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Sabre rattling won't work

The best weapon to deal with China on Doklam is patience

The Indian government effectively offered to engage with China over the Doklam plateau dispute through its foreign secretary's speech in Singapore. In its initial response, the Chinese foreign ministry signalled it was not interested. Things may yet change, but there are increasing signs that New Delhi and Beijing are hunkering down for a long and protracted standoff. But the continuing cordiality and the fact that no weapon has yet been fired indicates there is no desire for a genuine military confrontation.

Such a contest of patience is not unheard of between India and China. The Sumdorong Cho incident along the Arunachal Pradesh border in 1986 saw tens of thousands of soldiers deployed on both sides, lasted militarily for over a year and diplomatically took eight years to resolve. But it paved the way for over a decade of peace along the Sino-Indian border and stabilised bilateral relations as a whole. The present Doklam standoff is about New Delhi deciding it must put an end to a long-standing Chinese practice of nibbling away at Bhutan's border. Chinese official anger is presumably because it is surprised at India deciding to stand up for an ally. Beijing cites an 1890 treaty, Thimpu points to agreements of 1988 and 1998, and New Delhi references an understanding of 2012. Ultimately this is about Beijing's belief that it has arrived as a superpower and India's view that at least in its immediate neighbourhood it must resist China's advances. This is not a total mismatch. Pakistan is roughly a fifth the size of India in economic and territorial terms but still gives New Delhi a run for its money.

In territorial disputes with its neighbours, China tries to win by making the other side assume resistance is futile rather than by the actual use of violence. The Narendra Modi government must recognise that its best weapon is patience and steadfastness that is not governed by media concerns or even the election cycle. As previous crises have shown, what defines a loss is a sense, both at home and abroad, that New Delhi sought to find a solution at any cost rather than a solution that sends a message.

Domestic workers need legal protection

The Noida incident shows they are vulnerable to biases and violence

The problem of domestic workers being ill treated is not a new one. The recent case of a minor girl in Noida being accused of stealing, and the counter allegations of her ill-treatment are the latest in a long list of incidents involving domestic workers and questions of their rights. According to estimates by the International Labour Organisation (ILO), there are at least four million domestic servants in India. Most of them are migrants, women, many are minors, and belong to the lowest end of the economic spectrum. This makes them easy to replace, and easier still to exploit. Since they belong to the unorganised sector, there are no laws safeguarding their rights – no minimum wage requirements, no benefits, and no job security whatsoever.

Horror stories of domestic workers being locked up, beaten, and starved have become almost routine. The need for a law protecting the rights of this vulnerable community has once again come to the fore with the latest incident. India is a signatory to the ILO's 189th convention, known as the Convention on Domestic Workers; but has not ratified it yet. The convention mandates that domestic workers be given daily and weekly rest hours, must be paid at least the minimum wage, and that States must take protective measures to prevent violence against such workers and enforce a minimum age for employment. However, since these provisions are not binding on those countries that have not ratified the convention, India is not obliged to enforce these recommendations.

There has been an attempt at creating a law within the country in the form of the 'Domestic Workers Welfare and Social Security Act, 2010' Bill, drafted by the National Commission for Women (NCW), which attempted to bring this large and vulnerable work force into the mainstream. But little progress has been made in passing this bill so far. It is perhaps past time that India revived debate on this very important bill.

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Trump is not the only power centre

Much authority lies with the state governors and city mayors, thanks to the US' federal structure

A new study from Pew Research offers unsurprising news that many countries have a low opinion of Donald Trump. This survey of 37 countries found the percentage of those with confidence in the United States president has fallen from 64% at the end of the Obama presidency to just 22% under Trump. Some 62% says Trump is "dangerous", and 74% have "no confidence" in him. Fewer than one in three supports his bid to block citizens of some majority-Muslim countries from entering the US. Fewer than one in five approve of his trade and climate policies. The fall is steeper among some close US allies. From 2015 to 2017, the percentage of those with "confidence in the US president to do the right thing regarding world affairs" fell from 66 to 24% in Japan, 76 to 22% in Canada, 83 to 14% in France, and 73 to 11% in Germany.

Yet, officials in other countries know they can't simply ignore or isolate Washington. The US is still the only country that can extend political, economic, and military influence into every region of the world. There are still a host of international problems and challenges that demand US cooperation, if not leadership. The good news for those who want more from the US is its decentralised federal sys-

tem. Much power lies with state governors and big-city mayors to enact and enforce laws that don't exist at the federal level, even when these laws conflict with the president's priorities.

Trump has tried, so far unsuccessfully, to impose a ban on immigration from several majority-Muslim countries. But years ago, many local governments established 'sanctuary' status for illegal immigrants, and that process continues. 'Sanctuary cities' refuse to cooperate with federal immigration laws and bar local police from questioning an individual's immigration status.

US states, even its largest cities, have real economic heft. California's economy is larger than France's or India's. New York state is larger than Russia or Mexico. There's a wide variety of attitudes across US states toward Trump and public demand within some to establish independent foreign policies. Mayors and governors, particularly in states where Trump is deeply unpopular, can score political points by defying him and pursuing their own agendas.

No issue better illustrates the power of US states to set their own agendas than climate change. A few days after Trump withdrew US support from the Paris accord on climate, China's President Xi Jinping welcomed Cali-



President Donald Trump in Washington, DC, June 1, 2017

signed agreements on clean energy technological development with local Chinese officials.

Canada, far more dependent on the US economy than China, is adopting a similar approach to courting local US officials. Officials in Justin Trudeau's government have begun building on already close ties between Canadian provinces and US states.

The day after Trump explained his decision to withdraw from the Paris accord with a reminder that he "was elected to represent the citizens of Pittsburgh, not Paris", Canada's transport minister held a meeting on climate change policy with the mayor of Pittsburgh. Canada's federal government is also building relationships with officials in Florida, Texas, Michigan, New York and other states. "The United States is bigger than the [Trump] administration," said Canada's environment minister recently. She's right.

There's nothing new, of course, about other governments, particularly US allies, forging political and commercial relations with US states and cities. But the Trump administration, approach to the rest of the world has given these ties new urgency. The US president has considerable power, particularly on foreign policy. But more governments are discovering the potential benefits of using the decentralised structure of the US to get what they want. And they'll find a growing number of US governors and mayors waiting to embrace them.

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The views expressed are personal

LANGUAGE MATTERS



In a non-English-speaking environment, using the language to teach subjects on the school syllabus does not come easy

KUNAL PATIL/HT PHOTO

In schools, mother tongue works the best

Uttarakhand should not go for English as the medium of instruction in government schools

MITADRU BASU



For a child, the school acts like a bridge connecting the home and the world. In this transitional crossing of environments, research and study have highlighted the key role played by the mother language. That, when instructed in the mother tongue or home language, children perform better in subject-based learning. So, adopting English as the medium of instruction for early-age learners in schools, like the proposed plan for government institutions in Uttarakhand, looks problematic.

Education begins at home with the home language. The move from home to school alters the learning environment. School presents a structure whereas earlier it was a natural flow of experience. New peers, teachers, content, discipline, and format. A lot to adjust to quickly. And then, a new language of instruction. If education inspires learning and questioning and if education facilitates freedom of enquiry without fear, then which is better – a medium of instruction using the home local mother tongue or a powerful global language like English?

Looking at the aspirations of new generations, an English medium of instruction appears attractive. But what about grounding in curriculum subjects, of which English

is simply one subject of study? What about creativity, innovation, life skills? This real learning becomes that much more difficult without mother-tongue-led instruction.

In a non-English-speaking environment, using English to teach subjects does not come easy. Add to this the teacher's competence in handling English – first, in mastering the language; second, in using English to teach curricular subjects – which remains a cause for concern. Representing natural transition from learning at home, using the mother tongue to teach curriculum subjects leads to greater emotional connection with the learning process. Tending to actively engaged children, teachers can give free rein to their creative and innovative impulses. Learning becomes student-led, encouraging skill development. Naturally competent in imbibing new languages and now confident in their learning ability, children can easily pick up any new language – including English.

Instead of changing the medium of classroom instruction, the way forward lies in evolving a connected, implementable, and mother-language-based approach to school education: Develop instructional material for students and teachers that sustains creativity; conceptualise robust teacher training programmes; roll out innovative teaching methodologies; ensure goal-and-outcome focused learning assessments; apply data and analytics for personalised learning.

In here lies our tryst with destiny. Mitadru Basu works in the publishing and education sectors
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In Kashmir, a window of opportunity to talk peace

The solidarity between the BJP and the PDP should be a platform for the Centre to reach out to the Valley

HARINDER BAWEJA



A telephone call to a senior official in Anantnag, the district where seven Amarnath pilgrims were killed in a terror attack, elicited a weary response. "I am tired of looking at dead bodies, of yatri, of our own people [Kashmiris]. I'm just tired of the violence." The official had stayed up all night, tending to the injured, getting them airlifted to Delhi and Surat and, equally importantly, ensuring that there was no communal flare-up.

Jammu and Kashmir passed through a fragile moment when news of the terror attack on the pilgrims first broke because by training their guns at the yatri, they had hoped to increase the gulf that exists between the two ideologically-opposed regions of Jammu and Kashmir. They had also hoped to create a wedge between the state's coalition partners. The People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the BJP came together to form a government in 2015 but have had more disagreements than agreements.

The strange bedfellows were, however, able to paper over their seemingly irreparable differences and handled the fallout of the terror attack with tact and maturity. Both spoke in one voice; and both emphasised the syncretic culture. Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti called the killings an attack on the state's 'ethos and tradition'. Deputy chief minister Nirmal Singh, from the BJP, walked an extra mile and when asked about the targeting of Hindus, told a television channel that in fact more Kashmiri Muslim civilians had been killed than Hindus.

It would not be wrong to say that the state government came out looking good for the first time. Trouble for the unlikely allies had started on the day of the swearing-in when PDP patron Mufti Mohammad Sayeed credited Pakistan for an election

THE CENTRE HAS BEEN OF THE VIEW THAT IT NEEDS TO CONTAIN MILITANCY FIRST BUT AN OUTREACH WILL BE FAR MORE MEANINGFUL THAN ANY CORDON-AND-SEARCH OPERATION IN THE VALLEY

through many anxieties, which in turn leads to sickness. To get over stress, we need to stop worrying about the past. Almost all mundane phenomena fall beyond human control. No one has ever succeeded in controlling life's uncertainties. Then why should we get stressed?

How can one de-stress? What is the modus operandi of getting calm, cool and composed? Have you ever seen water flowing under a bridge? In this flow of water lie life-saving philosophies. Water never stays in one place; the spot under the bridge is

same but the water is not. So should it be in life. Never worry for what has already occurred in life, like water in the river which has flown. Nor worry for what has not yet taken place. When we focus only on what is taking place now – in the present – only that 'now' can we protect ourselves from, from the brunt and bruises of the stresses in our lives.

(Inner Voice comprises contributions from our readers
The views expressed are personal)

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STAYING IN THE MOMENT CAN HELP US OVERCOME STRESSES IN OUR LIVES

Shreepakash Sharma

Human life is complex. It gets even more complicated and mystic with the sporadic ups and downs of life. Breaking up of relationships and failures in our pursuits drive us to the crossroads where we naturally and uncontrollably get affected by mental stresses that come with these.

The plight of being stressed starts wreaking havoc both on our mental poise and physical wellness. Psychologists, over the world, say that the path of stress passes