the US had declared its sovereign jurisdiction over all natural resources on the nation’s continental shelf. This led to other nations also doing the same, with many extending their claims to 200 miles. Laborious negotiations took place between developed and developing countries under the aegis of UN. Under the subsequent UNCLOS treaty, three things were assured:

- a. 12-mile limit on territorial sea
- b. 24-mile contiguous zone
- c. An ‘Exclusive Economic Zone’ (EEZ) extending up to 200 miles within which the state would have sovereign right over natural resources.

US refused to ratify UNCLOS, as it stated that the seabed beyond national jurisdiction limits was the 'common heritage of mankind' and did not belong to any country.

The unique EEZ was neither part of high seas nor proper territorial waters. The UNCLOS never resolved issues related to EEZ, with security implications, and much of it depends on interpretation. While India ratified the UNCLOS, it also laid down some simultaneous caveats that subjected India's EEZ to its own domestic laws. While India's applicability of domestic laws to waters beyond its territorial jurisdiction maybe subjective, the US's arrogating to itself the role of an enforcer of a law that it itself has not ratified has also not gone down well in Indian circles.

UNCLOS is just another example of the toothless nature of much of international laws and frameworks. Subjective as their nature and interpretation is, they simply become an instrument for the powerful party to wield. It explains China's increasing maritime assertiveness and disdain for international law, as also US's arrogant stepping over allies. The same logic justifies India's maritime claims as well.

TRIBAL COUNCIL POLLS IN TRIPURA

Autonomous District Council (ADC) elections were held in Tripura and results announced. These were significant elections, as the Tripura ADC covers nearly 70% of the state's geographical area and houses 1/3rd of the state's population from 19 tribal communities. They were widely seen as a referendum on the BJP's performance.

All three major parties – BJP, CPM and Congress – performed badly, while a newly formed coalition of tribal

parties led by royal scion PradyotDebbarman registered a landslide. **The alliance was called Tipraha Indigenous Progressive Regional Alliance (TIPRA) and it won 18 out of 28 seats.** An independent won 1 seat.

BJP won 9 seats, after having contested 11 seats. BJP's alliance partner, Indigenous People's Front of Tripura (IPFT), was reduced to zero. CPI (M) was reduced to zero, as was Congress.

NAXAL ATTACK IN CHHATTISGARH

Early this month, 22 security personnel were killed in an ambush by Naxalites at Sukma-Bijapur border in Chhattisgarh. 9 Naxalites were also killed. The area lies in South Bastar forests. The advance anti-Maoist operation planned by security forces went astray. The operation was planned to get Hidma – a major Maoist leader on the radar of forces since a long time, in addition to 60-70 Maoists, based on an input about their location. The input was clearly a well-planned trap, and the forces came under immediate attack as soon as they started the combing operations.

They were cornered by 300 Maoists, including men and women from a local tribal militia. A captured member of the security forces was later released by the Naxalites. The central government has deployed NIA and other anti-terror agencies to investigate the ambush. Other than the ongoing investigations and the probable undercover, covert operations, there has been no major response to the attack by the Indian government.

The ambush has brought to fore the fact that the waning Naxalite problem has gained strength once again. In

the southern India, the jungles between Kerala, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu are also facing a renewed Maoist challenge, which the government of Kerala has dealt with a heavy hand and controlled to a great extent.

INDIA AND THE WORLD: US EXIT FROM AFGHANISTAN

Much like in many other areas, in the case of Afghanistan, the Biden administration has signaled continuity with Trump's policies. The US has decided to withdraw from Afghanistan by September 11, 2021. This leaves Afghanistan at the complete mercy of Taliban, with clear certainty that Taliban will rule once again in the country. **Unlike Trump's deal with Taliban which made US withdrawal conditional upon intra-Afghan talks and a commitment from Taliban to not shelter any terrorist group on Afghan soil, Biden's plan has no strings attached. This failure is clearly a victory of Taliban** and has made them even more aggressive and violent.

Biden's failed withdrawal plan has thrown the Afghan government under the bus, as Taliban has no incentive to be a part of any intra-Afghan dialogue. **It is surprising that the administration rejected the US Secretary of State, Anthony Blinken's robust package** which included a ceasefire, UN-led talks involving all stakeholders including India, intra-Afghan talks hosted by Turkey for an "inclusive interim government", and an agreement on foundational principles of a future political regime in Afghanistan. This package would have certainly constrained the Taliban. Its rejection and the no-strings attached deal given to Taliban has significant regional implications.

First, Taliban takeover of Afghanistan looks imminent.

Currently, Taliban holds 19% of the territory, while Afghan government holds 32%. The rest is contested. That Taliban are at their strongest now since 2001 indicates that it will take them little time to invade the whole country.

Second, a Taliban government in Afghanistan not only means the country will lose whatever progress it has made in 15 years, but also a friendly regime for Pakistan and a hostile one for India.

Third, the negative side for Pakistan is that in the event of civil war, the flow of refugees into Pakistan cannot be ruled out, creating a serious problem for an already stretched Pakistan. It is also noteworthy that Taliban is not a homogenous entity anymore, and sees itself as independent from Pakistan.

Fourth, for India, it is predictably negative. India not only faces a threat from Taliban, but also possibility of strengthening of other regional anti-India terror groups like Haqqani Network, JeM, LeT etc. Securing Kashmir through revocation of Article 370 certainly provides India a relief and an advantage in this regard.

Other than India, all other stakeholders – China, Iran, and Russia – have actively engaged with the Taliban. China has done so to protect its economic interests in the region and to insulate Xinjiang Uighur Muslim region from Taliban's notoriety. Iran has engaged Taliban, as it perceives an active security threat from the Sunni outfit. Russia simply wants to meddle, secure economic advantages and occupy US's place in the region, which is why it is actively engaging with both the Taliban and Pakistan.

“The future of the earth depends on a change of consciousness.

The only hope for the future is in a change of man’s consciousness and the change is bound to come.

But it is left to men to decide if they will collaborate for this change or if it will have to be enforced upon them by the power of crashing circumstances.

So, wake up and collaborate!”

– The Mother (CWM 15: 60)