



Junior council

The BJP is building a new leadership in Gujarat that is subservient to the Modi-Shah combine

No member of the previous Council of Ministers has found a place in the reconstituted Ministry led by Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel in Gujarat. Of the 25-member council of the BJP, nine members including the Chief Minister are first time legislators. Only three members have any previous ministerial experience. Ten are cabinet rank Ministers, five are MoS with independent charge and nine are MoS. Seven belong to the Patidar community, which got the lion's share; there are four from STs, two from SC communities, and eight from the various OBC castes. The BJP hopes to blunt the anti-incumbency sentiment against it before the State goes to polls next year through this clinical scrubbing. The party has been in power since 1998 without a break. Over the years, several Ministers had become power centres, and many were accused of being arrogant and aloof. The previous Vijay Rupani government had Ministers who continued from councils led by Keshubhai Patel, Narendra Modi and Anandiben Patel. While the Chief Ministers changed, political heavyweights such as Nitin Patel, Kaushik Patel, Bhupendrasinh Chudasama and Saurabh Patel continued as influential Ministers. They have all been eased out this time. Whether they will quietly fade away or create trouble for the new Chief Minister is an open question.

The BJP has done a balancing act in ensuring representation for major castes and communities, while cutting out veterans to rope in fresh faces. Purshottam Solanki, who served as a junior Minister in all BJP governments due to his formidable hold over the numerically strong Koli community in the Saurashtra region, has been dropped. Three Koli leaders who have been inducted are not influential beyond their own seats. Similarly, tribal representatives in the council are also relative lightweights. The BJP may be raising a new leadership for the party among different communities and regions to tackle the many barriers in its path to yet another Assembly victory, and beyond. Some leaders sidelined in the past by the party tried to revolt, but few survived eventually. The change of guard in Gujarat and the composition of the new Council of Ministers suggest that the party leaders in the State have little autonomy or control over their own fate. The blueprint of the BJP's Gujarat strategy is firmly in the control of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah. They draw their strength considerably from their control of the party's Gujarat government. The new council is indebted to the central leadership, at least to begin with. The question is whether they can marshal enough support for the BJP's continuing dominance in a State that is critical for its national hegemony.

A welcome decision

Vaccine production must be ramped up to sustain exports and meet domestic demand

In a welcome move to address the huge vaccine inequity globally, India will, from October, resume exporting much needed COVID-19 vaccines. The decision comes after the Government severely restricted vaccine exports in March and stopped them in mid-April. The renewed export drive, known as Vaccine Maitri, will first prioritise the global vaccine-sharing platform, COVAX, and neighbouring countries. Just four days after the vaccination programme kicked off in India on January 16, India shipped the first batch of vaccines to Bhutan and the Maldives as a part of its vaccine diplomacy. Till mid-April, India had supplied nearly 20 million doses to COVAX and donated nearly 11 million, while nearly 36 million doses were sold to 26 countries. But with the daily fresh cases and deaths in the second wave beginning to surge in March and the supply of vaccines from the two manufacturers not meeting domestic demand, the priorities quickly changed and the export of vaccines was put on hold. It became possible to export vaccines till March mainly due to the slow uptake of vaccines by health-care and frontline workers and Covishield vaccine manufactured late last year nearing the six-month expiry date. The daily uptake of vaccines began climbing steadily with vaccine eligibility too – all above 45 years from April 1 and all adults above 18 years from May 1.

With most developed countries hoarding vaccines and prioritising their vaccination, and India too halting all exports, vaccine supply to the COVAX facility has been hit. As a result, about 80% of the nearly six billion doses administered globally have been in high- and upper middle-income countries. Vaccine inequity is striking in Africa – just 2% of the six billion doses have been administered here and less than 3.5% of its people fully vaccinated. While efforts are being made through COVAX to increase vaccine supply to Africa, the continent will still end up with 25% fewer doses than anticipated by the end of 2021. Only 15% of the over one billion doses pledged by the developed countries have reached Africa, which has made unsuccessful attempts to buy vaccines. And now, with the U.S. and other developed countries focusing efforts on approving booster doses for certain categories, the supply of vaccines to Africa and other countries to immunise even health-care workers will continue to be restricted. A vaccination policy that leaves many of the countries in the Global South vaccine deprived will be hugely counterproductive. As long as vaccine inequity prevails, the virus will continue to circulate, thereby increasing the possibility of more dangerous variants, far more transmissible and resistant to vaccines than Delta, emerging. India's decision to resume vaccine exports is, hence, commendable. The need to quickly ramp up vaccine production here to sustain exports even while meeting the ever-rising domestic demand cannot be overemphasised.

Dravidam 2.0 as a time to reflect, for action

Even as the DMK government celebrates the movement's icons, it must address the newer challenges of the times



KALAIYARASAN A.

As the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam government in Tamil Nadu is celebrating its icons (Periyar E.V. Ramasamy, C.N. Annadurai and M. Karunanidhi) with renewed zeal, there is a need to revisit the Dravidian policies that have transformed the State. Today, Tamil Nadu is the most modern State that boasts a dynamic productive economy with impressive welfare provisions for its citizens. Its structural transformation has been substantial: less than 30% of its workforce is involved in agriculture, it is highly urbanised, and has a large industrial workforce. While this transformation has certainly created new opportunities and brought in a degree of inclusion, particularly for lower castes, Dalits and women, it has thrown up a set of fresh challenges. These are the problems of the "second generation", as it were, and are quite unique to the State.

The first generation of Dravidian policies, particularly its innovative approach to affirmative action, addressed quantitative concerns such as access to education and health for all, and the shift from caste labour to wage labour. The second generation needs a qualitative shift in the approach towards education, health, caste and gender issues, and decentralised governance.

Poor education, employment

The broad-based industrial transformation broke the occupational basis of caste by converting caste labour into wage labour, but it did not create enough decent jobs, with casual jobs being the predominant option outside agriculture. According to the latest Periodic La-

bour Force Surveys (PLFS)-2018-19, 62% of workers are in the informal sector and 82% of the workforce is not covered by any social security. Even among those with regular jobs and stable incomes, 75.2% do not have a written contract. This informality and resultant wage inequality are arguably a product of poor quality of education that the State has built in the last three decades.

Even as Tamil Nadu was a pioneer in universal school education, which challenged the elitism India's education system was known for, it has not been without its problems. In a recent report released by the Union Ministry of Education, Tamil Nadu scored the lowest among the southern States in learning outcomes for 2019-20 in the Performance Grading Index (PGI). One in four in Class VIII were not able to read Class II level text. More than 50% of students cannot do simple division. Since learning outcomes determine who goes to what college, this in turn reflects in labour market outcomes. Tamil Nadu's achievement in higher education with a Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of 51.4% compared to the all-India average of 27.1%, has not helped achieve quality in the job market.

In fact, the increased enrolment itself is an outcome of mushrooming private colleges. Tamil Nadu accounted for more than a fifth of all educational loans availed in the country from public sector banks in 2013-14 as well as in 2015-16. But many of the private engineering colleges do not meet the prescriptions of All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) in terms of infrastructure, qualified teaching staff, and syllabi. This disadvantages students from these colleges when they compete for employment, leading to poor returns on their investments in education.

Tamil Nadu's challenge is to focus on improving learning outcomes and arresting disparities in



quality of education. Students who are the first in their families to access higher education are disappointed, and they happen to be largely Dalits and those from the lower rungs of Other Backward Classes.

Feeble health care

Tamil Nadu is known for its public health interventions and socially inclusive health personnel. But what is not spoken of as much is that the State is a pioneer in private medical services, which provided the template for corporatisation of medical services across India. A significant population in the State relies on expensive private health care. As per the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO)-75th round (2017-18), average medical expenses for hospitalisation in private hospitals was ₹35,581, higher than Gujarat, Maharashtra, and the all-India average of ₹31,845.

Some of these fault lines became evident in the State's health response to COVID-19. Despite having a well-functioning public health system, the State's ability to contain the spread of the novel coronavirus, reduce mortality, and to vaccinate the public has been inadequate. Its case-fatality ratio was more than neighbouring Andhra Pradesh and twice that of Kerala. This failure is attributed to the State's neglect of decentralisation, whereas Kerala and Maharashtra performed better with their more decentralised efforts. Tamil Nadu has not seen its urban local body election since 2016.

While the Tamil Nadu govern-

ment's recent policy of recruiting archakas (priests) from all castes is a laudable move, caste inequality in the economy persists. Inequality across caste lines is exported to urban areas while it has diminished in rural areas. Urban Tamil Nadu, which was seen as a space less marked by caste, now reproduces caste inequalities in new ways. Besides unevenness in higher education, the elites have invented a new mechanism – 'opportunity hoarding' – through their caste networks that sustain caste inequality. Many States which include Tamil Nadu's neighbours Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, have introduced quotas for Dalits in public procurement for goods and services, Tamil Nadu is yet to enact one to display its credibility in addressing the Dalit question. Meanwhile, violence against Dalits is on the rise. The relative socio-economic and political rise of Dalits have a correlation with the rise in the violence against them. Often, this violence is physical in nature and targets the property of Dalits, which is a symbol of their material progress.

Further, the State has a peculiar record when it comes to women's empowerment. It has certainly increased overall women participation – the percentage of women (between ages 15-59) in the workforce is 42% against 34% in Gujarat, 41.3% in Maharashtra and 31% at the national level. Women's participation even in the non-farm sector in Tamil Nadu is 61% as against 34% in Gujarat and 35% in Maharashtra. However, this quantitative increase in the participation of women in the modern economy has been accompanied by pervasive violence against them in social life. Not only is the violence against women much higher than most States but the violence is also justified by both men and women. As per the National Family Health Survey (NFHS)-2015-16, domestic violence against women is 45%, which is comparable to Bihar's

45% (it is 33% at the all-India level). About 70% of women accept it and about 63% of men justify it. The State that boasts the Dravidian legacy of women's empowerment has sent just 12 legislators (or 5%) to its 234-member Legislative Assembly in the recent election.

Beyond 'crony populism'

The State does not do well even in terms of "fiscal justice", to use Thomas Piketty's phrase. Not only is its tax-GDP ratio one of the lowest - 8.7% in the country, TASMAR, or Tamil Nadu State Marketing Corporation Limited (a public sector network of liquor shops) continues to be a significant source of income. The State certainly must build new forms of fiscal progressiveness to move from this regressive taxation to something that the propertied class pays for. The State's political apparatus has a reputation for corruption and rent seeking which Michael Walton and James Crabtree characterise as an exemplary case of 'crony populism'. Dravidian parties have built a centralised mechanism for extraction of rents akin to pork-barrel politics which feeds into electoral funding. The State has one of the highest election expenditures per candidate in the country.

Leaving aside the frenzied praise for Tamil Nadu's success vis-à-vis the Bharatiya Janata Party-ruled States in quantitative terms, what the State requires is a renewed approach to address the qualitative aspects of social policy and governance. Just as Dravidian icons identified, understood and addressed the challenges of their times, the new government in Tamil Nadu, while it offers hope, must be mindful of the new challenges of the here and now.

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The big deal behind the ruckus over AUKUS

China's economic and military capacities as well as its belligerence have led to a shift in regional security paradigms



SUJAN R. CHINO

The announcement of the new Australia-U.K.-U.S. (AUKUS) trilateral security pact (<https://bit.ly/3tZUVvq> and <https://bit.ly/3EEWqE8>) has naturally generated animated debate in strategic circles, coming as it does just days before the first in-person Quad Leaders Summit to be hosted by United States President Joe Biden on September 24 in Washington. Last week, HMS Queen Elizabeth, the flagship of the United Kingdom's Carrier Strike Group, arrived in Japan after exercising with India, Malaysia and Singapore and traversing the disputed waters of the South China Sea. Exercise Malabar 2021, held in the Western Pacific from August 26-29, 2021, brought together, for the second year running, the U.S. Navy, Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF), the Royal Australian Navy and the Indian Navy.

Indo-Pacific is the core issue

Earlier in April, France, which like the United Kingdom has historically been an Indo-Pacific power with territories and bases across the region, participated in a multi-national naval exercise in the Bay of Bengal with the four Quad nations (the U.S., Japan, Australia and India). All this points to a vigorous strengthening of bilateral, trilateral and multi-lateral security dialogues and structures, seemingly different in scope and activity, but which converge on the core issue of maintaining peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific.

There is no gainsaying the fact that rapid accretion in China's economic and military capacities, but more particularly its belligerence,

has led to a tectonic shift in regional security paradigms.

The Quad is not a security arrangement though there is a widespread feeling that without stronger security underpinnings it would play a limited role in dealing with the real challenge of China's militarisation. The Malabar exercise is not a naval alliance, even though the habit of cooperation is geared to facilitate communication and interoperability in times of need. Several countries have been obliged to review their defence preparedness in response to China's rising military power and its adverse impact on regional stability.

In August, Japan's Defence Ministry proposed a budget of U.S.\$50 billion for the fiscal year 2022, which represents a 2.6% nominal increase in its annual defence spending. The traditional ceiling of limiting defence spending to under 1% of GDP is no longer sacrosanct. Its Defence White Paper, for the first time, highlighted the urgent need to take stock of developments around Taiwan, a clear acknowledgement that Japan's own security is linked to stability in the Taiwan Strait where muscle-flexing by China is the new norm. It is not without reason that Australia's defence budget has seen enhanced outlays for the ninth straight year. For the financial year 2020-2021, it touched AUD 44.61 billion (USD\$34.84 billion) representing a 4.1% hike over the previous year.

The AUKUS pact will facilitate the transfer of nuclear submarine propulsion and manufacturing technologies to Australia, the first instance of a non-nuclear nation acquiring such capability. Even if the first of the eight nuclear-powered submarines may be available only around 2040, or perhaps a few years earlier, the very fact of Australia operating such advanced platforms adds a new dimension to the evolving maritime security



architecture in the Indo-Pacific. It conclusively puts to rest a long-standing domestic debate on whether it was time for Australia to assess China through the strategic lens, overcoming the purely mercantile considerations that tended to dominate its China policy.

A chance for the U.K.

The AUKUS pact is also an emphatic assertion of the relevance of the U.S.-Australia Security Treaty (ANZUS). New Zealand, the outlier, walked away in 1984 from the treaty that ironically still bears its initials. Its "nuclear free" stance ran counter to the U.S. Navy's non-disclosure policy in regard to nuclear weapons aboard visiting vessels. Close ties notwithstanding, Australia's future fleet of nuclear submarines will not be permitted access to New Zealand's ports or waters, as averred by Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern.

AUKUS provides a fresh opportunity to the United Kingdom to reinvent itself more directly into the Indo-Pacific. It is already a member of the Five Eyes (FVEY), an intelligence-sharing alliance built on Anglo-Saxon solidarity (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the U.K., and the U.S.).

AUKUS is not a substitute for the Quad. At the same time, it does not erode the Quad's significance as a platform for consultations and coordination on broader themes of maritime security, free and open trade, health care, critical technologies, supply chains and capacity-building. The AUKUS

submarine deal, on the other hand, is an undiluted example of strategic defence collaboration, and a game-changer at that.

In 2016, Japan's Mitsubishi-Kawasaki consortium that manufactures the Soryu-class diesel-electric submarine lost out to France's Naval Group (formerly known as the DCNS) which bagged the contract to build 12 diesel-electric submarines in Australia to replace its six Collins-class vessels. The Shortfin Barracuda Block 1A submarine offered by France was a diesel-electric variant of its own Barracuda-class nuclear attack submarine. It is heightened threat perceptions that have now prompted Australia to switch from conventional to the far more potent nuclear attack submarines.

Beijing's stance is odd

China, expectedly, has strongly criticised AUKUS and the submarine deal as promoting instability and stoking an arms race. This is sheer hypocrisy. China has the world's fastest-growing fleet of sub-surface combatants, including the Type 093 Shang-class nuclear-powered attack submarine (SSN) and the Type 094 nuclear-powered Jin-class ballistic missile submarine (SSBN), not to speak of its burgeoning fleet of conventional diesel-electric submarines with AIP (air-independent propulsion) capability. Its nuclear submarines are on the prowl in the Indo-Pacific. Yet, China denies Australia and others the sovereign right to decide on their defence requirements!

As for India, it operates one indigenously-built SSBN (INS Arighat) after returning the SSN (INS Chakra) on lease from Russia. It operates a number of conventional submarines, though far fewer than what it truly needs, including the Scorpene-class diesel-electric attack submarine which is manufactured at Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Ltd. (MDL) in collabora-

tion with France's Naval Group under Project 75.

Australia's role gets a boost

Australia's proposed nuclear submarines, whether the U.K.'s Astute-class attack submarine or the U.S.'s Virginia-class vessel, will potentially be fully equipped with advanced U.S. weapons such as the Mark-48 torpedoes, the Harpoon anti-ship missiles and the Tomahawk cruise missiles. These will give Australia quite a punch in terms of a stand-off capability. Situated as it is, far away from any other country, the diesel-electric attack submarines that it currently operates, or even those that it might have got from France, have limited capacity in terms of range and duration of mission as compared to nuclear-powered submarines. The growing focus on anti-submarine warfare across a more expansive region is clearly altering calculations.

Australia's nuclear submarines would help create a new balance of power in the Indo-Pacific, especially in tandem with the U.S. and the U.K. Australia will now have a more meaningful naval deterrence of its own to protect its sovereign interests. Australia is set to play a more robust role in ensuring peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific.

France's momentary pique at the cancellation of the contract by Australia should soon subside. As a major Indo-Pacific power, France is an important part of the regional security calculus. The setback 'down under' may spur France to focus afresh on partners such as India, which must strike a balance between continuing imports and implementing the all-important Atmanirbhar Bharat in defence manufacturing.

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Vaccine exports

We must not forget that the devastating onslaught of the second wave of COVID-19 in India resulted in the 'competence' and chest thumping that heralded the 'Vaccine Maitri Scheme' being questioned and subject to criticism. Therefore, when it comes

to India's renewed 'commitment' to resume the export of COVID-19 vaccines (Page 1, September 21) – even as it prepares for a third wave of the pandemic while shoring up a faltering domestic economy – policymakers would certainly do well to exercise circumspection

and a less shriller display of 'commitment'.

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A game

For almost all political parties in Kerala, the Pala Bishop's remarks have come as a handy tool and windfall to expand their

existing vote-banks and create new ones. They are using every trick in the bag to hoodwink people in the name of defending minorities and secularism. It is for the people of Kerala to see through the games that politicians play to achieve their selfish ends. Almost all the religions in

the State are awash with enormous wealth. Why not utilise such assets for the uplift and welfare of the poor and downtrodden in the State, irrespective of their religion, caste or creed? It is time that religious leaders in the State upheld and practised the true tenets of their

religions, and became social reformers and spiritual lights. If this takes place, Kerala is sure to become god's own country. The simmering mistrust should not boil over.

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