

# INSIGHTS

SYNERGIA FOUNDATION

MAY 2021 | EDITION IV | WEEKLY

## WEST BANK & GAZA

Ur... Israeli occupation  
e 1967

- Armistice  
Priority

ISRAEL

Lake Tiberias

Tiberias

Nazareth

O'A

Tulkarm

Ramallah

Jerusalem

Bethlehem

Hebron

Dead Sea

Gaza

Gat

Beersheba



## THE ROAD PAST THE CEASEFIRE

### MUST READ

► GOING AROUND  
THE IPR



► MURMURS OF A  
MILITARY COUP



► REBOOTING  
STRATEGIC TIES





SYNERGIA FOUNDATION

# A CRISIS OF LEADERSHIP

The violence in Palestine and Israel is an outcome of extremist nationalism, but more importantly, it highlights the inadequacy of political leadership at both ends



**SYNERGIA FOUNDATION**  
**RESEARCH TEAM**

For over 70 years, the Middle East has witnessed several geopolitical tensions at the heart of which is the Palestine-Israel conflict. The recent violence at the Al-Aqsa mosque and in the Old City of Jerusalem has escalated into one of the deadliest exchanges between Israel and Palestine since the 2014 Gaza attacks. Coming in the midst of the holy month of Ramadan, the unprecedented scale of violence has generated global concern, especially in Muslim countries.

Although both sides say that they only target the combatants set up in residential areas and next to schools, and office buildings, it is inherently the civilians on both ends that must bear the brunt.

Historically, Israel's occupation of parts of Jerusalem has not been recognised by other countries, and before Trump initiated the 'Deal of the Century' in 2020, few Arab countries had any diplomatic ties

with Israel. Having established diplomatic bridges with several influential Arab countries, including the UAE, Israel was expected to avoid large scale violence and bloodshed of Palestinians in these pandemic times.

However, the violence primarily highlights the internal differences and leadership weaknesses on both sides.

## A PEOPLE ABANDONED

Over the years, the Palestinian cause has been greatly weakened and marginalised due to in-fighting and the unfortunate absence of a united voice. The two rival factions, the Palestinian Authority (PA) and the Hamas, control the West Bank and the Gaza Strip respectively. They lack cooperation or coordination in their approach towards their common enemy, Israel. This, in great measure, is exploited by Israel to further weaken their resistance and cause disarray in their ranks.

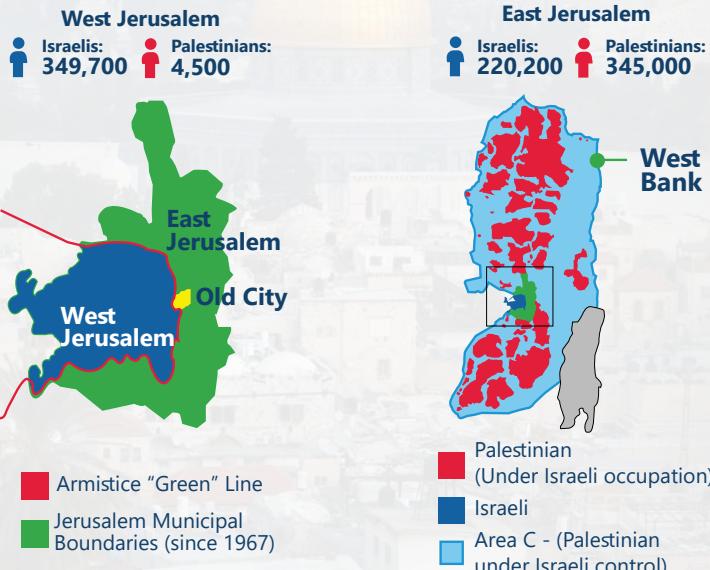
Although the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) theoretically signifies a sense of collective leadership, it is not put

to practice and was consequently co-opted by the Palestine Authority (PA). The autocratic nature of the organisations, along with the absence of elections and political checks and balances, depleted Palestinians of any form of political representation and participation. According to a poll released by a Palestinian media group JMCC, this vacuum has cultivated a sense of fatigue where nearly 40 per cent of Palestinians state they trust none of the current political parties.

Observers had staked a lot of hope on the impending Palestinian legislative elections, which were originally scheduled on May 22<sup>nd</sup> but were indefinitely postponed last month "until the participation of Jerusalem and its people could be guaranteed." Political changes to catalyse national unity and bring about the demobilisation of various factions, both from Fatah and Hamas, were some promises that the elections held out to the Palestinian people. Both the factions employ the rhetoric of 'protectors of Palestine' in their election campaigns that essentially tries to conceal the destruction caused in the same name. Political differences between

## 2020 JERUSALEM - THE DIVIDED CITY

West Jerusalem has been Israeli territory since 1948 with Jews in the majority.  
 East Jerusalem is Palestinian majority and was occupied by Israel in 1967.



Source: Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research (2020)

the two factions emerged in 2006 and continued to divide the leadership despite several attempts at forming a united government. By isolating themselves from Israel, citizens of Palestine, and its Arab neighbours, one can argue that PA self-interests are prioritised much higher than national interests, not to mention the absence of empathy for the daily sufferings of the common man.

On the Israeli side, the leadership has not greatly credited itself either. Observers blame the ongoing turmoil on the inability of the Israeli political parties to form a stable government

after several frustrating elections. This renders the government open to accusations of creating a political diversion for short term gains. The zealots who attempted to evict Palestinians living in the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah triggered a set of chain reactions that has now turned into a major conflagration. Netanyahu's critics have held the prime minister accountable for the escalation of violence, which they state is distracted by his political battles and trial on corruption charges. Other criteria that underline poor leadership on

the Israeli side is the lack of empathy for human lives, individual beliefs, and their holy sites.

### IS THERE HOPE?

In a wider context, a popular leader and lack of empathy is a losing combination. Whether it was Trump in the U.S. or Bolsonaro in Brazil, all of them have been criticised for their lack of empathy in dealing with a crisis that cost their voters a heavy price.

The need for collective leadership to de-escalate the violence is apparent due to the strain it lays on Palestine's private and public sectors. The security sector absorbs an asymmetrical distribution of the PA's budget than the education, health, and agriculture sectors combined. A collective leadership model may place Palestine on a path towards self-determination. If progressive youth-led organisations (like Palestinians for Dignity, Generation for Democratic Renewal) continue their initiative for collective leadership, democracy, and political participation, political change in Palestine will prove successful, albeit with incremental speed. The Central Election Commission's reports reflect the interest of Palestinians in electoral politics, suggesting that more than 93 per cent of the eligible demographic had registered to vote. An increase in women participation – nearly a third of around 1,400 candidates were women, and 39 per cent were aged under 40 – was also witnessed.

Additionally, no international interventions can singularly de-escalate the tensions in Palestine and Israel without the concerted efforts from both countries to lessen the violent exchanges. The absence of united leadership persistent in Israel and Palestine will mobilise extremists to not only exploit but also exacerbate the political instability in the region.

The absence of one strong leader and a united government is strongly felt in both countries that hinder the potential for peace. As aforementioned, the civilians on both ends are the most affected during the Israel and Palestine attacks, regardless of the rhetoric employed.

## COUNTRIES THAT CONSIDER ISRAELI SETTLEMENTS TO BE A VIOLATION OF INTERNATIONAL LAW.

■ Yes ■ "Not necessarily illegal" ■ No



Source: UN

© SYNERGIA FOUNDATION

# WARRING SKIES, BLEEDING GROUNDS

The current Israel-Palestine crisis needs to be examined against the larger political landscape, and not be seen as stemming from any isolated incident



## CEASEFIRE DECLARED

A ceasefire was announced in the early hours of 21-05-2021 bringing to an end 11 days of escalated violence between Israel and Hamas in Palestine. The key mediator who brought about the much awaited truce was Egypt with the US hailing the decision as a 'genuine opportunity for progress'.

There is still no official clarity on what led to the unprecedented violence which has caused the death of almost 232 civilians in Gaza and at least 150 IDF soldiers. The ceasefire, while being welcome as a way to prevent any more casualties does nothing to ease the tensions that have arisen out of the attacks in the region.

A dedicated multilateral approach spearheaded by a preferably unbiased regional player is needed to maintain this resolution and to make sure no further large-scale violence takes place.

and break their fasts. While the police claimed the barricading to be a yearly ritual, previous year footages say otherwise, which further exacerbated the situation. While the barricades were later removed, the space, also referred to as Jerusalem's 'Tahrir square', witnessed violence yet again, post the news of eviction of Arab residents from Sheikh Jarrah.

What gave these almost routine clashes the added impetus was the nature of provocation at the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Israeli police had clashed twice with Palestinian protestors at the mosque, injuring them in hundreds. Being the third holiest site



**TOBBY SIMON**

FOUNDER, SYNERGIA FOUNDATION

**T**he latest bout of violence between Israelis and Palestinians can be traced to a variety of interlinked factors. While it is tempting to blame the string of recent incidents on the historic animosity between the duo, it is pertinent to ask what triggered such a heavy escalation in the midst of a pandemic.

## THE WEB OF REASONS

The root cause of the violence, this time, may be related to the eviction of six Arab families from the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah. The move by Jewish settlers is reflective of growing population in East Jerusalem and their desire to wrest away territory from the Palestinians, eventually contributing to their already dwindling numbers and altering the

region's demographics.

While there is no denial of the eviction being the trigger point, there were previous factors that set the ball rolling, namely the protests and clashes which emerged in and around the Al-Aqsa mosque and the Damascus Gate.

On the first day of Ramadan, which coincides with Israel's Memorial Day, Israel had requested the Al-Aqsa Mosque leadership to avoid broadcasting prayers as Israeli President Rivlin was giving a speech at the Temple Mount. Upon their refusal, the police barged into the minarets and disconnected the speakers, provoking ire from the crowds.

Yet another incident was when Israeli police decided to barricade the area around Damascus Gate. Located in the occupied East Jerusalem's Old City, the plaza is of great symbolic significance to the Palestinians, especially during the month of Ramadan. It is thronged with Muslims who head over there every night of the holy month to hear the prayers from Al-Aqsa Mosque

## THE HUMAN COST OF THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

Israeli & Palestinian deaths/injuries documented by the UN

■ Deaths

■ Injuries



	Palestinian	Israeli
2008	3,202	853
2009	7,460	123
2010	1,659	185
2011	2,260	136
2012	4,936	578
2013	4,031	157
2014	19,860	2,706
2015	14,813	339
2016	3,572	222
2017	8,526	174
2018	15,628	130
2019	31,558	133
2020	2,781	61

Source: United Nations

© SYNERGIA FOUNDATION

in Islam, the standoff became more than mere attacks and was suggestive of an open aggression and attack on the Palestinian people, their religion, their culture, and heritage.

One of the major clashes at the Mosque, in fact, coincided with Jerusalem Day, an event which celebrates the victory of the conquest of East Jerusalem in 1967. As part of the celebration, right wing Israelis carried out a flag march through the city reiterating their right over the

land. Hundreds were injured at the site. This move was the final straw for Hamas.

By the time, the Israeli authorities decided to de-escalate the situation by rerouting the flag march to bypass Damascus Gate and the Muslim Quarter, it was too late. Hamas fired rockets at Israel on the same day which was met with quick retaliation by Israel who launched air strikes towards Gaza.

Unstable leadership, at both ends,

has also contributed to the conflict at hand. Early in April, Mahmoud Abbas, president of the State of Palestine, had decided to postpone the elections due to his declining credibility. This had severely incensed Hamas and further strained their relationship. Hamas's decision to act first by firing rockets at Israel played a big role in the escalation of conflict.

On the other hand, President Rivlin had just asked the opposition leader, Yair Lapid to form a coalition government as the incumbent PM Benjamin Netanyahu has failed to do so even after being given multiple chances. It was at this juncture that the escalation erupted at the border giving Netanyahu an opportunity to prove to the Israeli population of his hard-line stance when dealing with forces which threaten the sovereignty of the nation.

### PRESSURE POINTS

The Israeli court's ruling in favour of evicting Arabs and Palestinians from Gaza has certainly appeased the right-wing settlers. However, the question remains whether Israel may have jeopardized the situation. If Israel has committed such a tactical mistake, in an already convoluted environment is something only time will tell.

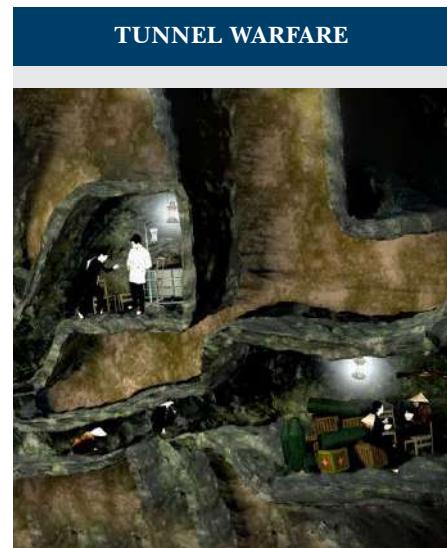
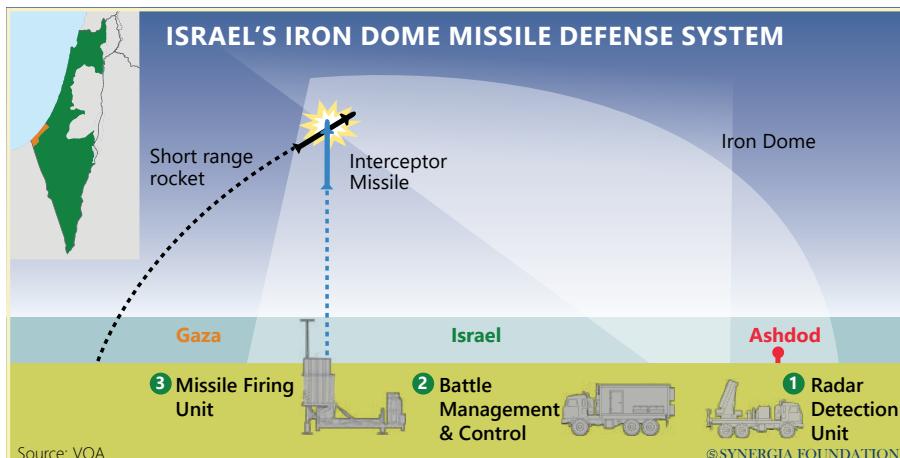
The previous U.S. President, Donald Trump, had formally recognized Jerusalem as the Israeli capital back in 2017. Having declared so, the U.S. embassy was shifted from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. This has upset the Palestinians and has reduced the stature of U.S. being the most credible mediator to resolve the conflict between the two states.

A diplomatic achievement of the Trump administration was the signing of the Abraham Accords. The Accords marked the beginning of normalisation of relations between Israel and the several Arab states. These accords were largely heralded in the region as a means to establish peace by reducing Israeli incentive to further expand into West Bank and Gaza. It is to be re-evaluated what exactly the Accords will do with respect to regional peace and stability.



# THE IRON DOME

The iron dome, that shields Israel from Gaza's rockets, is only an illusion of long-term national security



**SYNERGIA FOUNDATION**  
**R E S E A R C H T E A M**

**T**he iron dome is a national air defence system developed in Israel with heavy financial and technical backing from the U.S. It consists of radar and Tamir interceptor missiles that track and neutralise any air-borne Israeli targets, which includes – rockets, artillery, and mortars (C-RAM), aircraft, helicopters, and unmanned aerial vehicles. With over 4000 rockets having been fired by Hamas into Israel (as on 19 May), the number of casualties in Israel has been relatively low.

The detection and tracking radar spots any incoming threats with an infrared sensor; the Battle Management and weapon control system (BMC) liaises between the radar and the missile firing unit that launches defence rockets to destroy the incoming rockets. The AI technology implemented helps the dome distinguish whether the incoming missiles will land in an uninhabited or a populated area, disregarding them in the former case, ergo reducing operating costs and keeping unnecessary defensive launched to a minimum.

An air defence system consists

of two to three radars to spot and track incoming objects pre-launch. After its launch, the weapon's own head will take over. However, when some rockets do not hit directly at the target, a laser-controlled 'proximity fuse' activates and blasts rockets with shrapnel that 'destroys the target in such a way that it caters for the velocity of the missile and the target' says Retired Air Marshal Anil Chopra, head of Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS).

Researchers suggest that the Iron Dome in Israel is designed for very specific threats of low-range rockets, essentially from the regions like Gaza or West Bank. It cannot intercept those coming from Iran, for example, which would be defended by the 'David's Sling' or the 'Arrow' missile system. Hence, this technological defence system appears to be effective only for close-range nations with relatively unsophisticated technology. This clearly suggests the unsymmetrical advantage Israel own over Palestine. The Hamas group are attempting to overwhelm this defence system.

While the iron dome suffices for now, it will have negative impacts on the Israeli public and on long-term national security. Overplaying the idea of temporary mitigation distracts Israelis in seeking out an inclusive regional political solution driven by effective diplomacy.

Tunnel warfare dates back to the Vietnam War in the 1960s when Viet Cong soldiers used the Cu Chi tunnels as hiding spots, and as communication and supply routes.

The Iran-backed Hezbollah militant group had dug a secret network of 100 km-long tunnels from Beirut to southern Lebanon. This was uncovered by Israel in 2018 after a decade of rumours since the end of the war between Hezbollah and Israel. One tunnel started from the village Kfar Kila adjacent to the Israeli border, enabling them to enter discreetly into Israeli territories. In 2015, a pro-Hezbollah newspaper reported the existence of a vast network of concrete tunnels with a 24-hour power supply, a ventilation system to prevent damage to military equipment, and a series of secondary escape shafts. In January 2020, the Israel Defense Forces installed a chain of sensors underground to identify similar tunnels dug along the Israeli-Lebanon border.

According to some reports, Hezbollah had 'North Korean advisors [who] had assisted Hezbollah in building tunnel infrastructure'. Israel's vulnerability to tunnels surfaced in 2014 during its war with Hamas in Gaza.

# GOING AROUND THE IPR

The U.S. support for a potential patent waiver on COVID-19 vaccines has raised hopes globally, but realists warn that there is still a long way to go before it becomes a reality



**SYNERGIA FOUNDATION**  
**RESEARCH TEAM**

India and South Africa introduced the waiver proposal in the WTO in October 2020, which called for exemption in four categories of IP rights – copyright, industrial designs, patents, and undisclosed information under the Agreement of Trade-Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS). The proposed waiver would apply only to selected COVID-19 vaccines until most of the world population receives effective vaccines and develops immunity to COVID-19.

The proposal implied that waiver would not only be on the patent formula but also other types of IP and materials, including, for instance, manufacturing know-how, test data and cell lines, which are needed for mass-based production and supply worldwide. The U.S., however, has supported only the waiver on formula and not on the technical know-how.

While most lower and middle-income countries supported the proposal, more affluent countries such as the U.S., EU, Canada, Japan, Switzerland, and Germany opposed it. Negotiations, both bilateral and multilateral, have been in progress over the proposal since then. After six months of the proposal, the Biden administration has expressed support for waiver considering the 'extraordinary circumstances' that the world is facing. In a statement from the White House, Katherine Tai, the U.S. Trade Representative, read out, "We will actively participate in text-based negotiations at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) needed to make that happen. Those negotiations will take time given the consensus-based nature of the institution and the complexity of

the issues involved." This implies that there need to be rounds of excessive talks and meetings to bring both countries and patent-holding Pharma companies to the same table.

Considering the opposition raised by pharmaceutical companies and concerned countries, it can take anywhere from a couple of months to a year until that waiver is granted.

## INDIA'S DOMESTIC SCENE

India being a forbearer of the waiver, welcomed the decision of the U.S. India previously has exported over 66 million of its domestically produced vaccine to over 95 countries. Of these, about 10 million were grants from the Indian government, 20 million were sent as part of the global COVAX programme in conjunction with the WHO, and 36 million were commercial exports.

The country is currently battling a second wave of the pandemic with a much more mutant version of the COVID virus, leading to an alarming increase in cases. India is also facing a vaccine shortage. The Centre and State governments have been haggling over vaccine prices while putting pressure on pharma companies to speed up vaccine production and distribution.

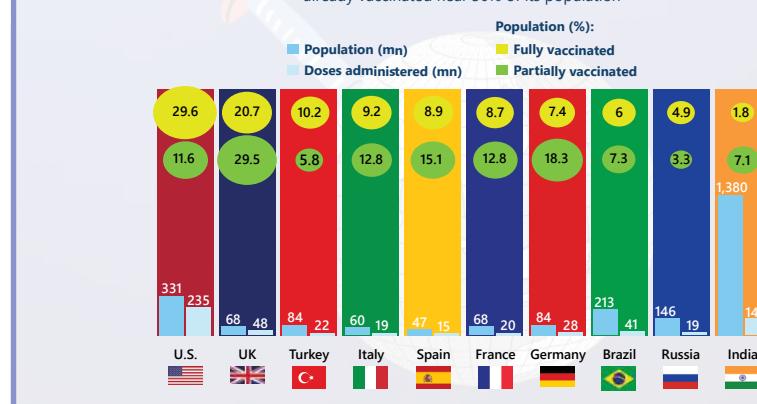
There are currently two vaccines in circulation in India. The first is COVAXIN developed jointly by the ICMR (Indian Council of Medical Research) and Hyderabad based biotechnology company Bharat Biotech. The other is COVISHIELD, developed by the Oxford-AstraZeneca company, and then licensed out to Pune based SII (Serum Institute of India).

Since the ICMR is involved in the R&D of COVAXIN, it means that it was developed from public money, thus reducing the profit-seeking imperative by a considerable margin. Also, being a joint effort, both parties would surely hold patent rights as decreed by the 1970 Patent Laws of India. This gives them the right to license the patent to other manufacturers. The Union government has now issued orders and allocated funds to three other vaccine manufacturers – Haffkine Institute, State-run Indian Immunologicals Ltd, and Bharat Immunologicals and Biologicals Ltd, to boost vaccine production tenfold.

Considering that the Union government handed out these commissions indicates some sense of ownership over the intellectual property rights of the vaccine. So, the government should be able to license out the vaccine to more

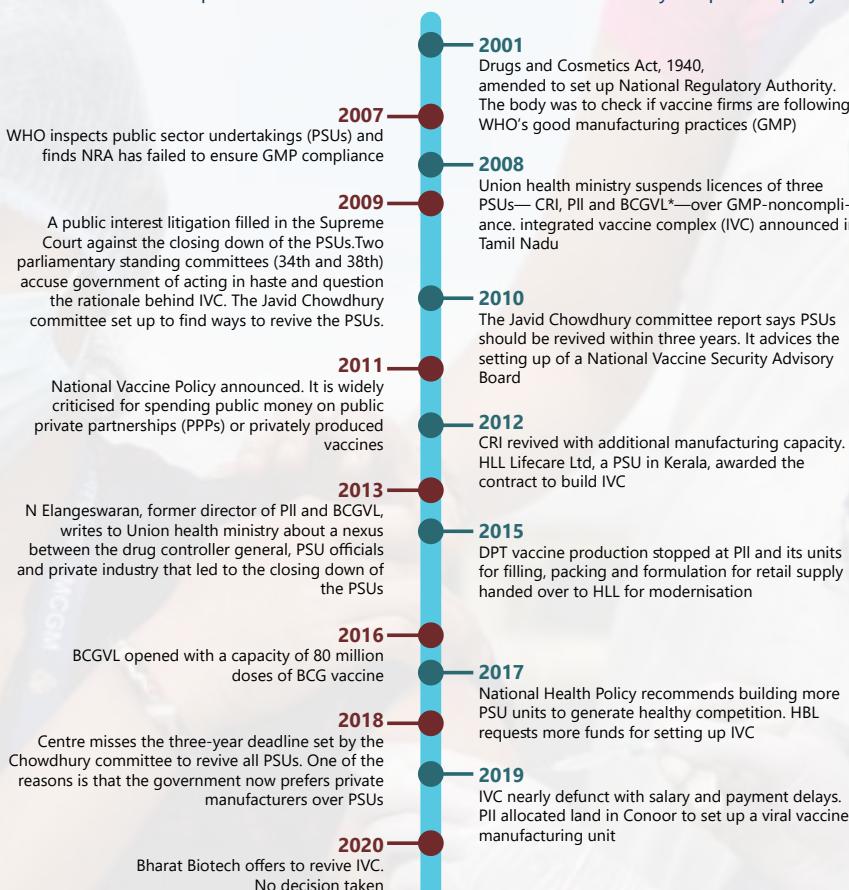
## COVID-19 VACCINATION: INDIA VS THE WORLD

India is trailing other countries in the percentage of population that has been vaccinated against COVID-19. India has fully vaccinated only 1.8% of its 1.38 billion population till April 2021, while the US has already vaccinated near 30% of its population



## DELIBERATE?

India disbanded its public sector vaccine manufacturers to make way for private players



\*CRI-Central Research Institute, Kasauli, Himachal Pradesh; BCGVL-BCG Vaccine Laboratory, Guindy, Tamil Nadu; PII-Pasteur Institute of India, Coonoor Tamil Nadu

Source: CSE-DTE Data Centre

©SYNERGIA FOUNDATION

manufacturers, or at the very least ensure that patent rights are not enforced, giving leeway to interested drug manufacturers to make 'copycat' versions. Was it mere apathy from the side of the government that such licenses were not lent out earlier?

### WHY NO COMPULSORY LICENSING?

Compulsory licensing and the like come under the ambit of TRIPS flexibilities. Flexibility clauses are exceptions wherein nation-states are given rights to override patent laws and restrictions in emergencies and other context-specific situations. These are essential safeguards written into the agreement to enforce public health and universal access to quality healthcare.

Dominant wealthy nations like the EU, Japan, Switzerland, and the U.S. have long undermined the use of TRIPS flexibilities in developing countries to protect the interests

of their pharmaceutical industries. Since India issued its first compulsory license on pharmaceutical patents, the U.S. has applied continuous pressure on India to discourage any further compulsory licensing on patented medicines.

The USTR's (U.S. Trade Representative) report has had India on its list of IPR violators for many years. It recently updated the list where they have maintained India's position on the 'priority watchlist' of IPR violators.

It is a reality that innovation and creative control need to be valued and protected in a highly competitive global market. Pharmaceutical companies spend 18% of their revenues in research and development. Any foreign private player would therefore want their intellectual property to be staunchly guarded by their governments. Such protection would incentivise further research and development, and bring in more investment to domestic developing economies. Therefore,

developing countries are caught in this vicious loop between IPR and their developing economy where most citizens would not have access or cannot afford most patented products.

Then there is a larger economic angle. The White House statement on the waiver resulted in a drop in the share prices of the vaccine manufacturers and left their investors shuddering. Only a day earlier, Pfizer vaccine revenues were forecasted at \$26 billion, with a profit of over \$7 billion!

### IS A THIRD WAY POSSIBLE?

So, it remains to be seen as to what extent the possibility of patent waivers will create an effective change in producing and distributing vaccines universally. Whether these waivers will be agreed upon in time for it to be most effective and bring about herd immunity is another concern. In the time being, WTO Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala has suggested the necessity of a third way. She stated in an Op-ed piece "We must find a 'third way' on intellectual property that preserves the multilateral rules that encourage research and innovation while promoting licensing agreements to help scale-up manufacturing of medical products".

She further called upon countries to reject vaccine nationalism and protectionism and instead co-operate on new emerging treatments and vaccines. The WHO has already set up a C-TAP (COVID-19 Technological Access Pool) where member nations are called upon to share and transfer information, technology voluntarily, and methods to fight the virus, the response to which has been bleak.

The slow pace of vaccine diplomacy may incur a huge cost in human lives if no immediate action is taken to find a way out of this stalemate. In its editorial of May 5th, the Guardian commented that, "the ugliness of the EU's and UK's position has been exposed by the U.S. reversal. They now have a chance to place themselves on the right side of history."

# MURMURS OF A MILITARY COUP

Beset with Islamic and racial violence, the French Republic once again woke up to rumblings within the powerful military fraternity



MAJ. GEN. AJAY SAH (RETD.)  
CHIEF INFORMATION OFFICER

In a country that has a long history of military coups in modern times, and in fact, is credited for coining the word 'coup d'état', there are once again sounds of misgivings from the military, both serving and retired, hinting at the generals flexing their muscles once again.

On one hand, there has always been general discontent in the right-wing in France regarding the rising cases of terrorism by Islamic extremists, mostly French-born or immigrants. The right-wing, which has a large following amongst the servicemen-serving and veterans, has been critical of the government's handling of the problem. However, this is the first time it has openly boiled over.

On April 21st, an open letter signed by 50 retired generals and over 2400 servicemen (active duty and veterans) was first published by a right-wing magazine, Valeurs Actuelles. The letter warned of an imminent takeover of France by Islamists, calling it a "grave hour, France is in peril." It further derided the French President by stating that "those who run our country must imperatively find the needed courage to eradicate these dangers."

The majority who signed the open letter comprises of both retired, and serving members of elite units like the paratroopers, the famous French Foreign Legion and marine infantry. This shows how deep extreme right-wing patriotism runs within the French soldiery.

## A POLITICISED MILITARY

The date chosen for publishing the letter is significant. It is on this day in 1961 that the Algiers putsch



also called the Generals' Putsch, was launched by the former commander in chief of the French Army in Algeria, General Maurice Challe and his fellow generals. The coup leaders disagreed with the decision of President Charles de Gaulle to abandon the French colony of Algeria and mutinied en masse. Of course, within six days, the uprising had been crushed.

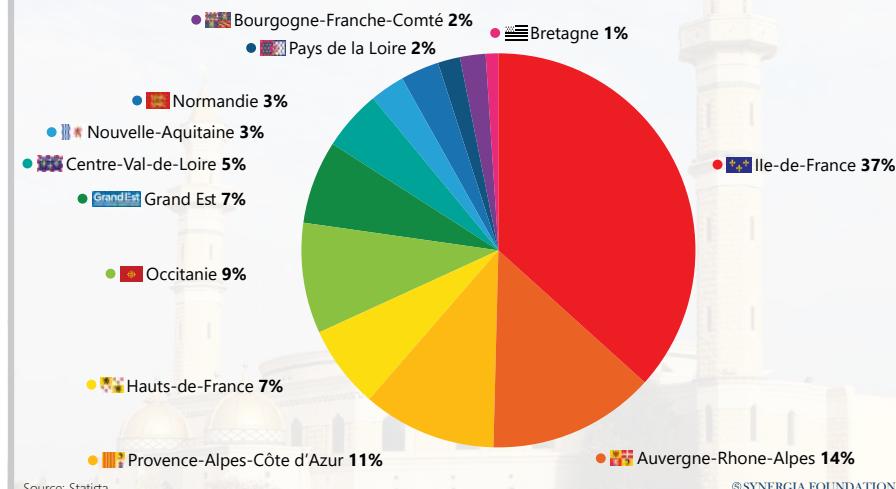
Historically, the French military is one of the most politicised ones in the Western world. It is borne by a series of uprisings by the military whenever there has been a severe political crisis brewing in the country. In fact, the constitution in force in France today itself emerged from a coup in 1958. The Army generals had used military force to bring down the parliamentary Fourth Republic to

return General Charles de Gaulle to power in what was christened as the Fifth Republic.

## A SUPPORTIVE PUBLIC

The French military draws the encouragement to be so vocal about their political leanings and opinions from the support from a large segment of the civilian population. The people have always considered political balancing in a crisis as part of the military's calling, especially in instances where the Republic was thought to be facing an existential threat. Many French residents of Algeria supported the coup in 1961, both through their political and financial support as also by taking up arms.

## BREAKDOWN OF THE NUMBER OF ANTI-MUSLIM CRIMINAL ACTS IN FRANCE IN 2019, BY REGION



Leading signatories such as Generals Martinez and Piquemal have warned that if the situation worsens because of immigration, crime and Islamism, the soldiers may take control. This current display of political heft, has only invited applause from the public. In a survey, 58 per cent of respondents agreed with the views of the soldiers.

## THE POLITICS OF COUP

Underlying the whole affair is the intense politics at play as France gets closer to the presidential elections scheduled in 2022. Marine Le Pen, a potential candidate of the National Rally for the Presidential elections, spoke in support of the former generals while remaining short of supporting an actual insurrection. Daughter of a Foreign Legionnaire and paratrooper, she comes from a family that comprises of die-hard supporters of right-wing anti-Gaullist forces. This time around, perhaps she may have overstepped a bit because it gives a handle to President Macron to beat her and her party. Being painted as reactionaries in the likes of the Vichy, the much-hated followers of the French General who collaborated with Nazi Germany during World War II, does not bode well for them.

Le Pen enjoys the electoral support of the military, as was evident in 2017 when she got almost 65 per cent of the vote in military

communities.

General Martinez, the principal author of the open letter, is a child of the Algerian revolution. He hopes to contest in next year's presidential elections as a candidate of his right-wing movement, the Volunteers for France. His campaign is based on a return to 'traditional (meaning white French only) identity and an end to multiculturalism, and "Islamisation of France".

The government has tried to brush off the letter calling it politically motivated and indulged by a fringe element. The French minister for the armed forces called for the military to uphold its guiding principles – loyalty and neutrality. As per law, the serving members of the armed forces are prohibited from siding with any one political party and can face court-martials. In a recent well-publicised case, a general of the Foreign Legion was dismissed from service for participating in anti-migrant protests. In the instant case, too, the military swiftly initiated disciplinary actions against the serving signatories, who are not more than eighteen in number, and includes both officers and enlisted men. With regard to the veterans, the French Army chief, Gen Lecointre, has threatened them with exemplary punishment. This includes denying them the right to wear their campaign medals and uniforms in ceremonial events, along with cutting off of their pensions.

President Macron has shown

supreme confidence over his past handling of the military. Soon after taking over as the President in 2017, he slashed the military budget. When the then military chief, Gen Pierre de Villiers openly protested, Macron forced his resignation which itself was without precedence in French civil-military relationship.

## (S) Assessment

Realistically speaking, it would be a bit far-fetched to contemplate a military coup under the present circumstances. Comparison to the 1961 putsch is merely symbolic as that military revolt centred around four elite paratrooper units with battle-hardened troopers under seasoned commanders, all on active duty. Yes, there was civilian support in the form of French settlers in Algeria, but this class too had been militarised by years of living amidst a hostile populace. Today the situation is far different. Only 18 active-duty servicemen have been implicated in the open letter in breach of disciplinary norms. Also, the purge against the Algeria mutineers was so brutal that potential rebels in today's much truncated French military would have to be very strongly motivated and led.

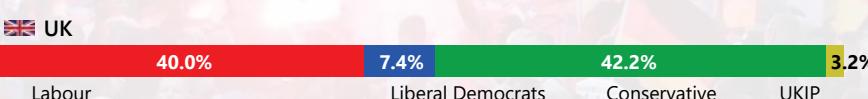
There is little danger to the French Republic as a stable democracy. The French military has been, over the years, greatly trimmed and emasculated. However, a new President who is openly far right is a distinct possibility. In fact, recent polls give an edge to Le Pen in favour of President Macron in the 2022 elections.

Notwithstanding the above, the open letter is a sign of the dangerous times that we live in. Democracies, anywhere in the world, when faced with an existential threat from radicalism and terrorism, and confronted by right-wing elements and a discontented military, could face disastrous consequences.

## THE FAR RIGHT IS RISING IN EUROPE

Top 3 parties by voter share at General/Presidential Elections 2017

■ Left ■ Central/Liberal ■ Conservative ■ Right



# A UNION IN CRISIS

SNP's victory in the Scottish parliamentary elections appears to have reinvigorated sub-national movements across the UK



**SYNERGIA FOUNDATION**  
RESEARCH TEAM

**A**midst intense speculations about a possible disintegration of the United Kingdom, crucial elections have been held to the regional assemblies in Scotland and Wales, along with local and mid-term polls in England. Pro-independence parties are projecting the results as a popular call for separation. While the Tories have made strident gains in England, celebrations were muted owing to the results pouring in from Scotland. Securing a historic fourth term in office, Nicola Sturgeon, and

her pro-independence Scottish National Party (SNP) have won a convincing 64 of the 129 seats in the Edinburgh-based Parliament, finishing just one seat short of an overall majority. She is expected to make up for this deficit through an alliance with the Scottish Green Party (The Greens), which controls eight seats. Together, they will be able to exert renewed pressure on Westminster to authorise a second referendum on the secession of Scotland.

Meanwhile, in Wales, the victory of the vehemently pro-devolution Labour party portends a mounting constitutional crisis for the Union. A visibly nervous Boris Johnson has invited the leaders of the UK's

devolved regions to a summit, hoping to counter a potential break-up. It remains to be seen whether the Conservatives' brand of 'muscular unionism' prevails in this deeply divided country.

## DEVOLUTION OF POWERS

Towards the end of the 20th century, the devolution of powers to Cardiff, Edinburgh and Belfast had radically changed the course of British politics. Although it did not equate to federalism, the devolved regions had been granted a greater level of self-autonomy, with the ultimate authority residing at Whitehall. Any disputes between the different layers of government were

## INDEPENDENCE COULD BE A COSTLY PROPOSITION FOR SCOTLAND

Estimated long-term effects of the following scenarios on Scottish income per capita



Brexit  
No Independence



Brexit  
Independence  
UK common market  
Low border cost



Brexit  
Independence  
UK common market  
High border cost



Brexit  
Independence  
Scotland rejoins EU  
Low border cost



Brexit  
Independence  
Scotland rejoins EU  
High border cost

Source: London School of Economics

© SYNERGIA FOUNDATION

papered over by deferring to the powers of the European Union.

Over the years, however, Westminster was accused of a policy of 'devolve and forget'. Many emerging factions within Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales suspected it of centralising power under the garb of parliamentary sovereignty. A significant turning point came in 2016 when Britain sought to assert greater control over

its internal markets by quitting the EU. With the passing of the Brexit referendum, the Union was radically polarised, with electors in Scotland and Northern Ireland preferring to remain in the EU, even as a majority in Wales and England voted to leave the bloc.

Now, as the region simmers from economic uncertainty and political rancour in the wake of Brexit, these fault lines have been thrown into

sharp relief.

### SEVERING THE CORD

The independence movement in Scotland has always had some traction since the 1970s, owing to the rise of the SNP. Apart from issues pertaining to the devolution of power, London's control over the revenue from North Sea oil had been a politically contentious issue in the region. Nonetheless, when a referendum on independence was held in 2014, around 55 per cent of the Scottish public had voted against it. Analysts believe that a principal reason was the desire to stick with the UK's long-standing membership of the EU.

After the 2016 vote on Brexit, however, this strategic calculus changed, with many Scots feeling betrayed by the decision to leave the EU. The conclusion of a bare-bones trade deal with the bloc did little to assuage their concerns about economic disruption, as important sectors like the Scottish fish industry suffered massive declines in their exports. Capitalising on this sentiment, members of the SNP have steadily pushed for a plebiscite on independence. According to them, Brexit has triggered a 'material change in circumstances', which justifies another vote on Scottish secession. In recent times, they

## SUPPORT FOR SCOTTISH INDEPENDENCE

Referendum voting intention for the question: "Should Scotland be an independent country?"

■ Yes ■ No

51%

49%

Source: Survation, January 2021

© SYNERGIA FOUNDATION

have also sought to distinguish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon's 'deft handling' of the Covid-19 crisis from Boris Johnson's alleged mismanagement of the pandemic during its initial stages. This strategy seems to have paid off, with public opinion polls suggesting that the number of Scots who support independence have gone up over the last two years. However, it will not be easy for the SNP to conduct another referendum, despite coming to power. Prime Minister Boris Johnson has categorically stated that he will block any such vote.

Even though the Scottish Parliament has its own portfolio of devolved powers, it is the Westminster that ultimately controls legislation pertaining to constitutional matters. Under Section 30 of the 1998 Scotland Act, only the UK Prime Minister can authorise the holding of a referendum before Holyrood passes a law to that effect.

Since London is likely to stonewall any such attempts, the SNP may be forced to pass a plebiscite bill in the Edinburgh parliament that is devoid of official sanction, paving the way for a 'wildcat' independence referendum. However, this will inevitably spur a feverish legal battle at the UK

Supreme Court, further aggravating the Anglo-Scottish standoff.

### RETURN TO THE TROUBLES?

The results of the Scottish elections have been keenly watched in Belfast, which is facing its own spate of troubles in the aftermath of Brexit. Unhappy about the Northern Ireland Protocol that effectively creates a trade border with England, Scotland and Wales, many Unionists in the region have been left disillusioned. Sporadic violence has broken out across the province, raising the spectre of renewed 'Irish Troubles'. Arlene Foster, the Unionist leader of the government in Belfast, has announced that she will step down at the end of May 2021, blaming the Brexit deal for having destabilised the region. Meanwhile, public discussions about a referendum on Irish unity have increased, with opinion polls showing that a majority of the Northern Irish favour a vote on reunification with the Republic of Ireland. Against this backdrop, the victory of the SNP in Scotland has been heralded as a game-changer for the constitutional future of the Union Jack.

Sinn Fein, a prominent Republican

party, has already indicated that a border poll may take place as early as 2030. Under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement, which ended three decades of violence between Catholic nationalists and Protestant unionists, a referendum can be called if a 'yes' majority looks likely. The first indicator for any such move will be the Northern Ireland parliamentary elections next year, where a Sinn Fein victory may accelerate calls for a broader break-up.

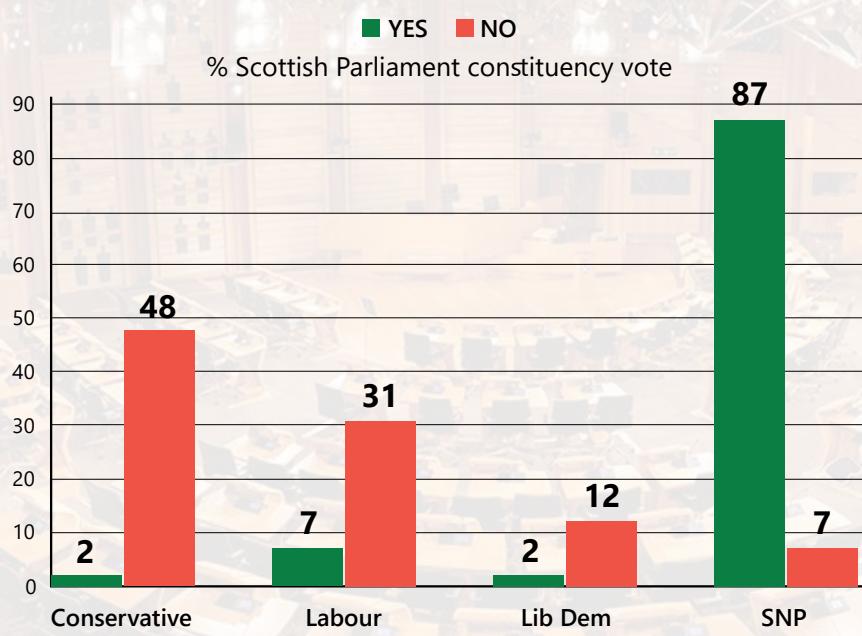
### (S) Assessment

The SNP must carefully consider the economic costs of separation and the viability of an independent Scotland over the days to come. Applying for EU membership as a separate nation can create a hard border with England, causing several disruptions and hindering trade. Learning from the Catalan example, where an unconstitutional pro-independence referendum in 2017 had failed to translate into separation from Spain, the SNP will need to ensure that its stand-alone referendum does not flounder on legal grounds.

The negative impact of Brexit has invariably spurred a great deal of soul-searching on the constitutional future of Northern Ireland. Given that the province remains a political tinder box largely divided along religious and nationalist lines, Stormont will not find it easy to reconcile the competing visions of sovereignty.

Even in Wales, a desire for separation simmers under the surface. As can be recalled, Plaid Cymru, a Welsh nationalist party had pledged to hold a referendum on independence if voted to power. However, it has only managed to secure the third place in the recently concluded elections, providing a temporary breather to those who oppose the disintegration of the United Kingdom.

## SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT VOTE INTENTION BY PREFERENCE ON INDEPENDENCE



# REBOOTING STRATEGIC TIES

By recommencing trade and investment negotiations with Brussels, New Delhi hopes to counter Beijing's role in the global value chain



**SYNERGIA FOUNDATION**  
**RESEARCH TEAM**

**H**ailed as a watershed moment for the India-EU strategic partnership, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has participated in a virtual summit with 27 European heads of state, along with the Presidents of the European Council and the European Commission. Hosted from Portugal, this is only the second time that such a hybrid arrangement has been employed in the aftermath of Brexit. Only two months ago, the first 'EU+27' meeting had been convened with U.S. President Joe Biden to bolster transatlantic relations. The extension of this rarely used format to India signals the level of importance that Brussels accords to bilateral ties, as it amplifies its role in the Indo-Pacific.

Apart from this symbolic gesture, the two sides have marked a key milestone in their mutual relationship by resuming negotiations on free trade and investment agreements. They have also agreed to establish a comprehensive 'Connectivity Partnership' that incorporates digital, energy, transport, and people-to-people connectivity. Dedicated dialogues on regulatory cooperation, supply chain resilience and artificial intelligence are some of the other areas that were touched upon.

As the COVID-19 pandemic ravages the world, New Delhi and Brussels have stressed the importance of multilateral institutions in combatting the virus and facilitating economic recovery. They have also organised an India-EU Business Roundtable to coincide with the Leaders' summit so that greater cooperation can be forged in healthcare, climate change and

digital transformation.

By embarking on such ambitious endeavours, India and the EU appear well-placed to implement the '2025 Roadmap' that prescribes a joint action plan for strengthening strategic relations. They have also provided fresh impetus to the 2016 'Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy', which pivots the EU to Asia and places special emphasis on ties with India and Japan.

## BEGINNING AFRESH

New Delhi and Brussels have come a long way since 2013, when several unresolved issues jeopardised trade negotiations. As can be recalled, the deadlock was primarily triggered by market access issues and Indian tariffs on wine, dairy, and automotive parts. Issues pertaining to data security, public procurement, and the EU's resistance to visas for Indian professionals had also proven to be contentious. Now, by agreeing to relaunch free trade talks, both sides are expected to pick up from their points of disengagement in 2013. India is especially keen to make its markets more attractive to the bloc, following its refusal to join the

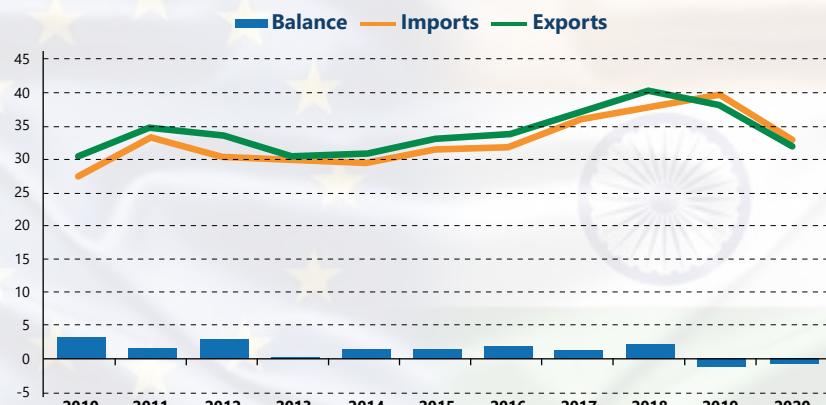
Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). Any mutually beneficial trade agreement that matches the lucrative investment opportunities in RCEP-integrated China can further help Europe to 'decouple' its markets.

This political desire is complemented by the economic rationale that lies at the heart of the India-EU partnership. It is worth remembering that Brussels ranks first among India's trading partners, with exports being valued at USD 57.17 billion in 2018-19. Acknowledging this, the two sides have commenced negotiations on a comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (FTA), which includes separate but parallel tracks on trade and investment.

## ATTRACTING INVESTMENT

With close to \$100 billion investment from its 27 member states, the EU is one of the largest investors in India. However, relations have run into trouble since 2015, when New Delhi unilaterally terminated all its Bilateral Investment Treaties (BIT). In the wake of the Cairn and Vodafone tax disputes, the Indian government had sought to implement a new model BIT that

## EU TRADE IN GOODS WITH INDIA, 2010-2020 (€ BILLION)



prevented foreign investors from opting for international arbitration in tax matters.

Presently, however, the country has liberalised its Foreign Direct Investment rules, fuelling fresh hopes about a high-quality investment agreement with Europe that prescribes investor-state dispute settlement mechanisms. New Delhi also hopes to side-line Beijing in the global value chain, at a time when tensions over Xinjiang have soured the EU-China relationship and frozen their comprehensive pact on investments.

While no timeframe has been specified for the upcoming negotiations, a high-level mechanism has been instituted between the bloc's trade commissioner and India's commerce minister to steer deliberations on investment. It remains to be seen whether they can harness the full potential of economic engagement and work towards a stand-alone investment protection agreement in the near future.

#### TRANSPORT AND INFRASTRUCTURE LINKAGES

A significant outcome from the India-EU summit has been

the unveiling of a 'connectivity partnership' that catalyses public and private investments in joint projects across Africa, Central Asia, and the Indo-Pacific. Grounded in a rules-based system of international governance, they seek to link the transport, energy, and digital sectors in India and the EU, even while fostering people-to-people contacts.

By highlighting shared principles like sustainability and transparency, the two sides are offering an alternative to China's Belt and Road initiative (BRI). They hope to attract those economies which have fallen into the BRI's debt traps by way of partner state dependencies or 'assets for money swap' arrangements.

As part of this connectivity project, the European Investment Bank (EIB) has also signed a \$150 million contract for the development of the Pune Metro rail project just a day before the Leaders' meeting. Furthermore, the EIB has focused on facilitating 'green, safe and affordable public transport' through additional investments in metro systems such as Lucknow, Bhopal, Bangalore, and Kanpur.

Over the coming days, New Delhi and Brussels are expected to initiate plans for regional connectivity by coordinating with the member

states of the 'Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation' (BIMSTEC). Aided by the financial heft and regulatory expertise of EU states, such frameworks can be deployed to further cooperation in sectors such as renewable energy and smart electricity systems. More broadly, they can be leveraged to signal a normative convergence between India and the EU when it comes to the development of the Indo-Pacific.

#### (S) Assessment

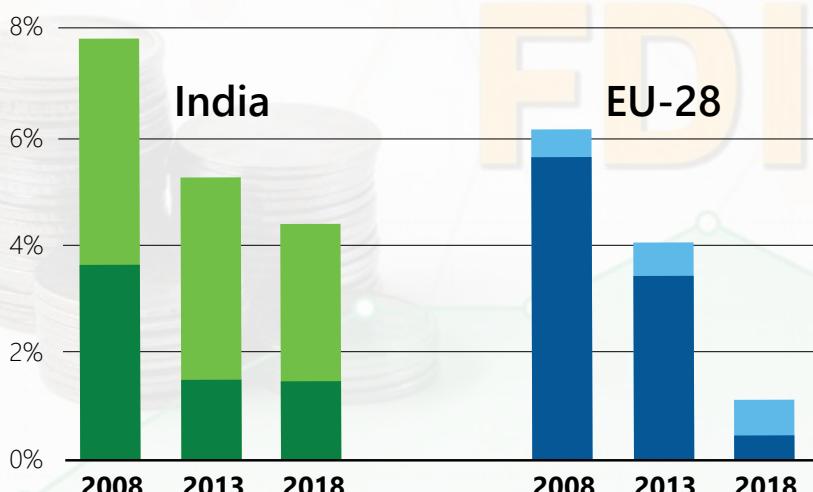
For India, the strategic partnership with Europe should not be a substitute for closer ties with East Asian partners. Even while negotiating FTAs with the EU, New Delhi should continue to cultivate economic relations with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations through policies like Act East.

As India and the EU gear up for free trade negotiations, they will have to address persisting irritants in bilateral ties. Apart from issues pertaining to market access, the most recent controversy over COVID vaccine patents will be a sticking point. Although Brussels has indicated its full support for strengthening global health preparedness, it continues to push back against India's proposal to waive intellectual property protections at the World Trade Organisation. This could potentially derail the goodwill that exists between both partners.

Coming close on the heels of the EU's official Indo-Pacific policy, the virtual summit indicates that India remains central to Europe's vision of a free, open, inclusive, and rules-based Indo-Pacific. Together with economic cooperation, the two sides can enhance their strategic partnership through inter-agency and cross-sectoral cooperation in the maritime domain. In any case, it is heartening that traditional conceptions of security have been expanded to include health, climate, and technology.

## FDI AND REMITTANCES TO INDIA AND THE EU-28

■ Remittances received (% of GDP)  
■ FDI net inflows (% of GDP)



# GREENING THE DESERTS

The oil-rich kingdoms of the Gulf region are finally turning their attention to self-reliance in food production, a critical move to secure their future well-being



**SYNERGIA FOUNDATION**  
**RESEARCH TEAM**

The Middle East has witnessed several geopolitical events that have already legitimised the challenge of food insecurity in the region. The 2011 Arab uprisings, instability in Egypt and Syria, and concurrent spikes in international food prices have highlighted the inherent shortages in food supply for decades. Due to the non-arable nature of the land and water scarcity, the ability of countries in the Middle East to produce locally has remained a challenge, engendering reliance on imports. Yet, across the Middle East, increasing local food production is

a pressing issue as the region holds key events such as Expo 2020, FIFA World Cup in 2022 and expects both an influx in travellers and an increase in population. The unprecedented disruptions by the coronavirus pandemic in trade and everyday lives, in terms of volatility of import prices and such, were underlined in 2020. It captured the interests of the regional leaders to effectively address their vulnerability in this most basic of life's requirements.

## A NEW AWAKENING

Given the aridity of the land, and the fact that local food production would require greater economic investment and resources (like water), it seemed far-sighted that the oil-rich, six-member Gulf

Cooperation Council (GCC) would dive into the agriculture sector. Despite these challenges, the reason for heading in the direction of local food production is two-fold.

Firstly, for a while, GCC was comfortable with the wealth stability they derived from their surplus oil resources and investments that they attracted from it. In 2019, the first jolt hit when the US overtook Saudi Arabia as the world's largest oil producer (17 million barrels per day). The realisation dawned on the gulf monarchies that their oil wealth by itself could not secure their comfortable future; they must diversify their economy, and sooner, the better.

The second jolt came with the pandemic, which closed borders and disrupted supply chains. The GCC



relies massively on international trade where 80 to 90 per cent of food consumed is imported, exposing them to risks of price and supply. Moreover, incidents of trade disruptions from other parts of the world encapsulated the need to adopt alternative food supply, such as the week-long closure of the Suez Canal. Consequently, the volatility of import prices and disruptions in imports was underlined, and efforts to enhance local food production proliferated.

### TECHNOLOGY DRIVES NATURE

With technological advancements, the idea of sustainability in a desert is slowly turning into reality. Acknowledging the infertile farmland and the nonavailability

of surplus water resources in the region, indoor farming and hydroponics (soil-less farming) are rising technologies that serve as promising models for agricultural proliferation in the region.

Innovative solutions in the field have made it possible to grow fresh produce in Climate Controlled Environments (CCE), where factors such as temperature, humidity, light, nutrients, and water are controlled to duplicate the ideal environment necessary for the growth of crops. In these setups, crop growth is faster, and crop cycles are shorter. Moreover, CEA in greenhouses and indoor vertical farms are proving to consume 90 per cent less water than traditional farming.

Developing hydroponics farms in containers is another alternate

to indoor farming that significantly reduces transportation and maintenance costs. Because the crops grow indoors in controlled environments, pesticides and insecticides are unnecessary. The containers can be stacked and are durable. They are easy to modify and can be easily moved from one place to another as per requirement.

Qatar has had a demand for local food production due to tensions with its Gulf neighbours. It is additionally expanding production capabilities to host the FIFA World Cup. UAE has been an indispensable contributor to the region's growth in the Food and Beverages (F&B) sector and has further launched a technology fund of USD 10 billion for investment in Israel. Moreover, the normalisation of ties between Israel and UAE, along with other Arab countries, will allow for easier exchange of technology and knowledge. Saudi Arabia, too, has increased investments in the F&B sector, which is reflected in the construction of greenhouses and indoor vertical farms. Other countries are following suit.

### S Assessment

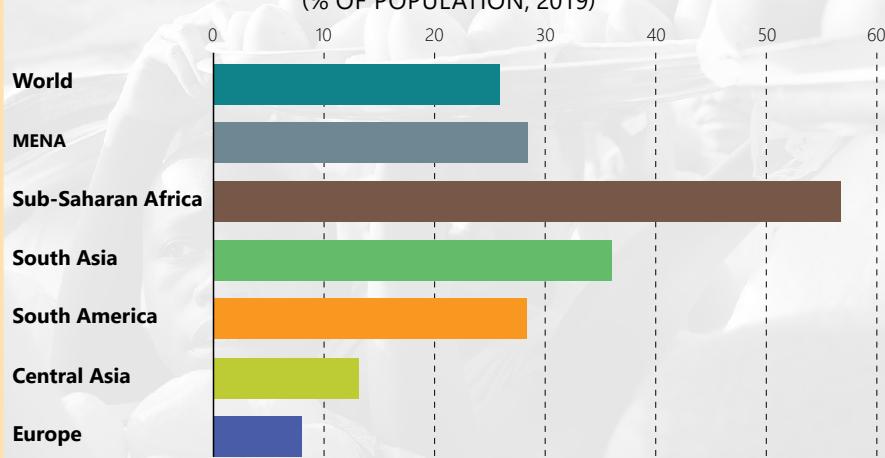
Food insecurity will remain a key challenge in the wider regions of the Middle East due to persistent armed conflicts and political instability across the region. Vulnerabilities in supply disruptions may also occur as politically motivated acts.

While the richer GCC region is largely food secure, it is essential to predict future challenges on demand and supply for food and water resources. Increased investments and digital infrastructures will accelerate the progress in the agriculture field in the GCC.

What gives hope for the future is that these initiatives towards developing agri-tech display the ability of future prediction. It is proof that a promising and forward-looking leadership is at the helm of affairs in these gulf sheikhdoms.

### PREVALENCE OF MODERATE AND SEVERE FOOD INSECURITY

(% OF POPULATION; 2019)





SYNERGIA FOUNDATION



## SYNERGIA FOUNDATION

 34, Vittal Mallya Road, Bengaluru, Karnataka 560001, India

 +91 80 4197 1000

 info@synergiagroup.in

 @SynergiaFoundation

 @SynergialImpact

 [www.synergiafoundation.org](http://www.synergiafoundation.org)  
[www.synergiaconclave.org](http://www.synergiaconclave.org)