
Coronavirus (COVID-19) Outbreak in India: Past, Present and Future Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Before the first COVID-19 case was recorded in India, India had begun to take the required precautionary steps to avoid the outbreak. In the present study, we have reviewed the past and present status of India in view of COVID-19 along with future perspective as well. There is a dilemma between lives and livelihood, lockdown is essential for the survival of life and economy is essential for the survival of livelihood; at this juncture, it is for us to decide which should be the priority and which should take a backseat. We end up discussing some major challenges post Coronavirus, and what India should do to overcome them.

Keywords: COVID-19, Lockdown, Tablighi Jamaat, Testing, ICMR

1. BACKGROUND

Coronaviruses are a group of viruses that can be foundation of disease in humans as well as animals and nCOV-10 is the most recently discovered coronavirus among them. This new virus was unknown till the outbreak began in Wuhan, China, in late December, 2019 and which has now affected more than 209 countries and territories around the world as on 24th April [1]. Previously a lot of calamities had affected smaller regions, diminished gradually or stopped with time. But the way Coronavirus spread has been something, we never would have thought off. Despite great developments in medicine and technology, the vaccine could not be found yet.

WHO officially named "COVID-19" as the name of this emerging disease on 11th February 2020 rather than n-CoV19, citing the recommendations established by the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) [1-4]. The COVID-19 requires a human carrier to be transmitted or multiplied, if it lies in the open it will die out after a certain time depending on the surface [5].

WHO announced the outbreak as a pandemic on March 11, 2020; and more than a dozen states in India announced the outbreak as an epidemic under the Epidemics Disease Act, 1897. On 22nd March, India observed a 14 hour voluntary 'Janata Curfew' or public curfew which was followed by a 21-day lockdown of the entire nation as announced by the Indian PM Narendra Modi. The lockdown started not with the idea of eradicating the virus but it was a measure for creating new opportunities to contain the virus by deploying and training and levelling up the healthcare facilities in the country to treat and isolate patients. PM Narendra Modi has shown courage and strength while announcing a 3-week lockdown at 4-hour notice. He displayed these values when addressing the country on March 24, as he clarified the reasons for this measure. He said the only way to manage coronavirus transmission is to break the transmission chain by social distancing [6].

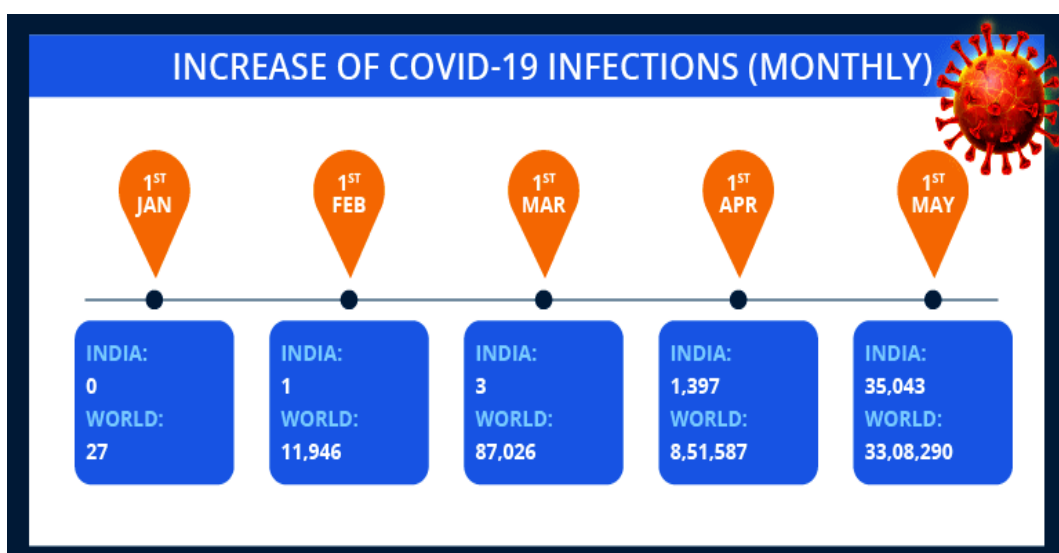
2. INDIA AND COVID-19: PAST SO FAR

Before the first COVID-19 case was recorded in India, India had begun to take the required precautionary steps to avoid the outbreak. It can be seen with reference right after Wuhan Municipal Health Commission, China, confirmed a cluster of COVID-19 cases of pneumonia in Wuhan, Hubei Province on 31 December, of which WHO acknowledged the same on social media on 4 January [7] and right after that Dr Harsh Vardhan, Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) along with the health secretaries started regularly reviewing the public health preparedness, and the core committees to timely identify and measure the importation of COVID-19 into the country [8]. The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare

started monitoring the situation in consultation with WHO and keeping in view the limited human to human transmission instructed the Ministry of Civil Aviation for the returned passengers from China at selected airports namely, Kolkata, Delhi, and Mumbai via thermal scanners. In coordination with the Ministry of Civil Aviation, in-flight announcements were also being made. A travel advisory was also issued to the passengers travelling to and from China on the issue.

India’s first case was reported in Thrissur, Kerala on 30th January 2020 when the woman studying medicine at a university in the Chinese city of Wuhan tested positive [9-10]. On 31st January, Government of India (GoI) made elaborate arrangements for evacuation of 366 Indian citizens from Wuhan city in response to the emergency that has arisen due to an outbreak of COVID-19 in China [11]. Also, a 50-bedded critical care facility was set-up at Safdarjung hospital in Delhi for critical care of the patients. Month-wise trend of COVID-19 in India along with the World is shown in Figure 1 [12].

Figure 1: Monthly trend of COVID-19 in India and World



Source: Ministry of Health and Family Welfare [corona graphics]

For instance, as the number of COVID-19 cases started to increase, educational institutes were called off and the lockdown was announced by our honorable Prime Minister on 24th March. But within a few days, it became apparent that the government had not made prior preparation to implement the lockdown when lakhs of migrant workers from the informal sector, who found themselves without food, shelter and livelihood, started to flee to their villages on foot to avoid the lockdown. Within a day; Indian government had issued a press statement indicating that it had asked state governments to set up relief camps for the traveler workers returning to their hometowns and essential services were allowed to run[13].

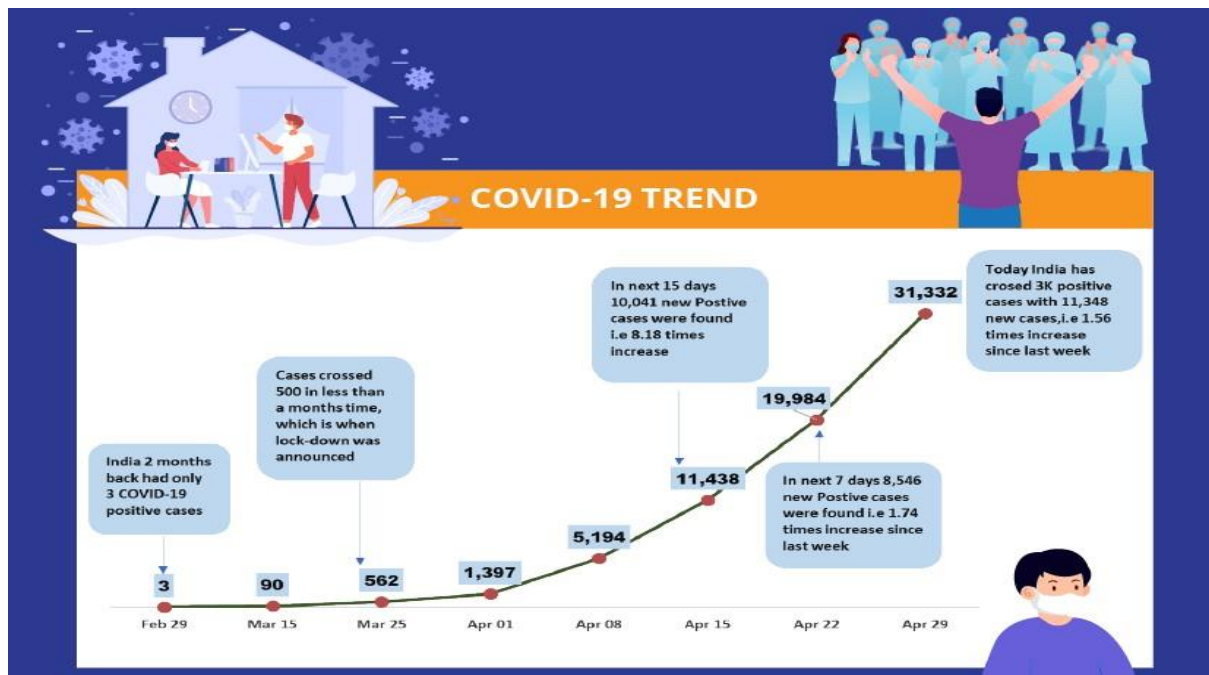
Also the religious congregation at the Tablighi Jamaat Markaz, the group which was known only by intelligence officials, national security experts and wary among police officials for their terror connection all over the world, not many Indians heard of Tablighi Jamaat before the explosive Nizamuddin coronavirus episode. The congregation took place on March 13-15, ignoring directives from the Delhi government to bar a large gathering, indicating the organizers' complete disregard towards civic duties. Their acts ended up infecting a huge number of people and making up to 30% of all cases in India while tracing them [14]. Several initiatives taken by the government were:

- Prime Minister of India has interacted with Gram Panchayats Sarpanchs across the country through video conferencing on the occasion of National Panchayati Raj Day 2020. During this event, a unified e-Gram Swaraj Portal and mobile application and Swamitva Scheme were launched.
- On 22.04.20, India's Food Corporation set a new record as it transferred 102 train loads bearing around 2.8 Lakh Metric Tonnes food grain. The cumulative food grain stocks transferred by FCI during the lockdown time reached 5 MMT at a regular average of 1.65 Lakh MT with this shift.
- All shopkeepers belongs to rural area were allowed but malls restriction were same, said by the Home Ministry in order on 24th April 2020, late Friday night [15].
- The Union Cabinet passed an Ordinance amending the Epidemic Diseases Act of 1897 to protect healthcare personnel and their properties and living / working premises during epidemics as it allows incidents of abuse against health workers and medical professionals as an offence that is cognizable and non-refundable [16].
- RBI Governor Shakti kanta Das provided extraordinary liquidity provision to non-banking finance and microfinance companies, ended up cutting reverse repo rate, eased asset classification requirements [17].

3. INDIA AND CVOID-19: PRESENT SITUATION

According to MoHFW, a total of 35365 COVID-19 cases (including 111 foreign nationals) have been confirmed in 32 states/union territories on 1st May, 2020. That comprises 9065 cases who were cured/released from the hospital, 1 who had migrated, and 1152 fatalities.

Figure 2: Trend of COVID-19 cases in India as on April 29, 2020.



Source: Ministry of Health and Family Welfare [corona graphics]

Since the tendency of cases continues to increase in India, on 1st May, MHA decided to once again extend the lockdown for further 14 days dividing the whole region into three zones namely red zone, orange zone and green zone. Things were allowed with certain restrictions and social distancing. Key points of the lockdown 3.0 are as follows:

- Red Zones are hotspots that will see increased security procedures, contact tracing and Aarogya Setu App's 100% coverage. Some of the substances that were allowed are, e-commerce activities only in respect to essential goods, manufacturing of IT hardware, Jute industry, private offices with operation capability of up to 33% power, all administration offices, food handling units, construction activities limited to in-situ construction, agricultural activities, plantation activities, health services (including AYUSH), banks etc.
- Green zones are districts with either nil documented cases in the last 21 days or no confirmed case. All activities are permitted, except for a restricted happenings prohibited all over the country, regardless of the zone. Means of transportation can operate with seating capacity up to 50 per cent and bus depots with capacity up to 50 per cent can operate.
- Orange areas are regions that are not red, nor green. Taxis and cab aggregators of 1 driver and 2 riders will only be allowed in contrast to the practices permitted in the Red

Zone. Inter-district passenger and car transport can be allowed only for approved activities. Aside from the rider, four wheeler vehicles will have a maximum of two occupants, and two-wheelers would require pillion riding [18].

- Shramik Special Trains will also be run for the movement of stranded persons on request from both State Governments concerned.

4. INDIA AND COVID-19: FUTURE PERSPECTIVE

The damage and aftermath of people, economy, politics, and globalization are difficult to predict. The perspective or outlook of the world in the eye of every individual might change, completely or partially; the madness of materialism will change as we connect to ourselves and try to find happiness even between busy schedules.

The economic fallout from COVID-19 is going to have a long term effect on the global economy including that of India. The direct impact has also started to be seen due to ban on travel, maintain social distancing, loss of employment and opportunities in the transport, tourism, education sector, etc and few other sectors will be badly affected and will require the extensive intervention of the governments of the countries. Psychological and social impact on people should be given priority attention. Extended lockdown and supply chain disruption may affect the Indian population to a greater extent given the large informal economy and unorganized employment. Government support is critical to reviving domestic consumption.

Though the global economy is likely to see a sharp decline, possibly sliding into recession still India is likely to grow at a rate of 1.5 to 2.8% as per current fiscal due to COVID-19 even when other advanced global economies will see a negative growth as per the details projected by IMF and World Bank.

Free exchange of information, technology and resources, including viruses and other laboratory samples, can take place to improve and protect health of the nationals. The fight for security of nationals would be lost otherwise if inoculations, treatment regimens, and services and diagnostics are available only to the wealthy. In Feb, 2020 China nationalized the mechanism on the manufacture and supply of the health equipment's therefore country as big as India must build up an economic environment which helps her to become self-reliant as the geopolitical scenario seems to be inclined towards a nationalistic approach [19]. It is becoming vibrant that India determinations play a superior part as compare to most affected countries in the domain. It would be contingent that how healthy it grips this emergency, and additionally, what lesson it learns from the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties and self-reliance [20].

5. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Deglobalization and Swadeshi Movement 2.0 (Economic nationalism) is what India needs to prepare and plan for carefully. There is a dilemma between lives and livelihood, lockdown is essential for the survival of life and economy is essential for the survival of livelihood; at this point of crisis, it is for us to decide which should be the priority and which should take a backseat.

The armed forces will also need to be inducted to deal with such situations as they have more experience of dealing with rapidly-changing environments and why not allow them to formally represent them in disaster management committees.

Digitisation and building strong integrated digital models will become essential in the post COVID-19 era and that can be done by enhancing technology and its associated tools like artificial intelligence/machine learning, telecommuting and cloud. It is significant to look at the world's comeback to the disaster, India's strengths and weaknesses, and some gemstone gazing into the future. Lastly, the supremacy of a country's interests has to be acknowledged and petty political interests sacrificed.

India should be self-reliant in every aspect, not only in manufacturing API (active pharmaceutical ingredient) but also in parts and components needed to manufacture Electronics, Electrical and engineering industries. India is very much dependent on China in these aspects, so to become a self-dependent country it had already started working on several initiatives like "Make in India", "Skill India" and "Digital India" including "GST" to achieve self-reliance. The seed which was sown in the earlier years by PM Modi can become a game-changer for the Machine & Electronic sector in days to come.

Manufacturing most of the things in India itself may be expensive in the start but it will fetch benefits for the long term. The Indian domestic market itself is so vast that manufacturers are not required to shift its focus on exports as we already have seen in several instances of the Indian Railway manufacturing units like Modern Coach Factory, Integrated Coach Factory and Chittaranjan Locomotive Works. So it can be assured that our manufacturing industries will be able to earn enough profits while satisfying the needs and wants of its fellow countrymen.

China has threatened that Chinese population is reluctant to use Australian goods which China imports. There is nothing like Chinese population opinion as we know it is run by a Communist regime and all the opinion that comes out is that of Communist Party of China and its propaganda. It is a threat in disguise to India because India is putting a bar to Chinese Financial Institutes who are trying to capture Indian economy in this critical situation where financial markets of the World are facing a slump. In this critical juncture self-reliance is the

key to overcome all problems and this will prosper India. When we used to talk about World War III, we often brought in the term, “the invisible enemy”. So, does that mean that today, we are dealing with the invisible enemy, i.e., COVID-19 aka China Virus and this time we are not fighting a conventional war but fighting a biological war? The COVID-19 is not only a pandemic in 2020 but will consequently have effects for decades to come. There will be different changes including priorities and societal changes.

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