

13 EXPLAINED



SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE

The Trump administration has shown its total weakness by handing over executive power to Congress in the most humiliating way.

DMITRY MEDVEDEV, Prime Minister of Russia, English-language handle, 1.15 million followers. Donald Trump on Wednesday signed a Bill imposing new sanctions on Russia after it was approved by a bipartisan majority in both Senate and House. The Bill was "seriously flawed", Trump complained.

Behind India's unease with a global child abduction law

SOFI AHSAN explains The Hague Convention and why India has been reluctant to ratify it despite repeated recommendations from courts and Law Commission

A SIGNIFICANT piece of legislation was introduced in the US Congress last week — the Bindu Philips and Devon Davenport International Child Abduction Return Act of 2017 seeks to punish countries that do not adhere to US court orders on the return of abducted children. The Bill is named after two women — an Indian American and a Brazilian American — who allege their children were abducted and taken to India and Brazil by their husbands.

Back home, India has been struggling for years with legislation on the custody of children caught in transnational marital discord. The central government decided last year to not ratify The Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction (1980), which would force Indian women who return with their children after conflict with their husbands, to go back to the foreign country for settlement of custody.

A Committee headed by Punjab and Haryana High Court Justice Rajesh Bindal subsequently studied the issue in depth. Last month, the committee released a concept note on its recommendations.

What is The Hague Convention on international child abduction?

It is an international treaty to ensure the prompt return of a child who has been "abducted" from the country of their "habitual residence". Ninety-seven countries are party to the Convention. Despite pressure from the US and European countries, India is yet to ratify it. Under the Convention, contracting countries must establish a central authority to trace unlawfully removed children and secure their return to the country of habitual residence, irrespective of the country's own laws on the issue. The Convention applies to children under age 16.

Where does India stand on this matter?

In 2009, the Law Commission of India recommended signing The Hague Convention, because it "will in turn bring the prospects of achieving the return to India of children who have their home in India". The Commission observed that in the absence of a law, Indian courts had not followed a pattern in such cases. In February 2016, Punjab and Haryana

High Court again referred the matter to the Law Commission and Ministry of Women and Child Development. In his interim order, Justice Rajive Bhalla (now retired) noted that "the removal or retention of a child in breach of custody rights is a wrong under The Hague Convention but for want [of] the Union of India acceding to The Hague Convention or enacting a domestic law, children will continue to be spirited away from and to India, with courts and authorities standing by in despair". The court asked the Commission and the Ministry to "consider whether recommendations should be made for enacting a suitable law and for signing The Hague Convention...".

In June 2016, a draft Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction Bill, 2016, with provisions similar to The Hague Convention, was uploaded on the Ministry website for public comments. After examining the Bill and the issue, the Law Commission submitted a revised version of the Bill, called The International Child Removal and Retention Bill, 2016,

in October, in line with The Hague Convention and legal precedents in the country.

What were the key recommendations?

The Commission noted that "women involved in cross-jurisdictional divorces, 'holiday marriages' or 'limping marriages' have to face additional challenges in the custody battle", and that "the woman must not be put in a situation where she has to make the impossible choice between her children and putting up with an abusive relationship in a foreign country". In most cases of so-called "parental abduction", parents take away the child because "of the fear of losing his/her custody", the Commission said — "such an abduction... is out of overwhelming love and affection and not to harm the child or achieve any other ulterior purpose". The Commission, thus, dropped the word 'abduction' from the title of the revised Bill.

The report did not, however, remove the previous Bill's provisions on sending the child

back to her habitual residence, as envisaged by The Hague Convention. It also retained the provision that gave the central authority the power "to secure the voluntary return of any such child to the country (of)... habitual residence, (and) to bring about an amicable resolution of the differences" between the parties in the dispute.

Given the draft Bill is largely in conformity with The Hague Convention, why is India still not keen to join the treaty?

Critics have argued that the legislation would affect the interests of Indian mothers fleeing from abusive or difficult marriages. The law, the critics said, would compel these women to return to the foreign country where the child was born, to fight for custody in possibly unfavourable conditions. The Ministry of Women and Child Development, wary of Indian women being charged or prosecuted in foreign countries, declined to back the law.

In February 2017, at a national consultation on signing the Convention chaired by WCD Minister Maneka Gandhi and attended by

judges from the Delhi and Punjab and Haryana High Courts and a member of the Law Commission among others, it was again decided to constitute a committee to draft suitable legislation, and to advise on whether India should become a signatory. The committee was asked to submit its report in four months.

What has happened since then?

Last month, the committee, comprising two Punjab and Haryana HC judges, a Delhi HC judge, the chairman of the Punjab NRI Commission, a family law expert, and six representatives of various Ministries released a concept note for public suggestions. The committee is learnt to have received a large number of representations, and its major challenge is to reconcile contradictory views. The foremost legal question is which court will have jurisdiction to decide custody — one in the country of habitual residence, or one where the child has been removed which, in most cases, is India. The committee has not met after the compilation of the feedback, and its report has been delayed.

SIMPLY PUT



The delay in declaring the results apart, students also fear the new system will lead to inaccurate or unfair assessments of their performance. Express Archive

UNPRECEDENTED DELAY IN RESULTS

4.2 lakh careers could be on the line: what's wrong at Mumbai Univ?

PRIYANKA SAHOO
MUMBAI, AUGUST 3

THE UNIVERSITY of Mumbai, the largest and oldest in Maharashtra, faces an unprecedented crisis — final year results are delayed like never before, and the future of close to 4.2 lakh students — 90% of the over 4.7 lakh who wrote the exams in April-May — is on the line.

What is going on? Why are the results delayed?

The 160-year-old university has traditionally declared final year results by mid-June. This year, results of only 200-odd of the 477 examinations have been declared so far. A delay of another week is expected.

This delay of almost two months has been attributed to the university's decision to hastily introduce a process of "on-screen assessment". Students and politicians are now holding Vice Chancellor Sanjay Deshmukh responsible for putting the future of students in jeopardy — the VC has been accused of unilaterally deciding to overhaul the entire system, despite calls from all quarters to introduce the change in a phased manner. Student organisations and opposition parties want the VC to resign as punishment for his "short-sightedness"; the issue has also figured prominently in the monsoon session of the Legislative Assembly.

But what is this "on-screen assessment"? Why did the University of Mumbai have to embrace it?

On-screen marking or OSM is a way to evaluate answersheets using technology. Answersheets are scanned on to computers, and the evaluation and marking is done digitally. The Central Board of Secondary Education, Manipal University, Rajasthan Administrative Services and Rajiv Gandhi University of Health Sciences in Bengaluru are some of the institutes that use this method of assessment, apart from Mumbai University. By itself, the method is considered scientific.

The OSM switch was triggered by a cheating scandal. In May 2016, the Bhandup police busted a racket in which answersheets were extracted from the university campus, tampered with, and replaced. Following the bust, the VC announced in January this year that all final year answersheets would be evaluated digitally.

So, what went wrong?

There are a host of reasons for the delay, but the key factor was the university's failure to appoint an agency to help with implementing the new system in time. Bids for hiring the agency were invited ahead of time, but the response from private parties was lukewarm. The deadline to close the on-line tendering process was extended four times. To attract contractors, the university also eased the technical criteria. Finally, at the fifth attempt, an agency was appointed on April 27 — which meant that the process of assessment, which usually begins three days after the exams, was delayed by more than a month. The university also did not have the infrastructure to handle the transition, and the teachers were unacquainted with the new system. After a hastily arranged training process, when teachers began assessments, technical glitches surfaced, slowing things down.

How does the delay affect students?

Over 4.2 lakh final year students stare at the prospect of losing a year. Students who have secured admission to universities abroad or within the country are in a helpless situation. The deadline to submit documents is usually in the first week of August. The admission and visa application processes are stuck in the absence of results. Those looking for jobs, too, are in a difficult situation — students have complained that prospective employers are unwilling to wait indefinitely for the university to declare results. An overwhelming concern is that glitches in the system might lead to discrepancies in marking and inaccurate assessments.

What are the government and the university doing about the crisis?

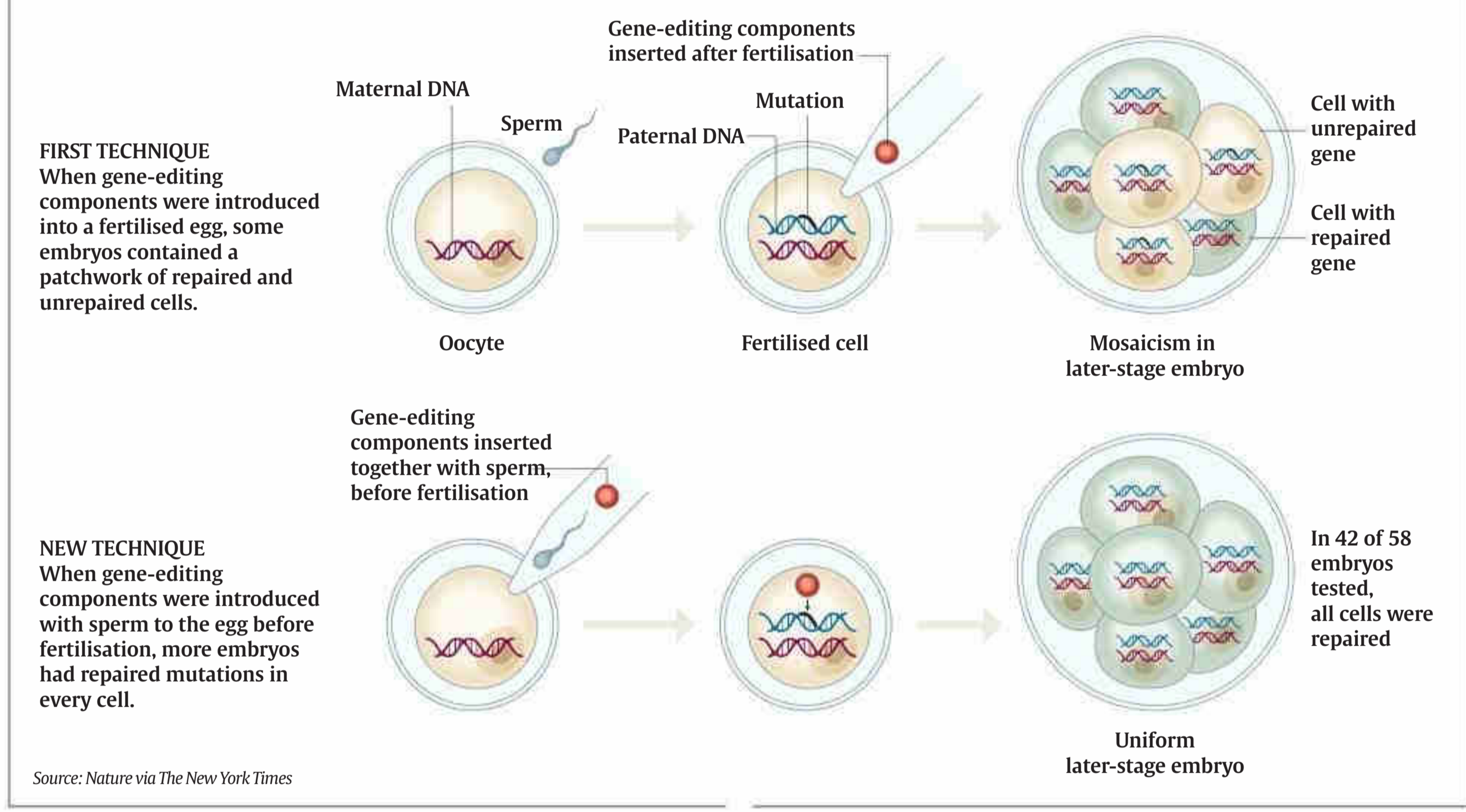
Following uproar in the media, Governor Ch Vidyasagar Rao, who is also Chancellor of the University of Mumbai, set a deadline of July 31 for the declaration of results. The government appointed an expert as Officer on Special Duty to help with the assessment and to monitor its progress. The university decided to delegate some of the assessment work to teachers in other state universities such as Nagpur, Pune and Aurangabad. But this has not made a significant difference. After outrage in the House, the government has now launched a probe into the delay in the declaration of results.



VC Sanjay Deshmukh has been accused of rushing into a new system of assessments

Gene Editing in Embryos

Scientists tried two techniques to remove a dangerous mutation. In the first, genetic "scissors" were inserted into fertilised eggs. The mutation was repaired in some of the resulting embryos but not always in every cell. The second method worked better: by injecting the "scissors" along with the sperm into the egg, more embryos emerged with repaired genes in every cell.



PATHBREAKING SUCCESS PROMISES BABIES PROTECTION FROM DISEASE

How a chop-plug technique fixed a dangerous mutation



FLAGGING INTERESTING RESEARCH

GENE EDITING

CREATING HEALTHY EMBRYOS

Published in *Nature*, August 2, 2017

AUTHORS: Shoukhrat Mitalipov, Juan Carlos Izpisua Belmonte and Others

NEW RESEARCH published in the journal *Nature* on Wednesday reported the first successful editing of genes in human embryos to repair a common and serious disease-causing mutation, producing apparently healthy embryos. The research marks a major milestone and raises the prospect that gene editing may one day protect babies from a variety of hereditary conditions.

The achievement is also an example of human genetic engineering, once feared and unthinkable, and is sure to renew ethical concerns that some might try to design babies with specific traits, such as greater intelligence or athleticism. Here's how the scientists carried out their research.

The new study involves hypertrophic cardiomyopathy, a disease affecting about one in 500 people, which can cause sudden heart failure, often in young athletes. It is caused by a mutation in a gene called MYBPC3. If one parent has a mutated copy, there is a 50% chance of passing the disease to children.

Using sperm from a man with hypertrophic cardiomyopathy and eggs from 12 healthy women, the researchers created fertilised eggs. Injecting CRISPR-Cas9, which



Newly fertilized eggs before gene editing, left, and embryos after gene editing and a few rounds of cell division. A study published on Wednesday announced that edited human embryos can repair common and serious disease-causing gene mutations. Shoukhrat Mitalipov, via The New York Times



works as a genetic scissors, they snipped out the mutated DNA sequence on the male MYBPC3 gene.

They injected a synthetic healthy DNA sequence into the fertilised egg, expecting that the male genome would copy that sequence into the cut portion. That is how this gene-editing process works in other cells in the body, and in mouse embryos, said Shoukhrat Mitalipov, director of the Center for Embryonic Cell and Gene Therapy at Oregon Health and Science University and senior author of the study.

Instead, the male gene copied the healthy sequence from the female gene. The authors don't know why it happened.

Maybe human sex cells or gametes evolved to repair themselves because they are the only cells that transmit genes to offspring and "need special protection", said Juan Carlos Izpisua Belmonte, a co-author and geneticist at the Salk Institute.

Out of 54 embryos, 36 (or 67%) emerged mutation-free, a significant improvement over natural circumstances in which about half would not have the mutation. Another 13 embryos also emerged without the muta-

tion, but not in every cell. The researchers tried to eliminate the problem by acting at an earlier stage, injecting the egg with the sperm and CRISPR-Cas9 simultaneously, instead of waiting to inject CRISPR-Cas9 into the already fertilised egg. That resulted in 42 of 58 embryos, 72%, with two mutation-free copies of the gene in every cell. They also found no unwanted mutations in the embryos, which were destroyed after about three days.

The method was not perfect. The remaining 16 embryos had unwanted additions or deletions of DNA. Mitalipov said he believed fine-tuning the process would make at least 90% of embryos mutation-free.

And for disease-causing mutations on maternal genes, the same process should occur, with the father's healthy genetic sequence being copied, he said.

But the technique will not work if both parents have two defective copies. Then, scientists would have to determine how to coax one gene to copy a synthetic DNA sequence, Mitalipov said. Otherwise, he said, it should work with many diseases, "a variety of different heritable mutations". **THE NYT**



Enzyme Cas9, in blue and grey, can cut DNA, in gold, at selected sites, as seen in this model from electron microscope images. David Taylor and Jennifer Doudna, via NYT

WHAT IS CRISPR-CAS9?

IN 1987, Japanese scientists discovered unusual repeating sequences in the DNA of *E. coli* bacteria. Similar sequences were found in the DNA of other bacteria and archaea, and were given the name "Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats", or CRISPR. In 2007, researchers found that these clusters formed part of the bacteria's immune system.

BACTERIA are often attacked by viruses, and whenever a bacteria got the better of a virus, it chopped up the virus's genetic code and stored them in the CRISPR spaces. When a new virus attacked, the bacteria produced an enzyme called Cas9, which contained bits of the viral genetic code. And if the attacking virus's RNA matched with the code in Cas9, the enzyme started to cut up the new virus's DNA.

SOON, a way was found to feed the Cas9 protein with artificial RNA — and a paper in 2012 showed the CRISPR-Cas9 system could slice any genome at any place scientists wanted.

WHILE gene editing itself wasn't new, CRISPR-Cas9 was revolutionary because of its precision. It did whatever it was told to, had a 100% success rate, was cheap and fast. Genes — such as the one that causes Huntington's Disease — could be "silenced" by cutting them out, and "good" genes could be plugged into the "holes". **NYT**

"The problem for Pakistan is that the government continues to cling to a story of economic success... while the consensus among economy watchers outside government is that Pakistan is on the verge of a familiar unravelling."

—DAWN

Why 2017 is not 1987

A more nationalistic Beijing and the location of the dispute make the current India-China crisis different from the earlier stand-off



SUSHANT SINGH

THE STAND-OFF BETWEEN THE Indian and Chinese armies at Doklam shows no signs of a resolution. For New Delhi, the most preferred option is a mutual withdrawal by the two armies from the contested area. The next best option is continuation of the status quo, a prolonged stand-off at the site where Chinese road construction has been stalled. The Chinese thus cannot build the road to the militarily important Jangpheri ridge, and diplomats of the two countries can use the prolonged period of détente — of a few months if not more — to find an amicable solution.

The attractiveness of a prolonged stand-off lies in a precedent from May 1986, when an annual Indian army patrol discovered that the Chinese army had occupied an Indian patrol point in Sumdorong Chu valley in Arunachal Pradesh. It was close to the location of the initial confrontation which had started the 1962 conflict. India formally protested to the Chinese in July, who replied with a straight face that they were, just like India, improving border management.

India moved in troops, occupied the dominating Longrola and Hathungla heights, setting up military posts in eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation with the Chinese soldiers. India's offer not to re-occupy the post next summer, if both sides withdrew troops, was rejected by China. The rhetoric from Beijing went up, when in October, Chinese Premier Deng Xiaoping warned India, via the US Defence Secretary, that China would have to "teach India a lesson".

In May 1987, foreign minister N.D. Tiwari went to Beijing en route to North Korea and conveyed that New Delhi had no intention of aggravating the situation. A formal flag meeting took place at Bum La on August 5, 1987 and the military de-escalation started. Diplomatically, it took another seven years to restore status quo at Sumdorong Chu. The stand-off led to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's historical visit to Beijing in December 1988, where the two countries agreed to negotiate a boundary settlement and maintain tranquillity pending that settlement. By taking a strong military position at Sumdorong Chu, India's aims were met and the path for future agreements between the two countries was also laid.

There are obvious lessons to be learnt from the Sumdorong Chu stand-off but it would be misleading to draw exact parallels as the facts are materially different. For one, China's global standing and its own self-image. In 1987, China was still following Deng's strategy of "hide our capacities and bide our time" in a global order dominated by the US and Soviet Union. It wanted to stabilise the region to deal with the world. The China of 2017 has become increasingly assertive in the military arena under Xi Jinping, which is reflected in its aggressive and expansionist stance in South China Sea.

Beijing's external aggression is also an

outcome of its increasingly nationalistic domestic politics under Xi, who is heading into an important party congress in November. The anti-India rhetoric from other party-controlled media outlets has been incendiary and intemperate. Reports suggest that 1962 war veterans have been paraded on state television, and the party's propaganda machinery is upping the ante on Weibo and other social media platforms. This is a substantive shift from the 1987 stand-off where the nationalistic fervor in local Chinese media, including invocations of 1962, were negligible if not absent.

More than the global and domestic situation, the biggest difference between the two stand-offs is their respective locations. Forty years ago, the two armies were confronting each other on territory claimed by both India and China. Now the face-off between India and China is in a plateau contested between Bhutan and China. While Chinese road construction affects the Indian claim over the tri-junction, Beijing contends that Indian soldiers are in Chinese territory — or, at best, in territory claimed by Bhutan. Because Indians are in a third country's territory, Beijing says that there is nothing to negotiate unless the Indian soldiers withdraw unilaterally first.

New Delhi may bet on a prolonged stand-off but the Chinese have given no inclination of being interested in continuing the status quo. But we must not forget that the bigger power is a loser in case a situation ends in a stalemate. Even China recognises that it can no longer humiliate India militarily the way it did in 1962 and it will suffer heavy losses for any misadventure, but a prolonged stand-off can lead to inadvertent escalation. Clausewitz posited this as friction or the fog of war, where accidents are unpredictable. The consequences of these accidents can often lead to a crossing of a recognised military limit, which would be catastrophic in the case of two nuclear-armed neighbours.

So far India has been mature in its approach to the stand-off, providing no provocation to the Chinese by any military movement or through its official statements. But New Delhi's position is critically dependent on Bhutan, a close friend and ally. Although Bhutan is unlikely to flip on its support to India anytime soon, a prolonged stand-off will lead to the strengthening of voices in the Himalayan kingdom who want a more balanced Bhutanese foreign policy. In 2007, Bhutan had offered a swap deal to China where it agreed to give Doklam in exchange for the disputed areas in its north, which India vetoed. In 2013, the democratically elected Bhutanese government had started showing signs of independence from Indian guidance and New Delhi had let its displeasure be known in the 2013 Bhutanese elections. The signs from Thimphu have been there, and a prolonged stand-off could be the catalyst for altered India-Bhutan ties.

The choice for New Delhi is not between capitulation and war. Diplomatic engagement has provided creative answers to more complex problems but there is little luxury of time now. A military conflict would be catastrophic but even a prolonged stand-off has its own perils. The tensions between India and China thus need an early diplomatic resolution.

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C.R. Sasikumar

Schools for scandal

Two questions we need to ask schools — and don't: How good are your safety norms? How well trained are your teachers?



DEV LAHIRI

THE TRAGIC DEMISE of Arman, 10 years old, in circumstances that have yet to be established, touches a raw nerve — as indeed it should. Arman reportedly succumbed to head injuries after a fall at the Ghaziabad school he attended this week. No doubt, there will be a search for the "truth", through the media, inquiry committees and what-have-you. But there is one truth that stares the nation in its face. Arman's tragedy, and indeed the fate of many such children, is only symptomatic of one of the many failures of our education system. Student safety is certainly not on the priority list of those who control the levers of our system.

There are two main reasons for this. One is that, by and large, education is run by people who have no background in, empathy for, or knowledge of, the real issues that affect this critical sector. The private schools are run by and as "business interests". So anything that does not contribute directly to the coffers is seen as inconsequential. Student safety and teacher training (both of them are linked) are seen as redundant expenses. Sitting as almost all schools are, in a position of power in a sellers' market, they can afford to and do get away with such arrogance. After all, when as a parent you have spent months filling in forms for your child's admission to a school of your choice, dialled various numbers to get "contacts" till your fingers fall off, and then probably stood in an endless queue to put in the application, you

are hardly likely to turn around and ask the school after getting that magic admission, "How good are your safety norms?" Or "How well trained are your teachers?"

The sad part is that if and when something goes wrong, it is usually the hapless principal who takes the rap, no matter that she/he would have been screaming for more funds for years to deal with such issues. The other kinds of schools, the ones that are run supposedly by "trusts," "societies," "boards" and consider themselves "superior" to those who "educate for profit", are not very different in this respect. Here, the financial interest is given a fig-leaf of respectability, by including so-called "eminent educationists" who are not influenced by crass considerations such as money. So what drives them? In my experience, it is, for them, a huge ego trip. Interest in the welfare of children, or their education, has very little to do with it.

Without generalising, therefore, let me illustrate from my career in which I had the privilege of heading two of the country's leading "public schools" for close to two decades. In the first instance, the school was by some peculiar accident of history run by the ministry of human resource development, with the chairman, the ex-officio secretary, education, government of India. I served under at least four chairpersons, and realised that while their intentions were honourable, they did not have the time to pay attention to the matters of a remote boarding school in the hills. It took weeks, often months of telephone calls to the chairman's secretary to even fix a board meeting, and more often than not, the chairman would have to back out at the last minute, leaving the field to a sundry collection of board members (all nominees of the ministry), many of whom were either not interested, or worse, had their own agenda. In this situation, it was difficult — to say the least — to have any meaningful discussion on issues per-

Student safety and teacher training (both of them are linked) are seen as redundant expenses. Sitting as almost all schools are, in a position of power in a sellers' market, they can afford to, and do get away with such arrogance. After all, when as a parent you have spent months filling in forms for your child's admission to a school of your choice, dialled various numbers to get 'contacts' till your fingers fall off, and then probably stood in an endless queue to put in the application, you are hardly likely to turn around and ask the school after getting that magic admission, "How good are your safety norms?"

taining to the school.

The second public school in Dehradun had a chairman for life, who nominated his own board. This was a school founded in 1935, and when I took over in 2003, I found that none of the buildings had even a fire escape, all the electric wires were exposed and not earthed, the water tanks had not been cleaned for years (resulting in a typhoid outbreak within a month of my taking over), the catering staff had no medical examinations, and the medical records of the students were, at best, sketchy. And this was not because the board did not want to spend the money for these essentials. It was simply that they were blissfully unaware, and sought refuge in the fact that all the buildings were very old any way, and it took a cussed principal in 2003 to wake them out of their slumber.

It is not just the boards that have to take the rap. We are all culpable. Whilst there are principals who are concerned, a disturbingly large number are not willing to "rock the boat". More distressingly, how many principals, or indeed teachers, are trained in these areas? The ICSE and CBSE have both published detailed guidelines for schools. But these, as we all know, remain confined within their covers. How often are safety audits carried out? Why do PTAs not hold school managements responsible?

If this is the state of affairs in a well-known, high-value school, what must be the fate of the ones in lesser-endowed schools? Arman, and others who have suffered his fate, can never be brought back. But if the lessons we learn from their tragedy are used to improve and make safer the lives of other children, they will perhaps have reason to look down and smile.

The writer is former headmaster of Lawrence School, Lovedale, and former principal, Welham Boys' School, Dehradun



TARINI MOHAN

A field of her own

Advancing rights of women farmers can revolutionise the rural ecosystem

THE STEREOTYPICAL IMAGE of an Indian farmer is a mustachioed man, clad in a white dhoti with farming tools in hand. The reality is the Indian agricultural landscape is fast being feminised. Already, women constitute close to 65 per cent of all agricultural workers. An even greater share, 74 per cent of the rural workforce, is female. Despite their hard labour in the field, women are not officially counted as farmers, and are either labelled "agricultural labourers" or "cultivators". This is because the government does not recognise as farmers those who do not have a claim to land under their name in official records.

As many as 87 per cent of women do not own their land; only 12.7 per cent of them do. There are two primary reasons for the alarmingly low number: One, land being a state subject is not governed by the constitution under a uniform law that applies equally to all citizens but rather is governed by personal religious laws, which tend to discriminate against women when it comes to land inheritance. Second, the cultural aspect of the deep-rooted biases that hinder women's ownership of land in patriarchal societies cannot be discounted.

Providing women with access to secure land is key to incentivising the majority of India's women farmers. This, coupled with

the need to make investments to improve harvests, will result in increased productivity and improve household food security and nutrition. As has been determined from numerous studies conducted worldwide, women have a greater propensity to use their income for the needs of their households. Land-owning women's offspring thus receive better nourishment and have better health indicators. Land-owning mothers also tend to invest in their children's education. Ultimately, this is a win-win situation all around — for the farmer, her family and the larger ecosystem.

However, even if we could, all of a sudden, grant women the right to the land they cultivate, it would not necessarily immediately result in these beneficial outcomes.

Practically speaking, Indian farmers, both men and women, face an uphill battle even leasing land. After abolishing the zamindari system, states moved to restrict tenancy as a protective measure guarding against tenant exploitation. However, since the 1950s, the tenancy situation has varied across the nation as land laws are enacted by the states. And yet, nearly 35 per cent of India's agricultural land is cultivated by tenant farmers, who tend to be landless, poor and marginal.

Before aiming at the lofty goal of securing women's land ownership rights, work-

ing toward ascertaining security of tenure for tenant farmers is a necessary first step. With security of tenure, female farmers should be provided with the three critical driving factors — the incentive, the security, as well as the opportunity — to invest in the land they harvest. Security of land tenure also presents advantages for landlords by removing the fear of losing their land ownership.

In fact, in March 2016, the NITI Aayog released the Model Agricultural Land Leasing Act, which seeks to legalise and liberalise land leasing with the interests of both the landlord and the tenant in mind. The Model Act could enable the real cultivators of land to be recognised as farmers and thus be entitled to obtain important inputs provided to farmers by the state. This has the potential to improve the productivity of farmer harvests, replacing unwilling cultivators with willing cultivators. Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh have expressed interest in the Model Act, while some others like Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana are at an advanced stage of enacting their own land leasing laws based on the Model Act.

The macro-level results of securing women farmers' land tenure are clear, but consider for a moment the impact it would

have at the micro-level — the wiping away of the debilitating feelings of insecurity and vulnerability for rural women. The chance of propertied women being physically abused is reduced from 49 per cent to 7 per cent due to an increase in the wife's bargaining power. If female farmers are provided security of land tenure, they will be officially recognised as farmers and hence, will see their household bargaining power increase. Women farmers' self-confidence and agency will slowly grow and expand outside just their household.

We know India has the intention to ensure food security for its citizens and boost women's rights; these constitute goals two and five of the Sustainable Development Goals that our country committed to in 2015. Giving agency to women farmers is critical in realising these outcomes.

Ultimately, women farmers are unstoppable if they can be helped to realise that they deserve better. And it all begins with creating a new image for the "Indian farmer".

The writer is pursuing an MBA at the Yale School of Management and is currently an intern in the agriculture programme at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation India country office

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

EDITOR'S LABOUR

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Reinventing EPW' (IE, August 3) which mentions the quality of academic articles in the 1970s in that journal. It should be noted that many of the academics who later rose to eminence could not write clearly and cogently. Their articles were accepted by Krishna Raj, the dedicated editor, for their research findings or their ideas. In the early 1970s, Krishna Raj, Rajani Desai and I, the two assistant editors, tore our hair while re-writing and polishing jumbled and messy academic pieces. I wonder if the situation is any different now?

Jawid Laiq, New Delhi

WHO IS THE VICTIM?

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Victim in the dock' (IE, August 2). Let's assume that there is some truth in the contention that some women are misusing law. But don't they fear that investigation will bring out the true picture? The criminal justice system is so lax that they know that by the time law catches up with them they would have achieved their objective. It must be reformed

Chandan Pandey, Kanpur

BESIEGED COMMUNITY

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'The Nitish echo' (IE, August 3). The author charts out a roadmap of BJP's march towards hegemony. This also signals the near-redundancy of caste politics of

LETTER OF THE WEEK AWARD

To encourage quality reader intervention, The Indian Express offers the Letter of the Week award. The letter adjudged the best for the week is published every Saturday. Letters may be e-mailed to editpage@expressindia.com or sent to The Indian Express, B-1/B, Sector 10, Noida-UP 201301. Letter writers should mention their postal address and phone number.

THE WINNER RECEIVES SELECT EXPRESS PUBLICATIONS

the Samajwadi or Bahujan Samaj phase in UP. The non-Muslim OBC voter is moving to the BJP. The Muslim OBC groups are in a dilemma. This section of Muslims, many of them poor, could neither appreciate the democratic dispensation nor see its role beyond voting. Assertion of rights remains outside their worldview. They should not have any problem in voting for the BJP.

G. Jawid Rasool, Lucknow