

समाचार पत्रों से चयित अंश Newspapers Clippings

दैनिक सामयिक अभिज्ञता सेवा
A daily Current Awareness Service

Vol. 42 No. 135 17 July 2017



रक्षा विज्ञान पुस्तकालय
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M-777 howitzers being tested in Pokhran

India had last procured howitzers in the mid-1980s from Swedish defence major Bofors.

The artillery

- 3 more of these 155-mm guns will be supplied to the Army in Sept. 2018
- Induction will commence from March 2019 with five guns per month till the complete consignment is received

New Delhi: Two pieces of brand new M-777 A-2 howitzers are being test-fired in Rajasthan's Pokhran desert — the site of India's nuclear tests to collate and determine critical data like trajectory, speed and frequency of fire, an Army official has said on condition of anonymity. "The trials have been going on smoothly and data is being collected for formation of the firing table," the official added.

The two BAE Systems-manufactured howitzers are the first of a consignment of 25 guns which are being bought from the US in a fly-away condition while another 120 will be manufactured by BAE Systems in India in partnership with Mahindra Defence. The trials of the two guns will continue till September for formation of the "firing table" which is a major aspect of the overall induction process.

Three more of these 155-mm guns will be supplied to the Army in September 2018. Thereafter, induction will commence from March 2019 with five guns per month till the complete consignment is received by mid-2021.

With a maximum strike range of at least 30 km, the M-777 will fulfill a critical requirement for Mountain Strike Corps being especially raised for the Indo-China border in the higher and rugged eastern Himalayas in Arunachal Pradesh and in Ladakh. The Army needs the howitzers considering the evolving regional security scenario. India had last procured howitzers in the mid-1980s from Swedish defence major Bofors.

The alleged pay-offs in the deal and its subsequent political ramifications had severely crippled the Indian Army's procurement of artillery guns. India had struck a government-to-government deal with the US last November for supply of the 145 howitzers at a cost of nearly Rs 5,100 crore.

At just 4,200 kg and capable of being transported by helicopters to the place of deployment in remote and very high-altitude areas, the cannon, made of an alloy of titanium and aluminium, is much more sophisticated than the Bofors which had to be taken in parts to the higher reaches and assembled therein. The lightweight and mobility allows for easier "shoot and scoot" capability.



Made-in-India warship to be largest in Lankan navy's fleet

New Delhi: The Sri Lankan Navy is on the verge of commissioning its largest warship, which has been built in India under a ₹1,000-crore contract inked four years ago for two such vessels.

The manufacturer, state-owned Goa Shipyard Limited (GSL), will deliver the first offshore patrol vessel to the Sri Lankan Navy at a ceremony at the yard on July 22.

The 105-metre long warship, with a displacement of around 2,400 tonnes, is expected to be commissioned into the Sri Lankan Navy on August 2.

"It will be the largest warship to be operated by the Sri Lankan Navy. It is also the largest warship to be exported by an Indian shipyard. The step will deepen naval ties between the two countries," Rear Admiral Shekhar Mital told HT from Goa.

The shipyard has beaten the deadline for delivering the warship because of which the Sri Lankan Navy will induct the vessel almost three months ahead of the scheduled delivery. Sri Lanka will get the second warship in February 2018, again three months ahead of schedule.

Such patrol vessels carry out several roles including fleet support operations, maritime surveillance, defence of offshore installations and escorting high value ships.

Capable of reaching a top speed of 25 knots, the vessels have been designed to accommodate a helicopter on their flight decks. The shipyard will also deliver a fast patrol vessel to Mauritius on August 9, the 14th such vessel to be delivered to that country during the last two years.



Mon, 17 July, 2017

Malabar naval spectacle sends a strategic signal

The F/A-18 super hornet fighter jets line up along the 4.5-acre flight deck of the 98,000-tonne displacement US navy aircraft carrier USS Nimitz in the Bay of Bengal. The ship is sailing about a hundred nautical miles off the coast of Chennai.

One after the other, a dozen aircraft are catapulted into the sky in under two minutes each. The aim is to dominate the skies as the P-8 A and P 8 I Poseidon aircraft of the US and Indian navies carry out long-range maritime reconnaissance and antisubmarine warfare operations to dominate the seas. 21 ships, including two submarines and over 100 aircraft and helicopters of the US, Japan and Indian navies are currently carrying out the most complex naval exercise in the Bay of Bengal in an aim to hunt down enemy submarines.

“This is the most complex exercise undertaken by the three navies together.

INS Vikramaditya, India’s aircraft carrier with its MiG-29 K aircraft and P 8 I reconnaissance aircraft are participating in this exercise for the first time. The Japanese maritime defence force has also sent its most potent weapon platform JS Izumo with nine anti-submarine warfare helicopters for the first time.

“The US Navy has this aircraft carrier, LA class submarine, destroyers and cruisers, fighter aircraft, helicopters and P 8 A for joint submarine hunting and sea domination exercise,” says a top officer participating as an observer. Though on record officers of the three countries insist the operations are all about interoperability and jointmanship to work together from humanitarian aid disaster relief to anti-piracy, scratch beneath the surface they admit the exercise is an attempt to send out a signal to an increasingly belligerent China. The aim is to checkmate China.

“The exercise is designed to advance military to military coordination and capacity to plan and execute tactical operations in multinational environment.

There is a live firing gunnery exercises, helicopter cross deck operations and anti submarine warfare,” says Rear Admiral William Byrne, Commander of the US CarMalabar naval spectacle sends a strategic signal rier Strike Group. The message, to China, he insists is the same as to the rest of the world and that is to follow international norms. The Indian Navy is in the market hunting for anti-submarine warfare helicopters and on display are the capabilities of the MH 60 R ASW helicopters. The Chinese navy submarines are increasingly lurking in the Indian ocean region.

“We need better technology and more platforms to keep up with the Dragon’s every increasing footprint. This exercise is a step in the right direction,” he adds. As the navies refine their interoperability, the message is not lost. Today the three powerful maritime forces are operating in the Indian ocean region. Tomorrow, if required the three navies along with their allies can also operate across the high seas – from north Arabian Sea to the South China sea.

Mon, 17 July, 2017

Guardian UAV deal with U.S. still a work in progress

By Dinakar Peri

Defence sources say New Delhi is evaluating options

An American approval for the sale of 22 Guardian maritime surveillance has come India's way, but defence sources say the actual deal is a long way off as New Delhi is evaluating the options available.

"They gave a willingness. We have to look at the options as we have specific requirements. There are a few options available. This specific issue is on the table now. We got the offer and we will look into it," a senior defence official told *The Hindu*.

Another official said government-to-government discussions were under way but declined to put any timeline as to when it could be concluded. There was much speculation that the deal, likely between \$2-2.5 billion, would be announced during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Washington last month. However, while there was no such announcement, the U.S.-India joint statement issued at the end of the visit said Washington had "offered for India's consideration the sale of Sea Guardian Unmanned Aerial Systems" which would enhance India's capabilities and promote shared security interests.

"Given the Sea Guardian's capabilities, such a U.S. response to the Indian Navy's request demonstrates a major change in U.S. policy as this type of aircraft capability is only exported to a very select few of America's closest defence partners. This represents tangible implementation of U.S. Congress' designation of India as a Major Defence Partner," Dr. Vivek Lall, Chief Executive, U.S. and International Strategic Development, General Atomics said.

Boosting capabilities - The Navy currently operates Israeli Medium Altitude Long Endurance (MALE) UAVs and is keen on acquiring High Altitude Long Endurance (HALE) to augment its maritime surveillance capabilities. The other option is to go for Israeli HALE drones, which India is quite familiar with. Last year, the Navy asked General Atomics for the details of the Guardian, following which company officials made presentations on its capabilities.



Mon, 17 July, 2017

India, US to collectively train African military peacekeeping personnel

In a trilateral cooperation initiative, India and the US will conduct a training programme for military personnel from African nations, who in turn will instruct peacekeeping forces in their respective countries, a senior MEA official said today.

The two-week course, starting tomorrow, will see senior military officers from 34 African nations participating in the training session, said Rudendra Tandon, joint secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs.

These military officers will in turn train personnel in their respective countries.

This is the second year that India has organised such a training session for the African nations, which includes countries like Ghana, Malawi, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone.

“The programme is in sync with what Prime Minister Narendra Modi said at the United Nations General Assembly in 2015 - it is to share our rich experience in the peacekeeping missions,” Tandon said.

He noted that the training programme is also a part of the military collaboration between India and the US.

India is one of the major contributors to the United Nations Peacekeeping Force (UNPK) and a sizable chunk of its troops are deployed in conflict-hit countries like Congo and South Sudan. The Indian Army also has a dedicated training programme for its soldiers before they embark on a peacekeeping mission.



Mon, 17 July, 2017

Deceiving people on defence deals

It Speaks for the narcissism enveloping the country when a news item in a national TV website declares “To boost defence ties with India, US House clears over \$600 billion (~38.5 lakh crore) Bill”. The reference is to the passage of the humongous US defence budget by the lower House of Representatives. It needs to be passed by the upper house, the Senate, before going to the President to be signed into law.

Mere amendment

One would imagine from the headline that the entire purpose of the legislation is to promote India-US relations. But the actual fact is that the India part is just in the form of an amendment moved by Indian-American Congressman Ami Bera, tacked on to the Bill, with no financial implications at all. All it calls for is that the US State and Defence departments develop a strategy for advancing defence cooperation between India and the US within 180 days of the Bill becoming law.

Two other amendments by Dana Rohrabacher and Tom Poe call for the US secretary of defense to certify, prior to making reimbursements to Pakistan, which could be of the order of \$400 million (~2,57,000 lakh) per annum, that Islamabad is taking demonstrable steps to take on the Haqqani network and ensure security of supply convoys going to Afghanistan. These amendments gather one-day headlines and are thereafter ignored. What the final shape of the US defence budget Bill will be can only be determined after the Senate passes its version and the two are reconciled. These amendments may simply fall off the map.

Even if they get through, which it is likely they will, they mean little. For India, a legislative roadmap, minus any financial or legal commitment means little. For Pakistan, there is a good case to argue that the amendments actually enable US aid, not block it. No legislative directive can alter the realpolitik with which a US Administration has to deal with Pakistan. And neither, despite its fulminations about Pakistani “betrayal” can it alter Islamabad’s strategic calculus.

Past instances

We have been there before. In 1985, in a similar move to stop Pakistan from developing nuclear weapons, the Pressler Amendment was passed. It demanded an annual certification from the US President that Pakistan “does not have nuclear weapons.” Despite evidence to the contrary, the US President routinely gave the certification because US was locked into a proxy war against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. Only after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1990 did the US President refuse his certification.

By that time it was way too late. Looked at carefully, the Pressler Amendment was actually an amendment to enable the US to give Pakistan aid, not to block it. If the US Congress really feels strongly about Pakistani betrayal and so on, they can simply pass an amendment to block aid to Pakistan. All this business about certification is eyewash. Actually, to go by the law, Pakistan remains a Major Non-NATO Ally, a legal category involving some 17 countries which gives them a range of benefits.

They can establish cooperative projects with the US Defense Department for R&D, get priority delivery of US surplus equipment, get finance, loans of equipment and materials to lease certain equipment and so on.

Future hope

Israel is an MNNA, but it is specially privileged through a US-Israel Partnership Act that allows the United States to share and exchange research technology, intelligence, information, equipment and personnel. Israel's status is unique and it is designated as a "major strategic partner." Since 2016, India has been designated as a "major defence partner" of the US.

So while in statements, the US has said that it will treat India "at a level at par with that of the United States' closest allies and partners," the only legislative commitment we have is through Ami Bera's amendment in this year's Defense Department bill which calls on the Pentagon and State Department to develop an India strategy. No doubt, we will get there someday, but not right now.

The "major defence partner" designation was mentioned in the 2016 budget and formally conferred by the Obama Administration a month before it left office. The new Trump Administration has yet to reveal its hand on South Asia. For the past several months the US national security adviser H R McMaster is reviewing the US South Asia policy which includes issues relating to India, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The review has been delayed, but you can be sure, its focus will not be India, but Afghanistan and Pakistan. As for India, relations are on an even track and it is unlikely that there will be any dramatic change in any new US policy towards the region. The writer is a contributing editor, Mail Today and Distinguished Fellow, Observer Research Foundation



Mon, 17 July, 2017

The Arms of Others

In the defence sector, India's import fixation is taking a toll

By Bharat Karnad

As on some of his earlier foreign trips, Prime Minister Narendra Modi promised Israel, the host country, rich contracts for military hardware, in this case for joint development of medium range and long range surface-to-air missiles (MRSAMs and LRSAMs), and for off-the-shelf purchase of the Israeli Spyder Quick Reaction SAM (QRSAM) for the army.

Why do these deals stick in the throat? The Modi government approved them earlier this year even though it knew the indigenous QRSAM, for instance, was on track and would be tested soon. Both its first test firing on June 4 and the second, pointedly, on July 3, the day Modi left for Israel, went off without a hitch. A third successful test-firing and this locally made missile would be ready for series production and induction. Acting Defence Minister Arun Jaitley praised DRDO for the successful tests, but didn't take the next, logical, step — scrapping the contract for the Spyder that would have saved the country in excess of \$2-3 billion, and given a fillip to the local armaments design and development efforts at the heart of Modi's flagship Make in India programme.

There was no need to go to Israel for 500 units each of MRSAMs and LRSAMs either. The Akash short range missile is already operational with the Indian Air Force. True, this missile's performance is deficient owing to a sub-par Russian radar seeker, but there's little else wrong with it. So, a sensible solution would have been for the indigenous Akash project to be tasked with developing scaled-up medium and long range versions of the missile within the timeline given to the Israelis. A more narrowly defined deal with Tel Aviv to co-develop a radar-seeker for the Akash missiles could then have been signed at a fraction of the \$5-7 billion cost of MRSAM-LRSAM.

The Israeli contracts to win goodwill are like the PM's announcement in April 2015 in Paris to buy 36 Rafale combat aircraft. These are too few in number to have any sustained impact in war and too costly not to divert

scarce funds from the Tejas Light Combat Aircraft (LCA), which is technologically the same as the 4.5 generation Rafale. But because it is an Indian design, it can spawn a whole bunch of air force and naval variants in the future.

India's purchase of the Rafale prevented the French company, Dassault Avions, from closing down its combat aircraft development complex, because until then no country had bought this inordinately expensive fighter plane. The Indian contract will fetch France Rs 1,750 crore per Rafale, for a minimum payout by India of Rs 63,000 crore.

Incidentally, this is about the cost of raising 17 Corps, the army's first large offensive mountain warfare formation which Jaitley, wearing his finance minister's hat, had earlier rejected as unaffordable. Now the Chinese are acting up in the Doklam area and India, as ever, is bereft of forces to take the fight to the PLA on the Tibetan Plateau.

And while in Washington, Modi promised US President Donald J. Trump consideration of the 1970s vintage F-16 fighter plane for assembly in India. Lockheed Martin will make billions of dollars from shifting the worn out F-16 production line to India. The F-16 has no realistic chance if the IAF has any say in the decision, but the Saab Gripen is likely to get in as the single engine aircraft choice of the IAF, again at the expense of the Tejas LCA.

Modi is not the first prime minister to be profligate with the country's resources. In 1995-96, the Congress PM, P.V. Narasimha Rao, rescued the Sukhoi Bureau and manufacturing plant in Irkutsk from shuttering with a generous subvention of Rs 6,000 crore. In return, he did not contractually demand Intellectual Property Rights for the Su-30 technologies developed there, or that Sukhoi share the design work load with Indian aircraft designers in the Aeronautical Development Agency in Bangalore, who created the LCA, or that technology be fully transferred, including source codes, to Indian agencies, or anything else remotely to advance India's defence industrial capability.

Between an imports-fixated Indian military and an Indian government that seems incapable of thinking straight, the country is fated to remain an arms dependency. Karnad is professor for National Security Studies at the Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi, and author most recently of 'Why India is Not a Great Power (Yet)

The logo for The Economic Times newspaper, featuring the text "THE ECONOMIC TIMES" in a large, bold, serif font. Above the text, the website address "WWW.ECONOMICTIMES.COM" is written in a smaller, red font.

Mon, 17 July, 2017

Army Chief Analysing Jadhav's Plea for Mercy: Pak

Pakistan Army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa is 'analysing' the evidence against Indian national Kulbhushan Jadhav, sentenced to death by a military court, and will decide his appeal on merit, the Army said here on Sunday.

Jadhav, 46, filed a mercy petition before Bajwa last month, according to an Inter-Services Public Relations statement issued on June 22. The statement said that the former Indian Navy officer had filed the petition after the Military Appellate Court rejected his appeal.

Pakistan Army spokesman Asif Ghafoor has told reporters that Bajwa was "analysing the evidence against Jadhav. The Army chief will decide Jadhav's appeal on merit." Jadhav is eligible to appeal for clemency to the Army chief under Pakistan's law, and if his plea is rejected, he can subsequently appeal the Pakistan president for the same. He was sentenced to death by a Pakistani military court in April for his alleged involvement in espionage and terrorist activities.

The International Court of Justice in The Hague in May halted his execution on India's appeal. Pakistan has repeatedly denied India consular access to Jadhav in violation of the Vienna Convention.

Panama-Hit Sharif Gives Army Room to Upend Ties with Delhi

By Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury

Delhi giving less time to Islamabad and focusing instead on Beijing the guarantor of Pakistan's security

Pakistan, which faces elections in a year, has plunged into yet another political crisis, giving the all-powerful army the upper hand. That's having an impact on Islamabad's policy towards neighbours India and Afghanistan. It is no secret that the Pakistan army shapes the country's policy toward Delhi and Kabul and further deterioration in Indo-Pak ties cannot be ruled out under the institution gaining strength amid a weakening political class. Delhi though has decided to devote less diplomatic capital to Islamabad and focus instead on Beijing the guarantor of Pakistan's security. Sharif 's facing the threat of corruption investigations following the publication of the Panama Papers.

What would have pleased India is the US House of Representatives on Friday voting for three legislative amendments to impose tougher conditions on the reimbursement of defence funding to Pakistan, making it conditional on Islamabad showing satisfactory progress in the fight against terrorism. The conditions are related to Pakistan's support to terrorists and terror outfits, about which several top US officials and lawmakers have repeatedly expressed concern in the past. All the three legislative amendments to the \$651-billion National Defence Authorisation Act (NDAA)+2018 were adopted by voice vote.

What is needed now is a tougher approach by the US and other members of the international community to walk the talk in dealing with the Pakistan army, which has been instrumental in abetting and sponsoring anti-India and anti-Afghan terror groups for decades. Kashmir remains an unfinished task since 1947 and the Pakistan army still seeks revenge for the defeat it suffered in 1971. The proxy war that was launched in the early 1990s continues without a break notwithstanding the setback suffered by Pakistan in 1999. Embattled Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif 's efforts to improve ties with the Narendra Modi government suffered a setback in January 2016. Further weakening of his position could mean tougher anti-India posturing by the army with fears of increased tension along the Line of Control and terror plots.

The Pakistan army will have a free hand amid political instability and confusion, according to analysts. Jihadi forces could get further emboldened and China prefers to deal with stable situations with increasing instability in the backdrop of the mega China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project. According to one expert, tensions are being made to increase to give the Pakistan army an edge.

But Sharif is a survivor and not known for sticking to the high moral ground as throughout his political career there have been conflicts of interest on several occasions but his businesses have continued to flourish. There is little sign that he has lost support in Punjab province despite Panamagate. What is clear is that Pakistan has never been as polarised and divided except for the 24 years when East Pakistan existed.

The anger in both Sharif 's Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) and Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf parties add up to a volatile mix that can blow up when the Supreme Court announces its verdict on the Panama matter. Already, Sharif 's PML-N has rejected the findings of the joint investigation team (JIT). Pakistan's political class, largely feudal and corrupt, nurses a grudge that they are harassed while generals and judges go scot free.

For India, strengthening of the Pakistani political class remains a pipedream despite almost a decade of civilian rule. Every civilian government in Pakistan has been undermined by its own domestic performance and the army's overarching presence in governance. The lack of viable interlocutors within Pakistan has often limited India's options in the neighbouring country and therefore it is in Delhi interest to have limited expectations given the ambitions of the Pakistani army.

एक सेकंड में एक मील तय करेगी ये हाइपरसोनिक मिसाइल



अमेरिका ने ऑस्ट्रेलिया के साथ मिलकर दुनिया की सबसे तेज हाइपरसोनिक एयरक्राफ्ट मिसाइल का परीक्षण किया है। इसकी रफ्तार आवाज की गति से पांच गुना अधिक है। हाइपरसोनिक इंटरनेशनल फ्लाइट रिसर्च एक्सपेरिमेंटेशन नामक इस परियोजना की शुरुआत आठ साल पहले हुई थी। परियोजना पूरी होने के चरण में है।

<p>साथ आए संस्थान</p> <p>परियोजना में अमेरिकी वायुसेना, बोइंग, ऑस्ट्रेलिया का रक्षा विज्ञान व तकनीक विभाग, ऑस्ट्रेलिया की बीएई सिस्टम्स और यूनिवर्सिटी ऑफ क्वींसलैंड शामिल हैं।</p>	<p>पता लगाना मुश्किल</p> <p>कई बैलिस्टिक मिसाइल इससे भी तेज गति से उड़ सकती हैं लेकिन ऐसी मिसाइलों का प्रक्षेप पथ उपग्रहों द्वारा आसानी से पता लगाया जा सकता है। पर हाइपरसोनिक मिसाइल का पता लगाना बेहद मुश्किल है।</p>	<p>बदल सकती है रास्ता</p> <p>यह हाइपरसोनिक मिसाइल बीच रास्ते में अपनी दिशा बदल सकती है। इस वजह से इसे रोक पाना बेहद मुश्किल है। साथ ही यह बेहद घातक भी है।</p>	<p>3,836-7,700</p> <p>मील प्रतिघंटा : रफ्तार</p> <p>1,000</p> <p>मील : 17 मिनट में तय की जाने वाली दूरी</p>
<p>पूरा हुआ परीक्षण</p> <p>इस एयरक्राफ्ट मिसाइल का परीक्षण दक्षिण ऑस्ट्रेलिया की वूमैरा परीक्षण रेंज में किया गया। यह गत 12 जुलाई को पूरा हुआ। यह परीक्षण सबसे जटिल और मुश्किल था।</p>	<p>बढ़ेगी अमेरिका की ताकत</p> <p>ऐसे हथियारों की बढीलत अमेरिका उत्तर कोरिया जैसे अपने दुश्मनों को पलक झपकते ही निशाना बनाने में सक्षम होगा। वे एयरक्राफ्ट मिसाइल का पता तक नहीं लगा पाएंगे।</p>	<p>5.4</p> <p>करोड़ डॉलर : परियोजना की लागत</p>	

THE ASIAN AGE

How Trump is being tested by North Korea and China

By Skand Tayal

Trump has been very conscious of North Korea since 2013 and has tweeted about it more than 50 times in various contexts.

1946 born President Donald Trump may not recall the devastating Korean War (1950-53), but the Korean Peninsula has been an important US bastion to check the spread of unfriendly powers in East Asia since the end of the Second World War. The declared ideological enemy of the US in the post-war era was communism and the major adversaries were the then Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China. This confrontation was played out first on the Korean Peninsula and later in India-China devastating these geographies. The cost to the United States in blood and treasure had also been high with questionable outcome.

The roots of the perceived intransigence of North Korea go deep into the history to the US-USSR bargain in 1945 leading to first de facto and late de jure division of the hapless Korean Peninsula.

The war-weary US soldiers of the Pacific theatre entered the Korean War in 1950, nursing a deep-seated racial hatred of the "yellow races". Their treatment of North Koreans was brutal, inhuman and often sadistic. North Korean regimes have kept these bitter memories alive and have brainwashed their population to treat the US as an implacable enemy.

This consciously sustained paranoia against the US has been cleverly leveraged to manipulate the unfortunate North Korean masses and deny them any freedom or liberty to ensure dynastic succession.

Enough has been written regarding the motivation for the relentless quest of the Kims for nuclear weapons and delivery system as a shield against any future US misadventure against North Korea. But what about President Trump's perception of North Korea? Does a nuclear North Korea pose a real threat to the US?

Since the Clinton era in the 1990s, successive US Presidents have followed different policies to contain, check and reverse the North Korean nuclear programme but have utterly failed. What is President Trump likely to do?

Mr Trump has been very conscious of North Korea since 2013 and has tweeted about it more than 50 times in various contexts. Mr Trump's first reference to North Korea was in March 2013 when basketball star Dennis Rodman, who had appeared on Mr Trump's *The Apprentice*, visited North Korea and presented a copy of Mr Trump's book *Art of the Deal* to North Korea's sports minister.

But in 2014, Mr Trump tore into Rodman for suggesting that he wanted to accompany Rodman to North Korea and tweeted: "Crazy Dennis Rodman is saying I wanted to go to North Korea with him. Never discussed, no interest, last place on earth I want to go."

Businessman Trump also followed US policy towards North Korea and exhorted former President Barack Obama in a tweet in April 2013. "Mr President, it is time to lead on the Korean crisis. Make a statement from the Rose Garden and send a strong message to the man child." This insulting referenced to Kim Jong-un would definitely have been noted by Pyongyang.

Mr Trump did not tweet about North Korea in 2015, but made it an issue in his presidential campaign to attack Mr Obama and presidential candidate Hillary Clinton in 2016. For instance, in 2016 after September 9 nuclear test by the North Koreans, he tweeted: "Russia has more war heads than ever, N. Korea is testing nukes, and Iran got a sweetheart deal to keep theirs. Thanks, Hillary Clinton." He followed up in October 2016 and tweeted that Ms Clinton was weak on North Korea.

After assuming office, President Trump had tweeted about North Korea 17 times till July 4. After a missile launch, Mr Trump tweeted on March 17: "North Korea is behaving very badly. They have been playing the United States for years. China has done little to help."

Thus, Mr Trump rightly and publicly identified that China was playing a double game and was not sincere in curtailing North Korea's nuclear ambitions. On April 13, 2017, he tweeted that he had "great confidence" in China's ability to rein in North Korea but left open the possibility that the US could act alone if China failed to do so. He leaned on China more by tweeting on April 21 that, "China is very much the economic lifeline to North Korea. So while, nothing is easy, if they want to solve the North Korean problem, they will."

President Trump continued to place his confidence in China's role and tweeted on May 29 after a North Korean missile launch: "North Korea has shown a great disrespect for their neighbour China, by shooting off yet another ballistic missile... but China is trying hard."

President Trump shared his disappointment with China in a tweet on June 21, "While I greatly appreciate the efforts of President Xi and China to help with North Korea, it has not worked out. At least I know China tried."

President Trump's misplaced expectations from China were punctured after the July 4 launch of an alleged intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) by North Korea. This was a capacity, Mr Trump had repeatedly asserted that North Korea would not be allowed to possess. He tweeted that it was "hard to believe South Korea and Japan will put up with this much longer" and added, "Perhaps China will put a heavy move on North Korea and end this nonsense once and for all." This tweet again signalled China to take some decisive steps against North Korea to halt its missile programme.

At his summit with President Xi Jinping at Mar-a-Lago on April 7, Mr Trump had offered a deal to China to link its massive exports to the US to some real outcome to check North Korean strategic ambitions. Following

this course of action, Mr Trump tweeted twice on July 5. Without naming China he tweeted: “The US made some of the worst trade deals in world history. Why should we continue these deals with countries that do not help us?”

As the matter came before the UNSC and after talking to US Permanent Representative Nikki Haley, Mr Trump tweeted: “Trade between China and North Korea grew almost 40 per cent in the first quarter. So much for China working with us — but we had to give it a try.”

China continues to import garments, minerals, etc., from North Korea and almost all the North Korean imports, including petrol and fuel oil are from China.

It is a fact that UN sanctions against Iran had been much more severe as compared to those against North Korea because of the protective umbrella provided by China.

Ms Haley threw an open challenge to China on July 5 when she stated in the Security Council, “There are countries that are allowing, even encouraging, trade with North Korea in violation of UNSC resolutions. Such countries would also like to continue their trade agreements with the United States. That is not going to happen.” Ms Haley also warned both China and Russia against vetoing any resolution imposing stronger sanctions against North Korea.

In this background, fireworks were expected in the meeting between the US and Chinese Presidents when they met at Hamburg for the G-20 summit. What actually transpired has not yet come into the public domain but Mr Trump reportedly told Mr Xi: “I appreciate the things that you have done relative to the very substantive problem that we all face in North Korea.”

President Trump faces a serious challenge to his credibility. Both North Korea and its patron China have defied US entreaties with impunity. In the neighbourhood, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has been weakened after his party’s loss in the Tokyo city elections. And new South Korean President Moon Jae-in advocates a softer and more conciliatory policy towards North Korea. In an attempt to defuse tensions, South Korean intelligence agency has announced that the July 4 North Korean missile launch was of an IRBM and not ICBM, thus incapable of reaching the US mainland.

The critical actor in this power play is China. Unless the US puts unacceptable pressure on China, North Korea would continue on the path of acquiring a strategic deterrent against the US. It is now for President Trump to take a call whether China is also “playing” the US?

The writer has served as India’s ambassador to Uzbekistan and South Korea



Mon, 17 July, 2017

Bengal’s medicinal plants face threat

By Shiv Sahay Singh

Forest Department has documented 581 of these species in a unique 600-page-volume

The West Bengal Forest Department on Friday came out with a unique publication that provides details on 581 species of medicinal plants found across different regions of south Bengal.

The plants are being conserved in situ, that is, where the plants are naturally found, at four medicinal plant conservation areas (MPCA) across south Bengal — Bonnie Camp MPCA South 24 Parganas district, Kakrajhore MPCA at Janagal Mahal in the south-western part of the State, Garh Panchkot MPCA in the Panchet foothills in the Purulia district, and Susinia MPCA located in Bankura near Raghunathpur.

Collections from two ex-situ (conserving in an area where the plants were not originally found) conservation sites at the Amlachati Medicinal Plant Garden about 20 km from Jhargram town and the Digha Medicinal Plant Garden at the Purba Medinipur district have also been included in the 600-page book titled *Medicinal Plant Resources of South Bengal*.

Out of 20,000 medicinal plants listed by the World Health Organisation (WHO), India's contribution is about 5,000 species. "The publication lists 581 species, which means that one of every 10 species of medicinal plants found in India have been listed in the book," Santhosha G. R., Divisional Forest Officer, Midnapur Silviculture Division, told *The Hindu*.

Brink of extinction - Mr. Santhosha emphasised that increasing use of medicinal plants as raw materials by different pharma companies has pushed many of these species to the brink of extinction.

Stating that the volume will help scientists, foresters, researchers and Ayurveda practitioners, N. K. Pandey, Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, West Bengal, said that the publication is part of ongoing measures taken up by the State Forest Department to conserve medicinal plants.

A large number of plants compiled in the book are from the Amlachati Medicinal Plant Garden, which boasts of the largest collection of medicinal plants in the country, though it is located in a small area comprising of a few hectares of land. The publication lists medicinal plants in alphabetical order as per their scientific names. For instance, it provides details of three species of asparagus, a climber: *Asparagus adscendens*, *Asparagus officinalis* and *Asparagus racemosus*. All three species are found across south Bengal.

According to the authors of the book, while *Asparagus officinalis* is used for the treatment of jaundice and rheumatism, *Asparagus racemosus* is not only used to treat human ailments but also that of cattle, and is sold in the markets of south Bengal by locals.

Significant uses - The roots of a rambling herb *Gloriosa superba* found across south Bengal are poisonous, but they have certain anti-carcinogenic and anti-malarial properties and are widely sought by pharma companies.

The bark of the medium-sized evergreen tree *Saraca asoca* (commonly called Asok tree), which is a threatened tree species classified as 'Vulnerable' on the International Union for the Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) Red List, is used in the treatment of a number of ailments, including heart disease.

One of the authors said that sloth bears are reported to feed on the pulp of the *Cassia fistula* (amaltus) fruit for stomach ailments. The plant also has medicinal properties for treating skin diseases in humans.

"The publication will not only serve as a very important data bank of medicinal plants in the country, but will also generate interest among common people to come forward and conserve medicinal plants by growing them into their home gardens," Mr. Santhosha said.