

Vol. 22 No. 8

# CONGRESS

June, 2020

# SANDESH

*voice of the nation*



**Congress party totally supports our army, soldiers, military families and the government: Sonia Gandhi**



**Words cannot describe the pain I feel for the officers and men who sacrificed their lives for our country: Rahul Gandhi**

# Rani of Jhansi

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The nation pays homage to Rani Laxmibai on her death anniversary. She was a leading figure of the first war of Independence of 1857. She was born as Manikarnika Tambe and became a symbol of resistance to the British Raj for Indian nationalists.



**19 November 1828 - 18 June 1858**

## THE TRAGEDY AT GALWAN

**The price paid by our soldiers when national security is managed for the Prime Minister's image**

Over the past several weeks, China encroached upon Indian territory, provoked skirmishes with our soldiers and finally on June 15th, Galwan, Ladhak, martyred Col. Babu and 19 other of our brave jawans in a manner that makes the blood of every Indian boil. China has not dared to take an Indian life since 1975. What then gave them the audacity to conduct such a brutal attack now?



To understand why Galwan happened, we must first go back and understand what happened in Doklam in 2017 and the message that Modi ji has sent to China. Here in simple terms is what happened in Doklam. **China entered an area called Doklam that is strategically vital and overlooks India's narrow corridor to the North-East. It was not the first time when China tried this. China tried this in 1967 in Nathu La, in 1986 in Sum Dorong Chu Valley, Arunachal Pradesh and in 2013 in the Depsang Valley in Ladakh. They have been repulsed by our armed forces every time.**

But this time was different. It started building infrastructure there. India protested. Finally, China stopped the building of infrastructure but refused to leave Doklam. This is like a thief occupying your land and putting up a tent there. When you protest, the thief takes down the tent but refuses to leave your land. Would you be satisfied till the thief was off your land? Obviously not. But Modi ji declared that he had won because China was no longer constructing infrastructure, no problem if they remained sitting on our land! Modi ji was so desperate to show that 'All is Well' that within months, with no apology or explanation from the Chinese, he gave up his self-respect and was swinging on jhoolas with the people who took our land, let alone fight back.

**Why does Modi ji do this? Because Modi ji's only interest is protecting and projecting his own image. He is afraid that the price that has to be paid for standing up for our self-respect will be bad for his image. And so, rather than fight for what is ours, he prefers to lie. He said that the Chinese did nothing wrong and let them keep our land in Doklam.**

This emboldened the Chinese. They now believe that they can steal India's land and kill Indian soldiers at will and Modi ji, out of fear of damaging his image, will deny that anything is wrong instead of standing up to them. In Galwan they not only took our land but for the first time since 1975, they also brutally murdered our soldiers. **Unfortunately, the PM has reacted exactly as the Chinese wanted him to. He has now said that there are no Chinese on our land. So according to Modi ji, Galwan and Pangong were never ours. So rather than confront China for stealing our lands, the PM is saying that Galwan never belonged to us in the first place.**

This is an insult to the martyred soldiers, our armed forces and the Nation. Our martyred soldiers have left us with an invaluable lesson. They have shown us that there is no greater victory than confronting the aggressor and defending India's dignity, even when it demands the highest sacrifice. With folded hands, we must request the Prime Minister to embrace the example they have set and be fearless in the defence of the dignity of 'Bharat Mata'.

**Jai Congress. Jai Hind. Jai Jagat. ❧**

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**CONGRESS  
SANDESH**  
voice of the nation

Published in Hindi & English

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**NOW IS THE TIME FOR US ALL TO SUPPORT THESE PEOPLE; THE PEOPLE WHO HAVE MADE US ALL, THE PEOPLE WHO HAVE FAITH IN YOU, WHO HAVE MADE YOU, SUPPORTED YOU.**  
- PRIYANKA GANDHI VADRA

### PUBLISHER

Motilal Vora  
Published every month by Motilal Vora on behalf of Sandesh Trust, All India Congress Committee and printed at Chaar Dishayen Printers, G-40, Sector-3, Noida 201 301

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Two Years = Rs.200/- • Three Years = Rs.300/- • Five Years = Rs.500/-  
Outstation cheques should include Rs.75 extra towards realization charges. Cheques/Demand Draft may be sent in favour of 'Sandesh Trust', 24 Akbar Road, New Delhi-110011

# Indian National Congress and the entire opposition unitedly stand by our defence forces: Sonia Gandhi



**W**e are still in the dark about many crucial aspects of the crisis. ....Seeking the government's response on the details of Ladakh face-off and the "way forward", Smt. Gandhi stressed that "valuable time was lost between May 5 and June 6".

Remarks of Congress President Smt. Sonia Gandhi in All Party Meeting on 19th June, 2020

Mr. Prime Minister, Ministers, Leaders of Political Parties,

We meet today in the aftermath of a tragic conflict and our hearts are filled with great sorrow & anguish. Let me begin by paying homage to the brave soldiers of our Army, who laid down their lives as also convey my deepest condolences to the bereaved families. To the injured jawans, we wish them a speedy recovery and good health.

This meeting, in my view, should have come sooner and immediately after the government had been reportedly informed about the Chinese intrusion on May 5th, 2020, into several places in Ladakh and elsewhere. As always, the entire nation would have stood together like a rock and fully supported the government of the day in the steps required to defend the territorial integrity of the country. Alas, that was not to be.

In fact, even at this late stage, we are still in the dark about many crucial aspects of the crisis. We have some specific questions for the Government: On which date did the Chinese troops intrude into our territory in Ladakh? When did the government find out about the Chinese transgressions into our territory? Was it on May 5th, as reported, or earlier? Does the government not receive, on a regular basis, satellite pictures of the borders of our country? Did our external intelligence agencies not report any unusual activity along the LAC? Did the Military Intelligence not alert the government

about the intrusion and the build-up of massive forces along the LAC, whether on the Chinese side or on the Indian side? In the government's considered view, was there a failure of intelligence?

We in the Congress Party believe that valuable time was lost between May 5 and June 6, the date on which the Corps Commanders meeting took place. Even after the June 6 meeting, efforts should have been made to talk directly, at the political and diplomatic levels, to the leadership of China. We failed to use all avenues and the result is the loss of 20 lives as well as dozens injured. I would urge the Prime Minister to kindly share with us all the facts and the sequence of events beginning April this year till date.

The question is, what next? What is the way forward? The entire country would like an assurance that status quo ante would be restored and China will revert to the original position on Line of Actual Control.

We would also like to be briefed on the preparedness of our defence forces to meet any threat. In particular, I would like to ask what is the current status of the Mountain Strike Corps, with two mountain infantry divisions, that was sanctioned in 2013? Should the Government not treat it with utmost priority?

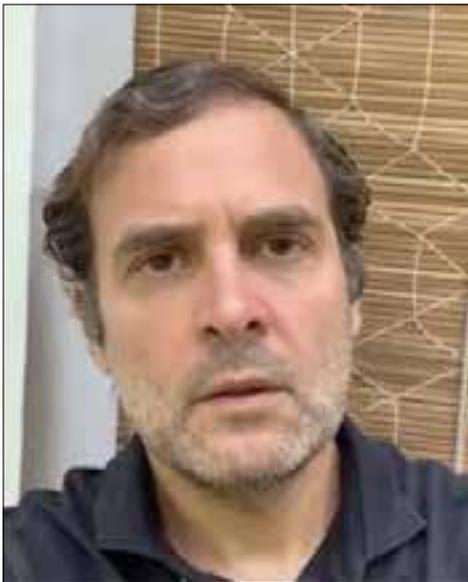


We in the Indian National Congress and the entire opposition unitedly stand by our defence forces and are prepared to make any sacrifice to ensure they are battle-ready. The Entire nation expects that Government will take all Opposition Parties & the country into confidence and brief us regularly so that we may present to the world a picture of unity and solidarity.

Prime Minister Modiji, I thank you for inviting the Indian National Congress to this meeting. Jai Hind! ❧

## Rahul Gandhi Tweets 2 Questions to PM Day After Meet on China Tension

**New Delhi:** Congress leader Shri Rahul Gandhi on 20th June,



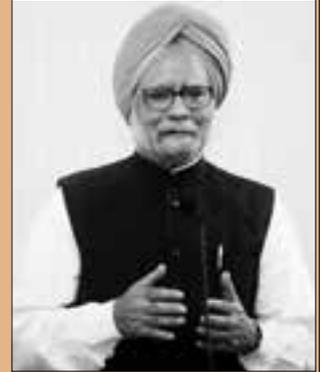
2020 morning, tweeted two questions for the government, a day after Prime Minister Narendra Modi held an all-party meeting to discuss the India-China clash at Ladakh on 19th June, 2020, in which 20 Indian soldiers were killed. “Why were our soldiers killed?”, he asked after PM Modi on 19th June, 2020 asserted that “neither is anyone inside our territory nor is any of our post captured”.

“PM has surrendered Indian territory to Chinese aggression. If the land was Chinese:

1. Why were our soldiers killed?
2. Where were they killed?” Shri Rahul Gandhi tweeted. ❧

**The Prime Minister must always be mindful of the implications of his words and declarations on our Nation’s security as also strategic and territorial interests: Dr. Manmohan Singh, Former Prime Minister**

**Press Statement by Dr. Manmohan Singh, Former Prime Minister on 22nd June, 2020**



**W**e, the Nation, lost twenty brave soldiers in the Galwan Valley, Ladakh, on June 15th-16th, 2020. They laid down their lives in the ultimate act of sacrifice, valour and duty to our country. Our brave hearts defended the motherland till their last breath and for that, we owe them and their families, our eternal gratitude. However, their sacrifice cannot be allowed to be in vain.

At this moment, we stand at historic cross-roads. Our Government’s decisions and actions will have serious bearings on how the future generations perceive us. Those who lead us bear the weight of a solemn duty. And in our democracy, that responsibility rests with the office of the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister must always be mindful of the implications of his words and declarations on our Nation’s security as also strategic and territorial interests.

China is brazenly and illegally seeking to claim parts of Indian territory such as the Galwan Valley and the Pangong Tso Lake by committing multiple incursions between April 2020 till date. We cannot and will not be cowed down by threats and intimidation, nor permit a compromise with our territorial integrity. The Prime Minister cannot allow them to use his words as a vindication of their position and must ensure that all organs of the Government work together to tackle this crisis and prevent it from escalating further.

This is a moment where we must stand together as a nation and be united in our response to this brazen threat.

We remind the Government that disinformation is no substitute for diplomacy or decisive leadership. The truth cannot be suppressed by having pliant allies spout comforting but false statements.

We call upon the Prime Minister and the Government to rise to the occasion, to ensure justice for Col. B. Santosh Babu and our jawans, who have made the ultimate sacrifice and resolutely defended our territorial integrity.

To do any less would be a historic betrayal of the people’s faith. ❧

# It is our duty to offer constructive criticism and suggestions, and be the voice of the people.: Sonia Gandhi



## Meeting of 22 Like-minded Parties

### Congress President Smt. Sonia Gandhi's Opening Remarks at the Video Conference Meeting of 22 Like-minded Parties on 22nd May, 2020

I welcome you and I am grateful that each one of you has made it possible for us to hold this meeting, virtually.

First of all, on behalf of all of you, I wish to express my profound sense of sorrow at the enormous damage caused in West Bengal and Odisha by Cyclone Amphan, including the loss of 80 lives.

Before I touch upon the issue of the pandemic and the current situation, I would like to point out that India was facing an economic crisis even before the first corona virus case was identified. Demonetization and a hasty and flawed GST were amongst its main causes. The economic downturn began in 2017-18. Seven quarters of declining GDP growth was no ordinary event; it was unprecedented. Yet, the government carried on with its misguided policies and incompetent governance.

#### Key Points

- Along with the Public Distribution System put in place by an earlier Congress government, it is the mainstay for our poorest and most vulnerable citizens in preventing starvation and destitution.
- On assuming office, Prime Minister Narendra Modi realised that shutting down the scheme was not practical. Instead, he sought to deride it, attacking the Congress party in a caustic speech in which he called it “A living monument of your failure”.
- Faced with unprecedented hardship and an economy already in slowdown, the government was obliged to fall back on the UPA's flagship rural relief programme.

As we all know, on March 11, WHO declared COVID-19 as a pandemic. All of us in the Opposition offered our full support to the government. Even when the lockdown was imposed on March 24, with barely 4 hours' notice, all of us supported the decision despite its suddenness and obvious unpreparedness of the government.

The initial optimism of the Prime Minister that the war against the virus would conclude in 21 days has turned out to be misplaced. It seems that the virus is here to stay until a vaccine is found. I am also of the view that the government was uncertain about the criteria for lockdowns, nor does it have an exit strategy. Successive lockdowns have yielded diminishing returns. The government also stumbled badly on the testing strategy and the import of test kits. Meanwhile, the pandemic



continues to take its toll.

The economy has been gravely crippled. Every economist of repute had advised an immediate need for a massive fiscal stimulus. The Prime Minister's announcement on May 12 of a grand Rs. 20 lakh crore package - and the Finance Minister spelling out its details over the next five days, have turned out to be a cruel joke on the country.

The defining image of the pandemic has been the lakhs of migrant workers, many with children, walking hundreds of kilometres, without money, food or medicines, desperate to reach their home states.

Apart from the plight of the migrant workers, those who have been cruelly ignored include the 13 crore families in the bottom half of the population, namely - the tenant farmers and landless agricultural workers; the laid off or retrenched workers and employees; the shopkeepers and the self-employed; the 5.8 crore out of the 6.3 crore MSMEs; and organized industries, including the large businesses, that drive our country's growth.

Many of us, the like-minded parties, had demanded that cash must be transferred to the poor, that free grain must be distributed to all families, that buses and trains must be arranged for the migrant workers to go back to their homes. We emphasized that Wage Assistance and Wage Protection Funds must be set up to protect the employees and the employers. Our pleas have fallen on deaf ears.

Far from offering succour and support, the government has embarked on a wild adventure of so-called reforms including a grand clearance sale of PSUs and repeal of labour laws. There is not even a pretence of consultation with stakeholders or debate in Parliament. We deplore these unilateral moves.

A number of renowned economists are predicting that 2020-21 will end with negative growth of up to minus 5 per cent. The consequences will be catastrophic.

That the present government has no solutions is worrying; but that it has no empathy or compassion for the poor and

vulnerable is heartbreaking.

The government has also abandoned any pretence of being a democratic government. All power is now concentrated in one office, the PMO. The spirit of Federalism which is an integral part of our Constitution is all but forgotten. There is no indication either if the two Houses of Parliament or the Standing Committees will be summoned to meet.

Friends, it is our duty to offer constructive criticism and suggestions, and be the voice of the people. It is in that spirit that we are meeting today. I would now like to request each of you to give your considered views.

### **Cyclone Amphan**

#### **Resolution Passed at the Beginning of the 22 Like-minded Parties' Meeting on the Death and Devastation Caused by Cyclone**

We, the opposition parties, extend our sympathy and support to the government and people of West Bengal and Odisha in meeting the impact of the devastation caused by Cyclone Amphan.

This meeting of leaders of opposition parties conveys its deepest condolences to the families of those who have lost their lives.



We express our solidarity and sympathies with the pain of those who have suffered other losses.

The country and its people are already in the midst of a grim struggle for survival combatting the Covid 19 pandemic.

A natural calamity like Cyclone Amphan has come as a double blow, breaking the spirits of the people.

People in both these states urgently need support and solidarity of the governments and people of the country.

Opposition Parties therefore urge the central government to immediately declare this as a national calamity and substantially help the states in facing the impact of this disaster.

At this juncture, relief and rehabilitation should be the top most priority. But the possibility of an outbreak of other diseases as a result of such calamity must also not be ignored.

Henceforth, we the Opposition Parties call upon the central government to provide urgent help to our fellow citizens/ countrymen.

### **A Report on meeting of Like-minded Political Parties**

**New Delhi:** Twenty-two like-minded parties met 22nd May, 2020 to exchange views on the extraordinary situation in the country, arising out of the Covid-19 pandemic. The parties were of the view that the economy has collapsed, all sections of society are facing acute distress, livelihoods are destroyed and precious lives are lost.

The like-minded parties applauded the heroic efforts of all public health personnel, particularly, doctors, nurses, paramedics as also police and security forces personnel, cleaners and those maintaining essential services like water, power etc., across the country in these challenging times. They have shown extraordinary courage and dedication. The Congress Party felt humbled by their devotion to duty at a time of grave peril to their own lives.

Acutely conscious of the magnitude of the present crisis, the like-minded parties extended their full cooperation to the Union Government. But it was also pointed out that the Union Government failed in discharging its responsibilities in a timely, effective and sensitive manner. Grand announcements were made but they did nothing meaningful to alleviate the sufferings of people and address the pressing concerns of farmers and farm laborers, of migrant and other workers, of trade & commerce, of MSMEs and of industry. In fact, Union Government unabashedly usurped powers vested in the States, undermining the constitutionally guaranteed federal democracy.

The like-minded parties were of the strong view that this is neither the time for Government at the Centre to indulge in showmanship nor in one-upmanship. The present time calls

for a gigantic collective endeavor. This is what the people of India need and this is what the people of India demand. It was a consensus that it's important for the Government of India to reach out and engage in a dialogue with all political parties in a systematic manner, listen seriously to the suggestions that they have to make, activate Parliamentary institutions like Standing Committees and be genuine in helping the states; financially and otherwise.

Opposition parties represent over 60 percent of India's people. Therefore, they made an appeal to the Union Government to listen and consider the following 11 demands:

1. Direct Cash Transfer of Rs. 7,500/- per month to all families, outside the Income Tax bracket, for six months. Rs. 10,000/- to be paid immediately with the balance being paid equally across the remaining five months.
2. Free distribution of 10 kg food grains each month to all needy individuals for the next six months. Increase the number of MGNREGA working days to 200 and provide the necessary budgetary support.
3. Free transportation for all migrant workers to their native places. Also, make immediate and reliable arrangements to rescue all Indian students and other citizens stranded overseas.
4. Provide accurate and relevant information on Covid-19 infections and goalposts vis-à-vis testing, infrastructure and containing spread.
5. Reverse all unilateral policy decisions particularly the annulment of labor laws.
6. Procure immediately the Rabi harvest at the MSP and give assistance for the produce to reach the market. The Government must also provide seeds, fertilizers and other inputs to the farmers to help prepare for the Kharif crop.
7. Release substantial funds to the state governments who are in the frontline of combating the pandemic.
8. Communicate in clear terms, the Central Government's exit strategy from the lockdown, if any.
9. Restore Parliamentary functioning and oversight with immediate effect.
10. Present a clear and meaningful economic strategy focused on revival and poverty alleviation instead of propaganda. The Rs. 20 lakh crore package and its contents mislead the people of India. We demand that government present a revised and comprehensive package that will be a true fiscal stimulus in order to stimulate demand in the economy.
11. Consult State Governments while allowing international/ domestic flights. ❗



**S**mt. Sonia Gandhi said – “My dear brothers and sisters, for the last two months, the entire country has been going through a severe economic crisis of livelihood and employment, due to the challenge of Corona epidemic and Lockdown. Everyone saw such a painful scene for the first time after the independence of the country, when millions of workers were forced to go back home; walking hundreds and thousands of kilometers barefoot, on empty stomachs, without medicines and resources. Every heart in the country heard their pain and sobs, but perhaps the government did not.

Millions of jobs were lost, millions of businesses were destroyed, factories closed, farmers had to roam about to sell their crops. The entire country grappled with this, but perhaps the government did not realize it.

Since the very first day, my fellow Congressmen, economists, sociologists and each person leading the society told the government repeatedly that this is the time to come forth and be of service, the time for the government to help everyone; be it a worker or a farmer, a big business or a small shopkeeper. I don't know why the government is constantly refusing to understand and implement this.

That is why, Congressmen have decided to carry on this social

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***We urge the Central government yet again to open their treasury and give relief to the needy. Grant Rs. 7,500 per month to each family for the next six months through direct cash and out of it, Rs. 10,000 must be given immediately.***

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campaign meant to raise the voice of India. We urge the Central government yet again to open their treasury and give relief to the needy. Grant Rs. 7,500 per month to each family for the next six months through direct cash and out of it, Rs. 10,000 must be given immediately. Arrange for a safe and free journey for the workers to enable them to reach home and arrange also for livelihood and ration for them. Ensure 200 days' work in Mahatma Gandhi MGNREGA so that jobs are available in their village itself. Give financial help to Small Scale Industries instead of giving them loans, so that millions of jobs are saved and the country progresses too.

Today, Congress supporters, Congress leaders, workers, officials from across the country are repeating these demands in front of the government once again through social media. I request you too to join this mission, share your problems so that we can raise your voices further.

We are with each and every individual during this hour of crisis and will definitely overcome these difficult times together.

Jai Hind! 🇮🇳

# This isn't BJP vs Congress... use MNREGA to help people of India



**T**he Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), 2005, is a shining example of a radical and rational systemic change. It is radical because it transferred power to the poorest of the poor and enabled them to escape hunger and deprivation. It is rational because it puts money directly in the hands of those who need it most. It has proved its worth in the years it has been in existence, even enduring six years of a hostile government. A government that sought to denigrate it, undermine it, has come to reluctantly rely on it. Along with the Public Distribution System put in place by an earlier Congress government, it is the mainstay for our poorest and most vulnerable citizens in preventing starvation and destitution wherever implemented in letter and spirit, especially in today's COVID-19 crisis.

## Key Points

- Along with the Public Distribution System put in place by an earlier Congress government, it is the mainstay for our poorest and most vulnerable citizens in preventing starvation and destitution.
- On assuming office, Prime Minister Narendra Modi realised that shutting down the scheme was not practical. Instead, he sought to deride it, attacking the Congress party in a caustic speech in which he called it “A living monument of your failure”.
- Faced with unprecedented hardship and an economy already in slowdown, the government was obliged to fall back on the UPA's flagship rural relief programme.

Let us not forget that the notification of the MGNREGA in September 2005 as an act of Parliament came about because of a people's movement after years of struggle by civil society. The Congress party listened to their voices and to those of the people. It became a commitment in our 2004 manifesto and those of us who pressed hardest for it are proud that the UPA government implemented it as soon as feasible.

The idea was simple: Any citizen in rural India now had the legal right to demand work and was guaranteed 100 days of work with minimum wages provided by the government. And it proved its worth very quickly — a grassroots, demand-driven, Right to Work programme, unprecedented in its scale and architecture, focused on poverty alleviation. Millions have been saved from hunger and worse in the 15

years since its inception.

Mahatma Gandhi said, “When ridicule fails to kill a movement it begins to command respect”. In independent India, there is no better example of this coming true than the MGNREGA. On assuming office, Prime Minister Narendra Modi realised that shutting down the scheme was not practical. Instead, he sought to deride it, attacking the Congress party in a caustic speech in which he called it “a living monument of your failure”. In the years since, the Modi government tried its best to throttle the MGNREGA, hollowing it out and undermining it. But with the unrelenting pressure of activists, the courts and

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*The Modi government may still be looking for some twisted logic to reconcile its dislike of a Congress party programme with its wholesale adoption of it. But the country recognises how the world’s largest public works programme not only helped lift millions of Indians from extreme poverty but transformed Panchayati Raj, contributed to climate change mitigation and revived the rural economy.*

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a vocal Opposition in Parliament, the government was forced to step back. In a characteristic reversal of course, it sought, instead, to give it a new appearance, by integrating it with the prime minister’s pet programmes like Swachh Bharat and Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana. These were passed off as reforms but, in reality, they were no more than a barely disguised dressing up of Congress party initiatives. It is another matter that payments to workers were delayed interminably and work was denied frequently.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the distress it has unleashed has brought the Modi government full circle. Faced with unprecedented hardship and an economy already in slowdown, the government was obliged to fall back on the UPA’s flagship rural relief programme. Deeds are more important than words, and nothing speaks more eloquently than the finance minister’s recent and belated increase in the overall allocation of the programme to more than Rs 1 lakh crore. In May 2020 alone, 2.19 crore households demanded work through the Act, the highest for the month in eight years.

The Modi government may still be looking for some twisted logic to reconcile its dislike of a Congress party programme with its wholesale adoption of it. But the country recognises how

the world’s largest public works programme not only helped lift millions of Indians from extreme poverty but transformed Panchayati Raj, contributed to climate change mitigation and revived the rural economy. It heralded social change by ensuring equal pay to everyone, empowering women, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other vulnerable populations. It helped them organise and offered them a life of dignity and self-respect. Understanding these well-established facts will be crucial to empowering India in today’s crisis.

Now, as dejected workers return from cities and towns to their villages in droves, deprived of employment, facing an insecure future, a humanitarian crisis on an unprecedented scale is unfolding before us. And the value of the MGNREGA has never been clearer and more evident. Relief efforts must be centred around rebuilding their faith. One immediate step must be to issue them job cards in the programme. The panchayats, empowered by Rajiv Gandhi’s path-breaking initiatives, must be brought centre-stage as the MGNREGA is not a centralised programme. The capacity of panchayats to manage public works projects must be strengthened and devolution of funds to panchayats must be prioritised. The nature of work must be left to gram sabhas. Local elected bodies understand ground realities, the influx of workers and their needs. They know best where to spend their budgets, in tune with the needs of the village and the local economy. The skills of the workers must be used to build durable assets that improve farm productivity, increase rural income and conserve the environment.

The government must put money directly in the hands of the people in this time of crisis by clearing arrears, ensuring unemployment allowance, and being flexible about modes of payment to the workers to cut delays. The Modi government has not paid heed to demands to increase the number of workdays to 200 and to allow them to be registered at the worksites in every gram panchayat. The MGNREGA must be ensured open-ended funding as it was meant to be.

The MGNREGA has proved its worth because it continuously improved and evolved during the UPA years. It was shaped by the people working together with the government through extensive social audits, transparency, openness to scrutiny by journalists and academics, and the appointment of an ombudsman. State governments played a crucial role by innovating best practices. It became known as a model of poverty alleviation throughout the world.

The Modi government has grudgingly come around to the significance of the programme. My plea to the government is, this is a time of national crisis, not a time to play politics. This is not a BJP versus Congress issue. You have a powerful mechanism at hand, please use it to help the people of India in their time of need. ❧

Courtesy: The Indian Express



## The government will have to listen... ..

Smt. Sonia Gandhi addressed the people via video message on 28th May, 2020, (Second Video Message)

**S**mt. Sonia Gandhi said, “My dear brothers and sisters, I felt the need to talk to you once again. The entire world is fighting with Corona. I want to talk to you regarding the steps taken against this epidemic and the steps that need to be taken.

Let us assume that the lockdown was indispensable, but was it necessary that the people of the country should be given only four hours of deferment? Did the government consider what would happen to workers when the owner of the factories, of the shops would shun the workers? Did the government consider what the workers stranded on roads would earn, what would they eat, where would they live, where would they go? It seems that these poor people, from whom every opportunity to live has been snatched because of corona and the lockdown, were sidelined right from the beginning.

The true and direct test of any government is what is it doing for the poor and the weak people of society. The Congress party demands the foremost relief to be given to the unemployed and the poor people.

When the Congress party announced the grant of free rail tickets to the poor migrants, only then the Central government announced to pay 85% ticket price. It is a different matter that wherever there is our government even today or governments of Congress supporters, the state government is giving free ticket to the migrant workers – while the 85% of the center is still not taken care of. Above all, you have seen yourselves that due to lack of rails how the workers are taking their entire families through highways by riding on trucks, tempos and bicycles. Anyone’s heart would have come to mouth seeing their condition. Even if someone tries to bring relief, he/she is prevented from doing so like the BJP government recently stopped the buses of the Congress on one or the other pretext.

It is very important to ensure 200 days employment in

MGNREGA so that employment is available in the village itself, financial support should be provided to Small Scale Industries so that crores of jobs are saved and there is progress of the country.

Undoubtedly, to rectify the economic problem of the country, the government should give full cooperation and support to the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) - so that employment can increase rapidly. It can provide them a help of one lakh crore for subsidy, interest payment and working capital. It is also equally important that under present circumstances, every unemployed and poor person be given a grant of at least 10 kgs ration without ration card. Apart from this, a direct transfer of Rs. 7,500 should be made into their accounts for the next six months.

One can ask a question as to where would the money for this work come from? The truth is that there is no money crunch, but what it takes is the rightful use of that money. The 20,000 crore rupees that the government has for the beautification of New Delhi’s ‘Central Vista’, can be used to help those people who are commuting on empty stomachs and are parched.

The government claims to have been providing 10% of the GDP to relieve the people of this crisis but if their data is scrutinized, one would clearly see that a mere 1% has been provided.

I am putting these demands in front of you. The government will have to listen to you. I am fully aware of the pain you hold in your heart for the poor and the unemployed, for the workers and the farmers, in this hour of crisis. So, you ask the government in a loud and clear voice – what is the reason for the present situation, why is that which is needed not being done, and when will something be done? Thank you, Jai Hind! ❗❗



## Profiteering Off Its People: Sonia Gandhi

**C**ongress President wrote to the Prime minister on 16<sup>th</sup> June, 2020 regarding surging Petrol/Diesel prices that have broken the back of common man in these challenging times.

*I hope this letter finds you well.*

*India has faced unprecedented public health, economic and social challenges during the ongoing battle against Covid-19. I am deeply distressed that in these exceedingly difficult times since the beginning of March, the Government has taken the wholly insensitive decision to increase petrol and diesel prices on no less than ten separate occasions.*

*Your Government is seeking to earn an additional revenue of nearly Rs. 2,60,000 crore by these ill-advised hikes in excise duty and increases in the prices of petrol of diesel. As it is, people across the board are facing unimaginable hardships what to say of widespread fear and insecurity. These price increases are saddling our people with an additional burden of this enormous magnitude that is neither justified nor appropriate. It is the duty and responsibility of the Government to alleviate suffering, not put the people to still greater hardship.*

*I see no logic in why the Government would even consider such a price increase at a time when the economic impact of Covid-19 is depriving millions of jobs and livelihoods, devastating businesses big and small, rapidly eroding the income of the middle class, even as farmers are struggling to sow the crop for the Kharif season.*

*Given that the international price of crude oil has fallen by approximate 9% over the last week (coming after a collapse of crude oil prices over the last few months), the Government is doing nothing short of profiteering off its people – when they are down and out.*

*It is a matter of record that despite historically low oil prices over the last six years your Government's revenues have been massively enriched by the cumulative increase in excise duty on petrol and diesel on twelve different occasions (by an additional Rs. 23.78 per litre on petrol and Rs. 28.37 on diesel). This translates into a 258 percent increase in excise on petrol and 820 percent hike in excise duty on diesel, yielding in these six years a staggering Rs. 18,00,000 crores from excise collection on petrol and diesel alone. If ever there was ever a time to deploy these resources in the service of the people, it is now.*

*I urge you to roll back these increases and pass on the benefit of low oil prices directly to the citizens of this country. If you wish for them to be 'self-reliant' then do not place financial fetters on their ability to move forward. And I am once again obliged to repeat what I have said before: please use the Government's resources to put money directly into the hands of those who need it in this time of severe hardship. ❝*

# ‘Oil price mechanisms should be driven by economic forces alone; in India the NDA is making it look like a pot of ‘political advantages’



Shiv Bhatia

**D**iverted by so many events around, the Indian public stands absorbed and hard pressed with the hike in petrol & diesel prices, yet again. Petrol or Diesel price in India, is a touchy subject and while we are collectively fighting repercussions of not just Covid-19 and its recovery process, we have the government to give us more worries. While everyone has a confused, wandering mind as to how the business & economy will upscale, there are border tensions going on too with our neighbouring nations. With such news & information around, the government seems to have taken advantage of this, while silently they have been increasing petrol and diesel prices, considering this will go unnoticed.

Sitting at June 22nd, 2020, while Petrol is priced at Rs.79.56/- and Diesel at Rs.78.85/-, we have no positive support to stabilize the micro economy of the

## Key Points

- Hidden monetary gain via tax on oil, is not going to revitalize this nation, rather, will be adding to a bigger failure of economy, in the coming months & fiscal 20-21.
- Hidden monetary gain via tax on oil, is not going to revitalize this nation, rather, will be adding to a bigger failure of economy, in the coming months & fiscal 20-21.
- Today Petrol in India is the costliest in all of South Asia and no one to be blamed because the NDA can rest on its cushion support of covid-19 repercussions and excuses.
- Why does it seem that only few big names are being supported to grow in this country?
- In the name of ‘Make in India’ a small set of companies, individuals and governments are growing, to fool the public on the lines of ‘country progress’, but these are delusions & diversions.

households, nor the macro economy of the country as a whole. Diesel on May 1st, 2020, was priced at Rs.62.29/- per litre and on June 1st, 2020, it reached Rs. 69.43/-. Factually if we consider, petrol has been hiked by Rs. 9.21/- per litre while diesel has been hiked by Rs. 8.55/- per litre, in the last 16 days. All these hikes have been taking place in India, even when the international crude oil prices retreated all through these months while the pandemic affected the entire globe. Crude oil is extremely weighed down due to an increase in US crude inventories and of course the Middle-East too. This supply excess led to price falls and the countries still continue to worry about a potential second wave of the corona virus pandemic, leading to such economic imbalances again.

The international crude oil price crash, to rarely seen

*Globally, the oil prices have fallen. It's a simple demand-supply correlation to which countries have, helplessly, adapted to. But in India, though the economic growth is surely falling day-to-day, yet, this downfall has managed to cause a hike in prices of both, Petrol & Diesel, rather competing with one another.*

levels, should have helped India to significantly cut the import bill, check inflation and boost revenue, if the government took advantage of the situation in a positive way for the benefit of the country. Crude oil was rated at \$116 per barrel in 2011, even then the government could control pricing in India, keeping petrol rated at Rs. 58.37/- per litre while all through April & May 2020, crude oil stood at a low of \$21.04, yet the price hike in petrol & diesel continues in our country, standing at a horrific shocking price of Rs. 79.56/- per litre for petrol and Rs. 78.85/- per litre for diesel as mentioned above. The price effect took a steep increase and since the last few months, has been adding to financial pressure to the rich, middle class and of course the poor. Ideally crude prices falling internationally and the fact that India imports over 80 per cent of its requirements, tells us that the country would have needed to shell out a lot less money to buy oil from abroad. Low oil prices can not only reduce India's import bills but it can also give a room to the government to divert existing funds to better priority areas; and put less burden on the common man. Further, low petroleum and fuel costs also bring down energy prices, moderating the inflation rate. India being a net oil importer tends to gain immensely from oil slump on its import bill. All these facts are strong if we look at the scenario with an economic perspective, however, the situation right now, is a clear implication of 'fund diversion & misuse by way of incremental prices of oil', which is clearly not an economic approach, rather a political one. This kind of hidden monetary gain via tax on oil, is not going to revitalize this nation, rather, will be adding to a bigger failure of economy, in the coming months & fiscal 20-21.

Considering the strength in the oil-pricing sector for India between 2004 to 2014, a decade where there was progressive taxation yet a hold on unnecessary price inflation, Narendra Modi called it a failure, blaming the UPA. Today Petrol in India is the costliest in all of South Asia and no one to be blamed because the NDA can rest on its cushion support of covid-19 repercussions and excuses. Globally, the oil prices have fallen. It's a simple demand-supply correlation to which countries have, helplessly, adapted to. But in India, though the economic growth is surely falling day-to-day, yet, this downfall has managed to cause a hike in prices of both, Petrol & Diesel,

rather competing with one another.

In 2012, the Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh, acknowledged the need to rationalize fuel prices. But, he affirmed & stated that at the same time it would have to be ensured that the poor is shielded from the effect of such a rationalization. Any change in fuel pricing is a political issue in India and eventually the consumers have to pay for the politics of oil. Understanding this as a lead economist & PM, Dr. Manmohan Singh explained the oil-price mechanism in the best of public interest.

"The challenges we face on the energy front are formidable. We need adequate supplies of energy at affordable prices. Domestic sources of crude oil and gas are inadequate to meet the growing demands of our rapidly expanding economy," he said. As a representative of not just the UPA but the country as a whole, he confirmed that to insulate the common man from the impact of rising oil prices, the Government shoulders a sizeable portion of the burden by pricing diesel and kerosene below their market price.

*In 2012, the Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh, acknowledged the need to rationalize fuel prices. But, he affirmed & stated that at the same time it would have to be ensured that the poor is shielded from the effect of such a rationalization.*

Yet today, we see a complete contrasting economic policy implication, which has sadly got diesel & petrol prices to almost compete with each other & has left the common man stranded trying to cope up. A middle class man, who travels to work in his vehicle, is pinched with extreme petrol price hike and the same has troubled and pinched the businessman too, who is struggling to survive during this pandemic and has to pay exorbitant prices for diesel for basic operations.

*As a representative of not just the UPA but the country as a whole, he confirmed that to insulate the common man from the impact of rising oil prices, the Government shoulders a sizeable portion of the burden by pricing diesel and kerosene below their market price.*

*continued on page 25*

# Sonia Gandhi's Questions to PM Modi after India-China Face-Off in Ladakh



On 15th June, 2020, a clash in Ladakh's Galwan valley area cost the lives of 20 Indian soldiers - some of them bludgeoned to death.

**New Delhi:** "Prime Minister Narendra Modi should step forward and explain to the nation how China managed to grab Indian territory and why 20 soldiers had to sacrifice their lives for the nation", Congress chief Sonia Gandhi said in a 3-minute video, she also posed a series of tough questions for the Prime Minister and announced that the party stands with the armed forces and the government.

Video Message of Congress President, Smt. Sonia Gandhi on the Chinese transgressions and martyrdom of our brave soldiers.

Congress President Smt. Sonia Gandhi said, "Hello! my dear brothers and sisters.

The martyrdom of our 20 brave soldiers, on the border of China, has shaken the conscience of the entire country. I pay my deepest heartfelt tribute to all these brave souls, with reverence, as also pray to God to give their families the strength to bear this suffering.

You all know that for the last one and a half months, the Chinese army has infiltrated the Indian border in Ladakh. Today, when there is a lot of resentment about this incident in the country, the Prime Minister should come forward and tell the truth to the country as to how China captured our land and why were the 20 soldiers martyred? What is the situation today? Are our military officers or soldiers still missing? How many of our military officers and soldiers are seriously injured? How much of our land has been occupied by China and where? What is the Indian Government's thinking, policy and solution to deal with this entire situation?

We assure that in this hour of crisis, the Congress party totally supports our army, soldiers, military families and the government. I am sure that in this challenging time, the entire

country will unite and face the enemy. I also urge the Prime Minister to come before the country and assure the country on the basis of truth and facts, in this hour of crisis.

## Rahul Gandhi posed questions over the Government handling of Galwan Valley

New Delhi: Congress MP Rahul Gandhi posed five questions to Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on 18th June, 2020 over the government's handling of the 'violent face-off' between Indian and Chinese soldiers in Ladakh's Galwan valley.



Responding to Shri Singh's tweet, which called the death of 20 Indian soldiers "deeply disturbing and painful", Shri Gandhi said that the Indian Army had been "insulted" by the Defence Minister not naming China in his tweet. Shri Gandhi also demanded to know why Rajnath Singh had tweeted a full two days

after the clash between the two militaries - the first involving fatalities since 1975.

"If it was so painful, Why insult Indian Army by not naming China in your tweet? Why take 2 days to condole? Why address rallies as soldiers were being martyred? Why hide and get the Army blamed by crony media? Why make paid-media blame Army instead of GOI?," he tweeted.

Rahul Gandhi tweeted his condolences on 17th June, 2020, writing: "Words cannot describe the pain I feel for the officers and men who sacrificed their lives for our country. My condolences to all their loved ones. We stand with you in this difficult time".

He also questioned Prime Minister Narendra Modi over his silence on the incident, writing: "Why is the PM silent? Why is he hiding? Enough is enough. We need to know what has happened. How dare China kill our soldiers? How dare they take our land?" ❝

# Rahul Gandhi interacted with Health Experts

As part of his on-going series of dialogues with globally recognised experts in the fields of economics, social sciences, healthcare and other fields on the tackling the Covid19 crisis, Shri Rahul Gandhi recently spoke to Professor Ashish Jha (PART-1), a globally recognised public health professional and Professor Johan Giesecke, the famous Swedish epidemiologist (PART-2).



## PART-1

**S**hri Rahul Gandhi interacted with Prof. Ashish Jha, Professor of Global Health, T.H. Chan School of Public Health and Director Harvard Global Health institute. Recently appointed Dean of School of Public Health, Brown University on 26th May, 2020

About Ashish K. Jha: He has been recently appointed as the Dean of the Brown University School of Public Health. He is an American health scholar, the K.T. Li Professor of Global Health Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health and the Director of the Harvard Global Health Institute. His research centers around improving the quality and cost of health care, focusing on the impact of public health policy.

Jha received his M.D. from Harvard Medical School in 1997 and then trained as a resident in Internal Medicine at the University of California, San Francisco. He returned to Boston to complete his fellowship in General Medicine from Brigham and Women's Hospital and Harvard Medical School. In 2004, he completed his Master of Public Health degree at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. He originally hails from Madhubani, Bihar, India. He was Born in Bihar in 1970 and moved originally to Toronto, Canada in 1979. He moved to the United States in 1983.

**RAHUL GANDHI : Hello.**

**PROF. ASHISH JHA :** Hey Rahul, How are you?

**RAHUL GANDHI : Nice to see you.**

**PROF. ASHISH JHA :** Thanks for doing this. I'm looking forward to it.

**RAHUL GANDHI : How are you doing?**

**PROF. ASHISH JHA :** I'm very very good. Thank you.

**RAHUL GANDHI : You are also in a sense, what a lot of young kids in India would aspire to be. Come from India, do well and become sort of leading light in the medical field. So you have traversed that journey.**

**PROF. ASHISH JHA :** Well I've tried. It's been a good journey. Even though I spend most of my time these days thinking about America and really thinking globally, India ofcourse, for all the reasons that you can appreciate, has a very important role in my mind and in my heart. Trying to be helpful to India during this most difficult of times is very important and so anything that I can do on that front ...I've been ....

**RAHUL GANDHI : What is your view on the idea of a lockdown and how does one pull oneself out of a lockdown because it is what I'm realising now and what a lot of people are saying is that it is a psychological change. When you classify the disease and then you say that we are going to have a lockdown, you change the psychology of the people, of the population, who suddenly are convinced that this is a very dangerous thing. Which it might be, but then you have to wean them off that idea and you have to do it carefully. You can't just blow open the doors. How does one navigate**



this complicated space.

**PROF. ASHISH JHA :** There are two aspects of it, that are both worth talking about. Both the pure public health aspect of why do the lockdown and how to release it, and the psychological aspect that you have described. And they are very interrelated in a way that I think policy people have not always understood.

So let's start with the public health part of it. The reason to do the lockdown is that you are trying to slowdown the spread of the virus. So the virus is a new virus. The humanity has not seen this virus before. That means all of us are suspect. All of us are susceptible population. Left unchecked, the virus will grow exponentially. We think on average, the virus infects 3 more people. All of a sudden 3 grows to 9, 27, 81 and all of a sudden you have exponential growth in millions. And the way to stop it is to take infected people and separate them from uninfected people.

Well how do you do that? You have two choices- you can do really vigorous testing, tracing and isolation. But if you can't do that, then you have to lock everything down. Can you slow the virus down from a lockdown? Of course you can. But of course it has very substantial economic repercussions. Most of which, many people have much more expertise than I do on economic issues. But it clearly has them.

The other thing I always ask about the lockdown is, what are you using that time to do? How do you prepare for releasing the lockdown? Lockdown buys you time, but lockdown is not the goal unto itself. You want to use that time to prepare a really fabulous testing, tracing, isolation infrastructure. You want to use that time to communicate with people.. now I will get into the psychological issues.

That life will be very different when lockdown ends. This is not about like going back to what life was like last May or June. That life over the next 6-12-18 months is going to look very different. And it's really about planning all of that out. So it's not just communication, but really thinking through, what will public transportation look like? Who will go back to work? What will schools do? There is a lot of work you want to be doing during the lockdown.

And the last point I'll make on this is around the psychological issues. There is a very clear signal that you send to people when

you lock down. We've had a lot of outbreaks in India, elsewhere. We've never had to do a national lockdown. So you are saying to people that this is different. This is much more serious and is potentially much more devastating if we don't do this. So now when you open up the economy, you have to create a certain level of confidence. Because the economy resides on confidence. Because if people are scared, they will not engage in economic activity. So you have to create some amount of confidence. It is a complicated thing. I haven't seen any country in the world do it brilliantly. But everybody is kind of making their way through this.

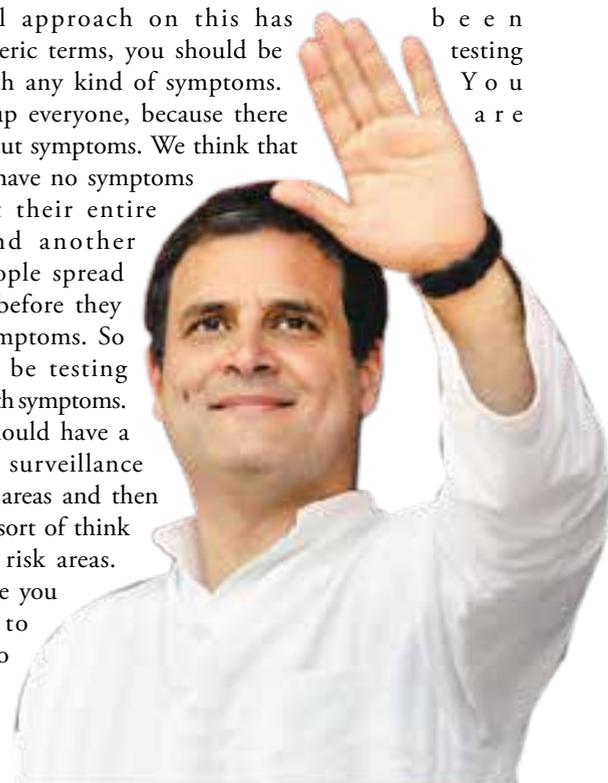
**RAHUL GANDHI :** I was speaking to some migrant labourers who were making this journey home, and I have spoken to quite a few of them. A lot of them say that the really frightening thing for them is the uncertainty. They live on minimum wage, they live on a daily wage. And they say, look we don't know what is going to happen tomorrow. That is the real problem for us. How does one think about opening this lockdown in a way medically, so that you minimise this type of uncertainty, so you don't have an accident with this second lockdown. What are the things medically you need to think about?

**RAHUL GANDHI :** What about the strategy of testing? Yes you have to test a lot, is there a particular method to testing or are there certain areas we test? How do we think about testing as a strategy?

**PROF. ASHISH JHA :** South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, actually the East Asian countries have done a very very good job of this. But certainly in Western Europe and US, people are still trying to come up with what is the right testing strategy.

My general approach on this has been that- In generic terms, you should be testing anybody with any kind of symptoms. You won't pick up everyone, because there are people without symptoms. We think that about 20% have no symptoms throughout their entire disease, and another 20-25% people spread the disease before they have any symptoms. So you should be testing everybody with symptoms. Then you should have a strategy for surveillance of high risk areas and then you have to sort of think of our high risk areas. That is where you really have to customise it to individuals.

Atleast here, we talk a lot



about homes for elderly people or hospitals. My feeling is that anybody who gets admitted to a hospital for almost any reason in an area with any kind of outbreak should be tested. Mostly because if you miss an asymptomatic person who comes in with a heart attack, broken leg. But they are asymptomatic and are spreading. They could spread it to 30 healthcare workers, 70 patients and that could be a disaster. You need an aggressive testing strategy in high risk areas in homes for elderly people etc. And then if you can, you want to be doing more community level surveillance. Just to make sure that you are not missing undetected cases. It is really a combination of all of that and it depends on how much testing capacity you have.

**RAHUL GANDHI :** Indian has got a unique aspect to it. I don't know if the US and other countries have, we have a large young population that is diabetic, that has heart disease, hypertension. Then you have poor people who work in polluted areas, they have lung diseases. So we have this cohort of young people who are also vulnerable.

**PROF. ASHISH JHA :** We know that the biggest risk factor for having a bad outcome from getting very sick or dying is age. And that is one advantage that India has, compared to Western Europe, America or even East Asia. India has a younger population.

Why is it that we are finding more and more, that even healthy young people, some percent of them end up getting very sick from this disease? So we should not be too cavalier even for otherwise what looks like healthy young people. And if you get into your issue of people who have lung disease, heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, those people are really at increased risk. Maybe not as high as a 75 year old, but definitely a lot of those people end up getting very sick and dying. We really in my mind have to protect all of those people. Which of course ends up being quite a lot of people.

This is why there are some people who say that in places like India we'll just let herd immunity happen and let hundreds of millions of people get infected. I think that is a terrible idea. The reason it is a terrible idea is that it will lead to millions and millions of people dying, including a lot of young people with this condition. We have to take a strategy that tries to protect everybody, particularly older people and younger people with chronic disease.

**RAHUL GANDHI :** So you don't agree with some of these arguments, which I find very very doubtful, that the virus doesn't operate in hot temperature that Indians are immune to the virus and we have certain vaccinations that protect us from the

virus. I was sceptical about this stuff. What is your view on that?

**PROF. ASHISH JHA :**

Let's

talk about them individually.



On the issue of Indians and vaccinations- I got a BCG vaccine when I was a child and many Indians have. There is some circumstantial evidence that maybe BCG vaccine may be helpful in reducing the severity of the disease. It is not very good evidence that I would bank on. I would certainly not make policy based on that.

It is a new virus, there is new testing, new studies going on and in the next couple of months, we will know much more. There are some nice randomised trials happening right now. I suspect that in the next three months, we will know much more if these vaccines will play a major role. I am personally sceptical that the BCG vaccine will be an important mediator. I don't know, but we'll know soon. But there is certainly not enough evidence to make policy.

On the issue of hot weather and temperature, there is some evidence again that weather makes a difference. And we think that being outside, there is less transmission than being inside. So the home with 15 people, all staying in one small room there is going to be very easy transmission. But once people are outside, and there is air and all that, that would make it a bit better.

But the question that I ask people who bring up the temperature issue is, do we think it is enough that it will keep the virus under control? No one I know thinks that it is enough. Maybe if the average person transmitting to 3 people, maybe it will be 2.5. 20% benefit. Good I'll take it. It is not enough to be able to get us out of this.

**RAHUL GANDHI :** You said something very interesting, which is very relevant for India. So you are saying that a joint family system, with old people living inside it is a complexity and a risk.

**PROF. ASHISH JHA :** Absolutely. And we have seen this coming out of places like New York where a lot of the people who got sick and died were older people who weren't going out and working. But basically what we think is that the young people they were living with were going out and working, coming home and then there was inter-family transmission. So it is a very big challenge when that happens and in India of course .... Three generations living together is of course a very common way of doing things. So there is a real challenge of how do you protect older people.

Especially as you open up and people go back to work.

**RAHUL GANDHI :** Testing will solve the problem.

**PROF. ASHISH JHA :** It will help a lot.

**RAHUL GANDHI :** If you could test at scale, you could test everybody and then you are much safer.

**PROF. ASHISH JHA :** Obviously testing everybody, depending on how big the population is difficult. There are strategies that you can use to augment and... there is pool testing.. there are all sorts of things you can do to test large numbers of people with limited kits. I've also felt that India has many advantages. One of them is a very advanced, very vibrant technology and biotechnology with a lot of capacity, lot of capability.

When people have brought up testing and India's testing capacity, my sense is that look I'm not an expert in the exact specifics of which company in India can do what. Everything I know about India and everything I know about testing, on which I do know something, makes me think I am not convinced that India could not do much more testing than it does right now. I don't know why it couldn't. It is obviously being moving forward, they've been doing 80,000-100,000 tests a day now. That is good, that is real progress from where things were. I don't know what prevents us from doing many times that. If we can get up to that level of capacity then yes, we can test migrant workers before they get out.



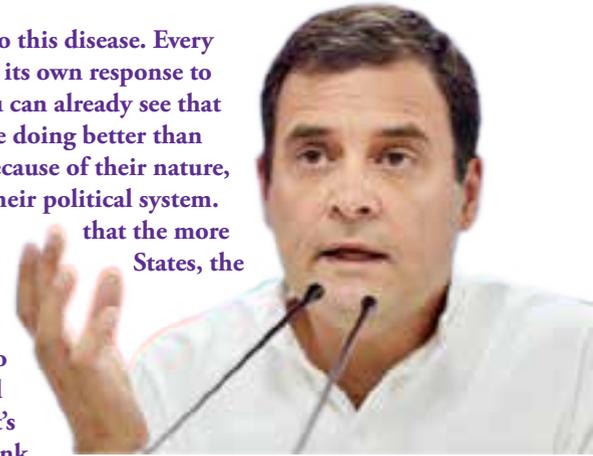
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**RAHUL GANDHI :** I've asked some bureaucrats why lower testing numbers. Their point is that if you push the testing numbers too high, you frighten the people much more and you build up a much more frightening narrative. Unofficially that is they say. I think it is much more important to fight the disease, push as hard as you can on testing.

**PROF. ASHISH JHA :** One of the questions that I have been thinking a lot about is, how will this virus change society? What will social norms and interaction look like in India two years from now? How do you think life will feel different? I've been thinking a lot about this, and I'm just curious.

**RAHUL GANDHI :** So I don't think there will be

one response to this disease. Every State will have its own response to its disease. You can already see that some States are doing better than other States because of their nature, their design, their political system. I get the sense that the more decentralised States, the States that spread more power closer to the people will do better. That's my sense. I think the large urban



centers will get hurt badly. I hope that this disease will bring people together and bring them to the realisation that you can't fight this disease as different religions, or different communities, different castes, different genders. I think in some ways there is a potential opportunity here. There is an opportunity that in fighting this disease we are able to start a conversation, we are able to understand that everybody is required to fight this disease and we are able to work together to get out of this. I think there is a potential for that. We will also have to prepare ourselves for significant pain. I do worry about our older people, I also worry about our younger people who are sort of critical for the future growth of this country.

At the global level, I think the virus is operating at two levels. One it is operating at a healthcare level and two it is attacking the globalised structure. If you look at the places that are vulnerable, they are all nerve centres of globalisation. And if you look at the people who are vulnerable, they are all people who have been damaged by the food chain. Heart disease, particular types of diets, particular types of behaviour, all come from globalisation and the virus is attacking them. I'm convinced that you are going to have a new world after this virus. I also think for example, I think it is going to reshape Europe. Many people won't like what I say... But I think Europe will have a real difficulty staying together. I think the balance of power between the US and China will change. I think we are entering... people say that 9/11 was a new chapter. This is a new book.

**PROF. ASHISH JHA :** Yes, I agree with that. Life will not look in anyway, five years from now, will look nothing like what it did five years ago. It's not only hard to predict. But it is not faded. Meaning, we have a lot of influence over what life will look like in five years. And certainly a lot of traditional models in our head of who is sort of the advanced economy and who is not, it has been very interesting for me being in the United States and saying that the countries that have responded the best are South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and the countries that have responded the worst are Italy, Spain, United States and the United Kingdom. Welcome to the new world order. This is not how we had always

envisioned things. It will have long term repercussions and I am not sure what those are.

**RAHUL GANDHI :** So, tell me. Ye bhaiya batiyea, vaccine kab aayegi? Aayegi nahi aayegi?

**PROF. ASHISH JHA :** Do teen toh vaccines hain jisme promise hai, ek American Vaccine hai, ek Chinese Vaccine hai, Oxford ka ek jo vaccine hai; teeno promising lag raha hai. I don't know which one will work. Ho sakta hai ki all of them, ho sakta hai ek nikal jaye. I don't know. Lekin I am very confident ki vaccine, kahin na kahin se next year tak aa jayega aur work karega and then India has to have a plan, kyunki India ke liye, you know, kitna 50crore- 60crore vaccine jarurat padega. So you know, India has to have a plan, how do you have that much vaccination available once it becomes possible. So that's an area where there has to be a lot of focus.

**PROF. ASHISH JHA :** The other thing I will say Rahul, that I think is very important is that we are entering an age of pandemics. I am confident that this is not the last large global pandemic you and I are going to see in the next 20 years.

**RAHUL GANDHI :** Why do you say that? Why do you say we are entering an age of pandemics? What is the structural reason?

**PROF. ASHISH JHA :** Yeah, so many things have happened that have made this. So, you know, we got lucky that in the 2009 H1N1 swine flu that ended up being not so bad, thought it was a global pandemic. So what's different now, than let's say 20years ago? You've actually touched on several of these. Globalization, right? So a virus that gets started somewhere spreads globally very quick. Second is big environmental changes. All of this economic growth that China and India and many other places have had, which has been wonderful for lifting people out of poverty, has also meant encroachment into, deforestation, encroachment into areas where there are more animals and most pandemics, most pandemics, most diseases that come to humans, new ones are jumps from animals to humans, right? So this virus has existed in bats but there was a small change probably in the genome and all of a sudden it became suitable for human hosts. I think that, I think climate change is going to make many of these things all the more worse and then of course the other things that have happened with economic growth is that people are eating lot more meat and so that also means more interactions between humans and animals. Put all of it together. If you look at the last 100 years you'll see increasing frequency of these kinds of outbreaks and this one of course is the worst in a 100 years but I am confident that we are going to have more global pandemics in the upcoming years and decades. And so as we get through this one, we have to ask ourselves, how we are going to better prepare for the next one.

**RAHUL GANDHI :** Well thank you very very much.

**PROF. ASHISH JHA :** It has been my pleasure. Stay safe.

## Mr. Rahul Gandhi interacted with Prof. Johan Giesecke, Former Chief Scientist, European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control

About Prof. Johan Giesecke: Prof. Giesecke was born in Stockholm. In 1979, he defended his thesis, On The Molecular Structure Of Dopaminergic Substances, at the Karolinska Institute. He trained as an infectious disease clinician and worked with AIDS patients during the 1980's. Giesecke received an MSc in epidemiology from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine in 1992, after which he worked as a Senior Lecturer at the school.

From 1995 to 2005, Giesecke served as state epidemiologist of Sweden. During a one-year sabbatical 1999-2000, he led a group at the World Health Organization working on the revision of the International Health Regulations. After this, he was Chief Scientist at the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control from 2005 to 2014. As of 2020, Giesecke is a member of the Strategic and Technical Advisory Group for Infectious Hazards of the World Health Organization, and also works as an advisor to the Public Health Agency of Sweden during the COVID-19 pandemic in Sweden.

**RAHUL GANDHI :** Good Afternoon Prof.

**PROF. JOHAN GIESECKE :** Good Afternoon.

**RAHUL GANDHI :** Thank you very much for agreeing to talk to me. I know you are extremely busy.





**PROF. JOHAN GIESECKE :** No problem. I have time.

**RAHUL GANDHI :** I saw an interview of yours where you were suggesting some different ideas and that sort of aroused my curiosity.

**RAHUL GANDHI :** You've been an infectious disease expert. How are you seeing this from Sweden and Europe?

**PROF. JOHAN GIESECKE :** This is a disease that is spreading across the globe like a wildfire and almost everyone in the world will be infected. But it is a very mild disease. 99% of the people infected will have very little symptoms or no symptoms at all.

**PROF. JOHAN GIESECKE :** So what we are seeing now is 1% of the epidemic. The real epidemic is going on. We don't know this is really.

**RAHUL GANDHI :** But ofcourse that is not the perception of the disease. The perception of the disease even in India is that it is a very dangerous disease. Why this discrepancy in perception? What has created this discrepancy?

**PROF. JOHAN GIESECKE :** Because people are dying, and quite a lot of people are dying... and it is a quick process. But in the end you will see that it is a very small proportion of old or all who have symptoms of the disease. Most people will be completely symptomless.

**RAHUL GANDHI :** How would you view the strategy from an Indian perspective? Massive country, over a billion people, large migration, population with specifically diabetes, heart disease, lung disease. How would you think of the disease from an Indian standpoint?

**RAHUL GANDHI :** And now that we are in a lockdown, how do you transition out of the lockdown? What is the best strategy to come out of a lockdown? Because now it is a psychological reality, the lockdown and an actual reality. So, how do you come out of that? What is the gentlest way, the smartest way from a healthcare perspective to come out of that?

**PROF. JOHAN GIESECKE :** That is a very good question. I've been asking myself, all the countries in Europe that instituted a lockdown one or two months ago, did they ever think about the exit strategy at that time? I don't think any single country said we'll do this lockdown, we'll close this school, we'll close this border, we'll close the restaurants. I don't think at that point they thought about how to get out of it. Now everyone is asking the same question, how do we get out of this.

**PROF. JOHAN GIESECKE :** It has to be step wise I think. You take all the restrictions you have in India, you take one away, you soften one restriction. You wait 2-3 weeks and see what happens. Do we have more spread of the disease? Yes we have more spread. Ok then we take one step back and try another restriction. So I think it will take months to really ease out the lockdown. But you must do one restriction at a time and see what happens.

**RAHUL GANDHI :** What is the role of testing in all this? How should one think about and use testing.

**PROF. JOHAN GIESECKE :** One is clinical. In the hospital you want to know if a patient has the infection or not. But then you can follow the epidemic a bit more across the country. See whether there are special geography or special people that have it. So that's for planning a little.

**PROF. JOHAN GIESECKE :** Then we have the new tests that you are aware of. We have the old test-the PCR test, which shows that you are infected right now, that you have the disease right now.

And then there is the new serology test that shows if you had the disease. That will also be useful to see who had the disease, and who is now immune.

**RAHUL GANDHI :** And ofcourse the real impact and the balance here is between economic damage and the healthcare damage. How do you think about those two aspects of this?

**PROF. JOHAN GIESECKE :** That is a difficult balance there. I think the way we have done it in Sweden is that the main thing is to protect the old and the frail. They should be protected from the disease. Everything else comes second.

So what we have done is that we have not completely shut down the country. Many workplaces are still open. Many people are working from home if they can. We don't have restrictions. You can go outside and meet other people outside. Better than in your home. But at some point, I think for India, and I don't know India, I've been in Delhi once to your Communicable Disease Centre in Delhi but that's many years ago. I think you will soon create more harm than good with a severe lockdown.

**RAHUL GANDHI :** That is from an economic perspective?

**PROF. JOHAN GIESECKE :** Economic and Humanitarian perspective.

**RAHUL GANDHI :** Of course there is a connection

between the economic side and the healthcare side because while you are doing this lockdown, you have got your hospitals under COVID wards so to speak. In India they have sort of decided that they are going to maintain some space in those hospitals just for COVID, so a lot of patients who have other diseases can't actually access those hospitals.

**PROF. JOHAN GIESECKE :** I think for India you will ruin your economy very quickly if you had a severe lockdown. I think it's better, skip the lockdown, take care of the old and the frail and let the other people have the infection. Most people will not even be sick. They will not even notice they have it. It's a mild disease.

**RAHUL GANDHI :** Do you have any questions about India on this front?

**PROF. JOHAN GIESECKE :** How are you talking about this balance between disease and economy?

**RAHUL GANDHI :** Well we got a full lockdown and I'm skeptical of a full lockdown myself. I do think that one has to move to a partial lockdown. I think the full lockdown is damaging and the damage increases exponentially. The sooner you get out of the lockdown, the better it is.

**PROF. JOHAN GIESECKE :** You may even create more deaths by a severe lockdown than the disease will do.

**RAHUL GANDHI :** Exactly. The issue in India is that we have a Central Government and a large number of State Governments, and there is a tension between these two. The Central Government has one view, the State Governments have another view. That sort of slows down the discussion. The big issue in India has so far been the migrant labour. The fact that we have a large number of people living in slums who happen to be migrant labourers, so when they have done the shut down, they can't go back to their homes in rural areas. That has created a lot of concern. Food is going to become a serious problem because we have a lot of manual laborers who depend on daily wages and they are already in trouble because they simply aren't getting those wages. Provision of food for them, at scale, is a challenge that the Indian government and State Governments are facing.

**PROF. JOHAN GIESECKE :** Now I think for you, the situation that India is in, with the federal States and everything, I think you should have a very soft lockdown. As soft as possible.

**RAHUL GANDHI :** I don't want to keep you.

**PROF. JOHAN GIESECKE :** Can I take a picture of you in my computer.

**RAHUL GANDHI :** Ofcourse you can take a picture of me on your computer.

**RAHUL GANDHI :** Very nice talking to you.

**RAHUL GANDHI :** Thank you very much. ☺☺

*continued from page 17*

## 'Oil price mechanisms should be driven by economic forces alone; in India the NDA is making it look like a pot of 'political advantages'

Why does it seem that only few big names are being supported to grow in this country? There is no fair price mechanism in any sector and, of course, oil being the most important and the most basic variable for most economic calculations, it requires stability and justified pricing. With easy entry and exit norms for commercial coal auctions, the government expects participation from Indian companies and this is a new addition to diverting factors, to make industries and the public chase new developments. All this is being announced and taken forward as 'new changes', but no one to care about the 'old mess'.

What was being pointed out before 2014 verses what the NDA is actually practicing, is so ironical. In the name of 'Make in India' a small set of companies, individuals and governments are growing, to fool the public on the lines of 'country progress', but these are delusions & diversions.

To the layman, as informational pieces, the government has been proclaiming that 80% of our fuel requirements are outsourced and we are at the mercy of not only international market sources, but also the strength of our currency. If this was the case, then International oil prices falling down over all these months should rather have been an advantage to us. But again, the government's actions are inconsistent with what they have been pronouncing.

While the graph of covid-19 is still reaching its peak in the country, it is expected that we will surely be the worst hit nation; it is unfortunate that we are in the hands of a system which only concentrates on monetary gains for their electoral promotions. It is very unjust that over 80% of India's small businesses expect to scale down, shut shop, or sell off in six months. The ruling government has not just failed to provide basics like food & shelter to the migrants, but has also led to failure of the educated resources of the country, while all kinds of businesses are suffering deeply.

There are difficult border tensions going on at every border of the country; be it armies or terrorists, the atmosphere is worrisome. But all that the government is focusing on, is 'price hikes' and greedy gains.

Such a historic failure, brought by this government, where in the fuel prices are hiked over a stretch of 16 days, is unbelievably toll-taking for the citizens of this country, who are being fooled.

Now is the time that India needs a fair government, which serves the people of the country. ☺☺

# Rahul Gandhi interacting with Rajiv Bajaj, Managing Director, Bajaj Auto Ltd. on 31st May, 2020

*Over two months after one of the most stringent lockdowns was announced with no prior notice, the devastating impact on the economy is obvious. Businesses across India have come to a grinding halt and unprepared essential services grapple with a severely disrupted supply chain. A consensus is emerging that the harsh lockdown has been a failure. The draconian measures have flattened the Indian economy instead of the virus.*

*Lakhs of businesses across India are unlikely to survive this devastating blow and it could be years before many can bounce back. Already reeling under the worst economic downturn in over a decade and the highest unemployment in 46 years, India has a challenging road ahead. The stimulus package does little to rebuild business confidence and has left many with little leeway to bounce back. The constant back and forth movements regarding regulations for reopening have left businesses paralyzed.*

Rahul Gandhi in a freewheeling conversation with Rajiv Bajaj, Managing Director of Bajaj Auto, discusses the impact of the lockdown and what it means for the Indian economy.

**RAHUL GANDHI :**  
**Good Morning Rajiv, How are you?**

RAJIV BAJAJ : Good Morning Rahul, very well. Nice to see you again.

**RAHUL GANDHI :** **How are things with you in the COVID situation. How is it looking?**

RAJIV BAJAJ : I think we are all trying to find some certainty in uncertain times. It is a new experience for everyone. It is a bitter sweet experience; let us put it like that. Some of us who can afford it are not too unhappy to be home. But when you see what is happening around you with both businesses and with the masses, it is certainly more bitter than sweet. So every day brings a new learning on how to cope with it, whether in terms of business, in terms of one's own emotions, in medical terms.

**RAHUL GANDHI :** **It's quite surreal. I don't think anyone imagined that the world would be locked down in this way. I don't think even during the world war, the world was locked down. Even then, things were open. It's a unique and devastating sort of phenomena.**

RAJIV BAJAJ : I will say this that I have friends and family, starting with Japan, because of our association with Kawasaki. People I know in Singapore, people I know in so many places in Europe. People in US of course, close friends and family in New York, Michigan, DC and when you say that the world has



never been locked down like this. Disruption... the way India has been locked down is a draconian lockdown. This kind of lockdown, I'm not hearing about from anywhere else. All my friends and family from across the world have always been free to step out, to take a walk, to go and buy something they require, to go and visit someone and say hello. So

in terms of the social and emotional aspects of this lockdown, they seem to have been in a much better place.

**RAHUL GANDHI :** **And it came suddenly also. The shocking thing to me frankly, the point you made about bitter sweet. Look, well o people can deal with this kind of situation. They have a home, they have an ecosystem which is comfortable, but what it has been for the poor people, for the migrants has been completely devastating. They have lost condence actually. Kaa logon ne bola hai ki bharosa kho gaya hai, bharosa hi nahi bacha and that I think is a very sad thing, and a dangerous thing for the country.**

RAJIV BAJAJ : I think right from the beginning, this is my view, whether it was in terms of how this problem was to be perceived, I don't understand how despite being an Asian country, we sought not to look at what was happening East, we looked at Italy, France, Spain, UK and the US. Which are not really the right benchmarks in any sense. Whether it is in terms of inherent immunity, temperature, demography, pre disposition to thrombosis etc. Everything that the scientists and doctors have spoken of, we should never have been looking there.

Even in terms of how to approach this from a medical point of



view, starting with the bogey of medical infrastructure. We are all aware that there can be no medical infrastructure that can be adequate to combat something like this. But nobody was willing to explain the maths to us. We are so many people, so many are vulnerable, 5% or whatever that is. This is what that looks like, this is how we are preparing ourselves or perhaps we cannot prepare ourselves. Maybe that is not a politically appropriate thing to say. But as Narayan Murthi ji always says, when in doubt always disclose. I think we have fallen very short of disclosing- facts, logic and the truth. And this has then got amplified and installed such an enormous fear in people that people seem to think that the contagion is equal to a contagious cancer or something. And now to change the mind of people and bring them back on board, and make them comfortable with the thought of living with the virus, which seems to be the new narrative coming from the government now. It is going to take a long time.

What do you feel? This is how I feel.

**RAHUL GANDHI : I was speaking to some experts and some specialists. And right in the early days of the lockdown, what one of them told me and which stuck in my mind, was that, look the moment you apply a full lockdown, you are changing the nature of the disease. You are making this non fatal disease to a fatal disease in the minds of the people. Once you've done that, then to reverse that, that is going to take a significant amount of time and it is going to take a lot of effort. He also said that don't view the lockdown as an on-off switch. It is not going to be an on-off switch.**

Once you have moved into a lockdown, switching it off again is not going to be easy. It is going to be extremely complicated. I liked your point about, we look West and not East. Why do you think we look West?

**RAJIV BAJAJ :** I guess as some people say, it's the first time that something like this say as opposed to TB, or pneumonia or Diarrhoea that apparently kills a 100,000 largely children in India. Here is something that struck in the heart of the developed world. When the rich and famous get affected, it always makes a bigger headline. As someone said in the very early days of this problem, that 8000 kids die of starvation in Africa every single day. Who cares beyond a point in civil society, we are not even aware of this factor. I think primarily the sensation was because affluent people in developed countries were vulnerable and perhaps

some people inferred that 'in ko aise ho sakta hai to hum kahan ke nahi rahe'. This kind of feeling, I have once said to people, that to my mind as a layman, I saw from the beginning there were 4 choices before us-

1. At one extreme on the left if I may say so is the choice of a hard lockdown. Which implies an airtight, impervious lockdown. And to the best of my knowledge, this has not happened anywhere in the world. To physically constrain yourself to your home and see absolutely no one.

2. On the other extreme I would say, business as usual. Just ignore it, carry on, jo hoga so hoga.

Nobody says this either. Everybody is trying to find a middle path between these two extremes. I think unfortunately, India not only looked West, it went to the wild west. I think we stayed more towards the impervious side. We tried to implement a hard lockdown which was still porous. So I think we have ended up with the worst of both worlds.

On one hand a porous lockdown makes sure that the virus will still exist and as you said, it is still waiting to hit you when you will unlock. So you have not solved that problem.

But you have definitely decimated the economy. You attended the wrong curve. It is not the infection curve, it is the GDP curve. This is what we have ended up with, the worst of both worlds. In my view, what should have been done is something more right of centre. Which is the kind of stuff that we are hearing out of Japan and Sweden. And people when they hear about this in terms of being articulated as herd immunity, tend to think that herd immunity means let the vulnerable die. It doesn't mean that at all. They are missing the details, whether it is in terms of sanitization, masks, distancing etc. Sweden, Japan etc. are following all these practices but they are not trying to go further into the unproductive zone as you said. Make something that is relatively benign and manageable, appear to be fatal and beyond control. I think unfortunately we have a quasi hard lockdown I would say, which has given us the worst of both worlds.

**RAHUL GANDHI : And looking at our situation, it is completely different. We have migrants, we have daily wage laborers and for some reason, we look West. Interesting question to me is, why didn't we look internally for our own solution? Why didn't we instead of looking to the West or to the East, why didn't we say that we are actually a confident country, let's look at ourselves and let's come out with an Indian solution., which is sort of what you do with your motor cycles. Why was that not the natural impulse?**

**RAJIV BAJAJ :** So if you were to have the kind of luxury of going back to the middle of March. Jab Pradhan Mantri ji ne Janta Curfew announce kiya, phir first lockdown announce kiya. If you could go back then, to your mind how would you have crafted a different roadmap for the last three months?

**RAHUL GANDHI : Hindsight is 20/20, so it is much easier for me to tell you how I would have crafted it. But what our discussion internally in the Congress party was at the time that the response has to be decentralised. Central**

**Government has to operate as a support system and as an enabler. Certain things that the central government needs to do eg. Air trac, railways etc. that it does. But then it moves the battle to the districts, to the CMs, allows them and enables them to ght.**

Now if you look at what has happened after the lockdown, which by the way, I call it a failed lockdown. It is the only lockdown in the world where the disease is increasing after we are opening up. What you are nding is that you are going back to that anyway. The central Government has backed o and has said that now we are going to be forced to leave it to the States. So the correct response is happening organically.

**RAJIV BAJAJ :** To our perception as a common citizen it is happening as passing of the buck and not passing of the strategy.

**RAHUL GANDHI :** That's ne, that might be the case. But the result is, India has had a 2 month pause button. India is now going back and reacting the way it should have reacted on day 1. Now the country has taken over. You can see a dierent strategies coming out. You can see a strategy in Punjab, you can see a strategy in Chhattisgarh, you can see a strategy in Maharashtra. Some will do better than the others. You've got a more bespoke response where the cost will suddenly drop. The ability to deal with the situation will improve. That is one aspect of it.

The second aspect of it is, and I think it is absolutely fundamental. I saw what the Germans have done, some of what the Americans have done. What the Koreans have done, what the Japanese have done. Massive injection of money to save the economy. I'm speaking to a big business guy, you don't view it as big business, small business, labourer, not labourer. You view it as 'Our biggest resource is our economy'. We have to at all cost protect our economy. Whoever has to be supported right now, should be supported, period, the end. So that would be a second component of a strategy.

Some people argue you know support the Small and medium businesses. Absolutely, 100% but there is a link between SME and Mr. Bajaj. SME cannot operate without the big businesses. So you have to create a holistic structure. The central thing in my view, this is something in my little experience that I have learnt is that, in India if you want to do something, be compassionate. Be compassionate and listen. And the country will automatically tell you what it is



desiring. So there are people right now, screaming in pain and the most obvious are: the manual labourers, daily wagers. And maybe the farmers, and the SM businesses. But big businesses are also screaming in pain, because they don't see a future. So a huge component of it is, building condence. The leadership to build condence to say, ok listen we are here. The country has had a terrible time, there is a virus that has hurt everybody, now we are going to support everybody and carry everybody out together from this situation. So there is an empathy that has to be built into it, where the Indian citizen, whether he is big business, medium business, farmer or labourer says haan bhai ho jayega, nikal jayenge, naiya paar ho jayegi, that feeling has to come. My main issue is that when you have a top down situation, that empathy is not there. Then, you basically break the will of people to ght. That would be my long answer to you. I don't know what you think about that.

**RAJIV BAJAJ :** I mean I agree with most parts of what you are saying. To put some color onto that.

I was speaking with the Pune Police Commissioner Dr. Venkatesh, a very ne man. I said to him Dr. sahib, my dissonance is that for the 50 years that I have lived in Pune and I am particularly sensitive to the fact, that India is the capital of the world when it comes to fatalities from road accidents. Whatever be the causes, that is the net result. But maine aaj tak kabhi aisa nahi dekha jab log 30-40-50 tak ke log bina helmet ke riding kartein hain, toh police waley kya kartein hain. 99.9% of the time kuch nahi kartien hain. On the other hand, kisi ne agar mask nahi pehna or someone steps out for a morning walk you are caning them, making them do exercises in the middle of the road to humiliate them. Aapne unke haat mein board laga diya ki main deshdrohi hoon, main gaddar hoon etc. Where is proportion in the way we are treating our own people. You talked about compassion. I'm talking about examples that I have seen with my own eyes here. I have seen senior citizens being caned for simply stepping out to get some fresh air.

A very close friend of mine from college who lives in Detroit, Michigan, Sanjay who you met a couple of years back. He has a small company. He has 8 people, he received full compensation and lot of other support that has helped him stay aot.

Otherwise, someone that would have been lot of trouble.

We hear stories of people from Japan, USA getting 1000 dollars a person as support, not as stimulus. We are not even talking about stimulus here. We are just talking support, whether it is for big businesses, small business and for individuals. I am aware of how authentic these numbers are. But I am told in many places in the world, two-thirds of what the government has handed out had gone to



organisations and people as direct benets. Whereas in India, it has only been 10%. You would be better placed to comment on why we have not chosen to put more directly in the hands of people.

**RAHUL GANDHI :** It has frankly been shocking to me and us in the INC, including ex PM, Finance Minister. I've been trying to gure this out myself. Couple of days back, I sent a feeler to some of the government people. I said that I don't understand why you are not giving a stimulus. Because logically it makes absolute sense. And I said, forget the politics of it, just give me the logic of it. I want to understand the logic, I don't understand the logic. And the response I got, it was a couple of bullet points.

Point no. 1- There is a huge opportunity for India with regards to China.

Point no. 2- If we give a handout to our labour now, bigad jayenge. They will get spoilt and they will not come back from their villages.

Point no. 3- We might send a wrong message to the international community who we will need to invest in us.

Point no.4- Later we might consider giving money to these labourers and SM businesses.

Whoever is going to invest in India is going to invest not because of your image, they are going to invest because of what you are and what you have. And what you are and what you have is your economy.

So the irst logic has to be, defend that economy. If you defend that economy well, you'll have an image and you'll succeed in inviting whoever you want here. If you don't have an economy left, there is nothing.

**RAJIV BAJAJ :** I strongly believe that a large country like India cannot save itself out of trouble. It has to sell itself out of trouble. We have to get demand going again, we have to provide something that lifts the mood of the people. We need some mood elevator. And I do not understand why there is no strong initiative, even if it is for a period of 6 months-1 year, to strongly lift the mood of the people and provide a stimulus to demand.

**RAHUL GANDHI :** The economy slowed down before

**Coronavirus. Unemployment was becoming a serious problem before Coronavirus. Now Corona pushed it over the edge. How do you see India taking care of its unemployment problem? How do we think about it moving forward? You are of course a part of the puzzle. Small and Medium industries are a much bigger part of the puzzle. How do you unleash this manufacturing, which I believe is absolutely critical, I mean I am not one of those people who think that India can be built without manufacturing. So how do we start competing on the global stage?**

**RAJIV BAJAJ :** The other day I was interviewing a potential senior candidate out of Brazil, because Bajaj is now thinking of entering Brazil and I asked him a question. Honda is so dominant in Brazil, the other Japanese have not been able to dislodge Honda, why do you think that Bajaj has a chance. He said something very simple, but often the truth resides in simple things. In Bajaj I see a combination of European design and Japanese quality and Indian prices. I think this is a magic formula for so many Indian companies. It doesn't matter if you are making a mixer grinder or a motorcycle. Whatever it is. I think the world can be your oyster if you look at it from this lens. So I think demand generation starts from wanting to play at a global platform. Next this automatically means that you have to narrow down the things that you are doing. If you want to be Dhoni, you can't play six sports at the same time. Everybody knows that. A great chef, a great spokesperson, a great doctor, a great musician they all specialise. Companies must specialise. I think the simple meaning of strategy is specialisation.

**RAHUL GANDHI :** But in the things you said, I found one thing very interesting. You said Japanese technology, European styling and Indian prices. What you are basically saying is that India is a bridge. India is a bridge connecting bridge between different cultures. Between different systems. That is something that India has historically been very good at. And if you look when we have been successful, we have always operated as a connector. Whether it has been in sort of our foreign policy or business system or whether it is in our philosophy. We have the ability that not many countries or civilizations have of absorbing. Of taking in things. I don't think anybody could have made a statement to you about a Chinese product that says it has European styling, Japanese engineering and Chinese price. Even if it was the case, China cannot get stuck in that same equation in the way in which India can. That is a powerful thing for us.

**RAJIV BAJAJ :** And I agree with you. That is a very valid point and I never looked at it like that. I think, I was asking myself as you were speaking why is this the case. Of course partly our temperament, partly it's our proficiency in English I suppose. But more than anything, I think when I reflect on that I think it is because we are very open as people. I don't mean this negatively. I would say, we demonstrate more openness to understand, to learn. Sometimes maybe we are in awe of them, that's why we do it, sometimes, it is, we are genuinely intellectually turned on by something; but whatever it is, we are very open as people,



very open as a country, it may work against us sometimes. This openness, you know, should never be lost. This is very important, as you were saying, whether it is in terms of Govt. or in terms of business.

**RAHUL GANDHI :** But you said openness. Right? And we are open, our civilization is open because there has been, traditionally, a certain tolerance in our country. Do... I mean, jo kahena hai keh do. Right? And that's been the case. One gets the sense that that has reduced significantly over the last couple of years. I mean, I'll be candid with you. Yesterday, a friend of mine asked me, you know, what is your next interview? And I said, you know, I'm speaking to Mr. Bajaj and the guy said, "Oh dum hai bande me". So I said, what do you mean? And he said, "Well he's got guts to speak to you", right?

**RAJIV BAJAJ :** I mean, I'll tell you my experiences. In fact, very similar to yours. I shared with someone yesterday, that kal 12 baje, I'm speaking with Rahul and this thing. And the first reaction was, don't do it. I said, but why not?, 'Mat karna, this can get you into trouble'. But I said, I may have said some things, perhaps a little too vehemently, but I've said it on NDTV, I've said it in the economic times paper, I've said it on Aaj Tak, I've said it on so many channels, so many media, so ab galti hai to galti ho chuki hai. He said, 'Nahi, media me bolna ek baat hai but Rahul Gandhi se baatein karna ek doosri baat hai'. I pushed that actually a bit, I'll tell you very candidly. I said, We are going to talk about business, economics, lockdown, what to do, how to move forward, technology, products, he loves motorcycles and so we'll talk about motorcycles etc. Abhi ye baatein bhi nahi ho sakti hai kya? So that person maintained, that why, why take a risk? But yes, that is the general mahol and you know, my own father raised that point, in November, at the economic times award function, where the home minister was there, the finance minister was there. So, you know, one hears a lot about this, but I try to ask people why this should be so because at least so far I have not faced any repercussion, so to speak, of this. But yes, what you say is true, this seems to be the general impression, which is sad because I think this openness is our strength and we must not lose it.

**RAHUL GANDHI :** Do you think this sort of mahaul that you spoke about, of fear damages business in India?

**RAJIV BAJAJ :** Nahi, dekhiyea, nobody will invest unless he does so with enthusiasm and confidence. So iss me toh koi doubt hai nahi. Ab saval ye uthta hai Hindustan me ki if 100 people are afraid to speak up, first point is perhaps 90 of them anyway have something to hide. See, we must also accept that in the last few years, towards, I would say UPA2 and NDA1, lot of skeletons have come out of the cupboard also. So businessmen are also not doodh ka dhula hua and so many examples we've seen of that, so maybe, my view is that a lot of people don't speak, unlike, if I may say so, somebody like my father, simply because perhaps they can't afford to speak. So, it may be fear, but the question is, fear of what? Maybe they have the fear of hiding something. Second, I would say, there are people and I think highly of such people, who do not want to speak. Who simply do not want to because they cannot deal with the backlash that comes their way, you know, and a little bit I fall into that category. You know, there is a reason I'm not on any social media and without naming a couple of channels I will say to you that even yesterday, I had an invite from the most prominent channel that is very pro govt., if I may say so, and I refuse to be on such channels because of the kind of stuff one hears on social media, the way one sees things conducted in panels on such channels is deeply distressing to anybody who is even remotely sensitive. So, I think yes, in terms of being tolerant, in terms of being sensitive, I think, India needs to mend a couple of things.

**RAHUL GANDHI :** Final question. Now we are in the process of opening up, how do you think about your supply chain as we open up, when does your supply chain actually start to function at a reasonable level? What... What opening up fully require?

**RAJIV BAJAJ :** See I'm not seeing that smooth, concerted, rhythmic movement towards unlocking. Yes, I understand, based on what I have heard yesterday also, that we are moving in that direction, but I think, a kind of aligned approach that is required, ke bhai one person will say one thing, abhi I don't know whether that is to be the CM of the state or the DM or whoever it is supposed to be and everybody in an aligned way must go forward. This is not happening and I think the blame for this rests again with the kind of fear we created in the first place, you know, that infection= death. And today, as infections rise, people are still carrying that this thing, so I'm sorry I'm not answering your question directly, but I am really distressed because it is a herculean task to open.

So I think that the first problem is to get this fear out of the minds of the people, there has to be a very clear aligned narrative, I would say from the PM because, right or wrong, when he says something people seem to follow. I think he needs to stand up and say to everyone that this is how we are going to move forward, it's all under control, do not fear infections, almost nobody is dying, you know and we have to move forward now.

**RAHUL GANDHI :** Okay. Thank you. Thank you very much Rajiv. Lovely talking to you.

**RAJIV BAJAJ :** Thank you. Thank you for the so much time you spent with me. Thank you very much, really appreciate it. ❧

# Without financial support from the Centre, our State Government's ability to help those urgently in need of support is limited

Statement issued by Shri Rahul Gandhi on 26th May, 2020

It is now over 60 days since the country was put under lockdown on March 24th, 2020. At that time the Prime Minister had said the war against the Coronavirus would be won in 21 days.

60 days later, it is now clear that the lockdown has not been able to defeat the virus. The number of new cases in many areas around the country are increasing exponentially. Clearly the PM and his advisors had underestimated the scale of the battle India had to launch to defeat the Coronavirus.

The Prime Minister was quick to take centre stage in the early stages of this battle. But now, when his leadership is most needed, he's stepped back. However, our state Governments are fighting valiantly against the virus, but they are struggling because the funding that the central government should have made available to them has not been forthcoming.

On behalf of the citizens of India, I want to ask the Government, with utmost humility and in a completely non-partisan manner, what is the Government's plan to tackle this growing crisis? It is now clear that 4 stages of the lockdown haven't delivered the results that were anticipated. What is the Government's Plan B?

It is important the Government share concrete plans for how it intends to deal with our migrants' crisis? How does it plan to scale up testing which is urgently needed? How does it plan to support our MSMEs? How will our State Governments be funded? There are many critical questions that the Government is not providing us answers to, which need to be addressed urgently.

Earlier this month the PM announced an economic stimulus which according to him was equivalent to 10 percent of the GDP. Economists in India and around the world have done the math and come to the sad conclusion that the economic stimulus announced by the PM is actually less than 1% of our GDP and

that too most of it is in terms of loans that could drag our MSME's into a debt trap from which they will struggle to recover.

In Congress run states we have been doing whatever we can to both stop the spread of the virus and reducing the economic pain our people are facing through direct cash transfers and other measures. But without financial support from the Centre, our State Government's ability to help those urgently in need of support is limited. “

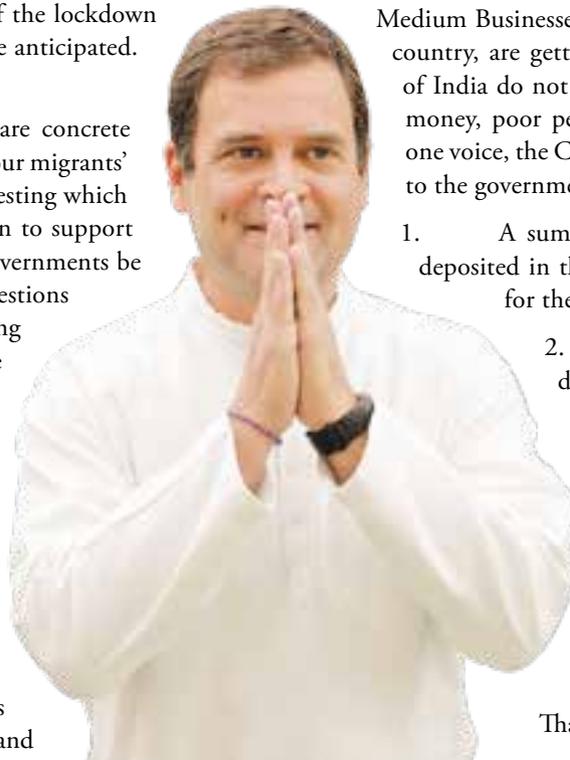
## Shri Rahul Gandhi addressed the people via video message on 28th May, 2020

Shri Rahul Gandhi said – Brothers and Sisters, Covid has taken India by storm. The poor people are the most severely hit. The workers have been forced to walk thousands of kilometers without food and water. Our backbone the Small and Medium Businesses, which provide employment to this country, are getting shut down in a row. The people of India do not need loans today. Today India needs money, poor people need money. That is why with one voice, the Congress party is making four demands to the government.

1. A sum of Rs. 7,500 per month should be deposited in the bank account of each poor family for the next six months.
2. MGNREGA should be run for 200 days instead of 100 days.
3. A package should be prepared immediately for our Small and Medium Businesses.
4. Our workers, who are standing on the streets today, are returning home. Facilities should be given immediately to help them return.

Thank You!

Jai Hind! “



11th June, 2020

Video, transcription and Youtube link of Shri Rahul Gandhi's conversation with Ambassador Nicholas Burns, Professor of Diplomacy & International Relations at Harvard, on how the COVID crisis is reshaping the world order.

## Ambassador Nicholas Burns (AB) and Rahul Gandhi (RG) Professor, Diplomacy and International Relations, Harvard

11th June, 2020

Video, transcription and Youtube link of Shri Rahul Gandhi's conversation with Ambassador Nicholas Burns, Professor of Diplomacy & International Relations at Harvard, on how the COVID crisis is reshaping the world order.



Ambassador Nicholas Burns (AB) and Rahul Gandhi (RG)

Professor, Diplomacy and International Relations, Harvard

**Rahul Gandhi : Good morning, Ambassador Burns. How are you?**

**Nicholas Burns :** Good morning, Rahul. So nice to see you and I bring you greetings from all your friends in the United States.

**Rahul Gandhi : And then how are things in Cambridge?**

**Nicholas Burns :** Well, you know, we are in lockdown the way India is and that is a surreal environment in existence for all of us in both India and the United States. Our country is in deep political and existential crisis. And I think that's what's really gripping all of us right now.

**Rahul Gandhi : So what do you think is going on in the United States? Why are we seeing these images?**

**Nicholas Burns :** In the United States, we've had a problem of race, of mistreatment of African-Americans since the beginning of the founding of the country. The first slave ships arrived here in 1619. That's a year before the pilgrims came from England

to settle in Massachusetts bay colony, where I live now. And you think about our civil war fought over slavery. Our greatest, I think, American of the last 100 years is Martin Luther King Jr. He fought battles peaceful, nonviolent battles. His of course, you know his Idol, his spiritual idol was Mahatma Gandhi.

He modelled his movement after the Gandhi movement to liberate India from British rule. Peaceful non-violence. King led us to become a better country. We elected an African-American President Barack Obama, a man I deeply respect. And yet you see race come back now. You see African-Americans mistreated this horrible murder of George Floyd, this young African-American man by police in Minneapolis, Minnesota. We have millions of Americans trying to protest peacefully, as is our right, as is your right in India and yet the President treats them all like terrorists.

**Nicholas Burns :** In many ways India and the United States share many traits. We were both subjects of the British empire, we both liberated ourselves from that empire in different centuries, but we did. I've always admired India. And so countries sometimes have to go through a discussion and a political debate about who are we at the core? What kind of nation are we? We are an immigrant Nation, a tolerant Nation.

**Rahul Gandhi : I mean, I think the thing we share and I think why our partnership works is because we are tolerant systems. You mentioned that you are an immigrant nation. We are very tolerant nation. Our DNA is supposed to**



**be tolerant. We're supposed to accept new ideas. We're supposed to be open but the surprising thing is that that DNA, that open DNA is sort of disappearing. I mean I say this with sadness that I don't see that level of tolerance that I used to see. I don't see it in the United States and I don't see it in India.**

**Nicholas Burns :** I think you've identified a central issue at least for the United States and the silver lining here is, the good news is that we have people demonstrating all across the country, in every major city in the United States this week peacefully, on behalf of tolerance, inclusion, minority rights, all these essential issues at the core of our democracy and I think one of the advantages that we democracies have, say over an authoritarian country like China, is that we can correct ourselves as a self-corrective part of our national DNA, and India and the United States.

As all democracies, we resolve this at the ballot box in free and fair elections. We do not turn to violence. We do this peacefully. That's the Indian tradition that we love about India from your founding. Yeah, the 1930s, the protest movement, the Salt March all the way to 1947 and 48. So I can't comment on your country because I don't know it nearly as well, obviously, but my country I think we'll be back. We will be back, we will strengthen our democracy.

**Rahul Gandhi :** But I feel that this division which occurs is actually tremendously weakening for the country, but the people who do the division, portray it as the strength of the country.

When you divide African-Americans, Mexicans and other people in the United States, so you divide Hindus and Muslims and Sikhs in India, you're weakening the structure of the country. But then the same people who weaken the structure of the country say they are the nationalists.

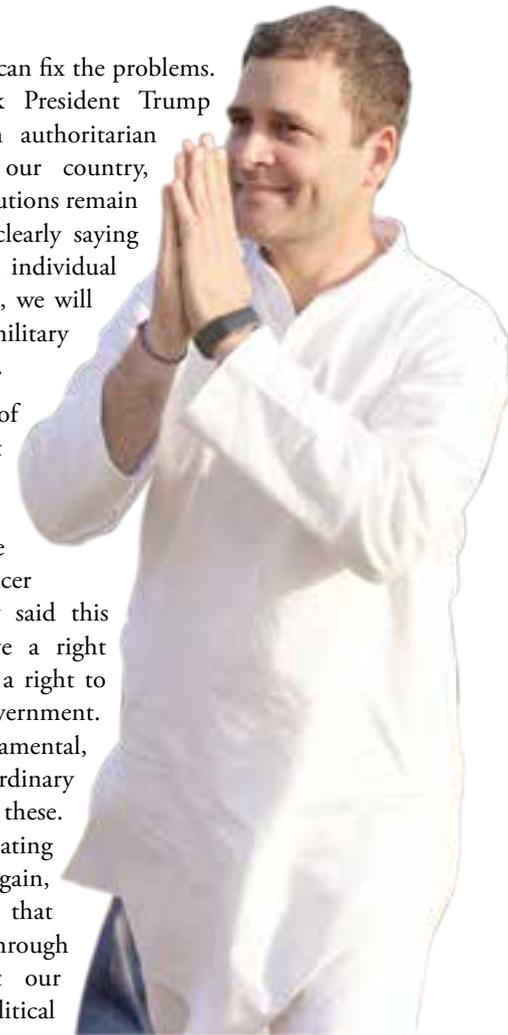
**Nicholas Burns :** Well, I think that is, I mean that is what President Trump is all about. He wraps himself in a flag. He

declares that he alone can fix the problems. I must say, I think President Trump is in many ways an authoritarian personality. But in our country, you're seeing the institutions remain strong. The military clearly saying over the last few days, individual senior military leaders, we will not put American military troops onto the streets.

That's the function of the police forces, not the military force. We will abide by the Constitution. The senior military officer General Mark Milley said this week, Americans have a right to protest. They have a right to disagree with the government. These are so fundamental, you see, it's extraordinary how to even debate these. So we're back to debating first principles. But again, I do see strengths that democracies go through trials. We play out our differences in political campaigns or in street protests, but at least we can do that. You can see authoritarianism coming back in China and Russia. We democracies, we sometimes go through painful episodes because of our freedoms, but we're so much stronger because of them. That's our advantage. I think inherently over the authoritarian countries.

**Rahul Gandhi :** When we look at the relationship between India and the United States, there has been a lot of progress over the last couple of decades. But one of the things I've noticed is that a relationship that used to be a partnership, seems to have become very transactional. It has become episodic and transactional, and then a relationship that used to be very broad- education, defence, healthcare, multiple fronts, has sort of focussed down mainly on defence. I mean, what do you think about where the relationship between India and the United States is going?

**Nicholas Burns :** Well from an American perspective, you know, it is interesting in our country right now. Democrats and Republicans agree on very little in our Congress. But there is, I think, nearly universal support in both of our political parties, that the United States ought to have a very close, supportive and all-encompassing relationship with India. We are the two largest



global democracies. I would argue we are the two most important global democracies. The secret weapon in the relationship, I'm sure you will agree has been the Indian-American community. It is an extraordinary community in the United States, you know, they started out lots of engineers and scientists staying on in the 1970s and 80s becoming doctors in our hospitals. We now have as you know, senior political leaders in Congress, in State Governors, Senators who are Indian-American, we have Indian-Americans in every facet of life. CEOs of some of our major tech companies in California are Indian-Americans. So I think there has been a maturation of that community and it is a profound bridge between the two countries. So I'm very hopeful that the US and India, our societies and not just our governments, are very closely intertwined, integrated and that's a great strength. If you think then one of the challenges we face is the coming power of authoritarian countries. I mentioned two before: China and Russia. We never want to fight, we don't want war but we want to preserve our way of life and we want to preserve our positions in the world. That's why I think so much of our, I think our relationship is so important between our two countries for that reason.

**Rahul Gandhi : I think the Indian-American community is a real asset for us and an asset for you. So it's a joint asset. It's a good bridge to have. And how does one think about that going forward?**

**Nicholas Burns :** Well, I think that to mention something you said before Rahul. Our military relationship is very strong. If you think about the US India Naval and Air Force cooperation in the Bay of Bengal and throughout the entire

Indian Ocean region, we're really together and this gives me hope.

But you are right, it can't be just about that. So my advice would

be, but I look forward to your thoughts that keep the doors open to each other, lower the

restrictions on the movement of peoples between the two

countries. I think H-1B visas were a lot of University, high-

tech Indian business people come to the United States on H-1B visas.

They've been severely limited in recent years. We simply don't have enough

engineers in the United States to run our economy and India can supply

many of those Engineers. I keep the

barriers low. I would

encourage the movement of people, encourage University

exchanges and certainly encourage us to be working together on democracy promotion around the world, on science and public

health issues. If there's another pandemic in our future and they most likely are, some sort in our two countries could be doing

a lot more together. I'd like to see our relationship going in that direction as well.



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**Rahul Gandhi : See if I look at the history of the United States and I go back over the last century, I see big Ideas, right? I see the Marshall plan. I see how the United States worked with Japan for example, I see how the United States worked with the Koreans. These societies were transformed. I don't see that right now. I'll be very blunt with you. I don't see that type of a vision coming from the United States that is transformative. And one doesn't expect regional ideas from the United States, one expects global ideas from the United States.**

**Nicholas Burns :** Well, that is a big idea itself, the search for a big idea. I remember we were working very closely with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. You'll remember this. Our relationship when I was involved centrally with the Indian government, it really was focused on trade, it was focused on the military relationship and we were always searching for your big idea. You are right because we have something very precious in common and that is our democratic traditions.

I still think that finding a way for Indians and Americans and our governments to combine forces to promote human freedom, promote democracy, promote rule of the people in the world. I think that is a powerful idea that Indians and Americans can bring together to the rest of the world. Again, you know, we are not looking for a conflict with China, but we are waging in a way, a battle of ideas with China.

**Nicholas Burns :** We can't decouple ourselves or delink ourselves from China. I would love to have you hear your thoughts on this.

**Rahul Gandhi : I see cooperative competition without ever going into violence. And yes, they have a different worldview. Yes they have an authoritarian worldview. Yes we have a democratic worldview and I'm pretty confident that**

**the Democratic worldview will do well.**

But in order to achieve that, that has to start from inside our countries. We can't have an authoritarian perspective internally and then make that argument. That argument has to be made from the foundation of democracy, within the country itself, within our countries. And that's where I see the problem. That it becomes very difficult for us to, from our perspective, to make an argument of democracy when our institutions are being torn apart. When our people are scared, when millions of people in our country are terrified of what is going to happen to them.

So the first, the most important battle from our perspective, yours and ours, is to actually bring back our countries to where they used to be; Which is sort of where we embrace our cultures, where we embrace our past, where we embrace our people and where we sort of give a healing touch as opposed to this sort of aggressive politics that we are stuck in.

**Nicholas Burns :** Yeah, I think that's a very interesting point.

**Nicholas Burns :** I think that in India, the United States can be working together. Not as you say not to fight China but to make it observe the rule of law as we try to live together in this world.

**Rahul Gandhi :** Why do you think that in this Covid crisis? And I say this for most countries, including India and the United States. Why do you think there has been almost no cooperation?

**Nicholas Burns :** I mean you and I have talked about this before, it is a terrible disappointment to me. I'm sure it is to you. You know, this crisis was made for the G20. It was made for Prime Minister Modi and President Xi Jinping and Donald Trump to be working together. All of our countries for the common global good. All of us are confronted, every Indian American is vulnerable to this disease. And I would have thought at the beginning of the crisis, I would have predicted that countries would have put down their differences and worked for a vaccine together or how to distribute that vaccine in an equitable and humane fashion and it hasn't happened. Even the US and China at the heart of the problem here. I hope when the next crisis comes, will do better to work together in a more effective way.

**Rahul Gandhi :** And it's the same. It's the same in Europe. I mean one sees the same friction between Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom that one sees across the world. So there is something happening in the world where people are going into themselves, becoming insular and I think this Covid crisis has accelerated that sense.

**Rahul Gandhi :** Few days ago I had a similar conversation with one of the big business people in India and he said to me, look, you know before I spoke to you, some of my friends called me up and said don't speak to him. It will be very bad for you, bad things will happen to you. There is this atmosphere of fear. You take unilateral decisions, you do the biggest lockdown in the world, most rigorous

lock down in the world and then you have millions of manual laborers walking thousands of kilometers back home. So it is this unilateral episodic type of leadership, where you just come in and do something and go away. It's very destructive. But it's the flavor of the time. That's the unfortunate thing. It's everywhere. And we are fighting it.

**Nicholas Burns :** These are difficult days in all over the world. I think they're difficult days for a major political party. I imagine you're still hopeful?

**Rahul Gandhi :** A hundred percent. See I'm hundred percent hopeful. I'll tell you why I'm hopeful. Because I understand the DNA of my country and I know that for thousands of years the DNA of my country is being of one type and it can't be changed. So yes, we are going through a bad patch. Covid is a horrible time, but I do see new ideas emerging after Covid, new ways. I can already see people cooperating much more than they were doing before. Now they realize that actually there are advantages to being unified. There are advantages to helping each other. So that is there. How do you think Covid is going to shape the balance of power? What is going to happen in your view between the United States, China, Russia, India? What is going to be the effect of Covid?

**Nicholas Burns :** That we set aside global political rivalries on issues like climate change or pandemics and it's because these issues are existential for everyone. They unite every person in the world. 7.7 billion people. We need to have a future of global politics. Of course, we're going to compete. China and the United States, India and the United States.

But we need to preserve space that we can work together on behalf of individual people around the world and give those people some hope that you know, that we as governments can help them. That's the challenge with Covid. If you think of it, in the last several years we've had SARS, H1N1, Ebola and now the corona virus. We will have another pandemic in the next four or five years. Can we respond as a global



*continued on page 33*



**Now is the time for us all to support these people; the people who have made us all, the people who have faith in you, who have made you, supported you.**

**- Priyanka Gandhi Vadra**

**Smt. Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, General Secretary and In-charge UP, addressed the people via video message on 28th May, 2020**

**S**mt. Priyanka Gandhi greeted everyone by saying 'Namaskar'. She said, "Today, Congress workers and Congress leaders are raising their voices, nationwide, in favor of those who are the most affected by the lockdown and the corona epidemic. We are doing so to enable the government to pay heed to them.

It is one of our demands that Rs. 10,000 be deposited each in the accounts of the needy, with immediate effect.

Our second demand is that for the next 6 months, Rs. 7,500 per month be deposited in the accounts of the needy. Along with this, the working days of MGNREGA should be increased from 100 days to 200 days to help the migrant laborers who have reached their homes and villages. The government should do something to help those who are small traders, those who are struggling with the after-effects of the lockdown, those who have not had a business for two months, those who are small shopkeepers, weavers and small traders. They should be provided a financial package so that they are not in debt and have purchasing power in their hands; so as to enable them sail through these testing times.

I want to make a special request to all political parties, but especially to BJP leaders. Refrain from doing politics, this is not the time for politics. This is a time when, indeed, the entire nation must be united; when the leaders of all political parties must come together to help people by eliminating their political considerations and by removing their ideological differences.

When in UP the 'bus' thing happened, okay, you rejected our

one thousand buses. It's okay. We had even asked you to put your banners and stickers, we had no issue with that, yet you rejected our offer. You announced to get 12,000 buses belonging to UP Roadways operated, but till date it's all about paying lip service. Similarly, look at the government of Maharashtra. There is a terrible form of epidemic in Maharashtra, the government is fighting it and you are trying to topple the govt. instead of providing your cooperation, you are trying to prove that the govt. is most unstable.

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So, I especially want to tell you that this is a time for cooperation. We all owe to the people of this country. You are in debt and so do we. The people have always stood by us through thick-

and-thin. They cheered you on your victory, stood with us in our defeat. The people of this country have always supported us with their kindness. Today the people of this country are sad, plagued, suffering. A son is toiling by carrying his family in a bullock cart. A daughter is riding a bicycle carrying her father for 600 kms to reach her village. The dead bodies of workers are lying in the 'Shramik' trains. A child is collapsing into his father's lap. A mother's corpse is lying on the railway platform while her child is trying to wake her up.

*I especially want to tell you that this is a time for cooperation. We all owe to the people of this country. You are in debt and so do we. The people have always stood by us through thick-and-thin. They cheered you on your victory, stood with us in our defeat. The people of this country have always supported us with their kindness.*

Every single mother of this country is watching this scene. Each mother feels one with that mother's heart. Each mother is weeping. Our 'Mother India' is weeping but you remain mute, you are not saying anything, you are not coming forward, not providing any help. It is not a political demand we are raising. It is a demand based on humanity. We are urging you to leave politics behind. Now is the time for us all to support these people; the people who have made us all, the people who have faith in you, who have made you, supported you. You need to stand with each Indian during this hour of crisis and suffering. You need to stand with those who are most in need, suffering the most, those who are most unhappy.

I know that a lot of workers from Uttar Pradesh will also be watching me on Facebook, I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart. Our President has been arrested but hasn't lost courage. I know that he is fighting even there and is with you and you are all standing by him. You have raised your voice time-and-again, we will continue fighting, he will continue fighting, it is our duty. Our duty is to raise voice for everyone and demand justice.

So, I would like to thank all of you. It is an opportunity for me to tell you that within the last 1.5 months, you have helped 90 lakh people till date by your resources and your commitment and you would continue to do so. So, I want to thank all of you and urge all those who are watching me to raise your voice at your own level through Facebook, through Twitter, through any other medium; so that justice is delivered, so that we can help those who are grieving, plagued and distraught.

A big thanks to all of you! Jai Hind!" ❧

*continued from page 31*

Community more effectively? Can we work together? I think that's the great challenge that I see coming out of Covid.

**Rahul Gandhi : And in terms of the balance of power. Do you think that's going to shift in any way or do you think that's going to stay the same? Well, what is it going to be like?**

**Nicholas Burns :** I think a lot of people right now are saying the China is going to surpass. China's winning the battle of corona virus, that it's gaining hearts and minds. I actually don't see that. China certainly has extraordinary power in the world. Probably not equal to the United States militarily, economically, politically yet, but it's gaining no question about it. What China lacks is the sophistication and openness of a democratic country like India or the United States. China has a fearful leadership. Fearful men trying to preserve their own power, increasing the grip that they have on their own citizens. Look what's happening in Xinxiang and the Uyghurs and in Hong Kong just to give those examples. And I actually think I'm hopeful about the future of India and the United States. I worry the Chinese system is not going to be flexible enough to accommodate the desires of the Chinese people for human freedom and liberty. So I'm a champion of democracy, as are you. I have confidence that democracies will survive these tests. I imagine Rahul one last question for you. It changes politics. I mean you can't go out right now and shake people's hand. You can't speak to a crowd.

**Rahul Gandhi : I don't shake hands but I go into contact with people with the masks and stuff. Yeah, but it does because public meetings are not possible and that's the lifeblood of politics here. So a lot of social media, a lot of Zoom conversations happening. It is going to change some habits in the political sphere for sure.**

**Rahul Gandhi : In India, it's also changed the psychology because of the lockdown and the way it was done. There is quite a lot of fear in the air. People believe that the virus is a very serious disease which it is, but they're convinced that it is a fatal disease. So that sort of needs to be slowly removed as the virus fades out. You know that sense of fear.**

**Nicholas Burns :** I was just going to say our battle here is to maintain social distancing, try to convince people to wear a mask just like it is in India because people are beginning to let down their guard in the United States. Typically young people. Another reason I think to keep the Universities closed is to protect people and so having that discipline to maintain these kinds of shut down is important to get through this in the future.

**Rahul Gandhi : Thank you Ambassador and lovely chatting to you. And do get in touch when you're here.**

**Nicholas Burns :** I certainly will come by to see you and all the best to you and to your family.

**Rahul Gandhi : Thank you so much. Thank you. ❧**

# Dragon invites elephant to dance

Despite meeting several times in the last six years, Mr. Modi has not been able to achieve any notable success in his interactions with Mr. Xi.



P. Chidambaram

Last week, we learned more about the geography of India. Unfamiliar names like Galwan valley, Pangong Tso (lake) and Gogra, all in Ladakh, have entered our living rooms.

It is Intrusion

The genesis of the current developments in the India-China relationship can be traced to the clashes that took place at Pangong Tso on May 5, and in the preceding days. Although the government has never admitted that Chinese troops are in Indian territory, the following facts are certain:

- Chinese troops in large numbers have moved in at points in Galwan, Hot Springs, Pangong Tso and Gogra in Ladakh and in Naku La in Sikkim which are in Indian territory.
- Galwan in Ladakh and Naku La in Sikkim have not, in the past, figured in any list of disputed or

## Key Points

- China experts are agreed that whatever be the motivation for China's recent actions, it cannot be to start a full-fledged war with India.
- China ploughs ahead with the RCEP, closer political and strategic ties with Nepal, and economic gains in Sri Lanka; India is at a loss to counter these moves.
- The elephant and the dragon are staring at each other in Galwan, Hot Springs and Pangong Tso.
- The Prime Minister has an obligation to be transparent and keep the nation fully and truthfully informed.
- What has happened in recent weeks or months to trigger the intrusion of Chinese troops into Indian territory and extend the differences to areas about which there, apparently, were no differences in the past, like Galwan and Naku La?

sensitive areas. China seems to have enlarged the areas of dispute.

– China has begun a massive build-up on its side. India is matching that build-up on its side.

– For the first time ever, talks were led by military generals on both sides. Hitherto, talks were helmed by diplomats of the two Foreign Services or the Special Representatives.

No Full-fledged War

It is difficult to believe that either China or India would, at this point of time, wish to aggravate the border dispute. The dispute goes back to the day when the McMohan line was drawn and it exploded into a full-fledged war in 1962. True, there have been clashes between the troops of the two countries from time-to-time but never at a time when both countries faced multiple non-military challenges. Both countries are still grappling with

the Covid-19 crisis; both countries fear an economic recession in 2020/2021; and both countries would not wish to jeopardize the advantages they have gained globally by ensuring 'peaceful, stable and balanced relations' between them.

Besides, while China may be confident that it is militarily stronger in 2020 than in 1962, China knows that India is also militarily stronger in 2020 than in 1962. Unlike 1962, a war between the two countries in 2020 will not throw up

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***Both countries are still grappling with the Covid-19 crisis; both countries fear an economic recession in 2020/2021; and both countries would not wish to jeopardize the advantages they have gained globally by ensuring 'peaceful, stable and balanced relations' between them.***

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a clear winner. China experts are agreed that whatever be the motivation for China's recent actions, it cannot be to start a full-fledged war with India.

Talks took place on June 6. At the end, the two sides issued separate 'read outs' which contained key common words — 'differences' should not become 'disputes'. So, there are differences, and these differences were there even before May 5. What has happened in recent weeks or months to trigger the intrusion of Chinese troops into Indian territory and extend the differences to areas about which there, apparently, were no differences in the past, like Galwan and Naku La?

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***Despite Wuhan (2018) and Mahabalipuram (2019), Prime Minister Modi and President Xi do not share a warm personal relationship. Mr. Xi is the only leader whom Mr. Modi does not greet with an embrace.***

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Some things are clear even to laypersons. Despite Wuhan (2018) and Mahabalipuram (2019), Prime Minister Modi and President Xi do not share a warm personal relationship. Mr. Xi is the only leader whom Mr. Modi does not greet with an embrace. Despite meeting several times in the last six years, Mr. Modi has not been able to achieve any notable success in his interactions with Mr. Xi. India looks for gains in trade

and investments; China remains transactional and has yielded nothing. India wishes to guard its backyard, China does not recognise even a yard as India's backyard. China ploughs ahead with the RCEP, closer political and strategic ties with Nepal, and economic gains in Sri Lanka; India is at a loss to counter these moves. India regained Maldives's trust, but China has not given up yet. India has rebuffed China's exclusive claim to the South China Sea and asserted freedom of navigation in international waters; China has ignored India as it has ignored all other challengers including the United States.

Depsang or Doklam?

What could be considered as a peaceful resolution of the current dispute? India wants 'restoration of status quo ante' as on May 5. If that happens, it could be another Depsang (2013) moment. [I deliberately chose Depsang over Doklam (2017) and the defence establishment knows the reason.] China's official position is that the situation is 'stable and controllable' which, in my view, is the opposite of status quo ante. China will be happy if the status quo is maintained substantially and not the restoration of status quo ante. Mark my words, the elephant and the dragon are staring at each other in Galwan, Hot Springs and Pangong Tso.

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***What has happened in recent weeks or months to trigger the intrusion of Chinese troops into Indian territory and extend the differences to areas about which there, apparently, were no differences in the past, like Galwan and Naku La?***

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After the talks, India hinted at mutual disengagement of troops, but retired Army generals dispute any disengagement yet.

Mr. Xi and Mr. Modi share one common trait. Both would like to be unchallenged leaders. So far, both have ignored domestic criticism, but criticism is growing in both countries. Mr. Modi is secure for another four years; Mr. Xi is secure only as long as the Politburo and the PLA support him. The two leaders are playing by different rules. India has a tradition of total support to the government in any crisis and the crisis thrown up by the India-China face-off will win for the Modi government the same total support. In such a situation, whatever be the outcome, the Prime Minister has an obligation to be transparent and keep the nation fully and truthfully informed.

The checkers game that China has started is a mystery. Its outcome may be 'a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma'. ❧

Courtesy: The Indian Express

# China debacle doesn't mean Nehru's foreign policy failed

**Y**et another book on the 1962 Sino-Indian conflict was released recently. Entitled '1962: The War That Wasn't' the latest book by Shiv Kunal Verma, like most others before it, is critical of both the political and military leadership, especially the former. Verma's exhaustive account is not very different from books written much earlier, especially John Dalvi's 'Himalayan Blunder', D.K. Palit's 'War in High Himalaya: The Indian Army in Crisis, 1962', Brij Mohan Kaul's 'The Untold Story' and D.R. Mankekar's 'The Guilty Men of 1962'. Though the author also quotes from B.N. Mullik's 'My Years With Nehru: The Chinese Betrayal', Verma conveniently omits the then IB chief's defence of Nehru. It is not surprising as the primary objective of the author is to denigrate India's first PM blaming him for 'Virtual destruction of his own military'. Such a view, however, is not only incorrect but also unethical and politically motivated.

Ever since 1954, Nehru had pressed upon the defence setup the necessity of physically holding the entire frontier of north-eastern India, by moving up outposts, bringing it under administrative control and paving the way for the emotional integration of locals. According to Mankekar, it was quite possible that if the Army headquarters and the MoD had acted upon Nehru's instructions and desires from 1954 onwards, the situation in Ladakh might have been different.

In the NEFA in particular,



Praveen Davar

Nehru had been prodding the Army headquarters to establish border posts at all the key points along the McMahon Line, to assure India's presence in the disputed border region. It was the top Army leadership's responsibility to acclimatise and prepare the troops for mountain warfare, especially when things began to deteriorate after the failure of Nehru-Chou en Lai talks in 1960.

Delivering a lecture on 'Nehru and Defence Policy'

in 2003, K. Subrahmanyam, one of the leading military strategists of post-Independence India said: "By the mid '50s, Nehru became aware of the possibilities of long-term conflict with China. He appears to have correctly decided that given the geostrategic configuration of India, China and the Soviet Union and the growing tensions between China and the Soviet Union, development of friendly relations with the USSR was perhaps the most effective way of countervailing China. Subsequent events after the Chinese attack in 1962 were to prove the viability of this policy. Today, very few would contest that non-alignment as a rational strategic policy for India paid dividends."

To a question on whether Nehru neglected defence preparedness, Subrahmanyam reeled out figures in defence of Nehru. The Indian Army steadily expanded from 280,000 to 550,000 during his stewardship. The entire Indian Navy and Air Force

## Key Points

- Nehru initiated the development of the first Indian supersonic aircraft in the Hindustan Aircraft Factory, Bangalore — HF-24, Marut.
- DRDO, Bharat Electronics and many institutions were founded to boost self-reliance, research and defence preparedness.
- It was Nehru's vision that gave India its most prestigious National Defence Academy, the world's first joint training institute for the future officers of the Army, Navy and Air Force.
- The debacle of the India-China War in no way raises doubts on the correctness of Nehru's basic thrust in foreign policy.
- The foreign military and economic aid received in 1962 ensured India successfully met the Pakistan challenge in 1965. This was the ultimate success of Nehru's foreign policy.

*Nehru had been right in pursuing a policy of friendship with China, even if it ended the way it did. Given the hostile relationship with Pakistan, it was in India's interest to try its best to avoid having another hostile neighbour and thus be caught in a pincer movement.*

were built up during his time. Fourteen destroyers and frigates, two cruisers and one aircraft carrier were acquired. The Air Force expanded from 7 to 18 combat squadrons. For the Air Force, 236 Vampire aircraft were produced in India under licence from UK, 104 Toofani Aircraft from France and 182 Hunter fighter-bombers from the UK.

Nehru initiated the development of the first Indian supersonic aircraft in the Hindustan Aircraft Factory, Bangalore — HF-24, Marut. In his time, agreements for licensed production of Gnat interceptor aircraft, Avro transport aircraft, MIG21 supersonic aircraft and Alouette helicopters were also concluded and 180 Sherman tanks were purchased from the US in the early '50s for the Army.

Though they were of Second World War vintage, with upgradation they were serviceable even in the war of 1965. Over 300 Centurion tanks to equip an armoured division were acquired. 160 light AMX-13 tanks with 75mm high velocity guns were purchased from France.

The Navy complained of neglect for quite some time after Nehru passed away. It was Nehru's vision that gave India its most prestigious National Defence Academy, the world's first joint training institute for the future officers of the Army, Navy and Air Force. The National Defence College was started in New Delhi to train senior military and civil officers in military strategy, international affairs and higher defence management. Earlier, the Defence Services Staff College came up in Wellington (Nilgiris) for preparing junior officers to take up middle-level command and staff assignments. DRDO, Bharat Electronics and many institutions were founded to boost self-reliance, research and defence preparedness.

Nehru pleaded for communist China's admission to the UN. His strategy was to expose China to the winds of international politics and blunt the edge of her isolation and militancy. He wanted to make the 1954 Panchsheel agreement with China to last for 25 years, but the latter settled for limiting it to an eight-year period.

In his book, 'India's Defence Problem', S.S. Khera says: "Nehru was disappointed. Also, late in the day as it was, his suspicion about the Chinese intentions were aroused. He stoutly defended

the 1954 agreement; but he also gave instructions to set up frontier posts to safeguard the country's northern frontiers."

Though both the political and military leadership can be faulted with benefit of hindsight, it would, however, be wrong to blame any individual or any particular unit/formation or even any organisation for the failure.

Why did China abruptly impose a unilateral ceasefire and then withdraw its forces? Two reasons seem important: First, Mao had accomplished his goal of humiliating India — China had prevailed over its Asian rival. The Chinese had become extremely envious of Nehru's rising stature as a world statesman. The second reason for China's restraint was undoubtedly US support for India. American President John F. Kennedy made it clear from the start of the crisis that the America was on India's side.

In his meeting with American ambassador John Kenneth Galbraith on November 22, Nehru cited two factors that convinced Mao to halt the war: First the "anger of the Indian people when aroused" and the risk of an open-ended conflict that would produce and, second, in Nehru's judgement, 'the speed of the American response'.

Bruce Riedel's JFK's Forgotten Crisis records: "Nehru was not alone in crediting US help with deterring further Chinese military advances. From his POW camp where he was held in solitary confinement by the PLA, Brigadier Dalvi credited Kennedy as a 'big brother and true friend of India.' He later wrote that the Chinese withdrawal was the direct result of President Kennedy's decisive action."

The debacle of the India-China War in no way raises doubts on the correctness of Nehru's basic thrust in foreign policy. For example, non-alignment ensured that even during the war, the US and Soviet blocs were not ranged on opposite sides. India succeeded in securing sympathy from both the blocs. This was unusual during the Cold War.

Second, Nehru had been right in pursuing a policy of friendship with China, even if it ended the way it did. Given the hostile relationship with Pakistan, it was in India's interest to try its best to avoid having another hostile neighbour and thus be caught in a pincer movement. India's espousal of China's right to have a seat in the UNSC was not given up by Nehru even after the Sino-Indian war, since he rightly believed that the Western powers' isolation of China only pushed her into becoming more irresponsible. By building up India's economic strength, Nehru enabled his successors to win military victories. The foreign military and economic aid received in 1962 ensured India successfully met the Pakistan challenge in 1965. This was the ultimate success of Nehru's foreign policy. ❧

*The writer is former Secretary AICC.*

Courtesy: The Asian Age

# What wasn't written

## State of Play: Cut. Paste. Concoct. Manufacture

A letter has recently been written to the people of India. It is from the Prime Minister, and it speaks of what he has done these past six years that he has been at the helm. The letter runs into several pages and is more than 1,500 words long, but there remain a few things it hasn't been able to accommodate or speak of.

It makes no mention, for instance, of *achchhe din*, the portmanteau feel-good promise that became his pivot to power in 2014. It does not tell you in what garden the pledged golden bird — *sony ki chidia* — continues to elude our grasp.

It does not tell you that in the years since, India has been turned into an architecture of fractures wantonly and consciously wreaked; and that in the pursuit of fashioning these fractures, Indians have been encouraged to go after other Indians, liberally fed on lies and prejudice, exhorted by dog-whistling from the top and brazenly led to murder and mayhem by gas-lighter commanders possessed of run over the law. Indians have been killed for what they wear, what they eat, what they are called, what books they read, who they pray to. The killers have come to be treated like heroes of spectator sport; they've been garlanded and celebrated.

The letter does not tell you of this civilizational mission of Excluding and Othering, at once merciless and joyous. It does not tell



Sankarshan Thakur

you a law has formally been passed as boost to its purposes.

It does not tell you that Kashmir, already woefully pellet-gunned, was jackbooted into prison, manacled, muffled, disabled, stripped of all rights and dignity. Just before that happened, elaborate, but covert, machinations had brought down a bolt that sundered India's crown and reduced, for the first time, a province to two Union territories.

It does not tell you that hundreds, including three former Chief Ministers, were incarcerated sans charge. It does not tell you that the pain of a populace became cause for lavish pleasure elsewhere.

It does not tell you of the disastrous consequences of demonetization, imposed with monarchic whimsy, a whole nation robbed overnight of access to rightful cash and forced to queue up for drip-feeds of financial sustenance. It does not tell you of favoured carpet-baggers who, around the same time, were plotting to decamp with purloined millions. It does not tell you of the woes of millions of farmers who marched long distances to be seen and heard until the soles of their feet gave and they fell and not a hand came to help.

It does not tell you of an economy in a shambles, its ratings downgraded, its minds clueless. It does not tell you the rupee is at

### Key Points

- It does not tell you that Kashmir, already woefully pellet-gunned, was jackbooted into prison, manacled, muffled, disabled, stripped of all rights and dignity.
- It does not tell you that hundreds, including three former Chief Ministers, were incarcerated sans charge. It does not tell you that the pain of a populace became cause for lavish pleasure elsewhere.
- It does not tell you of the woes of millions of farmers who marched long distances to be seen and heard until the soles of their feet gave and they fell and not a hand came to help.
- It does not tell you the rupee is at its worst ever against the dollar. It does not tell you of projects that have profited a handpicked few and impoverished the many.
- It does not tell you that many of those convicted of sectarian murder have been afforded bail.

its worst ever against the dollar. It does not tell you of projects that have profited a handpicked few and impoverished the many.

It does not tell you of the mindful plunder of institutional integrity and the evaporation of public faith in them — the autonomy of the Election Commission and the banking system, the conduct of investigative and policing agencies, the independence of the courts where appointments have been routinely fiddled and benches fixed to serve the ends of the establishment.

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*It does not tell you of the arrival of a dispensation that proactively, though quasi-covertly, promotes the apparatchik and aspiration of the Hindu rashtra, the very antithesis of what we, the people of India that is Bharat, had set out to be.*

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It does not tell you of the power-greedy, vandal politics that has prowled about, toppling and gobbling governments, making and unmaking the most cynical alliances; it is a dagger-driven politics whose tongue quivers with hatred. Its language is purposefully venomous and its actions treacherous. One day they could be sitting conferring with you across the table, the next they could throw you in jail.

It does not tell you that the lines between government and party, loyalty to nation and loyalty to person, have been sought to be cynically obliterated during this time, and a new ultra-aggressive, right-wing monotheism spurred. Democratic dissent has come to be renamed treason. Campuses and students have been violently targeted, labelled and persecuted on manufactured lies. It does not tell you that Dalits have been publicly and proudly whipped, often lynched, often driven to humiliation and suicide.

It does not tell you of the arrival of a dispensation that proactively, though quasi-covertly, promotes the apparatchik and aspiration of the Hindu rashtra, the very antithesis of what we, the people of India that is Bharat, had set out to be. It does not tell you that we now wish to be not a glowing contrast to Mohammed Ali Jinnah's Pakistan but a humungous, and more menacing, doppelgänger of his idea. It does not tell you that the antithesis of the constitutional idea of India is proceeding apace.

It does not tell you that many of those convicted of sectarian murder have been afforded bail. It does not tell you that many others have been shoved into jail on preposterously antediluvian allegations because the regime deems their honest work and

ideas antithetical. It does not tell you that a terror-accused has been eased out of prison and handed a ticket to Parliament. It does not tell you that the deifiers of Nathuram Godse, the murderer of Mahatma Gandhi, roam high and secure places.

It does not tell you that Jawaharlal Nehru, the architect of modern India, the most complex but most stable of post-colonial democracies, has been reviewed by rogues, his legacy lavished with unsavoury and mostly untrue puffery. Nehru, in the lexicon of the 'Rediscovery of New India', was born in a brothel and died of syphilis, having spent most of the intervening period playing playboy.

It does not tell you that these last few years have seen the inspired, and paid, eruption of a toxic propaganda machine that specializes in inventing lies and farming out disinformation that is of both Nazi and Soviet grade. This machine is helmed by the likes of Amit Malviya, the Chief of the Bharatiya Janata Party's IT cell, whose daily dabbling in fakery is legion. Such that he often snares senior ministers into endorsing his false claims and embarrasses them into having to publicly revise and recant. But Malviya and his troll cohort have proceeded regardless; unashamed and persuaded, in goblin fashion, that their diabolical litany of lies and falsification will eventually rule public perception. Cut. Paste. Concoct. Manufacture. Repeat the lie. Ridicule the truth. That's been the credo of the ruling dispensation, fired by innumerable social media engines.

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*It does not tell you how pitifully friendless India has become in its own neighbourhood, and how ineffectual.*

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For many of which the anthem is 'Go to Pakistan!'

It does not tell you how small all of that has rendered India's perception abroad. It does not tell you the poor notice the ruling confederacy routinely earns for its bully mien. It does not tell you how pitifully friendless India has become in its own neighbourhood, and how ineffectual. It does not tell you that hyper-chested ultra-nationalism has not secured the nation's borders any more than they were; the fabled stare was of dubious effect, it scared nobody off their bellicose intentions along our frontiers. Not the Pakistanis. Not the Chinese. Not the Nepalese.

There are far too many things that letter does not tell you than there is space to accommodate here. It does not, for instance, tell you of the inept and heartless handling of the health and humanitarian crisis which has now risen to our gills. But that story is on the front pages. ❧

*The author is an Editor of The Telegraph*

Courtesy: The Telegraph

# Migrant labourers lose faith in silent spectator Modi government



Dr Ajay Upadhyay

In the past several decades, hardly any other factor has affected human sentiment as much as the tragedy of Corona. The humanitarian crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic has tried to change the interpersonal relationships of the individual, society and the state system quite rapidly. The hollowness of socio-political convictions was transformed into public shame, right in front of our eyes. A glimpse of this was seen on many highways of the country during Lockdown, when millions of helpless migrant workers were forced to go to their native villages, thousands of miles away from the cities; hungry, thirsty, walking bare feet turned sore with blisters. The sudden unified decision of Lockdown, along with the wrong strategies of the central government and its short-sighted thinking, destroyed the lives of these millions of poor. Today, the various businesses of people have been ruined.

## Comparison with the Great Exodus of 1947

Many a people have compared this 'Huge exodus of helpless laborers' to the refugees coming from Pakistan to India, keeping in mind the circumstances arising during Partition in 1947; on which particularly, the President of the Indian National Congress Smt. Sonia Gandhi says that this highly disturbing present-day spectacle, is reminiscent of the painful sad moments of refugees; fleeing during the India-Pakistan partition. It should be noted that even at that time due to communal violence, millions of people had been helplessly forced to flee. One thing to be considered here is when people would have left their home, property, livelihood and the nefarious land of Pakistan for our country India, there must have been a belief in them that people would understand their problems. Perhaps this 'Hope or Belief' would have formed a strong basis for migration in such a desperate time of difficulty. They were gladly welcomed by people, society did the work of easing their pains and the state gave them a fair opportunity to be established.

## Breach of trust

It is important to mention that there is a big difference between the exodus of helpless people during independence and the exodus of the helpless laborers of today. The saddest aspect of the present exodus is the difference in attitude and thinking of the government; due to which these nation-builders (about eight crore laborers) have lost their trust in the government. In this atmosphere of today, one recalls the lines of the great poet Pash- "Sabse khatarnaak hota hai hamaare sapnon ka mit jana".

As we know, a heavy trouble was inflicted on these people who

had already been trapped since the beginning due to Lockdown. The ever-increasing toll of the pandemic, the dread of infection and the hunger, forced these millions of people to helplessly migrate to their villages and we all witnessed how the millions of our fellow beings set out through roads. But during this period due to the government's indifference, various decrees and restrictions, they had to bear the despicability; let alone any kind of help. In

such an uneven situation, the breakdown of patience was surely bound. However, many state governments tried really hard to make them have trust and wished that they stayed that way. A possible minimum arrangement was also made for them, in spite of this, all those exercises carried out at the eleventh hour proved to be fruitless. Keeping these two events in mind, these poignant lines written by the famous poet Gulzar automatically say a lot:

*"Kuch aise kaarwaan dekhe hain saintaalis mein bhi maine,  
Ye gaaon bhaag rahe hain apne watan mein  
Hum apne gaaon se bhaage thay, jab nikle thay watan ko  
Humein sharanaarthi kahke watan ne rakh lia tha  
Sharan di thi*

*Inhe inki riyasat ki hadon pe rok dete hain  
Sharan dene mein khatraa hai  
Khudaa jaane, ye bantwaaraa badaa hai  
Yaa vo bantwaaraa badaa tha."*

## The Central Government turns a mute spectator

The indifference of the mute spectator, the Central government, has been such that many people died, falling prey to road accidents. People became victims of train accidents on railway tracks. Every now-and-then, many people lost their lives in the special labor trains due to lack of minimum facility and food and water. One can see hundreds of reports revealing the condition of the bad system, describing the condition of these helpless people. But, our Central government was seen playing a very insensitive role. Even today, the government is not ready to accept these flaws. In the eyes of the government, even after wasting so much of tears, "Everything is fine" ("Sab changa si"). Railway Minister, Shri Piyush Goyal and Chairman of Railway Board, Mr. Vinod Kumar Yadav, are unable to see the suffering of the families of the people who died, due to lack of basic facilities and due to delays in trains which lost their tracks. That is why both of them denying it one-by-one, constantly tried to call it a socially fake news. Due to this mismanagement of the railways' delayed services, even those who have actually died seem photo-shopped to them. Recall that heartfelt picture of Muzaffarpur railway station, in which, how an innocent boy repeatedly tries to awaken the dead body of his mother,

*continued on page 46*

# Nation pays tribute to our freedom fighters and distinguished leaders

## Rani Lakshmibai

(19th November, 1828 – 18th June, 1858)

Rani Lakshmibai was born on 19 November, 1828, in the town of Varanasi. She was named Manikarnika Tambe and was nicknamed Manu. She was educated at home. Her studies included shooting, horsemanship, fencing and mallakhamba with her childhood friends Nana Sahib and Taty Tope.



After the death of her husband, the Maharaja of Jhansi Gangadhar Rao Newalkar, the British East India Company applied the Doctrine of Lapse, rejecting Rani's adopted son's claim to the throne. With this doctrine, the British annexed the state to its territories. When she was informed of this she cried out "I shall not surrender my Jhansi".

She defended Jhansi against British troops when Sir Hugh Rose besieged Jhansi on 23 March, 1858.

On 17th June in Kotah-ki-Serai near the Phool Bagh of Gwalior, a squadron of the 8th (King's Royal Irish) Hussars fought the large Indian force commanded by Rani Lakshmibai, who was trying to leave the area. It was during this flight when she lost her life on 18 June, 1858. Her tomb is in the Phool Bagh area of Gwalior.

Our countrymen will always remember that she was driven by ill-treatment into rebellion and that she lived and died for her country. We cannot forget her contribution for India. Statues of Lakshmibai are seen in many places of India, which show her and her son tied to her back. Indian representations in novels, poetry and film tend towards an uncomplicated valorization of Rani Lakshmibai as an individual, solely devoted to the cause of Indian independence.

## Sanjay Gandhi

(14th December, 1946 – 23rd June, 1980)

Sanjay Gandhi was a family member of the Nehru-Gandhi family. He was born in New Delhi, on 14 December, 1946, as the younger son of Indira Gandhi and Feroze Gandhi. He was very interested in sports cars and also obtained a pilot's licence in 1976. He was interested in aircraft acrobatics and won several prizes in that sport. Sanjay Gandhi married Maneka Anand, who was 10 years his junior. Their son, Varun Gandhi, was born shortly before



Sanjay's death.

The Congress (I) under Gandhi swept to power in January, 1980. Elections soon after to legislative assemblies in States ruled by opposition parties brought back Congress ministries to those states. Sanjay Gandhi at that time selected his own loyalists to head the governments in these states.

He stood for his first election to the Indian Parliament following the lifting of the Emergency in March, 1977 and escaped an assassination attempt at the same time.

Sanjay Gandhi died instantly from head wounds in an air crash on 23rd June, 1980.

## P.V. Narsimha Rao

(28th June, 1921 – 23rd December, 2004)

P.V. Narasimha Rao was born on 28 June, 1921, in Warangal District, now in Telangana. He was an active freedom-fighter during the Indian Independence movement.

He served in various ministerial positions in Andhra government from 1962 to 1973. He rose to national prominence in 1972 for handling several diverse portfolios, most significantly Home, Defence and Foreign Affairs, in the cabinets of both Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi.

He was the first person outside the Nehru-Gandhi family to serve as Prime Minister for five continuous years, the first to hail from the state of Andhra Pradesh, and also the first from southern India. He participated in a by-election in Nandyal to join the parliament and won with a victory margin of a record 5 lakh (500,000) votes and his win was recorded in the Guinness Book of World Records.

The major economic policies adopted by Rao include: abolishing in 1992 the Controller of Capital Issues, introducing the SEBI Act of 1992, encouraging foreign direct investment, streamlining procedures for FDI approvals etc. For these reasons, he is often referred to as 'Father of Indian Economic Reforms'.

He energised the national nuclear security and ballistic missiles program, which ultimately resulted in the 1998 Pokhran nuclear tests. His government introduced the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act (TADA), India's first anti-terrorism legislation. His crisis management after 12 March 1993 Bombay bombings, was highly praised. The same year, a strong earthquake in Latur, Maharashtra, killed nearly 10,000 people and displaced hundreds of thousands. Rao was applauded by many for using modern technology and resources to organise



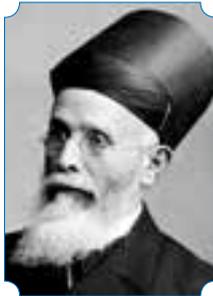
major relief operations.

After his retirement from national politics, he published a novel called *The Insider*. He suffered a heart attack on 9 December, 2004, and was taken to the All India Institute of Medical Sciences where he died 14 days later at the age of 83. A reformer, educationist, scholar, conversant in 15 languages and known for his intellectual contribution, he was called the 'Brihaspati' (wiseman) of Andhra Pradesh.

## Dadabhai Naoroji

(4th September, 1825 – 30th June, 1917)

Dadabhai Naoroji born on 4 September, 1825, in Navsari and known as the 'Grand Old Man of India' and 'Unofficial Ambassador of India', was an Indian Parsi scholar, trader and politician. He was one of the founding members of the Indian National Congress. His works in the congress are praiseworthy. In 1886, 1893 and 1906, i.e., thrice was he elected as the president of INC.



In 1854, he founded a Gujarati fortnightly publication, the *Rast Goftar* (or *The Truth Teller*), to clarify Zoroastrian concepts and promote Parsi social reforms. In December 1855, he was appointed Professor of Mathematics and Natural Philosophy at the Elphinstone College in Bombay, becoming the first Indian to hold such an academic position. Elected for the Liberal Party in Finsbury Central at the 1892 general election, he was the first British Indian MP.

Naoroji was an Indian nationalist and critic of British economic policy in India. In his many writings and speeches and especially in *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India* (1901), he argued that India was too highly taxed and that its wealth was being drained away to England. One of the reasons that the Drain theory is attributed to Naoroji is his decision to estimate the net national profit of India, and by extension, the effect that colonisation has on the country. He made the first attempt to estimate the national income of India in 1867.

He is regarded as one of the most important Indians during the independence movement, who died on June 30, 1917, in Bombay to rest in eternal peace. ❧

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considering her fast asleep. That child hardly knows that neither will his mother ever wake up, nor will the inexorable system of this country wake from its deepest slumber.

### Reality and instructions of the Supreme Court

The railways, that had been indifferent for so many days, is now definitely talking about investigation. That too, only when recently the Honorable Supreme Court and the National Human Rights Commission, have taken cognizance and reprimanded the government for this mismanagement and have called for a due investigation. On one hand, taking cognizance of the suffering of these workers trapped in different parts of the country, the Supreme Court has asked the states not to charge any fee from the migrants and that food and water be provided to them. On the other hand, the NRC in a statement said, that states have failed to protect the lives of these poor laborers aboard trains. The statement further said, "It has been alleged in a report that many migrant workers lost their lives while travelling by train". There was no arrangement of food and potable water. The Commission has issued a notice to the Union Home Secretary, Railways and the Governments of Gujarat and Bihar to give a detailed reply in four weeks. So far, it is well known from the government's intention what the direction of investigation will be. Sir, you might change the course of investigation, but according to media reports, 82 people have lost their lives due to the train gone astray. You can neither divert this truth nor can make people digress from the fact that, even now, 67% of people are still lingering in the outskirts.

A report released by 'Swan' has revealed that about 75% people still want to go home. Keeping these problems in mind, on June 9, the Honorable Supreme Court in a decision, has placed a huge responsibility on the Central government and the state governments, giving a deadline of 15 days for ensuring the return of migrant laborers to their homes; which includes proper arrangement of transportation, prompt action by railways on demand by states, comprehensive management of their livelihoods by the state governments etc. Although it seems a bit strange to take cognizance of it after so many days, but let's just follow the proverb of 'Better late than never'. It remains to be seen what action the governments take on this? Because the saddest part is that the democratic government elected by their votes, deprived them of their fundamental right to live respectfully, even after so many years of independence; which is extremely disappointing.

### Labourers forced to live in despair

Somehow, a few laborer brothers fortunately returned home after facing some trouble. But today, even they are getting disappointed being frustrated of the basic problems. A few reports that have been seen in the newspapers, are quite sad and heartbreaking. Recently, there have been reports of suicide of migrant workers from many villages of eastern Uttar-Pradesh; which is very unfortunate and a matter of serious concern. It is highly regrettable and dangerous for many of these returnee laborers to commit suicide, in the absence of employment and two meals a day. Can we ever think that a one or two wrong government decisions have made this tragedy, a great tragedy? The most disappointing aspect in this, is that of the gradual disillusionment of the common people, especially the poor sections of the country, the millions of workers deployed in the unorganized sectors, with the government. It is extremely detrimental to the future. So it seems, that now is the time when the state system needs to introspect. ❧

*The author favours the Indian National Congress in the national media; Coordinator, Vichar Vibhag and Chairman of Aahwan India Foundation*

# Dadabhai Nauroji

The nation pays homage to the founding member of Indian National Congress and its three time president (1886, 1893 and 1906) on his death anniversary.



**4 September 1825 - 30 June 1917**



## MNREGA

“My plea to the government is, this is a time of national crisis, not a time to play politics. You have a powerful mechanism at hand, please use it to help the people of India in their time of need.”

-Smt Sonia Gandhi

