



Time for clarity

The Centre must share details of what has been happening at Doklam

Five months after the government claimed the victory of "quiet diplomacy" to bring the 73-day stand-off between Indian and Chinese troops at Doklam to an end, the contours of the actual agreement and events that have followed remain a mystery. On August 28, the Centre had issued a statement on a mutual decision for Indian and Chinese troops to disengage and withdraw from the part of the Doklam plateau disputed between China and Bhutan that had been the scene of the stand-off. A second statement from the Ministry of External Affairs the same day said the verification of the disengagement by both sides from the "face-off" point, which included the withdrawal of troops, road construction equipment and tents, was "almost complete". However, last week the Army chief, General Bipin Rawat, said Chinese troops are in parts of Doklam they had hitherto not manned, and while the People's Liberation Army infrastructure development was "temporary" in nature, "tents remain, observation posts remain" in the disputed area. The MEA, which had maintained that there was "no change" in the status quo, also appeared to shift position, saying that New Delhi was using "established mechanisms" to resolve misunderstandings over the Doklam issue. While discretion and quiet negotiations are useful, especially when sensitive matters along the India-China Line of Actual Control are being discussed, such divergence in public statements also fuels speculation that something deeper and more troubling exists on the ground. The government must verify if satellite photographs showing much more permanent infrastructure in north Doklam, not far from Indian posts, that are the subject of reports in the media, are accurate and whether they pose a new threat to India.

Roiling matters further are the broader statements made in New Delhi last week. Speaking at the MEA's annual Raisina Dialogue, Foreign Secretary S. Jaishankar put China's rise first on a list of "major disruptors" in the region. General Rawat said that the "time has come" for India to "shift focus" from its western border with Pakistan to its northern border with China. This is bound to raise eyebrows given that the boundary with Pakistan has seen heavy shelling and rising military and civilian casualties in the past year. Similarly, Beijing's latest belligerent statements that all of Doklam belongs to China and is under its "effective jurisdiction" could be indicators that the agreement announced in August is unravelling. If so, a Doklam-style troop build-up in the future must be avoided at all costs. It is imperative that the government proceed with caution in step and consistency in statement, and drop the ambiguity it has embraced since the Doklam stand-off began in June.

Profit and loss

The disqualification of AAP MLAs is a legal question, not a political one

The Election Commission's advice to the President that 20 legislators of the ruling Aam Aadmi Party in Delhi are liable for disqualification will inevitably invite legal and political scrutiny. The party claims it was denied a hearing and alleges political motives behind the action. It has questioned the timing of the decision, just ahead of the Chief Election Commissioner's retirement. Regardless of the charge of political malice, the correctness of the EC's decision will be decided on legal grounds. The courts will have to rule on the question whether the post of parliamentary secretary, which these MLAs were holding, is an 'office of profit'. They may also examine whether there was any violation of natural justice. Twenty-one MLAs were appointed parliamentary secretaries in March 2015. The Delhi High Court set aside the appointments in 2016 on the ground that the Lieutenant Governor had not given his approval. The EC has been hearing a complaint by an advocate that these legislators had incurred disqualification by holding these posts, which, he contended, were offices of profit. The key question was whether the post was an office of profit even after the Delhi government made it clear that parliamentary secretaries would not be eligible for any remuneration or perquisites. They were only allowed the use of government transport for official uses and office space in the respective ministries. The EC has answered the question in the affirmative, and the President has acted on it.

Going by Supreme Court decisions, the test to decide whether a post is an office of profit is the role of the government in appointing and paying the person concerned. In *Jaya Bachchan*, the court said it was an office of profit even if one did not actually receive payment; it was enough if some pay was 'receivable'. In *Raman v. P.T.A. Rahim*, the court said only posts that are capable of yielding pecuniary gains, as distinguished from compensatory allowances, would be offices of profit. It is indeed true that the Arvind Kejriwal regime is politically disadvantaged because, unlike State governments, it cannot make many decisions without the Lt. Governor's concurrence. It could not pass, as States have done, legislation to save the post from disqualification. The President withheld assent to a law it passed without the LG's nod. However, Mr. Kejriwal should have been mindful of the growing perception, as evident in several judicial decisions, that the post of parliamentary secretary is a way of getting around the constitutional limit on the size of ministries. He could have avoided controversy by not appointing MLAs in posts that involved an executive role. After all, there can be no dispute over the principle behind the bar on legislators holding such posts: that there be no conflict between their duty and their interest.

The great American arms bazaar

Donald Trump's attempt to rework the commercial-strategic equation spells an opportunity for India



VARGHESE K. GEORGE

In a joint press conference with Norwegian Prime Minister Erna Solberg at the White House earlier this month, U.S. President Donald Trump made up the name of a non-existent fighter plane, "F-52," while lauding the F-35 fighter sale in a new defence deal with America's NATO ally. While the gaffe yielded a heavy round of Twitter humour at the expense of Mr. Trump, what has not been adequately noticed is the significance of weapons sales in his diplomatic pitch throughout. He has been an aggressive salesman for American defence manufacturers during his foreign tours and to visiting heads of foreign countries in his first year in office. Promoting the sale of U.S. arms could soon become a key result area for the country's embassies around the world, according to a Reuters report earlier this month. Arms supply has been a key tool of U.S. strategy for years. Mr. Trump wants to make arms sale itself a strategy.

The existing policy

Arms transfers by the U.S. happen primarily through Foreign Military Sales, Direct Commercial Sales, and Foreign Military Financing, all controlled by stringent laws, the most important of them being the Arms Export Control Act. The U.S. government sells defence equipment worth about \$40 billion every year under Foreign Military Sales. Direct Commercial Sales are worth around \$10 billion a year,



in which a foreign buyer and the American seller negotiate the deal directly. Foreign Military Financing is done through American grants. Of the roughly \$6 billion under that head, \$3.7 billion goes to Israel each year. Egypt, Jordan and Pakistan have been other significant recipients of Foreign Military Financing in recent years, followed by 50 countries that receive smaller amounts totalling \$1 billion. Arms supplies to foreign countries is critical to the U.S. for at least three reasons: it is a key leverage of global influence, it reduces the cost of procurement for the U.S. military by spreading the cost, and by employing 1.7 million people, the defence industry is a key component in the country's economy and consequently, its politics.

But the sale of weaponry, traditionally, is guided less by commercial considerations rather than strategic ones. The Bureau of Political-Military Affairs at the Department of State is the lynchpin of this process; the other players are the Department of Defence, the White House and the U.S. Congress. Each proposed sale is vetted on a case-by-case basis and approved "only if found to further

U.S. foreign policy and national security interests", according to the Bureau's policy. The actual process of a sale could be long-winded, and could take months even after it is approved in principle, an example being the ongoing negotiations to acquire 22 Guardian drones for the Indian Navy from American manufacturer General Atomics.

"We are very concerned that our partners have the ability to buy what they seek, within their means," a U.S. official explained. "So we assess the capability. If someone asks for [the] F-35, we have to ensure that they have the money, the capability to operate it and protect the technology as well as we can. So if we conclude that we cannot sell F-35s, we have at least 10 different types of F-16 fighters that we match with the capability and importance of the partner country." The process of initial assessment of selling arms to any country involves the State and Defence Departments. There are around 100 military officers attached to the State Department and around the same number of diplomats assigned to the Pentagon, who help in such decisions. It is also sought to ensure that the

systems sold to one country do not end up with a third party.

The White House, through the National Security Council, plays a key role in this process. Once all of them are on the same page on a particular proposal, Congressional leaders of the House and the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations are informally consulted. Once they are on board, the sale is formally notified. Significant sales require a tacit approval by lawmakers.

Changes Mr. Trump wants

Mr. Trump has not hidden his disapproval for the American strategy, which he thinks has been a big failure. His views on defence partnerships are in line with this thinking. He wants to reduce the Foreign Military Financing to the least, except for Israel. He wants American partners to buy more weapons from it, and it is also a move towards reducing trade deficits with key partners such as South Korea and Japan. He is hammering NATO partners to ramp up defence spending and believes that all these partners have taken the U.S. for a ride. He has little patience for linking human rights to arms sales. The fact also is that the actual practice of American arms supplies does not often live up to its professed objectives. The Central Intelligence Agency's clandestine weapons supplies for Syrian rebels reached the Islamic State and al-Qaeda for instance, and Mr. Trump has ordered the discontinuation of the programme. So, overall, the President is pushing for a liberalisation of U.S. arms sales to partner countries, guided less by any grand strategic vision, but by commercial and domestic political calculations. He is seeking to flip

the equation between commercial and strategic calculations behind arms sales in favour of the first.

The security establishment and Congress will not easily accede to major changes in existing U.S. laws in order to further Mr. Trump's ideas. However, Mr. Trump holds the last word on defining what U.S. national interests are, and his thinking could turn out to be an opportunity for India, one of the largest importers of major arms. India has bought \$15 billion worth of defence equipment from the U.S. over the last decade, but Indian requests for arms often get entangled in the U.S. bureaucracy for multiple reasons. The honorific title of 'major defence partner' notwithstanding, the traditional American propensity to link sales to operational questions such as interoperability and larger strategic notions dampens possibilities. India's robust defence partnership with Russia is a major irritant for American officials.

If Mr. Trump manages to emphasise the commercial benefits of arms sales, and de-emphasise the strategic angle, it could lead to a change in the dynamics of the India-U.S. defence trade, and bilateral trade in general. India, always wary of military alliances, will be more comfortable with weapons purchases as commercial deals. For America, India could be a reliable, non-proliferating buyer of its arms. The U.S. also has a trade deficit with India. It was the out-of-the-box thinking of a President that led to the India-U.S. civil nuclear deal. With his unconventional thinking, could Mr. Trump offer F-35s to India?

varghese.g@thehindu.co.in

Capacity building for primary health care

A pluralistic and integrated medical system remains a solution worth exploring

APARNA MANOHARAN & RAJIV LOCHAN

A contentious element of the National Medical Commission (NMC) Bill 2017 – an attempt to revamp the medical education system in India to ensure an adequate supply of quality medical professionals – has been Section 49, Subsection 4 that proposes a joint sitting of the Commission, the Central Council of Homoeopathy and the Central Council of Indian Medicine. This sitting, referred to in Subsection 1, may "decide on approving specific bridge course that may be introduced for the practitioners of Homoeopathy and of Indian Systems of Medicine to enable them to prescribe such modern medicines at such level as may be prescribed."

Missing the reality

The debates around this issue have been ranging from writing-off the ability of Ayurveda, yoga and naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and homoeopathy (AYUSH) practitioners to cross-practise to highlighting current restrictions on allopathic practitioners from practising higher levels of caregiving. However, these debates miss the reality: which is a primary health system that is struggling with a below-par national physician-patient ratio (0.76 per 1,000 population, amongst the lowest in the world) due to a paucity of

MBBS-trained primary-care physicians and the unwillingness of existing MBBS-trained physicians to serve remote/rural populations. Urban-rural disparities in physician availability in the face of an increasing burden of chronic diseases make health care in India both inequitable and expensive.

Therefore, there is an urgent need for a trained cadre to provide accessible primary-care services that cover minor ailments, health promotion services, risk screening for early disease detection and appropriate referral linkages, and ensure that people receive care at a community level when they need it.

Issue of cross-prescription

The issue of AYUSH cross-prescription has been a part of public health and policy discourse for over a decade, with the National Health Policy (NHP) 2017 calling for multi-dimensional mainstreaming of AYUSH physicians. There were 7.7 lakh registered AYUSH practitioners in 2016, according to National Health Profile 2017 data. Their current academic training also includes a conventional biomedical syllabus covering anatomy, physiology, pathology and biochemistry. Efforts to gather evidence on the capacity of licensed and bridge-trained AYUSH physicians to function as primary-care physicians have been under way in diverse field



settings, and the call for a structured, capacity-building mechanism is merely the next logical step.

The 4th Common Review Mission Report 2010 of the National Health Mission reports the utilisation of AYUSH physicians as medical officers in primary health centres (PHCs) in Assam, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Uttarakhand as a human resource rationalisation strategy. In some cases, it was noted that while the supply of AYUSH physicians was high, a lack of appropriate training in allopathic drug dispensation was a deterrent to their utilisation in primary-care settings. Similarly, the 2013 Shailaja Chandra report on the status of Indian medicine and folk healing, commissioned by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, noted several instances in States where National Rural Health Mission-recruited AYUSH physicians were the sole care providers in PHCs

and called for the appropriate skilling of this cadre to meet the demand for acute and emergency care at the primary level.

Our own experience at the IKP Centre for Technologies in Public Health shows that there is hope. Here, the focus has been on developing a capacity-building strategy using AYUSH physicians upskilled through a bridge-training programme, and the use of evidence-based protocols, supported by technology, to deliver quality, standardised primary health care to rural populations. Protocols cover minor acute ailments such as fever, upper respiratory tract infections, gastrointestinal conditions (diarrhoea, acidity), urological conditions, as well as proactive risk-screening. The Maharashtra government has led the way in implementing bridge training for capacity-building of licensed homoeopathy practitioners to cross-prescribe.

As anchors

Capacity-building of licensed AYUSH practitioners through bridge training to meet India's primary care needs is only one of the multi-pronged efforts required to meet the objective of achieving universal health coverage set out in NHP 2017. Current capacity-building efforts include other non-MBBS personnel such as nurses, auxiliary nurse midwives and rural medical assistants, thereby creating a

cadre of mid-level service providers as anchors for the provision of comprehensive primary-care services at the proposed health and wellness centres. Further, the existing practice of using AYUSH physicians as medical officers in guideline-based national health programmes, a location-specific availability of this cadre to ensure uninterrupted care provision in certain resource-limited settings, as well as their current academic training that has primed them for cross-disciplinary learning hold promise. These provide a sufficient basis to explore the proposal of bridging their training to "enable them to prescribe such modern medicines at such level as may be prescribed".

Ensuing discussions will be well served to focus on substantive aspects of this solution: design and scope of the programme, implementation, monitoring and audit mechanisms, technology support, and the legal and regulatory framework. In the long run, a pluralistic and integrated medical system for India remains a solution worth exploring for both effective primary-care delivery and prevention of chronic and infectious diseases.

Aparna Manoharan and Rajiv Lochan are involved with the IKP Centre for Technologies in Public Health; Rajiv Lochan is MD and CEO of The Hindu Group

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

Minister on evolution

It is the height of folly and absurdity that Union Minister of State for Human Resource Development Satyapal Singh has sought to debunk Darwin's theory of evolution and proposed to expunge "evolution" from textbooks ("Darwin's evolution theory wrong: Minister", January 21). It does not behove an Education Minister to deny a fact as incontrovertible and inescapable as "evolution". Like it or not, human beings developed or descended from earlier animal species. It is clear from the Minister's outlandish statement that he is unable to appreciate that "the timescales on which life has operated on this planet are measured not in thousands of years but in thousands of millions of years". It is apt to sign off with Charles Darwin's words: "There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having

been originally breathed into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved."

G. DAVID MILTON, Maruthancode, Tamil Nadu

Learning outcomes

The findings of the ASER report, as is the case every year, serve as a grim reminder of the poor state of school education in India. It is obvious that the RTE Act needs drastic amendment and must be extended to the 14-18 age group. The Act appears to have an excessive focus on raw enrolment and physical infrastructure, with almost no provision for quality of teaching and learning outcomes and the teacher-student ratio.

V. VIDYADHAR, Nellore, Andhra Pradesh

A key reason for school dropouts is male students being 'engaged in economic activities' and female students being 'engaged in domestic activities'; 'financial constraints' are common to both groups. Socio-economic policies, including employment and wage policies that encourage families to send children to school without engaging them in economic and domestic activities, are a must. As 'marriage' is another significant reason, child marriages should be curbed with the help of social groups and monitoring the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act. Finally, learning outcomes continue to be an area of concern, which can be linked to falling standards in the quality of teaching. Teacher training has not received focus. For better learning outcomes, teaching methods need to be improved.

KOSARAJU CHANDRAMOULI, Hyderabad

The RTE Act may be an important step in enabling learning, but what are schoolchildren learning? Actual learning must be looked at for the 6-14 age-group first. There is a humongous shortage of teachers in our schools. Teachers also need to be retrained. The availability of free books and uniforms is another problem, particularly for those from the disadvantaged sections. The present model of reimbursement often gets bogged down in red tape and affects economically backward parents.

SAURABH SINHA, Bhillai, Chhattisgarh

The U.S. example

The path-breaking move by a group of large hospital systems in the U.S. in planning to create a non-profit generic drug company to battle shortages and high prices appears to be an interesting idea ("Starting their own" ('Being' page,

January 21). Over the past couple of years, prices of essential drugs, available as cheap generics, have skyrocketed. Insulin is an example of what is wrong with medicine. As a recent UN report states: "Almost 100 million people are pushed into extreme poverty each year because of debts accrued through health care and high drug cost expenses." In India, the Central and State governments, which are bulk consumers of essential medicines, should look into this aspect and may be emulate the U.S. idea.

H.N. RAMAKRISHNA, Bengaluru

Fare hike

The Tamil Nadu government has tried to justify the steep hike in bus fares on the ground that transport corporations need to cover their huge losses incurred for a variety of reasons. At the same time, the government has not made any statement

on what it has done in the last several years to improve efficiency, avoid wastage, prevent corruption and reduce losses. There should have been a white paper on what prompted the hike. The government has also not revealed any long-term plans on how it plans to tackle the situation ("Bus fare hike sets off a chain of protests across Tamil Nadu", January 21).

N.S. VENKATARAMAN, Chennai

There may be some truth in the government's defence but the fact is that most government buses are in a very bad shape. The hike would have made sense had there been no compromises as far as passenger comfort and safety are concerned. A consistent passenger-centric approach would have balanced any negative reaction to the fare hike.

N. VISVESWARAN, Chennai

MORE LETTERS ONLINE: www.hindu.com/opinion/letters/