

## Challenges faced by private schools amid COVID-19

■ SUNIL SHARMA

We are going through tough and unprecedented times. Life seems to have become full of uncertainty. In this scenario, one of the sectors that are most affected is education of students. All is not as it appears to eye.

There are so many things that come to light, once one sits down to contemplate.

The current state of affairs led to a great churning of thoughts in myself, and what arose, as a result, made me pen down this article.

There are majorly four stakeholders in education sector- students, teachers, parents and school management.

The education department is fifth. If one thinks about it, what do they all aspire to? It is not too difficult to guess. All the above stakeholders want nothing but welfare of students. Let us try to examine this in detail:

The sole purpose of parents, school and Education Department is student's welfare.

The Education Department desires to ensure that they provide the best education to every student during pandemic.

The department takes this responsibility by keeping regular checks on schools and ensuring wellbeing of students and parents, especially during ongoing days of crisis.

On the other hand, 99 per cent of schools also aspire to give their best to the students during COVID-19. It is sincerely hoped that after session 2020-21 went online and education of students continued unaffected, parents and society, in general, have started valuing teachers much more than before. Respect for the teaching fraternity appears to have globally increased after last year.

The parents have realised and began appreciating the teachers and their hard work. Hats off to the teachers' community for giving their 100 per cent during these days and are continuing to do it.

On the other hand, parents undoubtedly wish for the welfare of their child.

Therefore is a significant challenge for parents during COVID, especially of younger children.

They are playing the role of a teacher at home. Undeterred by difficulties that arose, they took care of every aspect of their child at home during online classes.

With the grace of the Almighty, we came through these challenges and the academic session 2020-21 came to a close. All good, all done.

Unfortunately, as the second wave of COVID raised its ugly head, schools were forced to go online once again. Since this is now inevitable, there is no point in sitting and crying over the situation.

Once again, the teaching fraternity and the school managements have to tie their belts tighter and rise to the occasion without wasting a single day. What is practical reality staring schools at present? Is it another online session 2021-22?

At the school management's front, it is challenging to provide better facilities to teachers, who have already suffered health-wise, painstakingly having stared at screens to check students' work.

When world was asleep, the teachers had worked hard to prepare online lessons, taught students online and checked students' work - All Screen Time! Much more than any other sector, that too only for welfare of students.

The teachers' welfare is the utmost responsibility of the school, as much as students' welfare - now, more than ever. After all, it is only human to think so, isn't it? All the schools aspire to provide better facilities like computers, uninterrupted internet connection, props, training etc. to teachers to equip them to deliver better education to the students.

A private school's source of income is directly related to fee collected from parents. Even when it has become challenging for schools to collect justified fees from the parents, every private school is still putting their best efforts to take care of students' studies and staff's welfare on priority.

Now the question is, if we all seek the welfare of students, then why there are so many differences amongst parents, schools and Education Department? It seems they are drifting away from each other day by day.

If the system's whole purpose is child's development, then why can't we come on the same platform or one understanding?

It has been my observation for last couple of years that every year in March/ April, the Education Department suddenly gets active.

It starts rolling out notices, especially for private schools, to reduce fee, avoid selling of books etc. - sometimes even threatening to de-recognise the schools.

The pertinent question is that the schools, which put their hard-work and sweat to bring their institutions to the level one can only imagine, what crime they have committed? What kind of environment are we creating? Will it lead to an atmosphere of respect and understanding amongst everyone? Alas! Not at all! It is only and only generating an atmosphere of mistrust in society.

Schools are not terrorist organisations to harm students and community. One shudders to imagine where this wave of distrust and hatred for each other will lead.

It is also seen that a few parents get influenced by the opposing forces in society, which are against private schools. They always claim that private schools are 'Looting'.

It is unfortunate to see such people mushrooming in every city of J&K, and it becomes more ironic when a few innocent parents come into their influence and react to the situation.

From my perspective, it is crucial to understand each other in this pandemic time. Let's stop putting pressure and blame on each other and come to one consensus collectively, which should take care of all stakeholders.

Not with an order, but with respect and understanding - which is very much required but sorely missing from our society. Let us not forget even for a single moment that we adults can deal with our differences in a healthy way - to set a good example before young minds, we care about.

Let us not teach them through our behaviour and attitudes that the issues are resolved with mistrust and force. Instead, let us collectively give them true meaning of values and help them grow up as caring and responsible adult citizens that will take our nation to a better future. Amen.

## Fighting invisible enemy: MoD's response to COVID-19 surge

■ RAJNATH SINGH

The surge of COVID-19 cases during the last 2-3 weeks has resulted in once in a century crisis. Sensing the emergency situation, the whole Government machinery immediately swung into action by mobilizing all possible resources. Along with the efforts put together by the scientific community, health professionals, civil administration, the Armed Forces too have pitched in this battle against an invisible yet deadly enemy. Indian Army, Air Force, Navy, and other organisations of the Ministry of Defence like DG AFMS, DRDO, OFB, DPSU, NCC, Cantonments Boards, etc are engaged to help mitigate the sufferings of the people. Mobilisation of additional health professionals, setting up of new COVID facilities, deployment of IAF transport aircraft and IN Ships to provide logistic support to facilitate the supply of oxygen from friendly foreign countries and within the country and setting up of new oxygen plants are some of the ongoing efforts of the Ministry of Defence.

Emergency Financial Powers Granted: I have directed the Armed Forces to extend all possible assistance to the civil administration to tide over the crisis. People have great faith and trust in the capabilities of the Armed Forces. Emergency Financial Powers were granted to the Armed Forces so that Formation Commanders can establish and operate quarantine facilities/hospitals and undertake procurement/repair of equipment/items/material/stores, besides provisioning of various services and works required to support the ongoing effort against the pandemic. The powers were in addition to the emergency financial powers delegated to Director General Medical Services (Army/Navy/Air Force), head of Medical Branches at Formation/Command Headquarters of Army/Navy/Air Force/Andaman & Nicobar Command and Joint Staff including Command Medical Officers of Navy and Principal Medical Officers of Air Force (Major General and equivalent/Brigadiers and equivalent).

To tide over the immediate requirement of COVID care ready medical facilities Armed Forces Medical Services (AFMS), Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), Defence Public Sector Undertakings (DPSUs) and Cantonment Boards established COVID hospitals/facilities in Delhi, Lucknow, Bengaluru, Patna and more are coming up in other cities as per request of respective state governments. Nearly 750 beds in various Military Hospitals have been set aside for civilian use while the AFMS also dedicated 19 hospitals, over 4,000 beds and 585 ICU units across the country. Base Hospital in Delhi has been converted into a COVID hospital with capacity being increased from around 400 to 1,000 beds.

**DRDO Hospitals:** DRDO has set up a 500-bedded COVID-19 facility each in New Delhi and Lucknow, a 900-bedded hospital in Ahmedabad and converted ESIC Hospital in Patna to COVID hospital with 500 beds. Work is in full swing to set up COVID hospitals at Muzaffarpur and Varanasi. DRDO is also offering technical support to state governments in setting up temporary COVID hospitals.

**Additional health professionals mobilized:** The AFMS has deployed additional doctors, including specialists, super

specialists and paramedics, at various hospitals. My Ministry has granted an extension to Short Service Commissioned Doctors of AFMS till December 31, 2021, which has augmented the strength of AFMS by 238 more doctors. To further strengthen the workforce of health professionals, those who have recently retired from AFMS have been re-deployed. To cater to veterans and their dependents additional contractual staff have been temporarily hired in 51 high-pressure ECHS polyclinics for night duty for three months. In addition, DG AFMS is going to operationalise this week teleconsultation for COVID-19 related issues. Retired AFMS doctors are being engaged for this task.

**Army hospitals for civilians:** Indian Army has mobilised its resources to assist the civil administration to tide over the current COVID-19 situation in the country. Army has provided 100 beds each at Lucknow and Prayagraj in Uttar Pradesh to cater to the surge in cases. In Madhya Pradesh, a 40-bedded isolation facility has been set up along with ambulances at Sagour. 100 beds each have been provided at Bhopal & Jabalpur and 40 beds at Gwalior. A 50-bedded isolation facility has been established in Namkum, Jharkhand. In Maharashtra, 60 ICU beds have been provided at Pune and 20 at Kamptee while 100 beds have been provided at Barmer in Rajasthan. Besides, Army medical persons have been deployed at Ahmedabad and at Patna, battlefield-nursing assistants (BFNAs) have been provided to Patiala administration for hospital management. 200 drivers have been kept on standby for driving oxygen transporters to various parts of the country and 10 TATRA and 15 ALS vehicles are on standby to trans-ship medical supplies arriving at Palam airport.

**Logistics support by IAF and IN:** To augment the supply of medical oxygen, Indian Air Force (IAF) is carrying out sorties from within India and abroad. IAF transport aircraft carried out 50 sorties, airlifting 61 oxygen containers of 1142 MT capacity from abroad. Within the country, it carried out 344 sorties, airlifting 230 containers of 4,527 MT capacity till 5th of May 2021. Indian Navy has deployed its ships to augment the mission for meeting the oxygen requirements. The first such consignment was brought in to Mangalore on May 5 by INS Talwar from Bahrain. Other Naval ships viz. Kolkata, Kochi, Tabar, Trikan, Jalashwa and Airavat have been deployed for shipment of liquid medical oxygen-filled cryogenic containers and associated medical equipment from various countries in the Middle East and South-East Asia. The second batch of ships comprising Kochi, Trikan and Tabar mission deployed in the Arabian sea has also been diverted to join the national effort. Indian Navy also has the surge capability, to deploy more ships when the need arises. The Indian Army has repaired two civil oxygen plants at Agra to facilitate the resumption of supply of up to 1,800 cylinders per day.

**Oxygen plants:** DRDO initiated fabrication of 500 Medical Oxygen Plants under PM CARES Fund with the release of supply orders for 332 on Tata Advanced Systems Limited, Bengaluru and 48 on Trident Pneumatics Pvt. Ltd., Coimbatore. 120 plants will be produced by industries working with the Indian

Institute of Petroleum, Dehradun, belonging to CSIR. Two such plants have been established in AIIMS and RML hospitals in New Delhi. The remaining plants are expected to be installed within three months. DRDO also developed a SpO2 (Blood Oxygen Saturation) supplemental Oxygen Delivery System for soldiers posted at extreme high-altitude areas. The system will be useful for COVID patients as their conditions become similar. Several DPSUs also fast-tracked the procurement of oxygen plants to deliver to local government hospitals in different states under CSR. Additionally, orders for 23 mobile oxygen generating plants have been placed by DG AFMS on a firm in Germany. Delivery of these plants is expected in a week. Further, tender for 23 big sizes (300L/min to 750 L/min capacity) oxygen plants has been floated... This will help augment the supply of oxygen for Military Hospitals across the country.

**Defence PSUs pitch in:** Various DPSUs, including Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), and Ordnance Factory Board are providing COVID care services, including oxygen beds, at their facilities in several places across the country, in coordination with different state governments. A 180-bedded COVID care centre, with ICU, oxygen and ventilator support, set up by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) is functional in Bengaluru, Karnataka. The DPSU has also prepared a 250-bedded facility in Bengaluru and handed it over to municipal authorities under Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). A 70-bedded facility in Koraput, Odisha and a 40-bed hospital in Nasik, Maharashtra are also operational. Work has also been undertaken by HAL to set up a 250-bedded COVID care facility in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh. HAL is planning to provide more ventilators and oxygen points at Bangalore and Lucknow. Cantonment Boards are also helping the civil administration to tide over the situation. Presently, 39 Cantonment Boards are maintaining 40 general hospitals with 1,240 beds in various parts of the country. Oxygen support is available in 37 Cantonment Boards.

Services of NCC officers, JCOs and ORs have been placed at the disposal of Armed Forces and to support the state governments in the fight against the second wave and also assist them in the vaccination drive. The Armed Forces and various establishments of MoD are not just providing support to the civil administration/state governments in fighting the current situation but are also playing a pivotal role in conducting the vaccination drive launched by the government across the country. All the efforts and initiatives by the Armed Forces and various organizations of MoD, some of which enumerated above, are being done without compromising the objective of defending the nation from any external threat.

As the whole of India stands united in the fight against the current surge in the pandemic the Armed Forces are walking the extra mile for the nation to emerge a winner. Hard times demand the manifestation of an indomitable spirit to fight against the odds and that is what the country is doing at the moment.

(The author is Union Defence Minister of India).

## Space: Fourth Contested Front

■ RAHUL KHULLAR

You all must have heard about the phrase 'The Sky is the Limit', but this in context to space race has been refuted by belligerents of future space warfare. For them, 'The Sky is not the Limit', we need to venture much above into space for safeguarding our space assets from hostile and antagonist adversaries. In modern times, the nation's space assets are considered to be eyes of a nation and are absolutely critical to the contemporary way of war. Like sandcastles, space assets are challenging to build but would be way easier to destroy with weapons like A-SAT (anti-satellite) and ICBMs (Inter-continental Ballistic Missiles). From civilian to military uses, nations depend on their space assets. GPS, cell phones, gas pumps, traffic lights, power grids, guided missiles, surveillance and reconnaissance depend upon satellite-centric networks. During wars in the Middle East - the USA demonstrated its dependence on satellites for military reconnaissance, communication, target identification, weapon and guidance and command and control of the battlefield. Amid the India-China stand-off, we also got to see how we got the precise data about Chinese buildup from satellite images. So from this, you can gauge how contested, congested and competitive domain space is. After land, air, and sea, space would be the fourth contested front in the near future. In today's piece, we will be taking up the issue of space militarisation, weaponisation and the way ahead.

During cold war arena, the two superpowers, viz. Soviet Union and United States of America spent a colossal amount of money developing military technologies. The drive to place assets in the earth's Orbit stimulated space research and started the space race, which subsequently led to space militarisation. In 1957, USSR made the historic launch of its first artificial satellite, SPUTNIK-1, which led to the commencement of space-age. This step of the USSR infuriated the USA and led to what is infamously known as the 'Sputnik Crisis' which consequently led to the commencement of space race and creation of NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration). By the end of 1960, both superpowers regularly deployed satellites and came at loggerheads to establish space supremacy. Both USA and the Soviet Union began to develop anti-satellite weapons to handicap or destroy each other's space assets. Militarising the space: Militarisation of outer space refers to the use of space assets simultaneously with ground, sea and air-based military operations. This also includes developing assets to be based in space with ground infrastructure for military use such as early warning, communications, Remote sensing. The first military use of outer space was the development of intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs). The second was the defensive system designed to stop them. Till now, there has been no foolproof defence mechanism to stall an incoming ICBM. This makes it very lethal. Known developers of this technology having operational ICBMs are Russia, the USA, China, France, India, United Kingdom and North Korea. The reason for it not getting stalled lies in its ability to move at a very high speed and release multiple

deceptive decoys to baffle the enemy radar. After almost 60 years of research, the decoy issues remain unresolved, and it is a known fact that the ground-based and ship-based defence system of nation does not offer a complete solution to the problem of multiple decoys. Without a well-knit constellation of satellites, it is impossible to have a robust ground defence because space assets are responsible for alerting the ground-based defence infrastructure of any potential incoming threats and it also helps to guide weapons towards their intended targets, so militarisation of space in modern times is indispensable keeping in view the defence of the nation. Sensing this exigency for space defence, countries after land, water and air are now having 'space military exercises', one such exercise was conducted by France in March this year and was code-named 'AsterX'. This was the first of its kind exercise in the entire Europe. The exercise was part of France's ambition to become the world's third-largest space power after China and the USA. India too had conducted its first-ever simulated space warfare exercise, 'IndSpaceEx' in July 2019 to counter emerging threats to its space assets from all its adversaries in general and China in particular.

**Weaponising the Space:** This is an advanced stage of the militarisation of space. It refers to the placement of physical weapons in orbit having catastrophic capacity. This is when space itself becomes the battlefield for adversaries. Ground-based systems designed or used for space-based attacks also constitute space weapons; this means that virtually all the anti-satellite weapons at present constitute space weaponisation, though they are not technically part of the weaponisation of outer space since they are not placed in orbit. Recently in July 2020, Russia went a step ahead and fired a projectile at one of its satellites from its in-orbit satellite in space, as alleged by the UK and the USA. Russia recently proposed withdrawing itself from the International Space Station (ISS) by 2025 and decided to launch its Space Station by 2030. It intends to give impetus to space weaponisation and gear up for future possibilities of Space Warfare. Presently the big space powers like the USA, Russia and China dominate the earth's orbit, with these three countries having 68% of the world's operational satellites. As these three countries rely on the space-based assets the most so as a corollary to this, these three nations naturally desire to establish military supremacy in outer space out of a very basic apprehension, i.e. to preserve their satellites in space against other anti-satellite weapons and to safeguard the homeland's defence. Not to anybody's surprise here also the USA is the world leader in developing space-based weapon systems. Some of its declared projects for space weaponization include, Strategic defence initiative (Star Wars programme), Space based lasers. (SBLS), Space-based missile interceptors, Electromagnetic rail guns, Evolutionary air and space global laser engagement. (EAGLE), Space-based Infra-red (SBIR), Space tracking and surveillance system (STSS), Anti-satellite weapons (A-SAT), High altitude nuclear detonations, Global strike programme,

Common Aero Vehicles (CAV) and Rods from God.

And in recent past, under the Trump administration, a new branch of the USA armed forces was made to handle space infrastructure and increase interoperability among the USA tri-services concerning space affairs. The name of the branch is SPACE FORCE. Space force has been sanctioned \$15 billion for its work. This is the level of craving for Space domination via its militarisation and weaponization.

**Ramifications of Space weaponisation:** The arms race in space put at risk the entire range of commercial satellites and those involved in scientific explorations. The issue of space debris is a matter of concern for the international community in general and the USA, China, and Russia, in particular, which operates more than 65 per cent of the world's satellite network and are heavily dependent on them for civilian use and homeland's defence. Space debris can be created either by intentional radio frequency interference (Soft kill), i.e. By jamming the enemy radar by electronic warfare to disrupt the normal functioning without resorting to the actual destruction of the satellite, creating long-lived space debris. The second way is by using kinetic energy weapons (Hard Kill), i.e., smashing the target with the sheer force of its kinetic energy and not using explosive warheads. In 2019 under Mission Shakti, India targeted one of its defunct satellites (suspected Microsat-R) using this kinetic kill technology which attracted criticism from NASA over space debris concerns. Space debris becomes very lethal for nations' space assets. Due to the very high speed in low orbit, about 10 km/sec, particles less than one-tenth of a millimeter in diameter can damage satellites and spacecraft. International Space Station (ISS), a multinational space Laboratory, remains at risk of colliding with such space debris. In fact, in 2007, China conducted an anti-satellite test with the same kinetic kill technology at an altitude of 865 km. ISS had to do an evasive maneuver to save itself from the debris created by the Chinese mission. This test received severe backlash from the international community.

**International Safeguards:** The overwhelming majority of the international community and United Nations member states were concerned that weaponisation of outer space would lead to space turmoil and jeopardise the efficiency of many nations' ground-based defence infrastructure and a chain of things operated on a satellite centric network. Just for space's sustainability, a multilateral treaty was conceptualised by the United Nations in 1966. The treaty was named 'Treaty on Principles Governing activities of States in exploration and use of Outer Space', aka Outer Space Treaty, which came into force on 10th October 1967. Presently, it has 111 countries as its members. However, this treaty has become obsolete now as the ban on weapons in space was limited to nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction, giving states enough room to carry space warfare with conventional weapons. This treaty needs to be revisited from the contemporary and future perspective to provide a foolproof safeguard against treacherous fourth front space warfare.

daily life, and we can't imagine life without it. But the petrol prices are sky rocketing, and it is eventually going to affect each and everything that we use in our day to day life. Price hike affects only low wages or fixed-salaried middle-class families as compared to higher salaried class. Due to increase in prices of petrol and diesel, there has been increase in the prices of fares of vehicles causing a lot of problems for common man and poor people, who have to travel daily for work. How are we going to survive? We are already working on less salaries and the hike in public transport fares and petrol rate is making things difficult for us.

The increase in price of petrol and diesel directly affects common man making the situation miserable for him. Due to increase in the prices of petrol and diesel there has been rapid increase in the prices of the food products and other essential commodities. The middle class sections of the society is the worst affected. We work hard to earn money and

if the prices of the essential commodities rise than life would become very hard for we people. How will we run our families and manage daily chores.

It becomes almost impossible to bear the expenses with such hike in almost every essential commodity. This hike in cooking gas cylinder is making life miserable. Prices of cooking oil, vegetables, fruits and other essentials are sky rocketing. I do not understand what the Government is doing? Why making life so difficult for us? On one hand, it claims to bring a change with so-called 'Achey Din' and on the other hand there is such a huge hike in prices of daily needs. Is this some kind of mockery?

Through your esteemed daily, I would like to appeal the Government to take action to control sky high prices of commodities so that we too can live life comfortably. Please bring back those bad days, we do not need such 'Achey Din'.

Shatrughan Jamwal,  
Panjthirthi.

