

## Sino-India Relations and Ladakh Faceoff: An Analysis

Shamaila Amir<sup>1\*</sup>, Muneeba Ali<sup>2</sup> and Fayyaz Ahmad<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Fellow of Ph. D (Linguistics), Hamdard University, Karachi, Pakistan

<sup>2</sup>HR Trainer & Accessor, Sacred Heart International College, Melbourne, Australia

<sup>3</sup>Fellow of MS (Behavioural Sciences), NUST, Islamabad, Pakistan

**Corresponding Author:** Shamaila Amir, E-mail: [shaminhasan@hotmail.com](mailto:shaminhasan@hotmail.com)

---

### ARTICLE INFORMATION

**Received:** August 21, 2020  
**Accepted:** November 2, 2020  
**Volume:** 2  
**Issue:** 2

---

### KEYWORDS

Sino-India relations, Ladakh faceoff, India and China, Line of Actual Control, China-India relations

---

### ABSTRACT

Both China and India possess two of the largest armies in the world and are also trying to talk to each other about withdrawing their forces from the Line of Actual Control (LAC) but for the time being, the tension seems to linger on. The problem has a much wider background than meets the eye. China has invested heavily in the entire region and has increased its influence substantially, which has scared India out of its wits. Ideally, India should have joined the recent initiatives by China and welcomed new projects that are beneficial for the entire region. But sadly, India also behaves like Pakistan in the sense that it tries to equate with China as Pakistan tries to do so with India. The aim of this paper is to analyze the results of this situation and recommend what is the best strategy for India in these circumstances.

### 1. Introduction

It is astonishing to think about the factors that led India and China to react so furiously that a full-scale war was barely avoided. Though both countries are still at the brink of war, the situation appears to be slightly improving (Krishan, 2020; MSN News, 2020; Sensharma, 2020; Times Now News, 2020; Express Web Desk, 2020).

Both China and India possess two of the largest armies in the world and are also trying to talk to each other about withdrawing their forces from the Line of Actual Control (LAC) but for the time being, the tension seems to linger on (Chaudhri, 2020). This problem has a much wider background than what it displays apparently. China has invested heavily in the entire region and has increased its influence substantially, something which has scared India. Ideally, India should have joined the recent initiatives by China and welcomed new projects that are beneficial for the entire region but sadly, India tries to equate with China. It befits all countries to rightly assess their own strengths and weaknesses and rather than trying to outsmart each other, they should be collaborating for the development of their people. That has not happened in the past more than 70 years and during this period each bigger country has tried to bully the smaller ones, and the smaller one has tried to come at par with the bigger one. In this game, smaller powers have been on the losing side.

If India is not happy with Chinese investment in other countries, it can put forward its own investment plans; nobody is stopping it. But the Indian economy does not have that much potential, nor does it have a sound foreign policy to normalize relations with its neighbors (Krishan, 2020; MSN News, 2020; Sensharma, 2020). As a result, while China is implementing development projects from Burma and Bangladesh to Pakistan and Central Asia (Asadullah, 2020), India is still mired in its border disputes. If China is building bridges and ports from Asia to Europe, there is no need for India to feel restless. If China is transporting its goods to the world markets, India can also do it (Tibetan Review, 2020; Kar, 2020).

Instead, India started opposing China and did not respond positively to China's diplomatic efforts too (Krishan, 2020; MSN News, 2020; Sensharma, 2020). That is why it is important to look at the Ladakh problem in its wider perspective. Essentially, it appears to be Indian jealousy against the Chinese big projects in the region. On the face of it, the present problem is over the valley of Galwan, but it is not confined to it. There can be more than one interpretation of the current face-off (Tibetan Review, 2020).



**Figure 1: Indian road link for Dubruk (South), with Daulat Beg Oldie (North)<sup>2</sup>**

## **2. Interpretation and Analysis of faceoff between China and India**

As already mentioned, essentially, it appears to be Indian jealousy against the Chinese big projects in the region. On the face of it, the present problem is over the valley of Galwan, but it is not confined to it. There can be more than one interpretation of the current spat. Here is a quick analysis of that;

- a. The first is that India has challenged China in Ladakh because the Modi government has nothing to show to its people domestically. Its economy is in shambles, growth is declining, and other promises also remain unfulfilled. The Covid-19 epidemic has been badly handled and the number of deaths has crossed the 38,000 mark (Worldometer, 2020).<sup>3</sup> That is why perhaps it was deemed imperative to divert the attention of the people of India to a far-flung area such as Ladakh (Tibetan Review, 2020). Suddenly, India expedited its construction (Fig. 1) of roads leading to the LAC towards China (Bhonsale, 2020; Live Mint, 2020). Obviously, it was like throwing a challenge to China which considered it a threat to its own interests in the region. Therefore China could not tolerate a neighboring country not only working against Chinese projects but also creating border problems for it (Chaudhri, 2020).
- b. Since China is working on huge infrastructure projects around the world, it can solve this small Galwan Valley problem militarily in no time. The ruling Communist Party of China (CPC) is much more organized than the BJP in India, and China appears to be prepared both militarily and politically (Krishan, 2020; MSN News, 2020; Sensharma, 2020). The CPC has shown tremendous progress in the past forty years since the 1980s. Though its focus has moved from communism to capital generation, this amalgamation of capitalism and communism has worked well to a great extent. China has trampled democratic rights but at least it has been able to fulfil the fundamental needs of the people (Chaudhri, 2020).
- c. It is worth recalling that in 2017 too, China and India stood face to face in the Doklam area where China was planning to build a highway into Bhutan. At that time, Bhutan came under pressure from India and asked China to stop the highway construction (Ahmed et al., 2020; Wallen, 2020).
- d. If China and India are compared, it is obvious that China has put to work a majority of its 1.44 billion people so that they can earn their livelihood; India is lagging far behind in this matter. A majority of Chinese people have come out of extreme poverty and a large middle class has emerged whose lifestyle is much better than that in India (Tibetan Review, 2020). If qualified people from India are working all over the world, China is running big businesses across the globe. China finds employment for millions of youth every year, whereas in India due to a lack of quality

---

<sup>2</sup> Source: Som, 2020

<sup>3</sup> As on August 3, 2020

education and skills most of the youth increase the number of the unemployed; or if they have good education they try to move out of the country (Chaudhri, 2020).

### 3. Indian Position in the Current Situation

Looking at this backdrop, it appears that the current conflict will be highly detrimental to India. In the middle of June 2020 dozens of Indian soldiers lost their lives and even more sustained serious injuries (Bhonsale, 2020; Live Mint, 2020). Chinese casualties were much smaller in number, though China has kept mum about it. For India, in the past nearly half a century, this was the greatest loss of life outside a full war. Despite its border and political disputes with other countries, China has been sagacious enough to prioritize its economic interests by maintaining good trade relations with most countries. China considers Taiwan a part of China, but Taiwan is a separate country with which China has maintained thriving trade relations. Similarly, despite border disputes with India, China has increased its trade with India thirty-fold since 2000 including trade in medicines and medical equipment (Krishan, 2020; MSN News, 2020; Sensharma, 2020).

After the current fracas in Ladakh, customs clearance has been slow and goods are stuck at Indian ports, but that is harming India even more. With the humiliation that India has faced in Ladakh, the opposition parties in India are also leveling accusations against the Modi government. (Bhonsale, 2020; Kar, 2020). One reason for that is the conflicting statements that the Indian government is releasing. The Indian ambassador in China said that India was working within its borders and China should not have taken steps on the ground level. Then at an all parties' conference on June 19, Prime Minister Modi blurted statements to the contrary. He claimed that nobody entered into Indian territory and all check posts were under the Indian control.

In the same breath, he acknowledged that nearly two dozen Indian soldiers were killed in the border skirmishes. The question is: if China killed these soldiers within India, that means India could not defend its borders; and if they died in China, that means India violated the LAC. Such statements have made India a laughing stock. It is worth recalling that in 1962, China and India fought a full-blown war in which China roundly defeated India and occupied the disputed Aksai Chin region (Aurangzeb et al., 2020).

India finds itself in a similar bind now; it can neither risk a full war nor stop all trade with China because India benefits from it immensely. If trade stalls, India will not be able to easily recoup the losses (Chaudhri, 2020). In case of war, India may lose more of its territory to China, while the Indian nuclear arsenal may not be of much help (Krishan, 2020; Sensharma, 2020). If war breaks out, even the US is not in a position to help India much. Despite tall claims of friendship, Modi will not be able to drag the US into the war (Aneja, 2020).



Figure 2: Standoff at Rakinalah<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Source: Sawant, 2013

#### 4. Ladakh between India and China

Discussing Ladakh, it must be kept in mind that in August 2020, when the Indian government violated its own constitution to make a unilateral announcement of annexing Indian Occupied Kashmir into India, the situation changed dramatically (Ali & Saeed, 2019; Aurangzeb et al., 2020). Ladakh is no more a green valley; no monsoon rains fall in this region making it an arid and cold desert. Historically, Ladakh was a part of Tibet and a majority of the local people are of Tibetan descent. In 1834, Gulab Singh occupied Ladakh and incorporated it into the Sikh realm of Maharaja Ranjeet Singh who had established his capital in Lahore in 1799. His kingdom stretched to Ladakh which was famous for its high-quality wool derived from the herds of mountain sheep. The control over the wool trade benefited the Sikhs immensely. Chinese and Tibetan warriors did try to liberate Ladakh from the Sikhs but barring a few successes, they failed, and finally, from 1842 onwards Ladakh has never been part of China or Tibet (Tibetan Review, 2020; News India, 2020).



Figure 3: Location of Ladakh<sup>5</sup>

Within ten years after Ranjeet Singh's death in 1839, the British forces occupied Punjab ending half a century of Sikh rule. Gulab Singh helped the British forces in the first Anglo-Sikh war of 1845-46, and as a reward, the British sold Kashmir to him for just seven and a half million Nanakshahi rupees,<sup>6</sup> through the Treaty of Amritsar in 1846. Gulab Singh became the first Dogra maharaja of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir including Ladakh. After 1947, when the Kashmir dispute evolved, Ladakh remained part of the problem (Ali & Saeed, 2019; Aurangzeb et al., 2020; News India, 2020).

After a brief Indo-Pak war in 1948, Kashmir ended up divided between India and Pakistan, (Ali & Saeed, 2019; Aurangzeb et al., 2020) with the larger part being occupied by India including Ladakh. Now, from eastern Ladakh on the left, it is the highest point of the Karakoram Range called Daulat Baig Oldie can be seen which is adjacent to the Galwan Valley. Living or fighting in this area is as difficult as it is on the Siachen Glacier. In this windy corridor, humans may freeze to death within a minute or be blown away. In addition, this area is jagged and rugged, full of stones and boulders making it fairly difficult to dig or build any structure (News India, 2020).

No heavy machinery can reach there easily, which is why both India and China have been trying to fix some paved roads there so that machinery and other wherewithal can be transported. The Indian forces have been able to smooth a landing ground

<sup>5</sup> Source: Aurangzeb et al., 2020

<sup>6</sup> The currency

which is perhaps the highest such airbase in the world. It is over 16,000 above the sea level and small military planes can land there. Across the border, China has the advantage of having a relatively plain area which is on the Tibetan Plateau. Though it is on the same height, it is relatively easy to build structures and roads on the Chinese side (Tibetan Review, 2020; News India, 2020).

Having a bird's eye view of this region, to the west of the disputed land Ladakh, and to the east from Doklam and Nathola to the valleys of the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh a long line of disputed territories are visible. China also keeps an eye on Arunachal Pradesh, especially in its district called Tawang which China considers a part of southern Tibet. There is some truth in it because culturally and religiously, Tibet and Tawang are pretty close and Tawang also has one of the most sacred shrines for Buddhists, although that should not make much of a difference, as just like Pakistan has opened so many sacred places of worship for Hindus and Sikhs, India can also show a goodwill gesture by opening the shrine at Tawang to Chinese and Tibetan Buddhists (Tibetan Review, 2020; News India, 2020).

Another aspect of this problem is the Dalai Lama who had to escape from Tibet to India in 1959 because he feared persecution after the Chinese communist occupation of Tibet. Now, whenever the Dalai Lama visits Tawang, China raises objections. We may recall that this year in February the Indian prime minister also visited Arunachal Pradesh to which China officially protested. Since Arunachal was traditionally part of southern Tibet, the Sino-Indian border here is hundreds of kilometers long. The Dalai Lama has a divine status for the people of Tibet while China considers him a secessionist. Though the Chinese communist government had occupied Tibet in 1950, the people of Tibet led by their spiritual leader did not accept Chinese domination. In 1959, they tried to revolt against the Chinese but the failure led the Dalai Lama to escape and seek refuge in India. Tibet had been a free country after declaring its independence from China in 1912 (Tibetan Review, 2020; News India, 2020).

The tussle between China and India started in 1959 when the then prime minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru decided to offer protection to the Dalai Lama. It was like declaring that India had not accepted the Chinese occupation of Tibet. Before this development, China and India enjoyed fairly good relations and their prime ministers<sup>7</sup> were on apparently good terms. In the meanwhile, another significant development took place, and that was the falling out of China with the Soviet Union. Prime Minister of India was closer to the Soviet Union and China was moving away from it (Tibetan Review, 2020; News India, 2020).

While the Sino-Soviet relations deteriorated, China expected India to ditch the USSR and side with its bigger and immediate neighbor, China. But Nehru preferred the USSR and according to another version, the Soviet Union supported Nehru's decision to offer protection to the Dalai Lama. The dispute that emerged in 1959, had its fallout on the borders too and there were repeated skirmishes with an upshot of a full Sino-Indian war in 1962 in which the USSR could not help India much. The drubbing that India received, shattered Nehru both physically and psychologically and he died within two years after the war (News India, 2020; Tibetan Review, 2020).

Finally, a pleasant change occurred in the border disputes between China and India when in 2003 India recognized Tibet as part of China. At that time, Jiang Zemin was the president of China and Atal Bihari Vajpayee was the Prime Minister of India. Though Vajpayee was also leading the BJP, he was much more sensible and less pugnacious than Narendra Modi. It was Vajpayee who detonated atomic devices in 1998 but after a tit-for-tat response from Pakistan, perhaps Vajpayee realized his missteps and tried to normalize relations with both China and Pakistan (News India, 2020; Team, 2000; MSN News, 2020).

---

<sup>7</sup> Nehru and Zhou Enlai

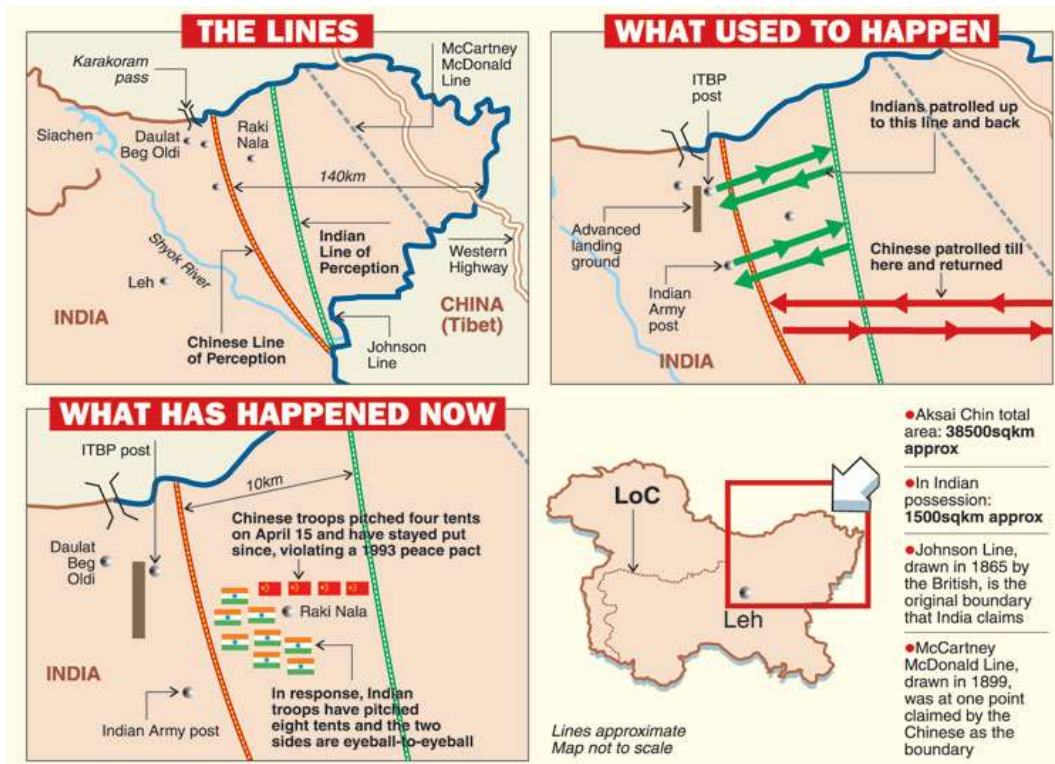


Figure 4: Present Situation of Ladakh<sup>8</sup>

Sadly, his efforts were thwarted by belligerent lobbies in China, India, and Pakistan. The latest from Ladakh is the interesting news about 20 martial arts experts that China is reportedly sending to Tibet to train its border guards. This is because according to an agreement signed in 1996, both China and India cannot carry ammunition and arms to the border and on both sides, the guards will be unarmed, but can at the most keep batons and sticks. That is why in the mid-June, 2020 brawl, nobody shot fires. Batons and fisticuffs were used but some of the sticks had nails in them that proved lethal for the Indian soldiers (The Economic Times, 2020; Singh, 2020; News India, 2020).

### 5. Conclusion

Whether the countries fight with batons or bombs, fighting is bad anyway. This region has seen such acrimony and ill-will among neighbors that it is about time the rulers rebooted their software. Afghanistan, China, India, Iran and Pakistan, all need a fundamental overhaul in their domestic and foreign policies, just as Europe did after WWII in 1945 and then again after the end of the cold war. In the past 70 years, the rulers have not displayed similar eagerness to match Europe's economic, political, and social integration.

### References

- [1] Ahmed, D., Ali, S., Shahid Ali, M., Rehman, W., & Amir, S. (2020). Face-off between India and China in Galwan Valley: An Analysis of Chinese Incursions and Interests. *Electronic Research Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 2, 38-50.
- [2] Ali, S., Saeed, A. (2019). Kashmir Dispute and Challenges to the National Security of Pakistan: An Analysis. *Electronic Research Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*. 1(2), 61-77
- [3] Aneja, A. (2020). Ladakh face-off; Russia begins discreet moves to defuse India-China tension. *The Hindu*. Retrieved August 1, 2020 from <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/ladakh-face-off-russia-begins-discreet-moves-to-defuse-india-china-tension/article31873222.ece#>
- [4] Asadullah., Karim, D., Mehmood, S., Ali, S. Amir, S. (2020). Sino-Pakistan Relations during Covid-19: The Weakest Links. *Praxis International Journal of Social Science and Literature*. 3(6), 1-6
- [5] Aurangzeb, M., Akhtar, S., Ali, K., Hayat, N., Amir, S. (2020). *Kashmir Struggle for Freedom: Proposed Solutions*. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*. 5 (1), 61-68

<sup>8</sup> War News Updates, 2020

- [6] Bhonsale, M. (2020). Understanding Sino-Indian border issues: An analysis of incidents reported in the Indian media. *Observer Research Foundation*. Retrieved August 1, 2020 from <https://www.orfonline.org/research/understanding-sino-indian-border-issues-an-analysis-of-incidents-reported-in-the-indian-media/>
- [7] Chaudhri, P. P. (2020). Sino-India relations defined more by rivalry than partnership. *Hindustan Times*. Retrieved August 1, 2020 from <https://www.hindustantimes.com/analysis/sino-india-relations-defined-more-by-rivalry-than-partnership/story-nkDsdVovXKH02tKRdh9xAM.html>
- [8] Express Web Desk. (2020). China claims troops have disengaged in most areas; India says process not yet completed. *The Indian Express*. Retrieved August 1, 2020 from <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-china-ladakh-border-troops-have-disengaged-chinese-ambassador-6531059/>
- [9] Kar, S. (2020). Ladakh Standoff: Eye For an Eye, Tooth For a Tooth – How Tensions Between India And China Escalated. *India.com*. Retrieved August 3, 2020 from <https://www.india.com/news/india/ladakh-standoff-see-map-eye-for-an-eye-tooth-for-a-tooth-how-tensions-between-india-and-china-escalated-4059689/>
- [10] Krishan, A. (2020). Ladakh face-off; India, China agree to de-escalate. *The Hindu*. Retrieved August 1, 2020 from <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/ladakh-face-off-india-china-agree-to-de-escalate/article31853208.ece#!>
- [11] Live Mint. (2020). *India-China face-off: No Indian troops were missing in action, clarifies Army*. Retrieved August 1, 2020 from <https://www.livemint.com/news/india/india-china-lac-face-off-updates-ladakh-galwan-soldiers-killed-latest-news-11592380308102.html>
- [12] MSN News. (2020). India in Talks With China Militarily And Diplomatically to Resolve Ladakh Standoff: Foreign Secretary. Retrieved August 1, 2020 from <https://www.msn.com/en-in/news/other/india-in-talks-with-china-militarily-and-diplomatically-to-resolve-ladakh-standoff-foreign-secretary/ar-BB16oX0b>
- [13] News India. (2020). Explained: Why Indian, Chinese troops are fighting in a remote Himalayan valley. *India Today*. Retrieved August 3, 2020 from <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/explained-why-indian-chinese-troops-are-fighting-in-a-remote-himalayan-valley-1690021-2020-06-17>
- [14] Sawant, G. C. (2013). India is no pushover; we are not scared of China: Salman Khurshid. *India Today*. Retrieved August 1, 2020 from <https://www.indiatoday.in/world/neighbours/story/china-india-china-incursion-into-china-border-160085-2013-04-26>
- [15] Sensharma, A. (2020). Ladakh Standoff: India, China likely to hold another round of talks next week to defuse tensions across LAC. *Jagran*. Retrieved August 1, 2020 from <https://english.jagran.com/india/ladakh-standoff-india-china-likely-to-hold-another-round-of-talks-next-week-to-defuse-tensions-across-lac-10014440>
- [16] Singh, A. P. (2020). China-India relations: Ladakh stand-off need not be a prelude to war. *South China Morning Post*. Retrieved August 3, 2020 from <https://www.scmp.com/comment/opinion/article/3094485/china-india-relations-ladakh-stand-need-not-be- Prelude-war>
- [17] Som, V. (2020). The Ladakh Stand-Off Between India And China Explained In Maps, Pictures. *NDTV*. Retrieved August 1, 2020 from <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/the-ladakh-stand-off-between-india-and-china-explained-in-maps-pictures-2236905>
- [18] Team, I. (2020). Historical perspective of Ladakh incursion. Defense and Security Alert. Retrieved August 1, 2020 from <https://www.dsalert.org/historical-perspective-of-ladakh-incursion/>
- [19] The Economic Times. (2020). *Disengagement process not yet complete in eastern Ladakh: India on China claim*. Retrieved August 1, 2020 from <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/disengagement-process-not-yet-complete-in-eastern-ladakh-india-on-china-claim/articleshow/77265470.cms>
- [20] Tibetan Review. (2020). *China suggests that Ladakh faceoff is not just about LAC issue with India*. Retrieved August 1, 2020 from <https://www.tibetanreview.net/china-suggests-that-ladakh-faceoff-is-not-just-about-lac-issue-with-india/>
- [21] Times Now News. (2020). *LAC standoff: India, China agree on “early and complete disengagement of troops” from eastern Ladakh*. Retrieved August 1, 2020 from <https://www.timesnownews.com/india/article/lac-standoff-india-china-agree-on-early-and-complete-disengagement-of-troops-from-eastern-ladakh/626852>
- [22] Wallen, J. (2020). China annexes 60 square km of India in Ladakh as simmering tensions erupt between two superpowers. *The Telegraph*. Retrieved August 1, 2020 from <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/06/12/china-annexes-60-square-km-india-ladakh-simmering-tensions-erupt/>
- [23] War News Updates. (2020). India China border tension continue to escalate. *Blogspot*. Retrieved August 1, 2020 from <http://warnewsupdates.blogspot.com/2013/05/india-china-border-tensions-continue-to.html>
- [24] Worldometer. (2020). *Coronavirus*. Retrieved August 3, 2020 from <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/india/>