

Covid-19 and India: The Impacts and Prospects

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Introduction

A spectre is, right now, haunting the world.

The spectre of a pandemic - COVID-19.

COVID-19,2,3 is a viral disease - both infectious and potentially fatal, belonging to the SARS family, caused by a zoonotic - i.e. transmitted from animals to humans, virus.

It, mainly, affects the human respiratory system.

While old infectious diseases - including cholera, typhoid, small pox, polio, TB etc., over the years, came to be very significantly controlled, or even eliminated, through better sanitation, supply of potable water, mass vaccination, availability of antibiotics etc.⁴, the recent decades have seen outbreaks of brand new ones - AIDS, Avian flu, SARS, MERS, Ebola, and Zika, spilling over from animal reservoir.⁵

These outbreaks appear to be strongly linked to (i) aggressive and ever-expanding human invasions of pristine forests - on account of logging, mining, agriculture, housing, infrastructure building or whatever, and (ii) trade in exotic wildlife.⁶

The spread of these infectious diseases are very much facilitated by higher and higher levels of interlinking of the globe.⁷

The virus causing the COVID-19 has been delineated as the SARS-CoV-2 - most likely originating from bats and/or pangolins.⁸

The outbreak was first reported by China in the city of Wuhan, on Dec. 31 2019, to the WHO.⁹

Apparently, after trying to suppress the info¹⁰ as regards the outbreak of a new seriously threatening infectious disease, for a while.

The earliest case is traced back to Nov. 17, at least.¹¹

In any case, on Jan. 1 it closes the Wuhan seafood market - the presumed originating point.

On Jan. 13, Thailand reports its first imported case.

On Jan. 21, the WHO confirms human-to-human transmission, with total 222 reported cases of infection worldwide.

On Jan. 23, the city of Wuhan is put under lockdown.

Despite deliberations, the WHO Director-General refuses to declare a public health emergency of international concern.

On Jan. 30, the WHO Director-General, eventually, declares the COVID-19 outbreak a public health emergency of international concern.

By that time, the total confirmed cases in China reached 9,692, with 213 deaths.

Quite a few countries stood affected, India reporting its first case.

On March 11, it is declared a “pandemic” - i.e. an epidemic of global proportions, with more than 118,000 (reported) cases in 114 countries, and 4,291 (reported) deaths. 9

The actual cases are, understandably, significantly higher than reported cases.¹²

It would, quite conceivably, vary from country to country - depending on intensity of testing.

The numbers are still rising exponentially - the new numbers being added each day is higher than that on the preceding day.

As on June 23, the US, with 2,388,225 has the 25.93% of the total 9,209,934 global cases, followed by Brazil (1,111,348) - 12.07% and Russia (599,705) - 6.51%. India (441,643) is at the fourth slot with 4.80% cases.

The total number of deaths being 474,797 with Indian tally being 14,027 - 2.95% of the global total.¹³

The Indian Scenario

India reported its first confirmed case on Jan. 30, in Kerala - a female student who had come home from Wuhan, on vacation.¹⁴

On March 12, India recorded its first corona death - In Karnataka, of a 76-year-old man, who had returned from Saudi Arabia.¹⁵

As on June 23, the total number of reported cases stands just over 4.4 lakh [1] - with Maharashtra contributing a tad below 1/3rd, number of reported deaths being just over 14 thousand.¹⁶

Indian Prime Minister, in an address¹⁷ televised nationwide, 8.00 PM onward on March 24 announced a strict lockdown, which would also be occasionally been referred to as “curfew”¹⁸, from 12.00 PM onward. Initially for 21 days.

The PM, on March 25 in an address to his constituency, would claim¹⁹ that the war against the virus/disease would be won in 21 days as the (mythical) Mahabharat war had been won in 18 days.

In the event, the lockdown - with hardly any relaxation, would be extended in instalments till May 31, with significant relaxations commencing on and from June 1 - with lockdown itself still in place.

The sudden declaration of the all-out lockdown, perhaps designed to keep the migrant workers locked-in at their places of work with hardly any support and complete disregard of their safety²¹, ²² - with only a few exceptions including for medical stores, provision shops and milk supply, created havoc especially for the daily wage-earners and the huge number of migrant workers - from within or outside of a state.

In the following an attempt is made to look into the salient aspects of developments since the imposition of the lockdown.

A. The Plight of Migrant Workers

The sudden clamping down of the lockdown triggered desperate Long Marches of the desperate people heading back home - in some cases more than a thousand kms. away.²³

By mid-May, one estimate puts the number of deaths on way back home at over 130, in road accidents alone.²⁴

On May 1, for the first time, a train would start its journey from Telangana to ferry back migrant workers to Jharkhand.²⁵

After repeated curt refusals to intervene, the Supreme Court, eventually, on May 26 - apparently prodded by interventions by a number of High Courts²⁶ and also stringent criticism voiced in public²⁷, took up the migrant workers' case²⁸.

On June 9th passed a detailed order²⁹ and fixed the date of next hearing on July 8.

The Solicitor General submitted before the Supreme Court that, between May 1st and June 3rd, approximately 57.22 lakh migrants have been shifted to various destinations by approximately 4228 Shramik Special trains and another(?) 41 lakh have been transported via buses.³⁰

Earlier, on May 23rd, he had averred that "around four crore migrant labourers are engaged in various works in various parts of the country".³¹

Prior to that, the Union Finance Minister had estimated that there are 8 crore migrant labourers in India.³²

As per a report released on June 4th, the Central Labour Commissioner informed that there were over 26 lakh migrant workers stranded in various stages of transit in 33 states, of which barely 10% were in government-run shelter houses.³³

Even considering the fact that a large number of migrants got back home on foot or cycle or via privately arranged transport, the estimate of 26 lakh remaining stranded appears an absurdly low one, whether one considers the total number as 4 crore or 8 crore.

Of course, there would also be those who would like to stay back.
Even then.

Also relevant is the fact that only 20.26 lakh migrant workers of the targeted 8 crore such labourers have received free food grains in May and June (2020), according to data released by the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution on June 7th.³⁴

No less relevant is the report that more than 40 Shramik Special Trains ran astray and took

inordinately longer time to reach the single-point destination - one of these taking 9 days instead of scheduled 2.35, 36, 37

All in all, these only reveal a criminal contempt, on the part of the regime, for the toilers of the land.

B. Pandemic Weaponised to Spread Communal Virus

Here it is necessary to remind ourselves that the BJP (together with the RSS and its other affiliates) is committed to dismantle the “secular”, “democratic” Indian state and eventually supplant it with a “Hindu Rashtra” (Hindu nation state), the contours of which are, understandably, not etched in stone but, at the very minimum, it would be denuded of all vestiges of substantive democracy and pluralism.

The process is, in fact, very much underway.

Towards this, the regime, steered by the BJP, has to mobilise the Hindus as “Hindus” - drowning out all other competing identities, linked to language, ethnicity, caste, gender, age-group etc.

In order to achieve that, one has to constantly stir up civil war-like conditions between the Hindus and the (constructed) inimical (religious) “others”.

The pandemic, triggering widespread anxiety, appeared as an excellent opportunity to do that.³⁸

A religious congregation by a rather marginal, and hardline, Muslim sect - Tablighi Jamaat, had been held,

Most of the attendees came from outside Delhi, some from abroad.

Quite a few overstayed - either deliberately or under compulsion, because of various restrictions on movements already imposed.

The place was just next to a police station, with the police under the control of the Union Home Ministry.

And as late as on March 13, the Union Health Ministry had announced that there was no health emergency.³⁹

It was on March 16, Delhi government banned religious gatherings of over 50.⁴⁰

Subsequently, some of the attendees were tested to be corona positive .⁴¹

Using this as a prop, a campaign of “Corona Jihad” was launched, painting ordinary Muslims as Jihadis intent upon spreading the virus deliberately in the communities.⁴²

The regular communiqués by the Union Health Ministry were also leveraged to reinforce this campaign.^{43, 44, 45}

Rumours were being spread that Muslim vendors and others are spitting on the fruits, or other food items, to be sold or being distributed as reliefs to the poor^{46, 47, 48 and 49.}

The drive, in modified forms, is still very much on.⁵⁰

It is necessary to point out that on February 24, Prime Minister Modi, along with the US President, had held a mega public rally, of mote than a lakh, with people huddled together.⁵¹

It was on Jan. 30 that that the WHO had declared a “public health emergency of international concern”.⁹

On March 24, in Madhya Pradesh, a BJP Chief Minister would take oath - after dislodging a Congress government by engineering defections, flagrantly flouting norms of physical distancing.⁵²

Prior to that, on March 12, Jyotiraditya Scindia had held a huge roadshow with people jostling each other.⁵³

In fact, even post-March 25, there would be scores of other instances of massive flouting of the norms of physical distancing - some of these being (Hindu) religious in nature.^{54, 55, 56}

One of these, on March 22, was triggered by the call, on March 19, of none other than the Prime Minister himself to clap and clang pots and pans to fight the virus.⁵⁷

Not only that, when numerous, infected and then cured, members of the Tablighi Jamaat would queue up for donating blood so that the blood plasma thus made available can be used for the treatment of the critical COVID-19 patients, as per a guideline issued by the ICMR, the Union Health Ministry, virtually overnight, reversed its stand to bar use of blood plasma.⁵⁸

Evidently, the regime got too concerned that its narrative of Corona Jihad was being effectively subverted by the Tablighi Jamaat members, in large numbers, donating blood. Hence, the reversal.

In early June, a video clip would appear where the principal of a medical college in Kanpur, UP, is heard telling^{59,60} that the patients belonging to the Jamaat are terrorists, must be refused all medical treatments and kept locked up in remote jungles. That underlines the intensity of hate triggered by the Corona Jihad campaign.

C. Intensified Assault on Democracy: Criminalising Dissent

Under the cover of the lockdown, conscientious dissenters - and Muslims in particular, are being slapped with the draconian UAPA.

Those who have been charged under stringent laws, during this period, include: former JNU student Umar Khalid, Congress activist Ishrat Jahan, United Against Hate member Khalid Saifi, and students like (pregnant) Safoora Zargar, Gulfisha, Natasha Narwal and Devangana Kalita.⁶¹

Of course, this is a continuation of a process which had already been set in motion.

Two eminent democratic rights activists - Gautam Navlakha and Anand Teltumbde, based on the FIRs registered earlier, were eventually sent behind the bars⁶² - denying bail, despite serious health issues.

There are, of course, scores of various other recent examples of the campaign to criminalise legitimate democratic dissent and targeting of minorities in the most egregious manners. ^{63, 64, 65}

Not to forget, the regime has used the din over the pandemic also as a convenient cover to initiate significant moves^{66, 67}, rather unobtrusively, to change the demographic profile of Kashmir, as a part of its broader agenda - unleashed with a big bang on the last August 4-5 intervening midnight, as regards Kashmir, which, of course, remained very much a burning issue⁶⁸ since its “accession” in late October 1947.

D. Curtailment of Federal Character

By declaring the lockdown unilaterally, without taking the states into confidence, under the Disaster Management Act, the Union Government has further curtailed the powers of the states and, thereby, undermined the federal character of the Indian state. 69

That the states are too dependent on the Centre for fund allocations and other material supports, to fight this emergency, have further exacerbated this power imbalance and thereby subverted federalism and democracy.70

E. Rise of a Surveillance State: Aarogya Setu

The Aarogya Setu app has been launched by the GoI on April 2, ostensibly, to track and monitor the spread of the disease.71

It is designed to monitor - 24X7, the location of the device on which the app has been downloaded and monitor which such other devices crossed its path.

In absence of any data protection law, it is a privacy nightmare.72

On top of that, as of now, less than 9% of the Indian population appear to have downloaded the app73, regardless of the vigorous push including coercion - overt and covert.

Given that abysmally low proportion, the promise of protection from getting exposed to an infected one or, at least an early warning in such an event, remains essentially hoaxical.74

Even otherwise, just over 500 million Indians - around 36%, are reported to be possessing smartphones as of December 2019.75

The initial attempts to make downloading compulsory had to beat a partial (and deceptive?) retreat as legal challenges have been posed by civil society groups.76, 77, and 78

On May 26, the source code of the app, at the handheld device end, was made public, but not at the server end.79

All in all, the essential threat, as yet, very much remains.

F. Assault on Labour Laws

Apart from the ongoing attempt of the Union Government to curtail hard-earned labour rights over the decades in the name codifying the labour laws80, 81, around mid-May, a number of state government - UP setting the most egregious example, decided to put a number labour laws in deep freeze.82

However, faced with concerted opposition by 10 central trade unions, the ILO and also others83,84 and legal challenges85, the Union Labour Minister was forced to change his tune and backtrack.86,87

But, again, the threat very much remains.

G. Heightened Attack on Environment

Under the cover of the lockdown, with the judicial process in partial freeze, the MOEF has gone on clearing/considering projects - including highly controversial ones, at a lightning speed. 88, 89, 90, 91

A total of 191 projects were to be considered for clearance during April-May.92

It has also reversed its longstanding position on use of “dirty coal” in thermal power plants.⁹³

On top of that, the draft EIA - recommending a number of crucial safeguards, was issued on March 12, with 60 days deadline for filing suggestions/objections. ^{94, 95} However, on May 7, the deadline has been extended till June 30.⁹⁶

H. Intensified Loot Maar

Apart from the continued push for privatisation of the PSUs⁹⁷ and the scams as regards procurement of the PPEs and test kits^{98, 99, 100}, during the initial phase, the most major move during this period is the Prime Minister’s Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations Fund (PM CARES Fund) that was created on 28 March 2020 as a fund managed by a (public!) trust¹⁰¹ headed by the Prime Minister. It includes three other Cabinet members - Union Ministers of Home, Defence and Finance for now.

Under an ordinance issued on March 31, it was given various preferential treatments.¹⁰²

While huge amounts are being collected - including from government employees, it won’t be audited by the CAG - only by an “independent auditor” appointed by the trust¹⁰³, which has since been appointed¹⁰⁴.

The PMO is also refusing to provide info to the RTI queries.^{105, 106}

In the first 52 days since Feb. 28, at least “Rs 9,677.9 crore (\$1.27 billion) has been collected in the Prime Minister’s Citizen Assistance and Relief in Emergency Situations (PM CARES) fund for COVID-19 relief.”

“Of Rs 9,677.9 crore, Rs 4,308.3 crore has been donated by government agencies and staff. Of this, at least Rs 438.8 crore has been deducted as one-day’s salary of government employees. At least Rs 5,369.6 crore of corporate social responsibility (CSR) funds have been donated by private companies, industry bodies and social organisations.” Further, Rs 1,250 crore has been pledged by government agencies, to be donated during the current financial year (2020-2021). Various private companies have pledged at least Rs 772.4 crore. Celebrities, mostly from Bollywood, have also pledged at least Rs 53.8 crore. PM CARES also receives foreign funding and Rs 22 crore has been pledged by two foreign companies, Fairfax Financial Holdings and Russia’s state-owned defence exports company, Rosoboronexport.”¹⁰⁷

Right now, a PIL against the fund is being examined by the Supreme Court.^{108, 109}

The petition has pointed out while the PM CARES fund is not subject to the CAG audit (nor to the RTI, as per the Union Government), the already existing National Disaster Response Force Fund (NDRF), meant to serve the very same purpose, is subject to both.¹¹⁰

That, obviously, makes the brushing aside of the NDRF, also headed by the Prime Minister, all the more intriguing.

I. The Hoax of 20 Lakh Crore of Economic Package

The government’s much-touted Aatma Nirbhar, or self-reliance, economic stimulus of 20 lakh crore announced over five days in May appears to be a rehashing of previously announced schemes, with very little additional spending.

“At 10% of India’s GDP, the Aatma Nirbhar economic package was billed as one of the largest in the

world. Yet, the opposition Congress Party says the stimulus in terms of actual additional government spending could be as little as between 0.91% to 1.6% of the GDP.”

The package consists of 7 elements: (i) Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojna, (ii) National Animal Disease Control Programme, (iii) Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises. (iv) Agriculture Infrastructure Fund , (v) Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi Yojna, (vi) MGNREGA wages and (vii) State Disaster Response Mitigation Fund (SDRMF).

Analysts opine that there is substantial fresh fund allocation only in case of the last two.

The Finance Minister had announced Rs. 61,500 crore in the Union Budget 2020-2021 - out of which Rs. 11,000 crore pertain to payment of pending arrears; now, in May, funding of additional Rs. 40,000 crore for MGNREGA has been announced.

However, given the ground situations, it would take some time for the money to reach intended beneficiaries and, hence, provides no immediate relief - which is a dire requirement.

The last one has too many conditions attached and sort of arbitrary.111

One of the starkest features of the Aatma Nirbhar package is that it offers virtually nothing to the hardest hit - the informal sector workers and circular migrants who lost their livelihoods, virtually nothing, in the immediate run.112

J. Push for New Technologies

The requirement of maintaining physical distance between fellow human beings has created quite an unprecedented situation.

It has, in the process, triggered push for new technologies to accommodate this requirement.

While the use of these technologies may very well be a sort of compulsion of the moment and have even certain obvious advantages, it is quite possible that there would be pressure generated to continue journeys in these directions, even in the post-Covid phase, encouraging and ensuring physical distancing between humans - having profound socio-political implications.

At least three areas have already been significantly impacted.

I. Virtual Meeting: The conditions of lockdown has enormously boosted the practice of virtual conferencing/meeting etc. for a variety of purposes.113

While this has made possible, at least hypothetically, simultaneous participation of people all across the globe, the elements of physical proximity and intimate interactions are obviously missing.

II. Telemedicine: There is also a spike in the practice of telemedicine, which does not require physical proximity between the medical practitioner and the patient. 114, 115, 116

This attempt, however, got nixed, at least for now, having been faced with legal challenge.117

This also, once again, underlines how arbitrarily the regime is bent upon acting under the cover of the lockdown.

III. Online Teaching: Apart from the issue of “exclusion”118 - an extremely serious issue in case of India, where internet penetration does not cover around half the population119.

But apart from that, there are also issues of the method, structure and, even, content of delivering knowledge and cultivating an inquisitive mind and also the atomisation of the student communities¹²⁰

In all these cases, one obvious advantage is that the need of physical infrastructure is done away with.

The likely impacts of these shifts deserve close examination.

K. Likely Trajectory of the Disease

The Prime Minister had on March 25 - the very first day of the lockdown, in an address to the people of his parliamentary constituency, had talked of winning the battle in 21 days - as against 18 days in case of the (mythical) Mahabharata war.¹²¹

So, the target set was April 14.

On April 25, a NITI Aayog member would announce there would be no new case after May 16.¹²²
On May 22, he would issue a denial.¹²³

Now, two Health Ministry officials have published (in early June) a paper which claims that "in the month of mid of September(sic), 2020" "the epidemic will be extinguished".

A close reading, however, indicates that it is predicted that in mid-September the (still exponentially) rising graph of "active cases" will start declining.^{124, 125}

In the meanwhile, as noted earlier the relevant numbers in India are still rising exponentially, despite more than two months of strict lockdown - thereby making India a sort of unique case.

However, the fatality rate is low, as compared to the global average, as is the case all across the South Asia region.¹³

More importantly, "With a high test positivity rate of 37.82 per cent and no effort to ramp up testing, Delhi is handling the coronavirus crisis like a pigeon closing its eyes to an approaching cat."

Not only that: "India has now ramped up its Covid testing to about 1.42 lakh a day. While this figure is much higher than what was being done when the lockdown started, the country as a whole needs to continue to increase its testing as the test positivity rate (TPR) is now rising." ^{126, 127}

The rising "test positivity rate" suggests persistent inadequacy of the level of testing.

Also of relevance: "According to Japanese financial research firm, Nomura, India has been listed among 15 countries where relaxing the lockdown could result in an increase in the cases of coronavirus infection more rapidly. And, in extreme cases, it could lead to the situation of re-locking." ^{128, 129}

Another more recent study by the University of Michigan predicts that the number of infected, as a consequence of easing the lockdown, will more than double to peak in in mid-July to 8 lakh.¹³⁰

What, however, appears extremely disturbing that the migrant workers, whom the regime tried its utmost to keep locked-in - without the requisite support, when the levels of community transmission were understandably low, have now - with the spread of infection reaching way greater height, in massive numbers have got back to their, highly vulnerable, villages - with even elementary

healthcare infrastructure virtually absent, which were almost unaffected till now.

That may turn things really scary.¹³¹

L. Impact on Economy

The Indian economy had been limping since before the lockdown with high unemployment rate.¹³²

During the fourth quarter of the financial year 2019-20 (Jan.1 - March 31 2020, which covers only the first seven days of the lockdown) the GDP growth fell to 3.1% - the lowest in, at least, 17 years.¹³³

In the third week of April the unemployment is estimated, by the CMIE, to have shot up to 26.2%. It is projected to further go up.¹³⁴

As regards the coming days, there are various estimates - one gloomier than the other.

“Overall, Goldman’s (i.e. Goldman Sachs) forecasts suggest India’s GDP will slump 5% this fiscal year, which would be its steepest contraction since 1979.”¹³⁵

Yet another estimate by the chief economist of CRISIL: “India’s economy is now set to lose 10% of its gross domestic product (GDP), thanks to the after-effects of COVID-19.”¹³⁶

Yet another: “(F)ormer Chief Statistician and one of India’s most highly regarded economists, Pronab Sen, has said “the Indian economy is in bad shape and there is no question about it ... my assessment is that it’s not good at all.” As things stand the economy will shrink by 12.5% this year after shrinking by 32% in the first quarter. By the end of the year unemployment could reach 11% with 50 million out of a job.”

He further added that “the steps the government has taken to freeze new projects is the polar opposite of what is needed and will only make a bad situation worse. He says the government is clearly in “a wait and watch mode but that’s just the wrong way to go.”¹³⁷

But, the gloomiest prediction comes from Prof. Arun Kumar: “India would be the first country in modern history to face a depression. It would take at least three to four years to emerge out of it.” Then goes on to elaborate: “In the current fiscal, the GDP is set to contract by at least 30 per cent. My estimate is that from Rs. 204 lakh crore, our GDP will come down to Rs. 130 lakh crore.”¹³⁸

Another economist of renown has called for bold actions to avert mass starvation during this monsoon.¹³⁹

So, the coming days are projected to turn out to be pretty much bleak.
The Shape of Things to Come

Worldwide, the pandemic has come as a big boon to the authoritarian regimes.^{140, 141}

During a crisis, people, by and large, tend to look up to the “authority” as the only possible saviour, more readily submit to its diktats and consider the dissenting voices as unnecessary and even harmful noises/distractions.³⁸

That makes things all that easier for autocratic regimes to turn even more autocratic.

For the Modi regime, being committed to dismantle the “secular” “democratic” Indian state^{142, 143} - informed with the ideals wrought out in the crucible of the epic Indian freedom struggle, and

supplant it with a “Hindu Rashtra” - denuded of all vestiges of substantive democracy and pluralism, the pandemic has come as a godsend.

As the account above clearly underlines, it is set upon to leverage it to the fullest in order to push its agenda.

As of now, has faced only very limited resistance.

But, its gross mishandling of the crisis¹⁴⁴ - especially its inept and eventually failed attempt to keep the migrant workers locked-in at their work-places, without any state support worth the name, so as to make them available to their potential employers at cheap rates when the lockdown lifts, triggering the Long Marches by millions over hundreds of kilometres, has already introduced a strong jarring note.

Its glaring inability to bend the curves down, despite strict lockdown for more than two months¹⁴⁵, cannot but attract, at least some, adverse attention - regardless of its massive propaganda machinery including much of the mainstream media.

On the flip side are the significantly lower infection and fatality rates all across South Asia.¹³

These are being tom-tommed as a unique achievement of the regime.^{146, 147}

In any case, the economy is already in severe trouble and things are only going to turn worse - more so, given the mishandling.

The pandemic, however, demands, and enforces, maintaining physical distances from the fellow beings and thereby inhibits street mobilisation.

That is how the large momentum of protests, against the NPR/NRC/CAA, that was getting built up got disrupted and dissipated.

But, in the coming days, if the scare of the disease recedes while the economy tanks, that will, again, open up spaces for even larger resistance movements than earlier.

While the differences between situations in the US and India, as they actually obtain, can hardly be casually dismissed. ^{148,149}, the largely spontaneous, protest movements in the US, under the banner of ‘Black Lives Matter’, could nevertheless turn out to be a source of inspiration.¹⁵⁰

A lot would, of course, depend on the skills and determinations of those who are meant to oppose the regime’s sinister agenda.

Epilogue

In the midst of all these, the Indian regime, finds itself embroiled in a rather sudden violent eruption of an old border dispute with its (only) larger and stronger neighbour, China, which has led to utterly unfortunate loss of twenty lives on the Indian side.^{151, 152}

That the Chinese side has visibly hardened its posture, going to the extent of issuing of virtually an open threat¹⁵³ asking India to fall in line may very well damage the macho image that Modi had so carefully cultivated¹⁵⁴, with abundant help from a largely compliant mainstream media.

This may very seriously undermine the Modi magic - his Hindu supremacist appeal to broad sections of the Indian masses.

May very well turn out to be the eventual game-changer.

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Footnotes

[1] The Indian numbering system is used in the Indian subcontinent to express large numbers. The terms lakh (100,000) and crore (10,000,000)[1] are the most commonly used terms (even in English, such as in a local variety called Indian English) to express large numbers in the system. For example, 150,000 rupees in India is referred to as “1.5 lakh rupees”, which is written as 1,50,000 rupees; 30,000,000 (thirty million) rupees is referred to as “3 crore rupees”, which is written as 3,00,00,000 rupees with commas at the thousand, lakh, and crore places. Wikipedia