

Lesson for Bhutan:

The incentive of an enviable income for teachers could mitigate many ills that affect India's education system

Bhutan's teachers, doctors and other medical staff will earn more than civil servants of corresponding grades, if a policy recently announced by the country's government is implemented. The new salary scales will benefit about 13,000 teachers and doctors. This is a novel move. No other country has accorded teachers and doctors such pride of place in its government service, both in terms of remuneration and symbolism. Remarkably, the proposal was announced by Bhutan's Prime Minister Lotay Tshering, himself a qualified doctor — which suggests that professional experience informs the policy.

Inspired or fanciful?

Let us examine the policy's educational aspect. Is the proposal part of a coherent strategy, or an inspired announcement that is resolute in intent but likely effete in effect?

The policy's tonal reference is to be found in Bhutan's 12th Five Year Plan (2018-23), published by its Gross National Happiness Commission, the country's highest policy-making body. The commission's strategy to achieve desired national outcomes through education opens with the notation, "making teaching a profession of choice". The proposal then is evidently at the core of a larger governmental strategy to achieve the country's human developmental objectives. The decision also comes in the wake of high levels of teacher attrition, especially the best. Clearly, the government has formulated the policy as a styptic to stop the serious haemorrhage.

Intuiting the correlation, as Bhutan has, between attracting the best talent to a profession and the remuneration it potentially offers is easy. But importantly, is it possible to demonstrate that improving the status of the teaching profession positively influences educational outcomes?

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is a worldwide study that measures and compares student ability in reading, mathematics, science and global competence, with financial literacy an option. Accordingly, it ranks educational systems of countries. An independent study led by the economist, Peter Dolton, has demonstrated a distinct correlation between student outcomes in a country, as measured by PISA scores, and the status that its teachers enjoy. The initiative's latest report, Global Teacher Status Index 2018, based on its own surveys across 35 countries, goes on to make a strong case for high wages to improve teacher status.

Policies act as levers that governments use to achieve desired results in focus areas. The results of Bhutan's policy, if implemented, will take a few years to emerge for critical evaluation. It is, however, based on credible research.

The fiscal implications

Bhutan already spends about 7.5% of its GDP on education. The fiscal implications of the new salary structure are unclear now. Generally, teachers constitute a considerable portion of government employees. Therefore, governments looking to emulate Bhutan's lead will inevitably be asked questions about the financial viability of such a momentous administrative decision. For instance, the Minister concerned in Tamil Nadu, one of India's better performing States on educational indices, turned down demands of striking teachers for better pension explaining that wages, pensions, administrative costs and interest repayments already amounted to 71% of the State's expenditure. He asserted it leaves little for other developmental programmes.

Can India afford a similar policy?

India currently spends about 3% of its GDP on education, accounting for about 10% of the Centre's and States' budgetary expenses. Salaries constitute a large portion of this expenditure. The NITI Aayog in its report last year recommended that India raise this to 6% of GDP by 2022. Paying teachers (and doctors) significantly higher salaries may seem like a tall order, but the Central and State governments could consider rationalising both teacher recruitment and allocation of funds to existing programmes. Some programmes may have outlived their purpose, while others could be pared down or better directed. In fact, improving accountability in the system could free up huge savings. A World Bank study found that teacher absenteeism in India was nearly 24%, which costs the country about \$1.5 billion annually. Absenteeism could be the result of many factors, including teachers taking up a second job or farming to boost incomes, providing parental or nursing care in the absence of support systems, or lacking motivation. The incentive of an enviable income which is girded with unsparing accountability could mitigate many ills that plague the system, free fiscal space and help meet important national developmental objectives.

Piloting a policy of such consequence may also be easier in a smaller State, say Delhi. Education is a key focus area for the Delhi government; the State invests 26% of its annual budget in the sector (much more than the national average). The administration has also worked on improving teacher motivation as a strategy for better educational outcomes. The base has been set. The political leadership in the State, which is unafraid of the bold and big in the social sector, could build on this. Moreover, since the State is highly urban and well-connected, it would be easier to enforce accountability measures, which must underpin so heavy an expenditure.

Ultimately, no investment that enables an educated, healthy, responsible and happy community can be deemed too high by any society. The short-term GDP-minded would do well to consider these words in OECD's 'Education at a Glance 2018' report: "The quality of education can be a strong predictor of a country's economic prosperity. Shortfalls in academic achievement are extremely costly, as governments must then find ways to compensate for them, and ensure the social and economic welfare of all." Governments intent on improving the quality of education they offer must step out of incrementalism in policy-making. Improving teacher status by offering top notch salaries to attract the best to the profession could be that revolutionary policy-step forward, which Bhutan has shown a willingness to take.

Louis Jude Salvadoray is Communications Consultant with the World Bank Group. The views expressed are personal

<u>Words</u>	<u>Kind</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
Incentive		inducement, motivation, reason, stimulus, impetus
Enviably		desirable, favourable, covetable, attractive
Mitigate		decrease, alleviate, lessen
Corresponding		correlate, agree, be compatible
Announce		declare, aver, avow, proclaim, profess, herald
Implement		execute, apply, put into effect put into practical
Novel		new, innovative, avant-garde
Accord		live, grant, present, award, conferon
Remuneration		payment, salary, wages, earnings
Coherent		clear, exoteric, lucid, limpid, explicit
Resolute		determined, purposeful, resolved, adamant
Intent		aim, intention, purpose
Effect		affected, pretentious, mannered
Tonal		having a particular key, pertaining to tone
Outcome		result, aftermath, accrual, upshots
Notation		symbols, alphabet, syllabary, script
Core		centre, interior, middle, nucleaus
Attrition		weakening, debilitation, enfeebling
Styptic		substance, capable of bleeding to stop

Triumph in North Korea:

The U.S. President appears committed to diplomacy in dealing with North Korea

U.S. President Donald Trump made history on Sunday when he stepped on to North Korean soil from the demilitarised zone (DMZ) that separates the two Koreas. He is the only American President to have visited North Korea, the isolated, nuclear-armed dictatorship that is historically seen as an enemy in Washington's policy establishment. The President's surprise announcement, via Twitter, that he was ready to visit the DMZ to meet with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un was typical of Mr. Trump, who enjoys conducting off-the-cuff personal diplomacy. North Korea seized the opportunity, and both leaders met at the DMZ, held talks for nearly an hour and decided to resume parleys that have stalled since the two leaders' failed summit in Hanoi. Mr. Trump deserves credit for infusing fresh life into the nuclear negotiations. His intervention came at a time when North Koreans were growing impatient over lack of progress in the matter of ties. In recent weeks, they had personally attacked U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and targeted the South Korean leadership over the sanctions and the logjam in talks. Now that both Mr. Trump and Mr. Kim have met and decided to set up teams on both sides to hold negotiations, the impasse is broken. But key challenges remain.

Mr. Trump appears to be committed to diplomacy in addressing the North Korean issue. Pyongyang, though often cryptic in its responses, has also shown interest in staying engaged with the U.S. Mr.

Kim has, in principle, agreed to denuclearise the peninsula, which is the goal of the U.S. as well. But the critical question is when and how it should be done. The Hanoi summit collapsed chiefly as the U.S. considered the compromise that North Korea offered insufficient to warrant reciprocation with sanctions relief. North Korea had agreed to close down the Yongbyon facility, its main nuclear fuel production site, but the U.S. rejected the offer, saying the North's nuclear capability is now much more diversified and goes beyond that one plant. When they resume talks, the question of how much the North should compromise to get at least a partial reprieve from sanctions will be back. If the U.S. sticks to its maximalist demands such as complete denuclearisation, the talks are likely to run into trouble again. For Pyongyang, nuclear weapons are its insurance against potential external aggression, and it would accede to total denuclearisation only if its security concerns are ensured and sanctions are fully withdrawn. Both sides should learn from their failure in Hanoi. They can take small steps towards the final goal. The U.S. could demand a total freeze on North Korea's nuclear activities, besides shutting down Yongbyon, which the North has already agreed to, in return for providing partial reprieve from sanctions. Constructive and reciprocal confidence-building measures would mean that Mr. Trump's personal diplomatic outreach and the momentum it created won't be in vain.

Words

Committed

Isolated

Announcement

Typical

Off the cuff

Seize on

Resume

Parley

Summit

Infuse

Intervention

Attack

Sanctions

Impasse

Challenges

Cryptic

Peninsula

Reciprocate

Diversify

Reprieve

Accede to

Kind Meaning

devout, devoted, dedicated, loyal

remote, outlying, off the beaten track

declaration, proclamation, pronouncement

representative, quintessential, model

something said with out thought & preparation.

take advantage of, cash-in-on, exploit

restart, recommence, begin again, reopen

negotiation, conference, summit, discussion, powwow

meeting, negotiation, conference, discussion

fill, suffuse, inspire

involvement, intercession, intrusion, interference

assault, go for, turn somebody on, fly at

penalty, punishment, deterrent, restriction

full stop, stalemate

gauntlet, defy

mysterious, enigmatic, obscure, incoherent.

headland, promontory, foreland

do the same in return, give back

vary, bring, variety, modify, change, alter

pardon, spare, amnesty

agree with, defer to, come round, comply with