

# Opinion

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 2019

## SECURING THE ECONOMY

Union Home Minister, Amit Shah

Govt has protected you from foreign investment, now you have a responsibility to make the \$5 trillion economy of Narendra Modi ji a success. Without private security, trade and business cannot prosper



## ● THE REAL MAINSTREAM

WITHOUT SERIOUS COMMITMENTS BY THE US AND CHINA TO DECARBONISE THEIR ECONOMIES, THE WORLD IS NOT LIKELY TO LIMIT GLOBAL TEMPERATURE RISE TO 1.5°C OR BELOW 2°C

# Leaders are laggards

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**O**N SEPTEMBER 20, the biggest-ever demonstration over global warming was held worldwide. The demonstrations were more pronounced in big cities of developed countries; in most developing countries, the response was muted. There was a token demonstration in India, for instance. The biggest demonstration was in New York, where the teenage activist Greta Thunberg spoke passionately about climate justice, and the need for world leaders to take leadership. But, alas, no such leadership was visible at the UN Climate Action Summit held on September 23 at the UN headquarters in New York.

To say that the summit was a great disappointment would be an understatement. The US, the world's greatest carbon polluter, didn't participate in the summit, though US President Donald Trump did make an inexplicable appearance, and left quickly. China, the world's largest current polluter, made ambiguous statements, and put the responsibility on the developed countries to lead. The European Union came with no concrete proposal. India made an ambitious announcement of increasing its renewable energy target from 175 gigawatts (GW) to 450 GW. But, overall, none of the large polluters met the UN chief António Guterres' call to raise their climate pledges. And, this is the crux of the issue—the G20 countries, who are the biggest polluters, are lagging far behind in climate action.

A day after the climate demonstrations, the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) released an advance chapter of the 2019 Emissions Gap Report to let the world know how G20 countries are failing the planet. The Emissions Gap Reports are released

every year to take stock of the gap between the emissions reductions required to meet 1.5°C/2°C target, and the reductions actually made, or pledged by countries collectively.

The 2019 Report shows that G20 nations, who account for 80% of global greenhouse gas emissions, are collectively not on track to meet their Paris Agreement commitments. Around half of these 20 countries are falling short of achieving their own target, called Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC), under the Paris Agreement. These countries are not yet taking on transformative climate commitments at the necessary breadth and scale to meet the goals of the Paris Agreement.

For instance:

- Too few countries have committed to net-zero greenhouse gas emission targets;
- Country commitments to fully decarbonise electricity supplies cover less than 1% of global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from electricity generation;
- Countries are not setting ambitious targets for industry;
- Very few countries have committed to phasing out coal-fired power plants;
- Commitment to decarbonise the transportation sector is lacking; and
- Commitments to zero net deforestation targets are not being backed with action on the ground.

What is evident from the report,

which it does not spell out, is the laggardly actions in the US. While Europe, India, and China are making some efforts (though inadequate), the US is doing everything possible to increase its emissions.

First of all, the US is not likely to meet its measly Paris Commitments set under the Obama administration. Under Donald Trump, energy-related CO<sub>2</sub> emissions of the country have grown in 2018, at a rate that is the highest since 2010, and is likely to be the second-highest in nearly two decades. In fact, the US, today, is more dependent on fossil fuels in absolute terms than it was 25 years ago, when the climate treaty was signed. With the anti-climate policies put in place by Trump, such as the reversal of the emissions and efficiency standards in the power, transport, and industry sectors, the emission scenario in the US is likely to worsen further.

The problem is that if the US doesn't take strong actions to reduce emissions, China will not move. And, even if the whole world sets the most ambitious emissions-reduction targets, the emissions from the US, and China will be sufficient to burn the world. This is the key challenge facing the world—its top two economic leaders are the laggards on climate change.

The 2019 Emissions Gap Report concludes that countries must at least triple the level of ambition of their current NDCs to have a chance of keeping the global temperature rise under 2°C; to keep temperature rise to 1.5°C, they must increase their ambitions five-fold. These ambitions cannot be achieved without real decarbonisation efforts by the US, and China. How do we move these two behemoths? We need to quickly find the answer to this problem if we want to save the planet for future generations.

## An Assam-type citizen-list can be problematic

The idea of a multi-purpose card with passport, driving license etc is good; but Aadhaar linkage works just as well

**T**HE IDEA OF having one multi-purpose card—home minister Amit Shah spoke of this possibility recently—that serves as a driving license, or a voter card, or a passport is an appealing one as it removes the hassles associated with multiple cards, and IDs. What is not clear, however, is whether a brand-new card is required since most of these functionalities can be acquired by linking the existing cards with an Aadhaar number, and making necessary changes in the law. So, if you can just type in your Aadhaar number where a form asks for a passport number, or a bank account, or an election ID, that will work just as well; in this case, each individual identity—ration card, driving licence, voter ID, etc—will be linked to Aadhaar, so the purpose will be achieved.

Some will argue that such Aadhaar linking is against the Supreme Court ruling, but this can be fixed by either approaching the court for direction, or by amending various Acts to allow for this. In any case, if a single card is to be made, and if some part of it—like the one that deals with PAN, or a Voter ID—is already Aadhaar-linked, all the others also get automatically linked. And, in any case, if frauds, and duplication have to be removed, Aadhaar is the most fool-proof solution there is right now.

What is worrying, however, is the possibility of an Assam-type citizenship card being built into this single multi-purpose card. There is little point in arguing that this is similar to the UPA's National Population Register; it may or may not be, but now that we have the Assam experience in front of us, the government—with civil society's inputs—needs to consider whether the exercise is worth the hardship, and what is to be done if millions are not able to prove their citizenship. An Election Commission ID is as close to a citizenship card as possible, but it is worth keeping in mind that a Voter ID is really just a proof of residence, and it is assumed the applicant is a citizen—if there is a complaint of a non-citizen getting a voter ID, that is investigated separately. If the identity card proposes to do that, there should be no problem, and it, essentially, just builds upon the Aadhaar database. But, if citizenship has to be proved, how is this to be done? Is proof of being 'ordinarily resident' in an area—the statements of two neighbours—enough to be considered proof of citizenship? If it is not, how do the millions of migrants that India has go around proving their citizenship? By going back to their villages during the enumeration exercise? The concern that intelligence agencies, and police forces have when it comes to illegal immigrants is genuine, but it is not clear a citizenship card is the way around it; also, this automatically presupposes terrorism is done only by illegal immigrants, and not by citizens, which may not necessarily be true. Either way, a considerable amount of public consultation should be done before any decision is finally taken.

## A vote for transparency

SC does well to bring govt-funded NGOs under RTI

**T**HE SUPREME COURT (SC) judgment holding NGOs and private bodies receiving substantial government financing—direct or indirect—as being accountable under the RTI Act is a vote for probity. The apex court has said that there is "...no reason why any citizen cannot ask for information to find out whether his/her money which has been given to an NGO or any other body is being used for the requisite purpose or not." NGOs and other private bodies that receive government funds have often stonewalled attempts to bring them under the ambit of the RTI Act by pleading that they are not a "public authority", as defined by the Act. But, the SC read the definition of "public authority" under Section 2(h) of the Act along with the law's objects and reasons section, which states that "democracy requires an informed citizenry and transparency of information", and ruled that NGOs and private bodies receiving substantial government financing are "public authority".

The SC also did well to disambiguate, as best as possible, "substantial financing". The bench, comprising Justices Deepak Gupta and Aniruddha Bose, ruled that "substantial" was "not necessarily" a major portion, or more than 50%, and that there can be "no hard and fast rule laid down in this regard". It made the effective functioning of an NGO or a private body the touchstone of determining whether the government funding was "substantial" or not, saying, "Another aspect for determining substantial finance is whether the body, authority or NGO can carry on its activities effectively without getting finance from the Government. If its functioning is dependent on the finances of the Government then there can be no manner of doubt that it has to be termed as substantially financed." The judgment specifies that "substantial financing" doesn't only mean direct financing, but also includes indirect aid, such as free or heavily discounted land. The bench said, "The very establishment of such an institution, if it is dependent on the largesse of the State in getting the land at a cheap price, would mean that it is substantially financed."

The landmark SC judgment brings a host of bodies, hitherto outside public scrutiny despite the public nature and scope of their functions, under the ambit of the RTI Act. Some are tainted with allegations of impropriety, too. For instance, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI)—including its member associations at the state level—which gets substantial direct and indirect government support, has steadfastly refused to come under RTI despite being dogged by widespread corruption. Similarly, political parties, whose offices stand on land granted by the government, have also evaded the RTI lens so far. Ironically, no other body in the country has as comprehensive, and direct a bearing on policy, and the functioning of public authorities as political parties do.

## Sham TRIALS?

The majority of approvals for cancer drugs in the EU between 2009 and 2013 came on the back of questionable trials

**A** NEW STUDY, published in *The BMJ*, has found that the majority of cancer drugs approved in Europe between 2009 and 2013, entered the market without clear evidence that they improved survival, or the quality of life of patients. The researchers, from King's College, London, and the London School of Economics, found that expensive drugs sans any meaningful benefit were approved. In some countries, significant amounts were paid from the public coffers to make them part of the public healthcare system. The research team analysed cancer approval by the European Medicines Agency (EMA), and found that of the 68 indications approved, 57% (39) came on the back of questionable trials. These drugs piggybacked on "surrogate endpoints", or measures that don't always reliably predict a drug's effect. Of the 32 new cancer drugs that received the EMA nod during 2014–2016, only nine had at least one randomised controlled trial that could safely be said to have a low risk of bias.

After a median of five years in the market, only 35 out of the 68 showed any kind of survival or quality of life gains over existing treatment, and, in most cases, even these were marginal. The efficacy of the remaining 33 is shrouded in uncertainty. This points at a sobering reality—even in developed jurisdictions, the quality of drug regulation is quite poor, perhaps due to the fact that regulatory evidence standards don't set a high enough threshold to meaningfully ensure drug quality. While it can't be said for certain that pharmaceutical interests hold sway over drug regulation even in the EU, the *BMJ* study shows that the regulatory standards seem to prioritise pharmaceutical interests over patient interests. The study has significant repercussions for Indian drug regulation as well, the standards for which are already believed to be quite low. And, now, The Drugs and Clinical Trials Rules 2019 do away with the necessity of conducting local trials for drugs that have been approved to be marketed in the US, the UK, the EU, Canada, Australia and Japan. Data generated in these countries will be deemed acceptable.

## Accelerating access to medicine

While Ayushman Bharat has significantly aided universal health coverage in the country, it is crucial, now, to ensure easy availability and access to life-saving foreign medicines in Indian markets

**NILANJAN BANIK & PHILIP STEVENS**

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Views are personal

**INDIA, LIKE MANY** middle-income countries, is committed to providing Universal Health Coverage. It has made significant progress through the Ayushman Bharat (AB) programme, targeting the bottom 40% of the population; as of September 2019, the government has allocated ₹6,000 crore, generated 10 crore e-cards, and has empanelled 18,000 hospitals across India. Estimates suggest that already, around 15,000 patients are treated daily.

This commitment will receive further international backing at the UN General Assembly in New York on the September 25, where a new political declaration on Universal Health Coverage will lend international legitimacy to the government's reforms.

Still, there is a long road before all Indians have access to quality care. According to a major study in *Lancet*, India has made solid progress in reducing deaths from common non-communicable diseases, such as cancer, and heart and lung diseases, but not enough to meet international targets, like the Sustainable Development Goals. India is also falling behind on maternal and child mortality measures, number of doctors, and hospital beds.

A key issue is availability of medicines. Although India is the third largest producer, by volume, of generic medicines, there are problems with their accessibility. This is true for generic medicines that have long been off-patent, as well as those that have more recently come into the market. Access to medicines stands at less than 35% in many Indian states, with important medicines unavailable in both public and private pharmacies. Newer medicines that could make a real difference to Indian patients are frequently only available in India years after their first global launch, or not at all.

The AB programme is a step toward rectifying this, and so, too, is the recognition that India spends far too little, overall, on healthcare—3.66%

of GDP (Centre and states combined) compared to the minimum of 6% of GDP recommended by the World Health Organisation.

There are several low-cost steps the government could take immediately to improve and accelerate access to medicines to reduce non-communicable disease mortality. These involve cutting red tape, taxes, and barriers to trade.

Even with the introduction of AB, 70% of healthcare expense are out of pocket. Anything that needlessly adds to the end price of a medicine constitutes a major impediment to access, yet there exist a range of counterproductive taxes on medicines.

Most obviously, there is GST of 5% on most medicines—an extra 5% from the pockets of sick people. There is also a 12% GST on a wide range of other important medical supplies, including bandages and sterile gauze, diabetic monitoring equipment, photographic plates used in x-rays, and so on.

Even though India is a major manufacturer of medicines, it still relies on imports, particularly for more modern medicines, required to tackle non-communicable diseases. Government actively drives up the price here, too, with a 10% tariff on all imported medicines.

It would be an easy win for the government to abolish GST, and tariffs on medicines and medical supplies. Many countries have unilaterally abolished these tariffs, including countries with large pharmaceutical industries. India can do this too.

In addition to tariffs, there are major obstacles to trade in medicines, particularly at, and behind borders. These so-called Non-Tariff Measures (NTMs) include inefficient customs procedures, red-tape, and hidden taxes. For medicines, they also include burdensome labelling and packaging requirements, the need for importers to have multiple permits and licences, and the requirement that imported medicines pass through specific ports.

In India, around 3,958 instances of NTMs were reported on medicines, mainly on account of labelling and packaging requirements.

The time, and effort involved in navigating these procedures add to the costs of trade in medicines, which are ultimately passed on to patients in the form of higher medicine prices. The government, therefore, should look to eliminate as many of these superfluous regulations as possible.

Then, there is the process of bringing a new medicine to India, which brings further delays and costs. A patent has to be examined, and granted before the process of registering, and launching a drug can begin. Due to delays and backlogs at the Indian Patent Office, it takes between five and seven years for a patent to be examined, meaning patients will not access a new medicine until many years after its global launch. To be fair to the government, additional patent examiners have been hired, but more needs to be done to reduce these backlogs.

After a patent has been granted, patients face long waits for new treatments due to bottlenecks in the drug regulator, from which all new medicines must first receive marketing approval before they can be sold to the public. In India, bureaucracy and red tape adds further delays of around 400–500 days, according to figures from the UK's Centre for Innovation in Regulatory Science.

Some countries have taken steps to reduce drug registration backlogs by entering into cooperation agreements with other mature drug regulatory authorities, for example, Mexico and a number of Gulf states. India has been reluctant to push reform in this area, still not even accepting clinical trials data generated overseas.

These reforms are cheap, easy to implement, and practical. They will supplement the government's wider reforms of the healthcare system to bring access to all.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Unavoidable traffic violations

There are crossings in Delhi where the green-light timer for one of the directions was set for just five seconds. In such a short span, at best, one car can cross the traffic light, with the next one automatically jumping the zebra line (stop line) as the traffic light would suddenly turn red. This is certainly a case of unavoidable violation of the traffic rule regarding crossing the zebra line, with the car driver being fined heavily for absolutely no fault of theirs. There are usual instances when either timer, or any of the three lights, or even all of them, at traffic signals don't work. The rule should be that no *challans* is to be done on a crossing where the traffic lights and/or the timer are not functional. If extraordinarily high traffic fines are a practical remedy to curb traffic violations and road accidents, then an even better option is to have the death penalty in the most severe cases of repeat violation. That system will generate even more fear, to the extent that people may stop using cars, which, in turn, would not only decongest roads and parking sites, but will also prevent deaths due to road accidents.

— Subhash Chandra Agrawal, Delhi

### India prepared

General Bipin Rawat has set to rest any concerns that his countrymen may be having over Pakistani infiltrators trying to sneak into India by assuring that our troops are well-prepared to deal with any ceasefire violation. It is believed that 500 terrorists, many of whom have been trained at the JeM camp in Balakot, are primed to sneak into the Valley as part of Pakistan's design to trigger unrest, and project to the international community that the situation in the Valley has deteriorated after India abrogated Article 370. US president Donald Trump, and Indian prime minister Narendra Modi have also vowed to keep terrorists at bay in an oblique reference to the rogue nation.

— NJ Ravi Chander, Bengaluru

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ILLUSTRATION: SHYAM KUMAR PRASAD

**ISHER JUDGE  
AHLUWALIA  
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**CITIES AT CROSSROADS**

# Wasting an opportunity

The thrust of urban solid waste management should be household level segregation. Lobbies are pushing unsustainable alternatives instead. The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs should stop financing compactors under the Smart Cities Mission

**T**HE FIRST RULE of waste management all over the world is that households must segregate their waste before it is collected from the doorstep. The Solid Waste Management Rules 2016 prescribe the same. If we do not mix wet waste with dry waste, the burden of solid waste management on our municipalities reduces significantly. The wet waste can be composted locally; the dry recyclable waste can go for recycling and what remains can be safely disposed. Our cities will then be really cleaned up, as opposed to just looking clean.

Some municipal authorities and some civic-minded individuals (mostly women) are working on inculcating among city dwellers the habit of not mixing different kinds of waste. But there is a disturbing force back to this campaign from three pushes that are implicitly misleading people that there are “smart” ways of handling mixed waste, which

make segregation unnecessary. First, the good news! Tamil Nadu has achieved 100% segregation in 20 of its 50 smaller municipalities, and 80-90% in the rest. However, the capital city of Chennai is lagging, segregating only 50% of its waste. Waste collection is organised daily for wet waste and once a week for dry waste. This is important because the unmixed transportation and processing of wet and dry waste encourages citizens to keep their waste unmixed too. Wet waste, more than half the total waste, is used for composting or biogas production in a decentralised manner. It reduces, at one stroke, the need for long-distance transportation of waste by half.

In Bengaluru, citizens have taken up the cause themselves. Dr Shanthi Tumala and her team of waste warriors have achieved about 90% segregation in the HSR Layout ward, which has 30,000 households. They have an awareness-building programme and also a strict

penalty of ₹500 when mixed waste is handed out. The ward now houses India’s first composting centre where different models of home and lane composting are showcased, and residents come for training. The Purva Venezia apartment complex with about 1,300 households has been segregating their waste 100% for the last seven years and produces compost of excellent quality that is used by farmers to improve yields.

There are fledgling efforts even in South Delhi to persuade people to keep their wastes unmixed. Bhavreen Kandhari, a homemaker and an environmental activist, together with a few like-minded residents of Defence Colony, is hard at work, building awareness for keeping wet waste separate. Kandhari and the others are working with South Delhi Municipal Corporation (SDMC) to ease access to biocomposters in the colony. Charu Gupta, a homemaker and Priti Wadhwa, a chartered accountant, of Greater Kailash I, have got together to persuade colony residents and those of areas around the colony to segregate their waste. They have tied up with Pick My Trash, a joint initiative of the NGO Chintan and Safai Sena (a registered group of waste collectors) for recyclables to be picked up from the locality and transported to a Material Recovery Facility at regular intervals. More households are coming forth, slowly but surely, to segregate their waste at source and participate in this effort. It is heartening to see homemakers becoming community makers. SDMC has decided to experiment. In Punjabi Bagh, they have set up a composting plant (1 TPD) and a bioremethanation plant (5 TPD), which would require segregating waste.

Now, about the pushback. It comes, seemingly superior technology that is actually retrograde. Earlier, in these columns, we talked of the perils of waste to energy plants which rely on the incineration of mixed waste. Such plants in India have been either non-starters or highly polluting failures. Even so, several cities are actively promoting incineration of mixed waste. Each state would be well advised to set up a high-level technical committee,

**The savings from eliminating costly secondary transport can easily fund the construction and operation of decentralised centres for the processing of wet and dry waste**

with environmental experts, to lay down a policy on this issue.

Two additional factors which push the system away from segregating wastes have to do with waste management practices. The practice of entering into waste transport contracts with private parties in which payment for waste transportation is made on a tonnage basis, provides an incentive to maximise the weight of waste any which way. They add wet waste, at times malba, and also get their doorstep waste collection staff to mix whatever is given to them separately.

The rapidly growing use of compactors is the other villain. Compactors are expensive machines that squeeze and compress the volume of waste. Whether installed at the *dhalao* or in the mobile truck, they enable more waste to be carried per trip and, thus, reduce transportation costs. Kolkata Municipal Corporation was the first in 2012 to use compactors at *dhalaos*. A national daily put this as: “The city took a step ahead towards becoming a vat-free metropolis”. Vat, in this context, is not a tax but a dustbin in a public space. The central message was that garbage was now going to be out of sight, and there will be no stench and vector-borne diseases in the vicinity. There has been a rapid increase in the purchase of compactors in many cities, including Delhi. Lucknow has purchased 20 compactors, and Ludhiana is proposing to purchase 39 compactors with funds from the Smart Cities Mission.

Compactors are the antithesis of segregation. The compacted waste is unfit for any resource recovery or safe disposal. Use of compactors on mixed waste makes it almost impossible to extract the recyclable dry waste such as plastics, metal, paper and cardboard from the mixture. The compression of wet waste in the mixture releases leachate (a black foul-smelling liquid) that is difficult to dispose. Leachate percolates into the soil and contaminates groundwater. When it drains off into the sewer system, it overloads the sewage treatment plants.

After the compacted waste is transported and dumped, the lack of aeration at the site results in the decomposing wet waste generating methane, a potent greenhouse gas that causes global warming. As waste pickers routinely light fires at landfill sites to extract scrap metal, the presence of methane gas stokes the fire further, and the presence of PVC plastic in the compacted waste means that the burning of plastics would release carcinogenic dioxins and furans.

A much smarter alternative for municipalities under Smart Cities Mission would be to promote decentralised centres for wet waste, tie-up with local *kabadiwalas* or NGOs for recyclable dry waste, and work on safe disposal of the rest. The savings from eliminating costly secondary transport can easily fund the construction and operation of decentralised centres for the processing of wet and dry waste.

There was a similar pushback on alternatives to landfilling when Municipal Solid Waste Rules 2000 were notified. Almitra Patel, a member of the Supreme Court Committee which provided the basis for those Rules, recalls a lecture tour by a manager of New York’s largest landfill at the time to promote landfilling in India. Today, New York plans near-zero waste to landfill by 2030, which is in line with our Rules 2000. The difference is that they are working towards it, while we are far from enforcing the Rules.

# Steering the right rules

**RC  
ACHARYA**

Former Member Railway Board. Views are personal



India needs a policy of surprise checks and frequent monitoring for road safety, not a knee-jerk reaction

**R**ECENTLY, I WAS witness to an unusual sight somewhere in Germany. It was midnight, dead of winter, with no other vehicle or soul in sight. For a forlorn traffic signal, a passenger car with a lone driver came to a halt, waiting patiently for the light to turn green; and then moved on.

Doing the right thing when no one is looking is a measure of self-discipline which is, perhaps, inculcated from the very young age in the more developed nations. And, is sadly lacking in most of the underdeveloped countries, including India.

In many road accidents, it is often the person behind the steering wheel who is responsible for the mishap. Eager to beat the light, throwing caution to the winds they are in a mad rush to reach the destination, often with scores of other vehicles trying to do the same. The name of the game is to flout the law.

Not being in possession of vehicle registration, car insurance, driving license, etc. have no bearing on preventing a road accident, if the driver is prone to rash and irresponsible driving. Seat belt or a helmet on a two-wheeler would only save her from serious injury or possibly death but not prevent an accident.

The rot in our system starts when a driver’s license is issued. There are 1157 RTO (Road Transport Offices) in 31 States, of which 1121 are enabled. These grant driving licenses based on certification of a driving school. They seldom conduct an actual test and are often persuaded by the omnipresent tout.

Imposing heavy fines for peripheral reasons, whereas it is the man behind the wheels who is the main culprit makes little sense. The person is never caught or fined for rash or dangerous driving since traffic police seldom monitor such aberrations in driving habits.

The traffic police do carry out ‘radar’ speed checks for over speeding, but such exercises are few and far between. It is assumed that once a driving license has been issued, the driver is responsible enough to obey all traffic rules and observe ample caution.

In the US, with its heavy reliance on road transport, the process of issuing a driving license is a serious business. Applicants often fail multiple times before they are granted driving licenses.

Though each state has its own set of rules and regulations, generally, the applicant for the learner’s permit has to be above 16 years of age. Some states such as California require the applicant to complete a driver’s education course. Proof of identity and residency, plus a vision test completes the formality for a learner’s permit. After a learning period of six months, the applicant is eligible to apply for a driver’s license, which requires passing of a written and a driving test. Apart from steep fines for violating rules of the road, repeated offences could end up in revocation of the license.

In India, after getting the driver’s license, the driver mostly concentrates on how to get through the maze of road traffic. Cancellation of a driving license is unheard of as cases of violation of traffic rules seldom enter a central database.

The obsession for taking risks is seldom detected or curbed unless the traffic police resort to traffic monitoring. Drunk driving, defective headlights and tail lamps, driving when sleep-deprived, are a few more causes leading to road accidents.

India needs a policy of surprise checks and frequent monitoring, not a knee-jerk reaction of putting road barriers, going through a round of verification of documents and levying steep fines.

**In the US, with its heavy reliance on road transport, the process of issuing a driving license is a serious business. Applicants often fail multiple times before they are granted driving licenses**

**H**AVING MET WITH North Korean leader Kim Jong-un three times—all to great fanfare—US President Donald Trump may still believe that denuclearisation is underway in the Hermit Kingdom. If so, he is probably the only one who does, given North Korea’s frequent missile tests and upgrades to its weapons.

It is anyone’s guess what the Trump administration’s North Korea policy will look like in a year, but for now, both sides seem to have what they want. Trump has wrangled a loose stalemate that could hold through the November 2020 US presidential election, and Kim has secured a suspension of US-South Korean military exercises, in exchange for freezing his nuclear tests.

The summits with Kim never should have led to the current “freeze for freeze” arrangement, which weakens the US-South Korea alliance. Yet when first meeting Kim in Singapore in June 2018, Trump decided simply to follow his instincts. He has been taking US policy on North Korea in the wrong direction ever since.

Thinking like a New York real-estate developer, Trump assumed that North Korea wanted economic relief. But he also listened carefully to Kim’s explanation of why North Korea pursued nuclear weapons in the first place: to deter a supposedly hostile United States from attacking it. If Trump found this argument plausible, that may be because his own national security adviser, John Bolton, is a living, breathing

# Trump’s North Korean appeasement

Trump might like the world to think that he is maintaining strategic patience, but it is now clear that his administration’s policy is one of appeasement

**CHRISTOPHER R  
HILL**

Former US Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia

validation of North Korea fears. Given Bolton’s blood-curdling scenarios, Trump could hardly blame Kim for being worried.

And so, at the press conference following the Singapore summit, Trump openly considered curtailing “expensive” US-South Korean military exercises, which he described using Kim’s own terminology (“wargames”). Between freezing joint exercises and making his always eager secretary of state, Mike Pompeo, available for peace-treaty negotiations, Trump assumed that he had addressed North Korea’s chronic trust issues. He need only maintain his avuncular relationship with Kim, and he

would be a shoo-in for the Nobel Peace Prize. It has now been 15 months, and the North Korean regime is still not even remotely interested in considering denuclearisation. Trump’s team—if one can call it that—is in disarray, cognizant of the imminent policy failure, but reluctant to admit that their dear leader may be in over his head. Steve Biegun, the US Special Representative for North Korea, continues to consult with relevant third parties, maintaining the fiction that denuclearisation is still on the table. But he does not appear to be receiving any support from Bolton or Trump, the latter having convinced himself



that progress depends on his personal intervention.

The North Koreans would agree with Trump on that, albeit not for the same reasons. Unlike Biegun, Pompeo, or Bolton—all of whom speak of denuclearisation with a sense of urgency—Trump seems to agree with the North Koreans that there is plenty of time. After all, he is primarily concerned with protecting his signature diplomatic achievement until November 2020. Accordingly, he need only maintain the appearance of progress through periodic feel-good summits.

Moreover, the Trump administration

and the Kim regime share a disinterest in developing a broader diplomatic architecture. North Korea has always preferred a bilateral process with the US, because that format enhances its own prestige, and, unlike the moribund six-party talks, avoids the appearance that it is being ganged up on. To be sure, dealing directly with Trump can be risky (he did, after all, walk out of the Hanoi summit in February). But, overall, the process of summits and love letters has created a warm relationship between Kim and Trump, thereby softening the latter’s position.

The US, meanwhile, has been happy to

brief interested third countries on the process, while keeping them on the sidelines and out of the negotiating room. Other members of the six-party process—South Korea, Japan, Russia, and China—have seen little reason to believe that progress is at hand. But they might as well let the US shoulder the burden and reputational risks of managing North Korea on its own.

There is never any guarantee that the North Koreans will play the role set for them. As matters stand, the benefits of the current stalemate probably exceed the costs of the sanctions regime, which has grown increasingly leaky. But the intensity of the North Koreans’ response to any mention of US-South Korean exercises suggests that they may see an opportunity in the current standoff—and in this president—to undermine US regional engagement more broadly.

The Kim regime’s recent missile tests and behavior toward South Korea may be meant as a warning to Trump. If so, the message is clear: unless you placate us, we will cause problems for you before November 2020.

Trump might like the world to think that he is maintaining strategic patience with respect to North Korea. But it is now clear that his administration’s policy is one of appeasement. Whether it will work for him remains to be seen. November 2020 is still a long way off.

*Project Syndicate, 2019.  
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