

THE EDITORIAL PAGE

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

Time for realpolitik

India should look at AUKUS alliance with caution, assess strategic gains from Quad, attempt new partnerships



ARUN PRAKASH

STATE OF SUSPICION

J&K order on government employees will lead to governance paralysis, further alienation from state

A NEW ORDER by the Jammu and Kashmir administration on the conduct of government employees is telling evidence that more than two years after the revocation of Jammu and Kashmir's special status, the much hailed "integration" is nowhere in sight. Indeed, if the contents of the order are anything to go by, its long term consequences are likely to be the very opposite. Effectively, the order places on record every doubt, suspicion and all other elements of profiling that the Indian state harbours against the Kashmiri people. The guidelines for "periodic verification of character and antecedents" of government employees, in the order's own words, cover a "wide range of activities governing conduct... in public and private life". Such verification is not just to take into account direct involvement of a person in violence, terrorism, sabotage and others act violating the Constitution such as secession and espionage on behalf of a foreign power. Now every government employee is also liable for the secessionist, treasonous, or violent actions, thoughts, and feelings (including sympathy) of his family members, and even more insidiously, of "persons sharing residential space with the employee to whom he or she may be bound by affection, influence, or obligation," and for "failure to report such persons".

It is hard to fathom the reasoning behind this egregious order, which comes on the heels of others indicating a toughening stance against Kashmiris in government employment. The alienation in the Valley is no secret. That is why young boys are still running away from home to join militant groups. The order is a tacit acknowledgement of this widespread disaffection. But if the administration believes the way to confront the problem is to crackdown on government employees, it is poorly advised. The order arms senior civil servants with vast and arbitrary powers to hold back promotions on the basis of suspicion and doubt, and shifts the burden of proving innocence on the accused. In the security saturated Valley, an order such as this goes against even the minimal definition of good governance, let alone serve grandiose titles such as "naya Kashmir".

What it will likely produce is more governance paralysis — from the cubicles in the Srinagar secretariat to the government offices in every block, tehsil and village — in a climate of general suspicion and vigilantism. Unaccountable bureaucrats brought in by the administration are blamed for the drift now; the inevitable consequences of this order might make it easier, perhaps, to lay the blame at the door of local government employees. Only the naive, tone deaf or the uncaring would mistake the outward absence of anger and resentment as a sign of normalcy.

FARMER'S FUTURE

India must shed obsession with 'marginal farmers'. Their future lies outside farms — in dairy, poultry, food retail

AN AVERAGE SO-CALLED agricultural household earned a total monthly income of Rs 10,218 during 2018-19 (July-June), of which net receipts from crop production (Rs 3,798) and farming of animals (Rs 1,582) together contributed hardly 53 per cent. The single-largest income source was actually wages/salary, at Rs 4,063. The average farmer, in other words, was more a wage labourer than a seller of produce from his/her land. Out of the country's estimated 93.09 million agricultural households, over 70 per cent possessed less than one hectare land. It shouldn't surprise, then, that wages generate up to 60 per cent of their incomes. But the share of agriculture — crop production plus animal husbandry — to total income was higher (about 62 per cent) for households with 1-2 hectares land, rising further to 73, 82 and 91 per cent for those having 2-4, 4-10 and above 10 hectares, respectively.

Simply put, if one considers as farmers only those deriving at least 60 per cent of their overall income from cultivation and rearing of animals, India wouldn't have even 30 million such homes, going by the National Statistical Office's Situation Assessment of Agricultural Households report. The 30 million are the ones also possessing one hectare or more land, which is clearly the minimum holding required for agriculture per se to generate a major share of any family's income. It also means that "agriculture policy" should primarily target these 30 million households. Farm incomes can, realistically speaking, be doubled or tripled only for those truly dependent on agriculture and having enough land to productively deploy labour and capital resources. They must be enabled to do so, through improved access to markets, water, electricity, credit and other productivity-enhancing inputs. The whole focus should be to lower their production costs by raising yields, while simultaneously ensuring higher input use efficiency and minimal environmental footprint.

The question that naturally arises is where does this leave the remaining 60-65 million households — those having less than one-hectare land and "agricultural" only in name? The answer is simple: Their future lies outside the farms. Outside doesn't necessarily have to be in large industrial centres or cities. It can even be in aggregation, grading, packaging, transport, processing, warehousing and retailing of produce. These activities — plus supply of inputs and services to farms — can generate far many more jobs than in the fields themselves. The government should stop obsessing over "marginal farmers". The limited land with them can, if at all, be put to better use for dairy, poultry, piggyery etc. rather than in regular crop agriculture. Farming is best left to those who can do it well. Better fewer, but better.

LEFT TURN

All five Scandinavian countries now have centre-left governments. But the right has not been reduced to irrelevance

SINCE AT LEAST 2016 — a year which saw the unexpected election of Donald Trump as US president and Britain voting to exit the European Union in a referendum — there have been ominous signs of a far-right, often xenophobic political wave across Europe and the West. Even in Scandinavian countries, questions around immigration and the transition to a climate-friendly economy led, at least in part, to the resurgence of relatively nativist and insular political forces. With the election of a centre-left coalition in Norway, it is clear that the forebodings of a far-right cloud over Europe were exaggerated — all five Scandinavian countries now have left-of-centre governments. However, it would be equally premature to imagine that a left-liberal order is now deeply entrenched in Europe.

Norway's Labour Party leader, Jonas Gahr Støre, is set to lead a coalition government. The questions in the election echoed some of the issues that Northern Europe — in fact, the global North as a whole — has been grappling with. How is the transition away from fossil fuels, and the jobs and wealth it creates, going to be managed? What should be the balance between fair taxation and rising inequality? In countries with ageing, declining populations, how should the political and social fallout of immigration be addressed? In this election, as others preceding it in the region, the mandate has been for welfareists and reasonable pro-environment Green parties to attempt to guide the country through these transitions.

Yet, it's important to remember that an election leads to a change in government; it does not eviscerate the social strands that form the background of politics. In France, for example, there have been political obituaries as well as over-estimations of the far-right's influence — both have been wrong. Marine Le Pen continues to be politically significant without being dominant. In Nordic countries, a similar process is likely underway. For the world, there will be lessons on how these developed states deal with the challenges of the 21st century.

IN A SURPRISE, virtual statement on September 15, the heads of government of Australia, the UK and US announced the formation of a trilateral security pact, to be known by the acronym, AUKUS. Without naming China, US President Joe Biden announced, in a press conference, that "in order to deal with rapidly evolving threats," the US and Britain would share, with Australia, intelligence and advanced technologies in areas like artificial intelligence, cyber-warfare, quantum computing and nuclear submarine construction.

The surprise at the formation of AUKUS is for a number of reasons. Firstly, the three nations are already allied to each other, in more ways than one — the US and UK are NATO allies, and Australia, New Zealand and the US are linked by the ANZUS pact. All three are also members of the "Five Eyes" intelligence alliance. Secondly, this announcement, coming just days before the first in-person summit meeting of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), places a question mark over the continuing relevance of this forum and its long-overdue actualisation. Finally, the inclusion of a much-diminished, post-Brexit UK in such a long-range alliance is bound to raise a few eyebrows.

China has made no secret of its neurosis about the Quad as well as the naval exercise, "Malabar," both of which, now, have a common membership, comprising the US, India, Australia and Japan. Beijing's apprehensions arise from the suspicion that this concatenation could be a precursor to "containment" — the Cold War strategy which eventually brought the USSR to its knees.

While frequently heaping scorn on their attempts at synergy and coordination, China loses no opportunity to send intimidatory messages to the Quad nations. This has led to palpable trepidation amongst members of this grouping, who have remained over-cautious in their utterances and tended to "tip-toe" around the "dragon" in their midst. The Quad has neither created a charter nor invested itself with any substance; fearing that it would be dubbed an "Asian NATO." China, on its part, has dismissed the Quad as a "headline-grabbing idea which will dissipate like sea-foam".

All that India has to show for its 'strategic partnership', is approximately \$22 billion worth of military hardware purchased from US companies — a distinctly retrograde step when we seek atmanirbharta and freedom from external reliance. We need all the technologies being offered to Australia, in addition to 'know-how' and 'know-why' of much else, including stealth fighters, jet engines, advanced radars and, of course, nuclear propulsion for submarines as well as aircraft carriers.

So far, China has had its way in the geopolitical arena without hindrance from any quarter. In the South China Sea, having staked outrageous territorial claims, and contemptuously dismissed the adverse verdict of the UN Court of Arbitration, China has proceeded to create artificial islands, and to convert them into fortified air bases. Regular "freedom of navigation operations" by the US and allied navies have neither deterred, nor daunted China.

Even more belligerent has been China's conduct along the Sino-Indian border, where it has used massive military deployments to stake claims to large tracts of Indian territory, leading to a sanguinary conflict in mid-June 2020. India, having counter-mobilised, at considerable economic cost, has stood its ground. Given our limited options, this dangerous confrontation is likely to continue.

Against this backdrop, it is possible that creation of the AUKUS could well be an attempt to send a stronger message to China. However, China's description of this alliance as an "exclusionary bloc," should be food for thought for two members of the Quad/Malabar forums — India and Japan — who have been excluded from the new grouping.

While uncharitable comments about "Anglo-Saxon solidarity" must be ignored, there may be substance in the belief that the "Anglosphere nations" — which share common cultural and historical ties to the UK — do inspire more confidence in each other. Whether the Quad and AUKUS will reinforce each other, or remain mutually exclusive, will, no doubt, become clear in the forthcoming Quad summit.

An issue that should give cause for reflection in New Delhi, arises from Biden's promise to transfer advanced technology, including submarine nuclear-propulsion to Australia. It brings into stark relief India's failure to acquire any significant high technology from the US, in spite of bilateral ties, which have steadily grown in warmth and closeness over the past decade and a half.

Some major milestones in the Indo-US security relationship have been: Signing of the pathbreaking Indo-US Civil Nuclear Agreement, in 2008; launching of the Defence

Technology and Trade Initiative in 2012; accord of the status of "Major Defence Partner" by the US Congress in 2016; grant of Tier 1 status to India, enabling export of high-technology items; and institution of "2+2 talks" in 2018. Signing of the fourth and last of the key "foundational agreements" in 2020, was supposed to have eliminated the final impediment to closer defence cooperation.

"Our strategic partnership with India, a fellow democracy... is reaching new heights," says a 2019 US State Department document. While the warming of the Indo-US relationship brings comfort to Indians, we must beware of hyperbole, obscuring reality, in the bilateral discourse. American offers of help "to make India a great power" and overzealous declarations (at the apex level in November 2017) that that "two of the world's great democracies should also have the world's two greatest militaries," must be taken with a generous pinch of salt.

China, it is said, owes its pole position to the advanced technology it was given, or it purloined from the US over a 30-year period. All that India has to show for its "strategic partnership," is approximately \$22 billion worth of military hardware purchased from US companies — a distinctly retrograde step when we seek atmanirbharta and freedom from external reliance. We need all the technologies being offered to Australia, in addition to "know-how" and "know-why" of much else, including stealth fighters, jet engines, advanced radars and, of course, nuclear propulsion for submarines as well as aircraft-carriers.

For India to attain its full potential, it will need insurance against hegemony, and a breathing space to restore its economy to its earlier buoyant trajectory. This respite will enable it to catch up with technology and boost its military muscle. While preparing to fight its own battles, India will need to seek external balancing. If realpolitik so demands, it must break old shibboleths and strike new partnerships — wherever there is convergence of interests

The writer is a retired chief of naval staff



BHUPENDER YADAV

A PARTY OF CHANGE

BJP has learnt to adapt to the times because of its ideological anchor

ELECTIONS ARE important in the Indian political system to test the policies of parties that have won public mandates. The mandate allows opportunities for new possibilities and newer people. Change within governments is also affected by this electoral process. This is important so that public representatives maintain communication and contact with the public.

The important question that arises is: How to find newer people and new opportunities in a party that is chosen by the public over and over again? Can parties that win elections repeatedly find a way to give opportunities to new faces? The second important question is: Can political parties based on an idea draw a line that makes politics all-inclusive, fully participative and an ideological mission?

In this context, the Bharatiya Janata Party, since its inception, has been an organisation that has tried to test new possibilities in politics. The BJP, which started with the mission to ensure the welfare of the last man in the social hierarchy, has shown ideological commitment not just in words but also in its actions.

While party representatives exhibited unprecedented steadfastness in fighting the Emergency, they also participated in the struggle for greater transparency. The BJP, which was part of a great many movements, is today in power and working relentlessly for good governance.

The BJP has proven itself as being a "party with a difference" — distinct from other parties. Its fight against family-based politics is reflected in its party structure. At a time when

other parties are faced with the challenge of maintaining inner-party democracy, the BJP has succeeded in making its organisation worker-oriented and based on ideology. The BJP has kept itself free of the dynastic politics that is the hallmark of all other parties.

When we assess the functioning of other parties, the question before the BJP is how should the party move ahead as a political entity. What is the way ahead for the BJP as an organisation working in coordination with the government? How do we build capabilities among workers? Umpteen questions like these are a part of our politics today. The answers to all these questions can be found in the BJP working under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The political leadership needs to have public communication, sensitivity, understanding of the ground situation in framing and executing policies and respecting the public mandate. New and practical policies can help establish coordination between the executive and bureaucracy. To bridge the gap between the two, it is important to have a clear policy and strong leadership. The BJP has worked towards these objectives to bring positive changes. It is natural for a party that has been earning the people's trust for a long time to go for internal changes.

Similarly, if a party wants to build capacities among its workers it needs to build upon its leadership. This is because when a new person gets a responsibility, they tend to fulfil it with greater dedication and renewed energy. At the same time, when a person returns to power after staying out of it for a long time,

he tends to bring fresh energy to his tasks. This is an experiment that needs to be accepted within politics on a wider scale. Since political parties are not the property of any individual or family, this is a people-friendly experiment. To ensure new ideas find acceptance in the times to come, we must welcome such experiments.

Another question that arises from this is about the difficulties that accompany change. These difficulties arise when the foundation of the organisation is not a commitment to an ideology but to a dynasty. Workers who are dedicated to an ideology easily adjust to changes and continue fulfilling their duties. In dynastic parties, organisational changes are accompanied by internal power struggles. This is a foundational difference that needs to be understood when it comes to change.

In the BJP, change is a natural process, while in other parties it leads to instances of confrontation. It is for this reason that analysts make mistakes while understanding changes within the BJP.

The BJP accepts changes based on new needs, new ideas, the requirement to give new people opportunities and to move ahead with greater energy while discharging duties both at the organisational and at the governmental levels. This is part of BJP's positive work agenda, which is accepted by all party workers wholeheartedly.

The writer is Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change & Labour and Employment



SEPTEMBER 21, 1981, FORTY YEARS AGO

PUNJAB VIOLENCE

TWELVE PERSONS WERE killed, and a number of others injured when police opened fire to disperse a sword-wielding crowd of Nihangs, which attacked security forces after Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale surrendered to the police and was taken to Ludhiana. The mob burnt a police jeep, a truck, three makeshift police offices, an improvised canteen and an unspecified number of beds and belongings of policemen. A jawan of the Punjab Armed Police was reportedly killed when a Nihang attacked him with a sword. The Bhindranwale had specifically asked his followers to remain peaceful after his arrest.

CONGRESS (I) PROBLEMS

THE CONGRESS (I) High Command is intrigued over the reluctance of many Karnataka leaders, including the Chief Minister R Gundu Rao, to comply with its directive and quit party posts. Though the AICC (I) formulated the 'One Man, One Policy', some months ago and directed all ministers to relinquish their positions in the party, many have refused to do so. Amongst the defaulters are the CM who continues to head the Coorg District Congress Committee (I).

SIVAKASI BLAST

THE DEATH TOLL in the blast in Sivakasi in

Tamil Nadu on September 19 rose to 31 with the death of one of the two seriously injured admitted to hospital. R B Thaba, chief executive controller of explosives, will be in Sivakasi to inquire into the incident. Arunachalam, owner of the unit manufacturing firecrackers in which the explosion took place, has been taken into custody.

MANSAROVAR PILGRIMS

THE GROUP OF Indian pilgrims to Mansarovar and Kailash were given a warm reception by Chinese authorities when they crossed into China. They were met by Chinese authorities at Lipulekh pass at a height of 17,800 feet.

Feud among friends

Delhi's interests lie in deeper strategic cooperation with France and Europe as well as the Quad. Its diverse relationships in the West must be deployed in full measure to prevent a split in the Indo-Pacific coalition



RAJA MANDALA
By C RAJA MOHAN

MORE THAN FOUR decades ago, Washington decided to end its commitment to supply nuclear fuel for the Tarapur Atomic Power Station that it helped build. That decision was triggered by the sharp reaction in the US Congress against India's 1974 nuclear test. India was furious with American unilateralism.

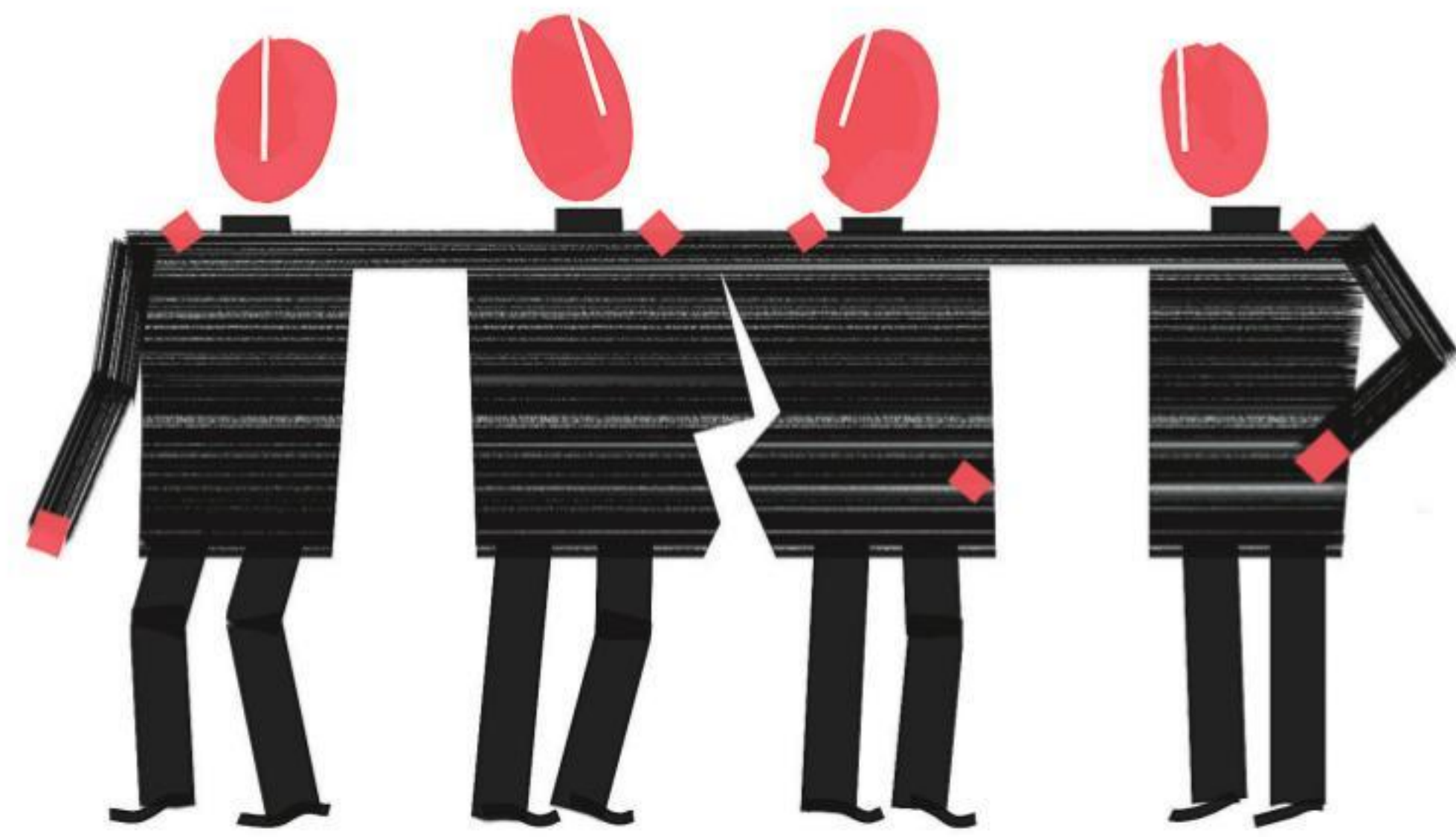
After Ronald Reagan took charge of the White House in 1981, his advisers were eager to improve ties with India and fix the Tarapur problem that appeared so intractable. The new US domestic non-proliferation law barred nuclear fuel supply to India. But the international nuclear rules did not. Washington turned to Paris to step in to replace the US as the supplier of fuel to Tarapur. The Tarapur diplomacy was a win-win for all. India got to run Tarapur; the US stayed within the confines of its domestic law; and France got the contract.

Where there is will, the Tarapur diplomacy reminds us, there is a way. That brings us to AUKUS — the nuclear coalition, which has ignited unprecedented French fury. Could not Australia, United Kingdom and the United States devise a sensible way for Canberra to get out of the conventional submarine contract with Paris and turn to London and Washington for a new agreement on the supply of nuclear-powered submarines? That the issue was handled poorly is not in doubt. All that, however, is water under the bridge. The angry French reaction — marked by a rare recall of envoys from Washington and Canberra — suggests it will be a while before the crisis can be overcome. There is concern that AUKUS could leave a deep scar on US-EU relations and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, and weaken the international coalition in the Indo-Pacific. Is there something that Delhi could do to heal the rift among its valued friend? An intense round of Indian diplomacy in New York and Washington this week should answer that question.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is heading to Washington for the first in-person bilateral summit with US President Joe Biden on Thursday. The PM is also expected to have bilateral conversations with the Prime Ministers of Australia (Scott Morrison) and the Japanese premier (Yoshihide Suga). On Friday, the four leaders will sit down at the White House for the first summit of the Quadrilateral Forum, or the Quad. The four leaders had met digitally in March this year. The PM will then head to the United Nations, where he will address the annual session of the General Assembly. External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar will also be in New York, meeting a large number of other world leaders.

Paris had cancelled a scheduled meeting of the foreign ministers of Australia, France, and India at the UN. In the last couple of years, the trilateral has become an important element in the emerging Indo-Pacific architecture. Jaishankar, however, will have a bilateral meeting with the French foreign minister Jean-Yves Le Drian. The two leaders spoke to each other after the announcement of AUKUS and agreed to consult closely.

That Delhi today is a part of a difficult con-



C R Sasikummar

versation between the US, UK, France, Europe, and Australia points to the growing depth and diversity of India's relations with different parts of the West.

Popular and academic discourse on India's foreign policy has been obsessed with the concept of "non-alignment" — that shorn of all mystification, was about keeping distance from the West as a whole. India's contemporary diplomacy, in contrast, takes a nuanced view of internal dynamics in the West, and recognises the political agency of individual states, and develops wide-ranging relationships with the Western nations.

Let us start with France: Paris has always taken an independent view of the world, while remaining within the broad framework of the American alliance. In the 1990s, Paris championed the construction of a multipolar world to constrain American "hyperpower". Delhi did not seize the opportunity as it embraced the Russian-Chinese version of multipolarity. The last few years, however, have seen an intensification of India's strategic engagement with France. For example, the NDA government has overcome the earlier reluctance in Delhi to work with Paris on Indian Ocean security.

The NDA government has also stepped up on the political engagement with Europe as a collective as well as its sub-regions — from Baltics to the Balkans and from Iberia to Mitteleuropa. For long, Europe was largely a diplomatic backwater for India. As Delhi discovers that every European nation, from tiny Luxembourg to a rising Poland, has something to offer, Europe has become a thriving hub of India's international relations.

Thanks to the bitter colonial legacy, relations between Delhi and London have always been prickly and underdeveloped. In the last couple of years, India has made a determined effort to build a new partnership with Britain, which is the fifth-largest economy in the world, a leading financial hub, a technological powerhouse, and punches well above its weight in global affairs.

India's neglect of London also meant Delhi had no time for the "Anglosphere" that binds the UK to Australia, Canada, and New Zealand. Many had presumed that the Anglosphere was about dead white English-speaking men — AUKUS, however, is a reminder that Anglo-

Could not Australia, United Kingdom and the United States devise a sensible way for Canberra to get out of the conventional submarine contract with Paris and turn to London and Washington for a new agreement on the supply of nuclear-powered submarines? That the issue was handled poorly is not in doubt. All that, however, is water under the bridge. The angry French reaction — marked by a rare recall of envoys from Washington and Canberra — suggests it will be a while before the crisis can be overcome. There is concern that AUKUS could leave a deep scar on US-EU relations and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, and weaken the international coalition in the Indo-Pacific.

Saxon political bonds endure. Instead of treating the Anglosphere with disdain, Delhi has begun to vigorously engage with the "settler colonies" that have so much to offer India — from natural resources to higher education and critical technologies. The UK and its settler colonies have long been the preferred destination for the Indian diaspora (besides the US). While the diaspora tends to connect the domestic politics of the Anglosphere with that of India, Delhi is figuring out that the diaspora politics can be played both ways. The transformation of India's relations with Australia has occurred despite entrenched scepticism in the foreign policy bureaucracy. Finally, Japan has been a part of the West in the post-War era and Delhi's relations with Tokyo have never been as rounded as they are today. They are also fellow members of the Quad.

This wide-ranging engagement with the West should help Delhi convey two important messages to its partners this week. One is to remind France, Australia, the UK and US of the shared interests in securing the Indo-Pacific and the dangers of letting the current quarrel undermine that larger goal. The other is to highlight the region's vast requirements for effective deterrence in the Indo-Pacific; and that there is enough room for the US, UK, France, and Europe to collaborate with Indo-Pacific partners in overlapping coalitions to develop high technology and defence-industrial cooperation in all the areas highlighted by AUKUS — effective underwater capabilities to AI, quantum computing and cyber warfare.

Finally, India's interests lie in deeper strategic cooperation with France and Europe as well as the Quad and the Anglosphere. It was French President Jacques Chirac who first, during a visit to Delhi in January 1998, called for ending India's nuclear isolation. But it required the full might of the US presidency under George W Bush to overcome the Western nonproliferation theology and Chinese political resistance. India's diverse relationships in the West must be deployed in full measure to prevent a split in the Indo-Pacific coalition.

The writer is director, Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore and contributing editor on international affairs for The Indian Express

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"There are aspects of coronavirus management, especially by developed nations towards those less so, that smack of discrimination."

— DAWN, PAKISTAN

Extend the coalition

Farmers' movement should take note of amendments to Haryana's land acquisition laws. To mount an effective challenge, it has to forge broader solidarities



JANAKI SRINIVASAN

A NUMBER of developments in the past few weeks signal that state governments in the region at the epicentre of the ongoing farmers' agitation have decided to shift the political conversation from the agitation. While former Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh's demand that the agitation be carried out only in Delhi and Haryana is admittedly the mildest move, the Uttar Pradesh government, despite being poll-bound, is banking on both the limited regional locus and caste dynamics of the agitation in addition to communal polarisation to blunt the electoral challenge posed by the farmers — despite the numbers of the Muzaffarnagar mahapanchayat. It is the Haryana government, however, where the ruling coalition's MLAs and ministers have been unable to hold public functions or even enter their constituencies, that has determinedly moved away from its earlier characterisation of farmers as "misled" and adopted an aggressive approach.

Despite the flare-up in Karnal and its capitulation to the agitating farmers' demands, the government has made fresh moves to clear the Delhi border and blamed the protests on Punjab and the Opposition parties. This points to a determined design to undermine the farmer-and-agriculture-infused political vocabulary that has been the mainstay of the state's politics and requires us to enquire into the calculations that underpin it.

A number of policies adopted by the Haryana government in recent months offer vital clues. The most important of these, which has surprisingly found limited space in the farmers' agitation, are the amendments the Haryana assembly brought in to the law governing land acquisition, rehabilitation and resettlement in the last week of August. It will come into force after obtaining the President's Assent. While other states have brought in similar pieces of legislation, since 2016, to reverse critical provisions of the Central Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act (LARR), 2013, the Haryana had desisted till now. The state's farmers were at the forefront of the protests to oppose the bid to amend LARR then. The INLD, JJP's parent party, had opposed these amendments in Parliament: Then INLD MP and current deputy CM Dushyant Chautala's impassioned speech in Parliament against the amendments he is now stoutly defending continues to be featured on JJP's YouTube channel.

The amendments do away with the requirement of consent from 70 per cent of affected landowners in case of a Public Private Partnership (PPP) project and of Social Impact Assessment (SIA) for a range of public sector and PPP projects, including the malleable category of "infrastructure", which defeats the limitation placed on the definition of "public purpose" permitting acquisition. It empow-

ers the collector to unilaterally determine compensation without calling for objections or conducting an inquiry, thereby narrowing the category of "project affected" which the LARR had widened to include all those dependent on the land for their livelihood and residence.

Social science scholarship on middle-caste peasantry in India, including of this Green Revolution belt, has pointed to the disjuncture between identity and aspiration that has come to characterise the landholding farming community since the turn of the century. While land remains a marker of identity, status and pride, aspirations of and for the youth (by the older generation) exhibit a disenchantment with farming and the desire for a salaried, preferably government, job or a desire to migrate abroad. As rising educational levels fail to translate into employment, both due to quality of education and shrinking employment opportunities, these communities have mounted agitations for inclusion in the OBC list, thereby qualifying for reservations in employment and education. Haryana was rocked by the Jat reservation agitation in 2016 by the very sections leading the current protests. In March, Haryana passed a law reserving 75 per cent of private sector jobs below the salary bracket of Rs 50,000 per month for domiciles.

At one level, the recent amendments to LARR constitute a sop to an industry critical of this requirement. That Chautala spearheaded this law while facing intense pressure from his own party rank and file vis-à-vis the farm laws, however, signals that the plan is to go deeper and break the tenuous link between land and identity by casting the dice in favour of aspiration by broadening access to the urban industrial and services sector. This is part of a broader churning to undercut the evocative hold of the figure of the "farmer" in the political, especially electoral, discourse and centre politics around a post-agrarian economy.

The farmers' agitation has garnered unprecedented solidarity from other social movements, mass organisations and trade unions including cautious support from those sections whose interests and caste experience lie in tension with landholding farmers. But to mount an effective challenge, this solidarity needs to translate into a coalition for which it needs to widen the agenda from return to status quo to the transformations required in agriculture as part of a development model which can ensure livelihood, dignity and ecological restoration. While the movement has taken an anti-corporate, anti-privatisation stand and some steps towards restoring broken communal harmony, it needs to have difficult conversations about caste and gender hierarchies in the agrarian social structure, and the prevailing ecologically unsound land-use patterns. It can take direction from the movement that led to LARR — anti-displacement movements had built alliances with other social movements, including that of farmers. The post-Green Revolution farmers' movement in India has hitherto worked with a limited agenda but retaining its political salience necessitates such a dialogue.

The writer teaches political science at Panjab University, Chandigarh

Growing together

Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 creates opportunities for its partners, including India



SAUD BIN MOHAMMED AL-SATI

FIVE YEARS ago, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia launched its Vision 2030, aiming to diversify its economy, modernise its administration and introduce bold reforms in many sectors. A lot has happened since then in terms of etching milestones on the path of the implementation while responding to the unpredicted Covid-19 pandemic.

The ongoing transformation of the Kingdom's economy and society revolves around Vision 2030 and its multiple goals, including diversification of the economy, enhancing government efficiency, increasing non-oil government revenues, reducing unemployment, and increasing women's participation in the workforce, etc.

Diverse reforms have been introduced in laws, regulations, and procedures. In the sphere of law, the Kingdom has implemented impactful reforms in the area of contract enforcement. Over 197 legislations have been introduced to improve the regulatory environment.

The Kingdom's e-government initiative is building capacities among government institutions to become more efficient, transparent, and accountable. The Kingdom is supporting a digitally-enabled industrial revolution for projects in mining, manufacturing, logistics, and energy through a \$453 billion fund. The Line project and the Neom, Red Sea, and Qiddiya projects are expanding the innovation portfolio.

A sound digital infrastructure has been

developed to support Vision 2030's ambitions. Saudi Arabia's robust digital infrastructure today ranks 7th globally in terms of internet speed and the quality of 5G. With the recently launched National Strategy for Data and AI, Saudi Arabia will soon be among the top 15 countries in artificial intelligence capability, attracting a total of SR 75 billion in investment.

From 2016 onwards, the government has delivered on more than 45 per cent of the 500 planned reforms. Through the National Licensing Reform Program (NLRP), more than 60 per cent of over 5,500 licenses selected for reform have already been eliminated or modified. Commercial licenses are being issued within 24 hours.

As stated by HRH Crown Prince in a recent interview, in the fourth quarter of 2019, the non-oil economy grew by about 4.5 per cent. The momentum gained since then has helped the Kingdom in dealing effectively with the economic repercussions of the coronavirus pandemic. FDI inflows have increased 331 per cent to reach SR 17,625 billion, with a total of 1,278 new foreign companies obtaining licenses in 2020. Saudi Arabia's investment environment is returning to pre-Covid-19 levels and is on track to increase the private sector's contribution to 65 per cent of the GDP by 2030.

The IMF's projections paint a positive picture, estimating Saudi Arabia's real GDP growth at 4.8 per cent, the real non-oil GDP growth at 3.6 per cent, and the real oil GDP

growth to reach 6.8 per cent in 2022. The Public Investments Fund assets were projected to be SR 7 trillion by 2030. As they are likely to touch SR 4 trillion in 2025, the target has already been re-adjusted to SR 10 trillion by 2030. PIF has already launched over 30 new companies and created 3,31,000 jobs in Saudi Arabia over the past four years and will further invest \$40 billion annually over the coming five years to support new sectors such as tourism, sports, industry, agriculture, transportation, space, etc.

The Kingdom is prepared to become a global hub for renewable energy (RE) and RE technologies over the next 10 years. The recent inauguration of the Sakaka solar PV and Sudair plant are in line with the recently launched "Saudi Green" and the "Middle East Green" initiatives. Both initiatives aim to collectively plant 50 billion trees, generate 50 per cent of power via renewables by 2030 and propel the region towards achieving more than 10 per cent of the global carbon emissions reduction targets. In its motivation to preserve the planet, Saudi Arabia plans to host the very first Green Saudi Initiative Forum and the Green Middle East Initiative Summit in Riyadh on October 23, 2021. Recently, Saudi Arabia has started producing renewable energy from its first wind farm at Dumat Al Jandal. The wind farm is estimated to generate green energy for about 70,000 Saudi households and eliminate 988,000 tonnes of carbon emissions a year. Under the green ini-

tiatives, the Kingdom is expected to also eliminate more than 130 million tons of carbon emissions by using clean hydrocarbon technologies.

In our endeavour to achieve the Vision 2030 strategic goals, we have created immense opportunities and an attractive business environment for our strategic partners. Indian companies in Saudi Arabia operate in diverse sectors such as management, consultancy services, construction projects, telecommunications, information technology, software development, pharmaceuticals, and more. The number of Indian companies investing and operating in the Kingdom has continued to grow. In 2020, 44 new licenses were issued for Indian investments. Saudi Arabia also had the highest FDI increase to India in 2020 with investments worth \$2.81 billion in areas of renewable energy, petrochemicals, agriculture, health, and technology.

As we celebrate Saudi Arabia's 91st National Day on September 23, we look forward to our continued partnership with India. Saudi Arabia has valued India as a close friend and strategic partner. Our dynamic cultural, socio-economic, and political partnership is based on mutual respect and shared values and interests and shall continue to thrive for the interests of our two friendly people and the people of the region.

The writer is Saudi Arabia's ambassador to India

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

STRATEGIC CHOICE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Channi's challenge' (IE, September 20). Charanjit Singh Channi's success in wearing the interim Chief Minister's mantle is not a fluke. Like others in the race, he has the required qualities and credentials, which have won him this prestigious post. The Scheduled Caste tag alone is not sufficient. But it is also now very clear that Channi has to hit the ground running to win the assembly elections with flying colours to claim this full-time post again. There are many dark horses waiting in the wings.

Tarsem Singh, Mahilpur

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Channi's challenge' (IE, September 2). After realising the shortcomings in Captain Amarinder Singh's four-and-a-half-year tenure, the Congress has played its cards strategically. Appointing a Dalit leader as CM meets the expectations of more than 30 per cent of the state's population. The party has played its trump card by selecting Channi as its next CM, keeping in mind SAD's collaboration with the BSP, and AAP's announcement of a Dalit leader as a CM. Channi has four months to prove himself.

Apoorv Raj, Noida

CASTE HEGEMONY

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'The Mandal-Mandir equation' (IE, September 20). The "Savarna" oligarchy sanctioned by scriptures like

Manusmriti is not merely socio-cultural. This has also promoted their hegemony over the nation's resources, including the burgeoning private sector, where quotas are not yet applicable. The unremitting demand for a caste census is a reflection of Bahujan resentment aimed to expose the ugly truth of their socio-economic and political marginalisation. The Modi government's rejig of cabinet berths for members from OBCs is a rehash of the window dressing adopted by the Congress for SCs and STs after Independence. It has a limited political shelf-life and carries the danger of a potential Savarna backlash.

L R Murmu, Delhi

SQUALID CITIES

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'City to recover' (IE, September 20). While there can be no question about the need to improve our towns and cities to attract and retain migrants, the sheer enormity of the task makes it an unrealistic goal. Urban India has the abysmal infrastructure and messy politics. It would be much better to improve rural areas so that people have a better quality of life there, and not do anything that ruins rural livelihoods, such as demonetisation. So long as people in the countryside have some land to fall back on, and support from family and relatives, they would hesitate to move in large numbers to cities. Migration is linked to the quality of life as much as it is to income.

Hemant Contractor, Pune