

The Resurgent India

A Monthly National Review

July 2021



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

– The Mother

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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)

UNANSWERED MYSTERIES PLAGUING THE COVID19 PANDEMIC

The world is facing a new set of challenges, as the global COVID19 situation appears to be morphing into a much larger health crisis, with the origin of the virus still enshrouded in mystery. Various countries are witnessing a rising graph of COVID19 infections, despite (or in spite of) vaccinations, and the phenomenon of vaccine hesitancy is back again. The present concerns of dealing with the virus mainly revolve around the rapid mutations of COVID19 and their possible impacts, and on the effectivity or possible adverse effects of vaccines. Speculated future mutations are expected to evade the immunity accorded by vaccines, reinforcing the reality that the human body's natural immunity supported by a strong psychology alone offers an effective way to deal with the new challenges.

THE ORIGIN OF COVID19: A RENEWED DEBATE

The uncertainty accorded by the rapid acceleration of the COVID19 coronavirus has reignited the debate about the speculated origins of the virus from a Chinese lab in Wuhan, where the virus was first detected. While a decisive conclusion may not ever be likely on the origin of the virus, due to lack of cooperation from China and its public relations machinery spread across the world, yet the debate once again brings into focus wider and deeper questions about implications of increasingly serious scientific manipulations by human societies.

The COVID19 coronavirus was first officially reported in December 2019 from China's Wuhan city. It was proclaimed by scientific experts of World Health Organization (WHO) as having spread due to transmission from animals to humans,

from an animal market. Both, WHO and the US experts, seemed to concur with the Chinese version that the virus spread from a wet market in Wuhan, effectively deflecting attention from the research being carried out at Wuhan Institute of Virology. Indeed, even the most recent World Health Organization (WHO) inquiry into the origin of the virus yielded a preliminary report in March 2021, where the lab-leak of the virus was declared as the least possible scenario. The report was widely criticized by all major countries and scientists for not having investigated properly.

Despite the repeated reinforcement of the official version of virus origin, doubts about the origin of COVID19 coronavirus were raised as early as February 2020, when a research paper established that the COVID19 genome sequence had a 96.2% match with a bat coronavirus, RaTG13 with which the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV) had been experimenting. RaTG13 was isolated by WIV for experimentation in 2013 and was extracted from a copper mine in China's Yunan province, where six miners had reportedly died due to pneumonia in 2012 (Subramanian, 2021). Another paper – later withdrawn – from a WIV researcher suggested that the virus likely originated from a Wuhan laboratory. Furthermore, a former Israeli intelligence officer, Dany Shoham, had also publicly linked the WIV to China's biological weapons programme (Money Control, 2020).

It subsequently came to light that the coronavirus-related research at WIV was being funded by American money – likely because it was less costly and safer to conduct such sensitive research in China and also allowed US access to the research at WIV. Dr. Peter Daszak of the Eco-Health Alliance, after obtaining funding from the U.S. National Institute of Health, subcontracted this research to Dr. Shi Zhengli of WIV.

Interestingly, Dr. Daszak – who has openly censured views questioning the natural origin of the virus and who has a personal financial stake in WIV – was a part of the recent WHO inquiry team that gave China a clean chit.

As is apparent, scientific community became deeply politically invested, as subsequently, powerful group of well-known scientists were engaged to rebut any claims that the virus originated from a lab. Even digital, social and print media censored any work that sought to explore the lab-origins of the virus. However, US's Defense Intelligence Agency's March 2020 assessment suggested the possibility that unsafe laboratory practices may have led to the emergence of the virus.

On January 15th, 2021, the US State Department publicly released a 'factsheet' that asserted that researchers at WIV, China had contracted symptoms consistent with COVID19 and seasonal flu before the first officially reported case of COVID19 on December 8th, 2019 from China. It also confirmed the similarities between RaTG13 and COVID19. It further said that the WIV carried out classified military scientific research on behalf of Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA).

A recent study by scientists Dr. Dalgleish and Dr. Sorensen – released in early 2021 – found that the virus was created at a laboratory in Wuhan and has no 'credible natural ancestor', after which the Chinese scientists tried to cover their tracks by reverse-engineering versions of the virus to make it look like it evolved naturally from bats (TOI, 2021). The study claimed that the Chinese scientists took a natural coronavirus backbone found in cave bats and sliced it into a new spike, turning it into the highly transmissible COVID19. The study also found unique fingerprints in COVID19 samples that could only have arisen as a result of laboratory manipulation. They posited that the virus contains four positively charged amino acids in a row,

which is only possible if it is artificially manufactured. Further, the study argued that a natural virus mutates gradually and is less pathogenic, which is not the case with COVID19.

The Chinese WIV research into coronaviruses was a part of the “Gain of Function” projects, as part of which natural viruses were tweaked to make them more lethal and more infectious, and these projects had been outlawed by the Obama administration in the U.S.

Till date, the confusion surrounding the origin of the virus persists and is likely to do so, as China has rejected another WHO investigation into the same. The fact that the host (a bat or an intermediary) that could facilitate the animal-to-human transmission of the virus has not been found has also helped to fuel the lab-leak theory. China has also removed all related publications from the WIV database that could lead to an incriminating inquiry. (The Hindu, 2021).

NEW ADVANCES IN TECHNOLOGY CREATE POSSIBILITIES

Regardless of the ongoing debate on whether the present virus leaked from a Chinese lab and whether it was done so willfully or deliberately, the ongoing developments have wider implications for human advancement in Science and Technology. Science and Technology have reached stages (and are rapidly progressing) where it is now possible to genetically engineer existing pathogens to make them more lethal and difficult to cure or treat (Prasad, 2021). The WIV has been conducting research on varieties of coronaviruses, focused on bioengineering more and more lethal coronavirus variants. Advances in the field of biotechnology and synthetic biology has made it possible to modify organisms or viruses to exhibit certain specificities as well. And it is those conducting such research who can possibly invent a vaccine or an antidote to such viruses.

In a 2019 interview, Dr. Daszak – associated with American funding of the coronavirus research at WIV – had claimed that after years of research, over 100 new SARS-related coronaviruses, some of which were introduced into human cells, caused SARS in humanized mice and were untreatable. The research involved “creation of novel, life-threatening and pandemic-creating viruses” (Prasad, 2021).

The field of synthetic biology itself has made rapid advancements in the 21st century. Its techniques allow scientists to quickly reconstruct or engineer/modify viruses based on available viral sequences (Li, Zhao, Zheng, & An, 2021). The applications of this field has spread to all major areas of human concern, such as energy, health, food and environment.

Given the advancements made in Science, coupled with all-pervading human greed and ill will, the havoc created by the COVID19 appears to be minuscule compared to the possibilities that could be unleashed in the future.

VACCINE FUNDAMENTALISM AND A NEVER-ENDING VIRUS

The recent acceleration in COVID19 infections and the rapid spread of various variants around the globe – especially the Delta variant, which emerged out of India – have increasingly convinced the scientific community that this is a virus that is here to stay. The future trajectory of the virus is also unpredictable, with different sets of research emerging every other day and mutually contradictory guidance being offered by the so called experts on different occasions.

The optimism and confidence that had accompanied the commencement of vaccinations around the world – with many Western publications bidding a premature goodbye to

COVID19 – early this year is now considerably deflated. India began her vaccinations in late March, and these coincided with the rise of a devastating second wave in the country, with the spread of the Delta mutant. While India’s second wave has subsided, the Delta variant is spreading across the world, and India is expecting her third wave soon.

World-over also, the cases and deaths have increased, with WHO reporting new cases up 8% and deaths up 21% in just a week, triggering warnings that the world has entered a dangerous, new phase of the pandemic in the third wave, which is creating fertile ground for breeding new virus variants (Cookson, 2021).

VACCINATION AND THE VIRUS SPREAD

The biggest question arising presently is what is the link between virus spread, deaths, hospitalizations and vaccines, and whether there is any link at all.

In order to examine this, the official data from United States can be seen. The country is once again witnessing a massive virus spread of nearly 1 Lakh cases daily, even though nearly 71% of the adult population and nearly 60% of the total population is now vaccinated with at least one dose and 50.5% of the population is fully vaccinated with both the doses of vaccine. California and New York are being regarded as the epicenters of the pandemic in US.

Top 5 states based on the criterion of highest cumulative infection load have been taken in the table below (as on 31-07-2021).

United States Provinces	Vaccination % (at least one dose received)	total cumulative cases	Deaths
California	64.8%	39,66,726	64,468

Texas	51.7%	31,52,148	53,487
Florida	57.7%	26,36,066	39,079
New York	63.1%	22,13,800	54,241
Illinois	62.4%	14,21,791	25,922

The states listed above have the highest case-load. They also have the highest death-load (except that of Pennsylvania and New Jersey which have a slightly higher death-load than Illinois) and highest one-dose vaccination coverage.

In terms of highest rates of fully vaccinated states, we have the following top 5 states (as on 31-07-2021):

United States Provinces	Vaccination % (fully vaccinated)	Infections (total cumulative cases)	Deaths
Vermont	67.54%	24,942	260
Massachusetts	63.93%	7,20,481	18,082
Maine	63.52%	70,463	900
Connecticut	62.28%	3,54,335	8293
Rhode Island	61.5%	1,54,590	2740

From both the tables, it is clear that states in which a substantial section of the population has received both doses of vaccines are performing well, as seen through lower case-loads and low death count. However, states in which substantial section of population is only partially vaccinated (with one dose) or in which a relatively lower percentage of population is fully vaccinated, are witnessing higher case-loads and death count.

This might suggest that the interim phase of ongoing vaccinations may trigger a greater virus spread, until the vaccination coverage is quite substantial. The danger, however, is that in this process of interim rising vaccinations, the rising case-loads may give rise to newer virus mutations that may

or may not be lethal. A study by Austria’s Institute of Science and Technology recently found the danger of vaccine-resistant strains becoming established was higher when more than 60% of a population was vaccinated and other measures — mask-wearing and restricting social contacts — had been lifted (Cookson, 2021).

It is also seen that in the past one month, hospitalizations in the US have almost tripled, with nearly 40% hospitalizations concentrated in Florida, Georgia and Louisiana (Strozewski, 2021). Georgia and Louisiana have lower vaccination rate of around 38-39%. It is not clear whether vaccinated or unvaccinated are getting hospitalized. But whatever be the case, the virus has spread like wildfire with a rise in vaccinations, even if it is, hypothetically, among the unvaccinated.

Moreover, micro-level analysis of some provinces report that vaccinated people are equally susceptible to the virus as unvaccinated. A town in Massachusetts saw that 74% of the COVID19 cases in the past month occurred in fully vaccinated persons (CDC, 2021). Recently, the US Centre for Disease Control (CDC) director admitted, in an interview to the CNN, that, “Our vaccines are working exceptionally well...They continue to work well for Delta with regard to severe illness and death, they prevent it. But what they can’t do anymore is prevent transmission” (Becker, 2021).

In the case of UK too, a similar trend is seen. It is being reported that while infections may have risen, yet reduced hospitalizations and deaths are recorded so far. This is borne out by data in England, where the Delta variant is rapidly spreading, during the country’s third wave.

In the case of Canada – with the highest vaccination coverage in the world – the cases and deaths are low, but cases are now rising, reaching 12% of the peak and continuing to

rise (Reuters, 2021). Canada's total vaccination coverage (both fully and partially vaccinated people) is 72%. In Spain, the total vaccination coverage is 71%, and the country's cases are also low, currently at 55% of the peak and falling (Reuters, 2021). This is followed by UK at 69.23%, where the graph of infections is now increasing. Country-wise variations also depend on which strain is currently dominant and how dominant it is.

VACCINE EFFECTIVITY IN QUESTION

The British Delta spread – and the American case analyzed above – raises questions about vaccine efficiency, since both are highly vaccinated countries. Like in US, the rapid rise in cases in UK has coincided with vaccination. Around 95% of the sequenced cases in Britain can be traced back to the delta variant, even though two-thirds of the population there have already been vaccinated (DW, 2021) – this does not necessarily mean that vaccines have fueled the spread of the variant, but the timeline of the virus spread and the vaccinations does coincide.

This naturally leads to the question of whether vaccines are effective, and to what extent. It is now being predicted that vaccines may not be very effective against the newer variants of the virus, which have worried the scientists, with the Delta variant having reduced the overall vaccine efficiency.

The following sets of research/arguments have raised questions regarding vaccine effectivity:

First, suspect antibody levels and duration of protection: COVID19 antibodies may be formed in the human body in two ways viz. by getting the infection, and, by getting a vaccine. However, vaccines are giving mixed results, as many reported cases do not see the formation of COVID19 antibodies, leading the governments and expert agencies to issue advisories

declaring that antibody test has nothing to do with vaccine efficacy.

However, the protection offered by the vaccine is also now raising questions about its overall utility. For, many major vaccine companies – Pfizer, Moderna, Astra Zeneca, and others – are preparing a third ‘booster shot’ prior to the winter months, as the current vaccines may not offer complete protection against the virus mutants. Those getting vaccinated have also been informed that the effect of the vaccine would last up to 6 months, after which they may have to get vaccinated again or require a booster shot (Grossman, 2021; McNamara, 2021). However, even 6 months is a long time, as recent research suggests that total antibody levels start to wane six weeks after complete immunisation with Pfizer and AstraZeneca vaccines, and can reduce by more than 50 per cent over 10 weeks (PTI, 2021). In a sero-survey in India’s Ahmedabad, it was observed that 30% of health staff at a hospital recorded reduced antibody levels after 3 months of vaccination, which according to the health experts, “indicates that protection against Covid reduces with time” (TNN, 2021).

It has also been reported that vaccines which use a messenger RNA (that is, m-RNA vaccines like Pfizer, Moderna etc.), instead of a dead virus (like India’s Covaxin, Chinese vaccines etc.), may be ineffective in protecting against virus mutants. These vaccines eventually make the human body develop resistance to the virus, requiring 5 or even 6 doses of vaccine in order to be effective (Anqi & Kang, 2021).

Second, the reduced efficiency of vaccines in preventing infection is, by now, well-established, ever since data from Israel got released. The Israeli data reported that Pfizer’s efficiency was 39% in preventing the Delta variant infection, while the Israeli government had previously estimated it to be around

64% (Anderson, 2021). It was after the release of this data that health professionals, vaccine-makers and governments shifted the goal-post from ‘vaccine prevents infection’ to ‘vaccine prevents severe infection and death’. What further goalposts will change in the future only time can tell.

Third, vaccine trials in different countries against different variants showed varying degree of effectivity, thereby confirming the fact that vaccines are not effective against all variants of the virus. A case in point is the Novavax trial early this year, which showed the vaccine to be 90% effective against the UK strain and only 49.4% effective in its South Africa trial – with both countries having two different dominant variants at that point of time.

Confirming this, a scientific study in March – using antibodies from blood samples for Pfizer and Moderna vaccines during trials – reported that, “Our study and the new clinical trial data show that the virus is traveling in a direction that is causing it to escape from our current vaccines and therapies that are directed against the viral spike... If the rampant spread of the virus continues and more critical mutations accumulate, then we may be condemned to chasing after the evolving SARS-CoV-2 continually, as we have long done for influenza virus” (Columbia University, 2021). Confirming these studies, recently, the Lancet COVID-19 Commission Taskforce on Public Health admitted that new COVID19 variants have put the pandemic control measures, including vaccinations, at the risk of being derailed (The Conversation, 2021).

Fourth, the scientific community itself does not know what to expect anymore and contradictory research being put out in the public domain is sending mixed messages to the public. A controversial technical briefing by UK’s public health regulator on July 25th, said that 43% (50 out of 117) of those who died

after the catching the new Delta virus had both doses of the vaccine, with the majority (around 60%) having received at least one dose (Spiegelhalter & Masters, 2021). And, the most recent study by British government showed that “levels of virus in those who become infected with Delta having already been vaccinated may be similar to levels found in unvaccinated people.” (Sky News, 2021).

Thus, the contradictory sets of data released every day from different parts of the world have increased, rather than addressed, the present uncertainty surrounding the virus and the vaccines, creating doubts about vaccine efficacy and fueling public skepticism.

VACCINATION AND MUTANTS

An important question being repeatedly raised looking at the data – rise in vaccinations across the world coinciding with rise in virus spread – is whether vaccination is fueling more mutants. Rapid virus mutations are raising doubts about the future course of virus and of vaccines. It is estimated that a single person infected with COVID-19 might carry 10 billion copies of the virus, enough to produce billions of mutated viruses every day, with many of these mutations not having much of an impact on the virus most of the times, or they may even make the virus less effective, or sometimes end up in a dangerous mutation (Freedman, 2021).

Many such mutants have emerged in recent times. Some are more infectious, while some have very little spread. These include mutants such as Eta, Kappa, Iota, Lambda, Beta etc. Beta is known to evade the immune system most effectively, while Lambda is reported to be extremely infectious and is striking fully vaccinated people with considerable ease. It has spread from Peru to almost all other Latin American countries,

although now the spread has slowed (Freedman, 2021).

In an interview prominent French scientist and Nobel laureate, Luc Montagnier, said that vaccination has led to creation of more COVID19 variants – “For the China virus, there are antibodies created by the vaccine. What does the virus do? Does it die or find another solution? The new variants are a production and result from the vaccination. You see in each country. It is the same. The curve of vaccination is followed by the curve of deaths...I will show you that they are creating the variants that are resistant to the vaccine” (HT, 2021).

While this analysis was quite blunt and straightforward and was not well-received by the public, yet, subsequently, major researchers in the latest scientific study issued a somewhat similar warning, with more nuance. According to a study issued in late July, “...a fast rate of vaccination decreases the probability of emergence of a resistant strain... Counterintuitively, when a relaxation of non-pharmaceutical interventions happened at a time when most individuals of the population have already been vaccinated, the probability of emergence of a resistant strain was greatly increased... When most people are vaccinated, the vaccine-resistant strain has an advantage over the original strain... This means the vaccine resistant strain spreads through the population faster at a time when most people are vaccinated” (CNN, 2021). Or, when simply put, the research confirms that the vaccine-resistant strain – and newer mutants – spreads the fastest at a time when most of the population is vaccinated.

This appears to be the case in US too, where states with high vaccination coverage of one dose and more than 50% full vaccination coverage, are witnessing greater case-loads and deaths. This is why the US government is now advising even fully vaccinated people to wear masks and Israel – amongst

the most vaccinated countries – is deliberating a lockdown again.

The uncertainty around vaccination and mutations was further enhanced in the light of a paper released by the British government on July 26th that analyzed that it is ‘almost certain’ that the virus mutations will lead to the ‘current vaccine failure’, arguing that some variants that have emerged over the past few months “show a reduced susceptibility to vaccine-acquired immunity” and that “as vaccines become more widespread, the transmission advantage gained by a virus that allows it to evade vaccine-acquired immunity will increase” (CNN, 2021).

VACCINE HESITANCY

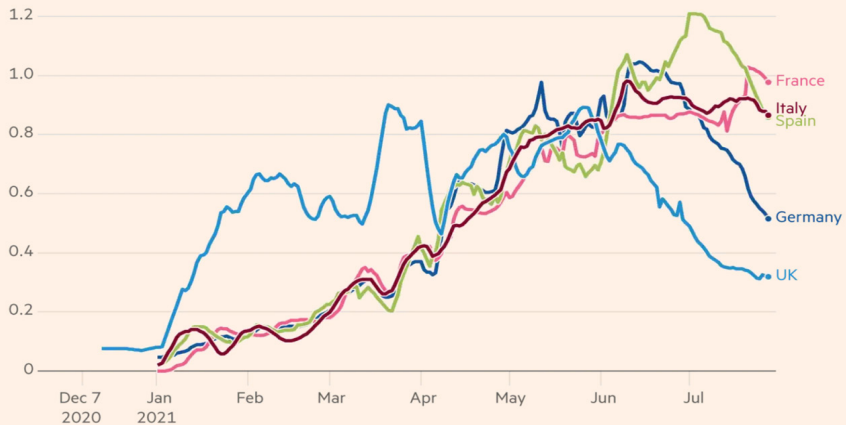
Such developments have undoubtedly resulted in an increase in vaccine hesitancy – people refusing to take vaccines even when they are available. A Pew survey in December 2020 found that nearly 40% Americans refused to take the vaccine – many of them had rational enough reasons, believing that vaccines came too suspiciously soon and more data is needed (Kluger, 2021). In Europe also, vaccination rates have recently slowed down, despite the spread of Delta variant.

A recent study showed that countries like US, UK and Netherlands have to throw away tens of thousands of vaccines due to people’s refusal to get vaccinated in several areas and localities (BMJ, 2021).

Furthermore, it is not only the effectiveness of vaccines against mutants that is fueling doubt among people, but also the possible side-effects. For instance, Pfizer’s and Moderna’s mRNA vaccines shots have been reported to cause a heart inflammation condition – myocarditis – among young people (Gallagher, 2021). Astra-Zeneca has been linked to rare blood

Covid vaccinations are levelling off in several European countries

Seven-day rolling average of daily doses administered per 100 residents



Some daily figures are estimates based on incomplete cumulative data.
Sources: Our World in Data; World Health Organization; national sources; FT research.
Data updated July 30 2021 7:24am BST. Interactive version: ft.com/covid-vaccine
© FT

clots (Mundasad, 2021). It has also been linked to a rare neurological disorder – Guillain-Barre syndrome, in which the body’s immune system mistakenly attacks part of its peripheral nervous system or the network of nerves located outside of the brain and spinal cord – in India and UK (PTI, 2021). US’s Centre for Disease Control (CDC) released data confirming around 12,313 deaths between December 2020 and July 2021 after receiving COVID19 vaccine, which was later downgraded to 6000 on the CDC’s website (Carlson, 2021).

VACCINE FUNDAMENTALISM

Despite the uncertainty surrounding vaccinations, the compulsion to get vaccination is increasing around the world. In major countries like US, UK and Europe, efforts are underway to ensure that all get vaccinated. Many of these efforts also include mandatory rules, such as vaccination as a pre-condition to travel (‘vaccine passports’), mandatory vaccination for

health workers and other government employees, private companies' enforcement of strict vaccine rules as a pre-condition for job etc. Recently, news media company CNN, fired three of its employees in US who had entered the office unvaccinated (HT, 2021). Other big American companies to mandate vaccines include Facebook, Microsoft, Google, Disney, Walmart and others (NYT, 2021).

France, Australia, Italy and England have seen major protests over government's decision to make vaccine passports and vaccination for health workers and other employees mandatory. In many European countries – such as France and Greece – various restaurants have stipulated that unvaccinated people will not be allowed to enter, while France and Italy have adopted the hardline approach of requiring vaccine certificates for entries into various other public places and for long journeys.

US has made it mandatory for millions of federal government employees to get vaccinated or undergo repeated COVID19 tests, and is also planning to introduce cash rewards to those getting vaccines (Reuters, 2021). Most of these major countries also have plans underway to ensure that no foreigner enters the country unvaccinated or else has to undergo COVID19 tests and mandatory quarantine.

CONCLUSION: AN UNPREDICTABLE PATH AHEAD

As things stand at present, the situation with regard to the virus is changing everyday. The power and money wielded by the global pharma lobby is immense, and that is why there is much suppression of data and facts and no liability for any harm caused by vaccines. Despite the fact that vaccines are known to be effective for a limited period (6 months or even 3 months) and are not stopping the transmission rate of virus

and are not even known to have the capability to fight mutants, their marketing has made the entire issue a different game altogether. It appears that vaccines act more like seasonal boosters which have to be taken every few months – even as pharma companies keep coming up with new booster shots and keep making profits.

What effect will such a scenario have on the body, and whether it will compromise the body's natural immunity, is yet to be debated. The protection offered by natural immunity, in a fear-free psychology, is perhaps one of the best defenses against such viruses – natural or man-made. As the Mother had said, "To whatever cause an illness may be due, material or mental, external or internal, it must, before it can affect the physical body, touch another layer of the being that surrounds and protects it. This subtle layer is called in different teachings by various names, – the etheric body, the nervous envelope...All communications with the exterior world are made through this medium, and it is this that must be invaded and penetrated first before the body can be affected. If this envelope is absolutely strong and intact, you can go into places infested with the worst of diseases, even plague and cholera, and remain quite immune" (CWM 3: 89).

However, the current scenario is such that governments are leaving little scope or choice to people – the result of rising vaccine fundamentalism. This enforcement of a one-size-fits-all approach with regard to forcing everyone to get vaccinated disregards the basic universal principle that no two cases in the universe are alike. A treatment for an illness administered to one person and having a certain effect on that person can never have the exact same effect on another body. Yet, this is exactly the irrationality being enforced in the name of vaccination.

As a result, the present scenario has become a mixture of technological and scientific advancements performing the slavery of the utilitarian, profit motive in society, with mankind playing a dangerous game with Nature. The impact of vaccination on COVID19 and the further course of development of the virus is yet to be seen. But the course taken by Science has put us on a path of an almost complete enslavement to the forces of Vital Nature, if not yet in the form of COVID19, then in form of other anticipated challenges that await us.

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HIGHLIGHTS

CHECKING CAPITALISM THE CHINESE WAY

In a ruthless approach to check a burgeoning industry with global footprint, the Chinese Government is continuing crackdown on its Tutoring and Technology (tech) giants in order to meet its social and political goals. In the words of the Chinese Communist Party's Politburo, it was determined to "prevent the disorderly expansion of capital" (Mitchell et al. 2021). The crackdown will completely downsize China's ultra-competitive education system, plagued by expensive tuitions and luxury.

In the process, there is also the spectre of the billions of dollars of losses to investors which incurred on Wall Street, as the value of Chinese tech shares had soared to \$2 trillion over the last two decades. The crackdown has also expanded to property companies with foreign listings, make it evident that the Chinese government wants to restrict foreign listings of its companies. The crackdown is expected to spread to other sectors as well where companies raise their capital abroad. The impact is already being felt in sectors such as food delivery, music, lifestyle apps and on digital currencies (which threaten governmental control over capital flows).

Now as the Chinese government overhauls the domestic legal structure – targeting the Variable Interest Entity (VIE) structure of companies that had allowed them to sell shares to foreign investors – of its tutoring tech companies, the Wall Street is taking a major hit, as investors are concerned that Chinese crackdown on tutoring tech sector could extend to other sectors using the VIE legal structure as well. China has stipulated new rules mandating the after-school tutoring companies to become non-profit entities and stopping

weekend classes, thereby making them less appealing for investment.

This comes in the backdrop of growing US-China confrontation in all spheres, including the corporate. The threat of US government to de-list Chinese companies that did not allow scrutiny of their audit processes, as well as the passage of China's new data security law that forbids companies from sharing data with any foreign officials without government approval, have been the precursors to the new developments. From Jack Ma's Alibaba group to Chinese tech giant Tencent to TikTok parent company to Didi Chuxing, the crackdown by Chinese government spares no one. Recently, the new data security law was applied to Chinese ride-hailing company, Didi Chuxing, soon after it listed in New York, leading to a 40% fall in its shares.

The simple message from Chinese government to its domestic industry is clear – the industry will not be allowed to easily bypass domestic regulations in the pursuit of profit, and that loopholes of legal structures such as VIE would be plugged. The crackdown is also being perceived as largely ideological and political, with the Chinese government ready to sacrifice economic gains in the immediate run, in order to meet its larger nation-building goals.

KARNATAKA POLITICS

After much upheaval in Karnataka, the state saw a change of guard and a smooth transition of power from the former Chief Minister, B.S. Yediyurappa (BSY), to the new Chief Minister, Basavaraj Bommai. The transfer of power marks the end of the BSY era on a positive and reconciliatory note, such that the critical factor of BJP's Lingayat votebank which commanded BSY's support, remains largely intact. Additionally, Mr. Bommai is also perceived to be on good terms with BSY, and is a Lingayat

leader himself, with an honest reputation.

For a long time, the Karnataka BJP had been witnessing power plays between the camps of BSY, and those staunchly opposed to him. BSY's name in corruption scandals had also made him a liability for the party, which wanted to open new avenues in the state. At the same time, the party realized that it is simply not possible to easily depose BSY without losing a huge chunk of the Lingayat vote-bank. The last time the BJP had decided to do so, it became a virtual non-entity in the state with BSY's exit. Therefore, for long, the party had tried to cultivate a new Lingayat leader, without unnecessarily antagonizing BSY.

The selection of Mr. Bommai has settled much of the confusion that the party faced in Karnataka, and proved wrong the naysayers who were certain that BSY's exit would spell difficulties for the BJP in Karnataka. In one stroke, the party has ensured three things, viz. internal dissent within the state unit is quelled, Lingayat vote-bank is retained and BSY has departed on a positive note.

US-INDIA RELATIONS: BLINKEN'S VISIT

The US Secretary of State, Anthony Blinken, has visited New Delhi, continuing the robust engagement between US and India on key bilateral issues. The frequent high-level engagements and visits between US and India is likely the first time any US administration has given such central attention to India. While Blinken was visiting New Delhi, simultaneously, US Deputy Secretary of State, Wendy Sherman, was in China, to meet the Chinese Foreign Minister in a visit that was marked by much angst, and the US Defence Secretary was visiting Vietnam and Phillipines. The Indian Defence Minister was, simultaneously, productively engaging his Russian counterpart at a conference of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in

Tashkent.

The simultaneous engagements reveal US's clear intent about its vision for the Indo-Pacific and the world, and India's intent to strike a balance between all its partners. Prior to his Asia visit, the US Defence Secretary, in UK, sent out a tough message that UK's military resources would be better served in Europe rather than in Indo-Pacific, where US, Australia, France and other allies are already increasing their presence. This message came immediately after UK's military naval expedition in the South China Sea, despite China's stated displeasure. The implicit message to the UK was that it was needed to fulfill the West's purpose in Atlantic and Pacific, to contain Russia, which is increasingly allying with China.

The key issues in Blinken's visit were Afghanistan, Indo-Pacific, climate change, and, COVID19, besides rhetorical assertion of shared US-India democratic values. Incidentally, Blinken did not dwell on human rights and related issues, even in his meeting with Indian civil society, where many activists complained about India's handling of domestic issues like CAA, love jihad, Farmer's protests etc. Blinken skillfully skirted all these issues and responded that both US and Indian democracies were a work in progress and no one is perfect.

Indeed, what the civil society meeting of Blinken in New Delhi really stood out for was his engagement with Dalai Lama's representative – US administration's first such direct engagement, in a clear message to China, and a hardening of US's position towards Tibet. This came after XI Jinping's much publicized visit to Tibet.

CABINET EXPANSION

The much-awaited expansion of the central cabinet has finally taken place. The expansion saw 43 ministers being sworn-in, of which around 36 new faces were being inducted

and 12 sitting ministers being dropped (including dropping of 6 out of the 23 cabinet ministers). This is being regarded as a large-scale purge in recent times, with prominent names like Harsh Vardhan, Ravi Shankar Prasad, Prakash Javadekar, R.P. Nishank, Santosh Gangwar and Sadananda Gowda being shown the door. The reasons for their exit are likely premised on the massive controversies that have dogged their ministries and their less-than-ambitious response in handling the mess. Jyotiraditya Scinda was inducted into a cabinet post as aviation minister. Other prominent names include Meenakshi Lekhi, Ashwini Vaishnaw, Sarbananda Sonowal and Mansukh Mandaviya.

The top rung of leadership – Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman (alongwith the entire economic team) and External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar – remains the same. Amit Shah now handles a newly formed Ministry of Cooperation – which will manage the cooperatives sector in the country. The sector is, interestingly, a key fiefdom of Sharad Pawar in Maharashtra.

Ministers of Departments like Social Justice and Empowerment, Health, Education, Labour, Information and Technology, and Environment and Climate Change have been removed and replaced by technocrats, indicating that the government prioritizes a robust and professional approach in these ministries, especially as some of them (like climate change) have a tough global fight ahead (Hebbar, 2021).

The expansion also sends out a message on geographical spread and caste representations, and accomodates smaller BJP allies like UP's Apna Dal and Bihar's LJP. Non-upper caste representation is very high, with 48 out of 77 Council of Ministers being from non-upper caste background – 27 OBC

ministers, 12 Ministers belonging to the Scheduled Castes, 8 Ministers belonging to the Scheduled Tribes, 5 Ministers from minority religious communities, and 11 women Ministers (Hebbar, 2021).

From the point of view of UP elections, the government now has 14 ministers from the state, with latest expansion inclusions being 3 OBC Ministers, 3 Scheduled Caste and only 1 Brahmin Minister. Uttarakhand has been accorded importance, in the light of the upcoming state elections. A large number of inductions have been made from eastern states as well, such as Bengal, Assam, Manipur and Tripura. 4 inductions from Maharashtra send out a message that the BJP keeps the state on its political priority list, along with 3 inductions from Gujarat. The South has also been given importance, with 4 inductions from Karnataka and 1 from Tamil Nadu.

ASSAM-MIZORAM BORDER DISPUTE

In a sharp escalation of the historic boundary dispute between Assam and Mizoram, at least five Assam Police personnel were killed in violent clashes on July 26th, at a contested border point where tensions had been simmering for quite some time. Fifty policemen from both sides were injured, including the SP of Assam's Cachar district, who sustained a bullet injury in the leg.

In fact, the Assam Police had come to resolve an issue of an illegal construction of a road and an outpost in the disputed territory by Mizoram, as claimed by the Assam Government, while Mizoram accused Assam police of forcing its overturning a Mizoram police outpost and even setting fire to some vehicles. Local Mizo people were also seen attacking Assamese Police and Villagers.

In the aftermath, while both sides filed murder charges against each other, including one against the Assam Chief

Minister, Assam imposed a costly economic blockade on Mizoram, preventing the transit of vehicles.

While the dispute is historic, such violent face-offs and follow-up of the kind that occurred is rare. Mizoram borders Assam's Barak Valley, and both border Bangladesh. The boundary dispute between the two states, which runs 165 km today, has a history dating back to the time when Mizoram was a district of Assam and known as Lushai Hills. Boundary demarcations in 1875 and 1933, particularly the second one, are at the heart of the dispute.

The 1875 demarcation differentiated Lushai Hills from the plains of Cachar in Assam's Barak Valley. This was done in consultation with Mizo chiefs, and it became the basis for the Inner Line Reserve Forest demarcation in the Gazette two years later. The 1933 demarcation marks a boundary between Lushai Hills and Manipur, beginning at the tri-junction of Lushai Hills, Cachar district and Manipur. The Mizos do not accept this demarcation on the ground that their chiefs were not consulted this time.

The dispute has been simmering since Mizoram became a Union Territory in 1972 and then a state in the 1980s. The two states signed an agreement that status quo should be maintained at no-man's land set up in the boundaries. While alleged transgressions have often happened over the decades, skirmishes have happened very frequently in recent months, for reasons that can only be speculated. Mizoram has accused Assam police of various disruptions over time, and there have even been small riot-like mob clashes among people of the two states.

There could be three immediate reasons linked indirectly to the violence:

First, since the Himanta government came to power in

Assam, there has been a large-scale crackdown on illegal trafficking and drugs. Mizoram was an important transit route of sending drugs to Assam, as was Manipur. The heavy crackdown on drug mafia has certainly aggravated the situation. Many of these drug mafia had patronage of the terrorist groups of Myanmar and Mizoram and also apparently some politicians from Mizoram.

Other forms of illegal trade such as forest felling, betel-nut trading etc. between Myanmar and Mizoram has also been adversely affected due to aggressive surveillance by the Assam police. Many important Mizo politicians have been alleged to be implicated in these forms of illegal trade with Myanmar (Mishra, 2021).

Second, settlers from Myanmar being pushed into Assam border areas via Mizoram and in reaction, pushing them back by Assam Police may have also contributed to the hostility between the two states.

Finally, Assam government's recent cattle protection bill might prove to be a costly affair for beef traders in Mizoram.

Now, with the intervention of the Union Home Ministry, the hostility is now being eased out, the vehicle movements have also been resumed and the FIRs against the politicians have been taken back by both sides.

INDIA-CHINA BORDER TALKS

India and China held 12th round of border talks. The talks led to a substantive outcome – disengagement from Gogra Heights, including dismantling of infrastructure and mutual verification of the same by both sides. The disengagement at Hot Springs has not happened, and will likely feature in the next round of talks.

This is the second friction area from which disengagement

has been done after Pangong Tso in February (Peri, 2021). India's position has been that disengagement needs to happen on the ground at critical points like Depsang, Hot Springs and Gogra for bilateral relations to smoothen.

CHINESE DOMINANCE IN TURKMENISTAN

Chinese Foreign Minister's recent visit to Ashgabat underscored the deepening ties between China and Turkmenistan, and the manner in which China's expansion has checked Russia's ambitions in Central Asia. The visit's key highlight was the expansion of China's relationship with the country from economic to security domain, prefaced by the background of Turkmenistan's support to China over the Xinjiang issue at United Nations recently.

In Central Asia, Russia, China and Turkey are some of the key players, among others. While Turkey's ambitions under Erdogan are focused on reviving the Neo-Ottoman era Muslim unity, Russia has its own Soviet-era legacy. China has mainly focused on expanding its economic interests in the region. China has also faced hostilities from local populations in Central Asian countries – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan – other than Turkmenistan, as other four countries resent China for the treatment of Uighur Muslims in Xinjiang, despite their economic ties.

Within the region, Russia and China appear to have an informal division of powers, with Russia being the security provider and China undertaking economic investments. This has enabled smooth Russia-China cooperation, fulfilling each one's immediate interests. However, developments with regard to Turkmenistan signal a changing balance.

While other four countries are within the Russian sphere of influence, Turkmenistan – often compared with North Korea in

its insularity and corruption of elites – is not. Turkmenistan is neither a part of Russia-China security organization, Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and nor a part of Russia-led Central Security Treat Organization (CSTO), unlike the other four countries. While Russia has continued a deep footprint in the other four countries, Turkmenistan has kept out the Russian influence.

On the other hand, Turkmenistan's relations with China have been better compared to other regional countries, as China has found it easier to bribe its elites and exploit its insularity from the world. China has heavily invested in the country's natural gas sector and the country acts as a transit route between China and Europe. Now with the threat of Taliban's control over Afghanistan looming large, the region is looking for greater security, and Turkmenistan and China appear to be transitioning their relationship from economic to security and military as well. In particular, Chinese private military companies are being hired for security provision in Turkmenistan. If Beijing becomes a security provider in the region, then it would, to an extent, overlap with Russia's interests and also marginalize Russia and the West, enabling China to compete with Turkey.

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“I have put down a few comments to throw cold water on all this blazing hot allopathism. But all these furious disputes seem to me now of little use. I have seen the working of both systems and of others and I cannot believe in the sole truth of any. The ones damnable in the orthodox view, entirely contradicting it, have their own truth and succeed – also both the orthodox and heterodox fail. A theory is only a constructed idea-script which represents an imperfect human observation of a line of processes that Nature follows or can follow; another theory is a different idea-script of other processes that also she follows or can follow. Allopathy, homeopathy, naturopathy, osteopathy, Kaviraji, hakimi have all caught hold of Nature and subjected her to certain processes; each has its successes and failures. Let each do its own work in its own way. I do not see any need for fights and recriminations. For me all are only outward means and what really works are unseen forces behind; as they act, the outer means succeed or fail – if one can make the process a right channel for the right force, then the process gets its full utility – that is all.”

– Sri Aurobindo
(CWSA 35: 514)