**WHY DOES THE GOVERNMENT SPEND MORE ON RAFALE DEALS THAN BASIC HEALTHCARE?**

What is the Rafale deal?:

Literally meaning “gust of wind” (or “burst of fire”), the Dassault Rafale is a French twin-engine, canard delta wing, multi-role fighter aircraft designed and built by Dassault Aviation. Equipped with a wide range of weaponry, the Rafale is built with the intention to perform air supremacy tactics, interdiction, aerial reconnaissance, ground support, in-depth strike, anti-ship strike, and nuclear deterrence missions. Due to such a versatile range of combat moves equipped to the aircraft, the Rafale is often referred to as an omnirole aircraft by Dassault.

In 2007, the Ministry of Defence issued tenders for the purchase of 126 fighter aircraft, in line with the procedure set out in the Defence Procurement Procedure. In particular, the Union was set to purchase eighteen aircraft from abroad in fly-away condition – ready to operate post-delivery. The other 108 aircraft were to be manufactured in India by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited; this was to be made possible via a transfer-of-technology method from the selected foreign company. After much consideration and an extensive selection process, the Union had narrowed their sights upon Dassault’s Rafale – by 2015, price negotiations had reached their final stage.

The unforeseen ambush:

In 2015, newly-elected Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the then President of France announced a new deal for the purchase of thirty-six Rafale fighter aircraft, in place of the original 126. Subsequently, the Minister of Defence announced the withdrawal of the tender for 126 Rafale aircraft. The new deal had included a fifty percent offset clause, which required Dassault and other involved companies to invest 50% of the contract value back into India via purchasing the nation’s goods and services.

Following the negotiations, Dassault announced a partnership with Reliance Group in October 2016 – they had joined hands with Anil Ambani to form a joint venture, the Dassault Reliance Aerospace Limited. Dassault had specified that it intended to invest USD 115 million in the venture to partially fulfil its offset obligation mentioned in the new Rafale deal. Following this, multiple litigants filed petitions in the Supreme Court stating that the Rafale Fighter Jet Deal suffered from serious procedural irregularities.

In 2018, a joint group consisting advoate ML Sharma, lawyer Vineet Dhanda, AAP MP Sanjay Singh, and politician Yashwant Sinha brought forward ,multiple concerns regarding the Rafale Deal in the Supreme Court. Some of them included the decision made by the Prime Minister to go ahead without the Cabinet Committee of Security’s approval, Reliance Defence being made Dassault Aviation’s Indian Offset Partner without the approval of the Ministry of Defence (as required by Defence Offset Guidelines), the improper removal of previously-proposed Offset Partner( Hindustan Aeronautics Limited), the deal being inter-governmental between India and France, violation of the Comptroller and Auditor General’s (Duties, Powers, and Conditions of Service) Act by foregoing disclosure of details of the deal, and pricing irregularities of the deal and the doubling of price from the first to second deal.

Did the deal go through?:

TL; DR – yes, the Rafale deal has gone through successfully. The Supreme Court, on the 14th of December of 2018, decalred that there was no occasion to doubt the decision-making process in the procurement of the fighter aircraft, and that it will not entertain any more appeals in the case. The first of the aircraft was expected to arrive in India by May 2020, which would have undergone a 1500-hour intensive testing, after which they would be an addition to the Indian Air Force’s extensive collection of defensive and support weaponry.

India’s healthcare situation:

As of 2020, India’s healthcare system seems to be at a crossroads – on one hand, there seem to be positive achievements when it comes to health indication and overall improvement, but on the other, it falls seriously short when it comes to care delivery. While the system has played a major role in the eradication and treatment of various diseases and infections, it faces a huge economic burden due to the struggle to balance accessibility, affordability, and quality; due to such shortcomings, the entire industry is unable to hike public health budgets.

Devising stratagems that focus on the strengthening of healthcare delivery and improvement of business prospects, policy makers and health care providers must work in tandem with business leaders and technological pioneers to transform the spark of future healthcare into a sustainable fire suited for a long run in this country’s economy.

Several challenges in the current state of healthcare in India include inadequate reach of basic healthcare services, shortage of medical personnel, quality assurance, inadequate outlay of health, and the most import of all being insufficient impetus to conduct research to further the nation’s healthcare systems and economy.

The magnitude of these challenges are very large to be resolved by the government alone – it must get the private sector to participate, while continuing to invest and enable the sector, as stated by Raviganesh Venkataraman, CEO of Cloudnine Group of Hospitals.

The use of decision support systems and technology is critical to solve issues, suggest various experts in the fields of both medicine and business. Limited resources ans supply of skilled caregivers necessitates finding of various ways to utilize technology to maximize their throughput, while not sacrificing on the quality and outcome factors of the sector. Technology has a huge role to play in this, and is the best way to achieve the vision of a connected healthcare ecosystem. A layer of analytics, in addition to technological resources, caregivers can be enabled to provide a much better analysis of the various conditions and recommendations to patients – we are well into this, with medical devices being present in hospitals alongwith mobile care applications, wearables, and sensors. Such advancements are transforming this ecosystem, and the results of such investments have been observed to be positive impacts exclusively.

A final word on the current situation:

The COVID-19 pandemic has helped uncover disparities in rural-urban healthcare, as well as the error-filled systems present in the sector, slowing down its progress. This wake-up call for the undisciplined Indian healthcare system has led to the government making various investments that may have usually taken years of processing in the absence of an urging situation.

The healthcare spending of India is 3.6% of its Gross Domestic Product, the lowest among developing countries. This is also a result of healthcare funds allocated to states being under- or un-utilized. On the other hand, private healthcare is renowned for its quality of service, but is unaffordable by the poor and lower classes of the society. Government hospitals, currently, are equipped with three beds for every five thousand patients. There also exists a shortage of health centres, with primary centres falling short by 22%, and community healthcare centres are lower by 30%. The rural healthcare system is also suffering from a shortage of medicines and instruments, as well as healthcare workers –often, they suffer from shortage of basic amenities as well.

But, among such bleak situations, a hope has blossomed – Swasth. Swasth is deemed as an alliance between some of India’s richest people and idea-crazy startups that have collaborated to try and transform India’s failing healthcare system. The informal alliance, now backed by the co-founders of Infosys Ltd., as well as prominent startups such as Practo and Policybazaar, is expected to be unveiled soon as an attempt to salvage a decrepit system by the digitization of all patient data and records, and by creating online platforms for hospital care to consulting doctors.

Swasth – meaning health in India’s most-spoken language, Hindi – and its 100+ members have pledged to build new services and coordinate efforts to improve emergency responses for the sick and needy. This was incepted in response to the exploding numbers of patients caused by the coronavirus pandemic, and rising infection numbers being mishandled by the country and its government’s services. The country’s digital healthcare backbone, the Bharat Health Stack, will be buttressing Swasth in its efforts to improve India’s healthcare system and revolutionize the sector in the country.

In the end, the future looks promising for the nation – its air defence now strong, and healthcare estimated to become stronger.