

CURRENT AFFAIRS

05 September 2022



TN – WELFARE SCHEME

CM to unveil scheme to pay girl students ₹1,000 a month

Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal to take part in the function

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

Chief Minister M.K. Stalin is set to launch the Moovalur Ramamirtham Ammaiyar Higher Education Assurance scheme, titled *Pudhumai Penn* scheme, at a function in Chennai on Monday in the presence of Delhi Chief Minister and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader Arvind Kejriwal.

During the event, Mr. Kejriwal is set to unveil 26 schools of excellence and 15 model schools being established by the Tamil Nadu government, emulating the model of the AAP government in Delhi.

Under the scheme, all girls who studied from Classes VI to XII in government schools will be paid ₹1,000 a month till they complete their undergraduate degree, diploma and ITI courses. The amount will be directly deposited into their bank account. The stu-



M.K. Stalin

dents will be eligible for other scholarships too.

Through the scheme, about six lakh girls would be benefited every year. The State government allocated ₹698 crore in the 2022-23 Budget for the scheme.

Minister for Higher Education K. Ponmudy, Minister for Social Welfare P. Geetha Jeevan, Minister for Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments P.K. Sekarbabu and Minister for School Education Anbil Mahesh Poyya-

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mozhi will attend the function.

In March, the government announced that it would transform the Moovalur Ramamirtham Ammaiyar Memorial Marriage Assistance Scheme as the Moovalur Ramamirtham Ammaiyar Higher Education Assurance Scheme after recognising that in higher education, the enrolment ratio of girls from government schools was quite low. The government had contended: "In line with the changing times, it is necessary to remould this scheme to promote higher education among girls belonging to the economically weaker families."

Moovalur Ramamirtham

- ✓ Tamil social reformer, author, and political activist of the Dravidian Movement, who worked for the abolition of the Devadasi system in the Madras Presidency.
- ✓ She was the author of the 1936 novel *Dasigalin Mosavalai alladhu madhi pettra minor* (lit. Devadasis' web of deceit or the minor grown wise) which exposed the plight of the Devadasis

- ✓. Originally a supporter of the nationalist Indian National Congress, she became a member of Periyar E. V. Ramasamy's Self-Respect Movement after Periyar left the Congress in 1925.
- ✓ In 1930, she supported Muthulakshmi Reddi's failed attempt to abolish the Devadasi system in the Presidency through legislation.
- ✓ She took part in the Anti-Hindi agitations
- ✓ The public awareness created by her novel and her continuous campaign to abolish the Devadasi system, were instrumental in the passage of the Madras Devadasi (Prevention of Dedication) Act or the Devadasi Abolition Bill, which outlawed the practice in 1947.

TOPIC: CONSTITUTIONAL BODIES

HC criticises TNSEC's move to cancel polls at town panchayat

Court says it was done to help DMK put up new candidates for the election

Tamil Nadu State Election Commission

- ✓ The Tamil Nadu State Election Commission is an autonomous, independent Constitutional and Statutory authority of Tamil Nadu.
- ✓ It was formed under the Constitution of India as per the provisions of the 73rd and 74th Amendments Acts of 1992 on 15 July 1994.
- ✓ All Local Body elections of Tamil Nadu are conducted by this Commission.

TOPIC: INDIA - NEIGHBOURHOOD RELATION

A lot is at stake for India-Bangladesh ties

While they have deepened ties, the Hasina and Modi governments have failed to resolve long-standing issues



In August, while addressing devotees gathered to celebrate Janmashtami, Bangladesh Foreign Minister Abdul Momen requested the Indian government to ensure that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina stays in power when Bangladesh goes to the polls next year. He claimed that both India and Bangladesh would gain political stability by ensuring this. These out-of-the-norm comments from the senior cabinet member created a stir on both sides of the border. Senior leaders of the ruling Awami League distanced themselves from these remarks, while India maintained silence. Mr. Momen's comments came before Ms. Hasina's visit to India from September 5 to 8, 2022.

Trade and connectivity Following the conclusion of the seventh round of the India-Bangladesh joint Consultative Commission in June, the two neighbours have expanded their partnership to include Artificial Intelligence, Fintech, cybersecurity, startups, and connectivity. Trade will be a focal point during Ms. Hasina's visit as the two countries gear up to sign a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA). The two Prime Ministers are also expected to inaugurate a joint venture power plant soon.

CEPA comes at a time when Bangladesh is set to lose the duty-free and quota-free market-access facility to India after 2026 when it graduates to a developing country. Bangladesh is India's sixth largest trade partner with bilateral trade rising from \$2.4 billion in 2009 to \$10.8 billion in 2020-21. Bangladesh imports critical industrial raw material from India on which its exports are reliant. According to a World Bank working paper, Bangladesh's exports could rise 182% under a free trade agreement. This could become 300% if combined with trade facilitation measures and reduced transaction costs. Bangladesh also could improve several manufacturing industries by leveraging Indian expertise in service sectors.

India and Bangladesh have implemented several projects to boost



eastern India-Bangladesh connectivity. India's connectivity projects with ASEAN and Bangladesh will open up the region to economic growth. Bangladesh has expressed its interest in joining the India-Myanmar-Thailand highway project. India-Bangladesh bilateral waterway trade will get boosted as India can now use the Mongla and Chittagong ports. India is rallying Bangladesh to divert its exports through Indian ports in place of Malaysian or Singaporean ports. Enhancing connectivity through India's Northeast and Bangladesh is important for bilateral cooperation. Currently, three express trains and international bus services operate between Indian and Bangladesh.

The sharing of the waters of the Teesta has remained a thorny issue between the two countries since 1947. For West Bengal, Teesta is important to sustain its impoverished farming districts which comprise 12.77% of its population. For Bangladesh, the Teesta's flood plains cover about 14% of the total cropped area of the country and provide direct livelihood opportunities to approximately 7.3% of the population. The countries are expected to sign at least one major river agreement during the upcoming trip.

In 2015, India and Bangladesh resolved the decades-long border dispute through the Land Swap Agreement. Indian Home Minister Amit Shah recently reviewed the security arrangements in the Assam-Meghalaya-Bangladesh tri-junction, which used to a smugglers' route. In 2019, India enacted the National Register of Citizens and the Citizenship

(Amendment) Act, which created an uproar within and beyond the borders. Ms. Hasina termed the move as "unnecessary". But her government has mostly kept silent on India's "internal matter" even as political commentators and citizens have feared it could have ripple effects for Bangladesh. The detainees caught at the border that year claimed they were Bangladeshi citizens who were returning to the country on failing to obtain Indian citizenship.

Regional geopolitics Chinese inroads into the neighbourhood have been a cause of worry for India. China has been actively pursuing bilateral ties with Bangladesh. Bangladesh had successfully approached China for a mega project to enhance Teesta river water flow. Bangladesh also requires China's support in resolving the Rohingya refugee crisis. Bangladesh is the second biggest arms market for China after Pakistan.

Bangladesh has also been warming up to Pakistan. The two shared frosty ties for decades after Pakistani politicians made unwarranted comments on the International Crimes Tribunal set up by Bangladesh. Although memories of 1971 remain, Bangladesh has expressed its interest in establishing peaceful relations with Pakistan.

In its election manifesto for the 2018 Bangladesh general elections, the ruling Awami League emphasised cooperation with India, including in sharing Teesta waters. Teesta remains a concern for the Bangladeshi population which is dependent on the river for their livelihood. Ms.

Hasina has worked on strengthening bilateral ties and has uprooted all anti-India insurgency activities within Bangladesh by leading from the front. But the unresolved Teesta issue does not put her in good standing with the electorate. Many believe that her bold and pragmatic steps in strengthening relations with India have not been adequately reciprocated by Delhi and Kolkata.

India-Bangladesh ties witnessed the lowest ebb during the 2001-2006 tenure of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). In 2004, a 10-truck arms and ammunition haul took place in Chittagong. Investigators believed that the delivery of the smuggled arms was intended for the United Liberation Front of Assam, a militant group seeking Assam's independence from India. These illicit activities created tensions between the countries. The BNP's short-sighted and unwise handling of relations with India cost it dearly, for Delhi's corridors of power lost confidence in the party. But by openly flouting its warm relations with India as a safeguard for continuity of power, the Awami League is not playing smart with the electorate either.

In Bangladesh, there is a prevailing perception that India's goodwill towards the country is aligned to one particular political ideology or school of thought as opposed to Bangladeshi society at large. For India, the challenge is to earn the trust and confidence of Bangladeshis across the spectrum and strata. Ms. Hasina has deepened ties with the Narendra Modi government, but the two have failed to resolve long-standing issues such as Teesta water-sharing and killings at the border. The question is, how these factors may affect elections in Bangladesh. For India it will take more than cosy relations with one particular government to have long-term stable relations with its most trusted friend in the neighbourhood, just as Bangladeshis remain grateful to India for the generous support extended by India during the Liberation War of 1971, they are equally sensitive to being treated with respect and fairness, no matter who rules their country.

—*Syed Munir Khasru is Chairman of the international think tank, The Institute for Policy, Advocacy, and Governance, which has a presence in Delhi, Dhaka, Melbourne, Dubai, and Vienna. Email: munir.khasru@ipag.org*

Comprehensive Economic partnership Agreement

- ✓ It is a kind of free trade pact which covers negotiation on the trade in services and investment, and other areas of economic partnership.
- ✓ It may even consider negotiation on areas such as trade facilitation and customs cooperation, competition, and Intellectual Property Rights.
- ✓ Partnership agreements or cooperation agreements are more comprehensive than Free Trade Agreements.
- ✓ CEPA also looks into the regulatory aspect of trade and encompasses an agreement covering the regulatory issues.

TOPIC INTERNATIONAL RELATION

India and Australia, from divergence to convergence

The fifth round of the bilateral Track 1.5 dialogue will set the pace for Canberra's deepening relationship with New Delhi



AMITABH MATTOO & LISA SINGH

In August 1950, one of Australia's most celebrated jurists, Sir Owen Dixon (who sought to mediate a settlement on Kashmir) wrote to his daughter, Anne, in Melbourne that Delhi was "a place I hope and trust that I shall never again see". More than 70 years later, as distinguished thought leaders from India and Australia meet in New Delhi (September 6) for the fifth round of the most important bilateral Track 1.5 dialogue, it is widely recognised that Canberra's relationship with New Delhi is among the most important and critical for the future of the Indo-Pacific. The leaders at the dialogue will reflect on the past, but recommend more concrete steps to foster the relationship and ways to create a more habitable and sustainable planet.

A gradual change

When we started this dialogue we recognised that for most of the 20th century, India and Australia rarely had a meaningful conversation. The long shadow of the Cold War, India's autarkic economic policies, the White Australia policy, and Canberra's decision not to transfer uranium to India and oth-

er factors had kept the two countries apart for several decades. We used to celebrate each other's problems rather than our successes. But that era of mutual schadenfreude is well and truly over.

Today, few countries in the Indo-Pacific region have more in common in both values and interests than India and Australia. Apart from being two English-speaking, multicultural, federal democracies that believe in and respect the rule of law, both have a strategic interest in ensuring a balance in the Indo-Pacific and in ensuring that the region is not dominated by any one hegemonic power. In addition, Indians are today the largest source of skilled migrants in Australia and the economic relationship, already robust, could potentially be transformed if the promise of the new Australia-India Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA) is realised.

Setting markers for ties

A dialogue is a conversation between equals who have agreed to work as partners. No one just preaches, no one just listens. Thought leaders have come here, some from long distances, to have a robust conversation about our relationship and ways in which we can carry it forward. We are here also to lead and provide markers for the future of the relationship between our two great countries.

We are living through a period of immense turbulence, disrupt-

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tion and even subversion: the world is more uncertain than it ever was in our lifetimes. Even the Cold War, some may say, had a predictability, icy as it may have been.

The Australia-India Leadership Dialogue is critical because ideas matter in a relationship as much transactions and negotiations do. Stable, strong and sustainable relationships are built not just on the possibility of immediate gains, but on the promise of the future. In other words, the relationship is far too important to be left to the two governments alone. Governments matter tremendously, but forums such as these can provide the space and the ambience that can infuse new ideas to generate a new energy into the relationship.

Seeds that will germinate

The Leadership Dialogue is also important because ultimately, people and real connections matter. Technology and the cyberworld can blind us into believing that face-to-face conversations are outdated. We, in this Leadership Dialogue, still believe in the power of

personal communication and collective communication in a shared physical space.

In her definitive account of India-Australia bilateral relations, historian Meg Gurry relates how Arthur Tange, High Commissioner to India and one of Australia's most formidable diplomats, wrote in 1965 to his Foreign Minister, Paul Hasluck, that there was fertile ground between the two countries, but "no one seems to know what seeds to plant". Nearly 60 years on, there are not only many seeds waiting to be planted, but much ripe fruit ready to harvest. And that is why we are here.

Some of those seeds will germinate during this important dialogue through discussion, from a broad range of business executives, government officials and scholars, eager to increase their understanding about how each country approaches shared challenges. From cyberthreats and artificial intelligence (AI) governance in a geopolitically turbulent region, to how they will decarbonise their economies and help each other develop trusted supply chains through critical minerals cooperation, to how India's tech talent can help address Australia's skills gaps through migration.

As the premier forum for informal diplomacy between Australia and India, backed by Australian-founded tech company Atlassian and its co-founder Mike Cannon-Brookes, outcomes that grow the relationship through emerging

technology are high on the agenda.

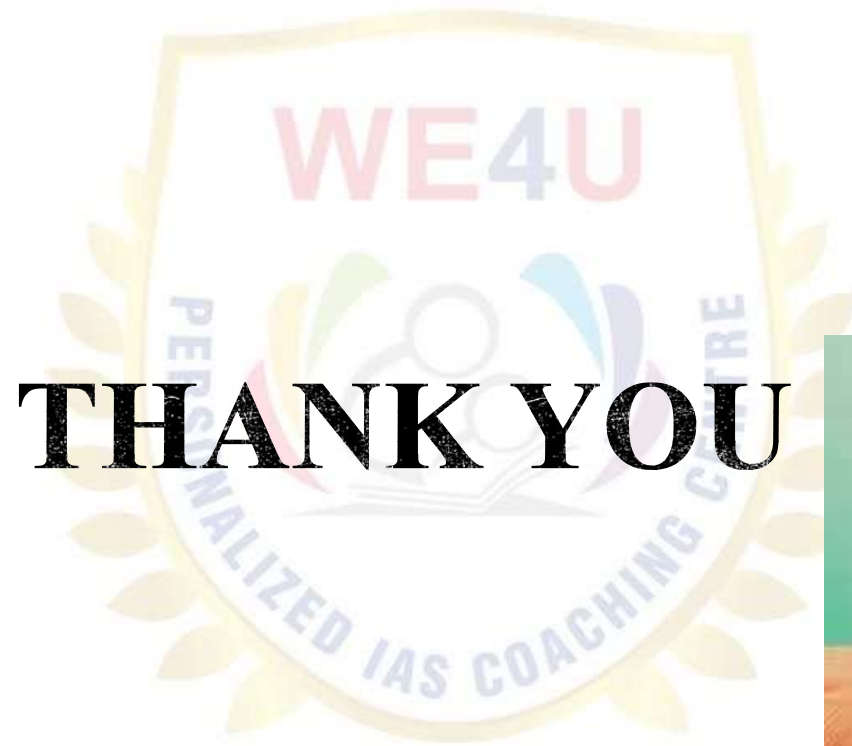
Australia wants to find alternative markets to China and diversify supply chains for its critical minerals. As a country with reserves of about 21 out of the 49 minerals identified in India's critical minerals strategy, Australia is well placed to serve India's national interests required for India's carbon reduction programme.

A shared framework

And while this is the first Dialogue since 2019, due to the novel coronavirus pandemic having kept both countries apart, as two nations we have only grown closer together through enhancing our shared framework for regional security, promoting business and commercial opportunities and strengthening our people to people links, bilaterally and multilaterally.

As India marks 75 years of Independence and surpasses the United Kingdom as the fifth largest global economy, the momentum around this fifth Australia-India Leaderships Dialogue and the bilateral fruit it may bear should not be underestimated.

Amitabh Mattoo is Professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University, Honorary Professor, University of Melbourne, and founding CEO of the Australia India Institute. Lisa Singh is CEO, Australia India Institute, former Australian Senator and the first woman of Indian heritage to be elected to the Australian Parliament



THANK YOU

