

STRANGE EMERGENCY: DONALD TRUMP'S PLAN TO BUILD THE MEXICO BORDER WALL

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed & developing countries on India's interests

Declaring [a state of national emergency](#) is hardly a trivial decision. While the U.S. has done so in the aftermath of the 9/11 terror attacks and similar exigencies, President Donald Trump has opted for this measure in the context of what he has described as “an invasion of drugs and criminals” from across the border with Mexico. The move has further polarised Washington and put the strident immigration debate front and centre again. The context for the emergency is the longest federal government shutdown in U.S. history, for 35 days, that resulted in the shuttering of nine government agencies and the furlough of 800,000 government workers. The primary cause was Mr. Trump’s refusal to sign off on Congressional appropriations bills unless lawmakers agreed to hand over \$5.7 billion to fund his plan to construct a border wall with Mexico. As the cost to the U.S. economy of the shutdown soared close to \$11 billion by late-January, Mr. Trump backed down on his demand, yet warned that unless Congress yielded on the border wall funding, “I will use the powers afforded to me under the laws and the Constitution of the U.S. to address this emergency.” Now he appears to have made good on that statement, probably on the basis that during national emergencies U.S. law permits the diversion of funds from military or disaster relief budgets to tackle the “crisis” at hand.

This begs the question of how real the emergency is and why the White House is devoting its considerable political capital to this one policy issue. Mr. Trump frequently alludes to the migration crisis that he believes has engulfed the southern border. It is true that more than 2,000 people were turned away or arrested at the border each day during November 2018, numbers that U.S. immigration hawks have seized upon to press the argument for a wall. Yet this figure has decreased considerably over the past decade, and border crossings by undocumented migrants are at an all-time low, down from 1.3 million in 2001 to about 40,000 in 2018. If this is then a purely political move that panders to Mr. Trump’s conservative voter base, it may stand on wobbly legal foundations. Already, the first few lawsuits challenging the emergency declaration are working their way through the courts. Further, Democrats, who now control the House of Representatives, may under their constitutional powers vote to terminate the emergency. This would put the Republican-controlled Senate on the back foot by requiring it to clarify its position on the *status quo*, by either supporting or defeating such a resolution. While Mr. Trump’s supporters are doubtless celebrating their Commander-in-Chief’s chutzpah for this move, the truth is that it will only take the U.S. further away from the ideal of peaceful coexistence within a pluralistic democracy.

The Meghalaya government must urgently ensure that all illegal mines are shut down

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