



Balancing act

CruX: India should oppose indiscriminate attacks on Israel and disproportionate bombing on Gaza

Act of Balance:

1. At the open UN Security Council session on the Gaza conflict, India, a non-permanent member, attempted a delicate balancing act by reaffirming its traditional support for the Palestine cause without abandoning its new friend Israel. T.S.
2. India's Permanent Representative at the UN, expressed concern over the violence in Jerusalem and the "possible eviction process" of Palestinian families in Sheikh Jarrah and warned against "attempts to unilaterally change the status quo" in Jerusalem.
3. He also reiterated India's "strong support for the just Palestinian cause and its unwavering commitment to the two-state solution". But India was careful not to upset Israel's sensitivities.
4. There is a direct condemnation of the rocket attacks from Gaza but no direct reference to the disproportionate bombing Israel has been carrying out on the impoverished Gaza Strip.
5. India also did not make any reference to the status of Jerusalem or the future borders of the two states, in line with a recent change in its policy. Until 2017, the Indian position was that it supported the creation of an independent, sovereign Palestine state based on the 1967 border and with East Jerusalem as its capital that lives alongside Israel.
6. The balancing did not appear to have gone down well with the Israeli side. When Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who has a good rapport with Narendra Modi, thanked 25 countries that he said stood with Israel, there was no reference to India.

Evolving ties:

1. For India, which voted against the creation of Israel in historic Palestine in 1947 in the UN General Assembly, ties with Israel have transformed since the early 1990s.
2. In 2017, Mr Modi became the first Indian PM to visit Israel and Mr Netanyahu travelled to India in 2018. While Israel ties are on a strong footing, India cannot ignore the Palestinians for historic, moral, legal and realist reasons.
3. Historically, India, which went through the horrors of 1947, opposed the partition of Palestine. Throughout the Cold War, it remained a strong



supporter of Palestinian freedom, taking a moral and legal position against the Israeli occupation, in line with international laws and norms.

4. It established full diplomatic relations with Israel in 1992, in the context of improving Israel-Palestine ties after the Madrid Conference and the changes in the global order following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, but never abandoned the Palestinians.
5. India's Palestine policy had realist underpinnings too. India has been energy dependent on the Arab world. It cannot alienate the Arab voices or be isolated in the General Assembly, where most member-countries oppose the occupation.
6. These factors should have driven India to take a more emphatic position against both the indiscriminate rocket attacks into Israel, in which 12 people were killed and the disproportionate bombing of Gaza, which has claimed at least 230 lives, including over 60 children.

Circumvention

Bypassing elected leaders:

1. Wielding power at the Centre comes with great responsibility. A major responsibility in a federal country with strong centralising features is to maintain the balance, as well as mutual respect, between political structures at the central and state levels.
2. In particular, it is an obligation of the Centre to refrain from bypassing the elected leadership while dealing with States. Two recent developments have raised concern that the Centre wants to give instructions to officials functioning under elected State regimes.
3. Prime Minister has held two virtual meetings with district magistrates and State officials to review the COVID-19 situation.
4. Union Education Minister held a virtual meeting to discuss the National Education Policy and related matters such as the conduct of Class XII examinations with State Secretaries in charge of education.
5. While such meetings may help the Prime Minister or any Union Minister get some feedback from the field across India, it is quite unusual for leaders in the central political executive to bypass their counterparts in the States.



Unprecedented:

1. The Prime Minister addressing district magistrates, or collectors, does have a precedent. Rajiv Gandhi addressed the heads of the district administration in Uttar Pradesh, when it was under Congress rule, on the issue of Panchayati Raj.
2. The defence then was that such direct interactions were permissible under the Constitution, citing Articles 256 and 257. These provisions stipulate that the States are obliged to comply with laws made by Parliament and also allow some directions from the Union government.
3. If the Prime Minister belongs to one party, and the officials addressed are from a State-run by another, there is bound to be resentment that the elected representatives of the State are being bypassed.
4. In the present case, it is true that the Centre has a major role in the pandemic response. The Disaster Management Act has been invoked to specify guidelines on lockdowns, restrictions and relaxations and to ensure smooth medical supplies.
5. However, it would be in the larger interest of the country if events and discussions are held in such a way that the political structures at the State are not seen to be undermined.

The outdated nature of bureaucracy

News: COVID-19 has tested the resilience of all public institutions. Despite its efforts, bureaucracy has emerged as a major concern for the ineffective response to the COVID-19 crisis. This inadequacy is a reflection of the outdated nature of public bureaucracy.

Generalist vs Specialist debate:

1. In the 21st century, democratic countries are still relying on traditional bureaucracies to perform public policy formulation and implementation roles. These bureaucracies have outlived their relevance.
2. Weberian bureaucracy still prefers a generalist over a specialist. A generalist officer (IAS and State civil service officials) is deemed an expert and as a result, superior, even if the officer works in one department or ministry today and in another tomorrow.
3. Specialists in every government department have to remain subordinate to the generalist officers. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed this weakness.



4. Healthcare professionals who are specialists have been made to work under generalist officers and the policy options have been left to the generalists when they should be in the hands of the specialists. The justification is that the generalist provides a broader perspective compared to the specialist.

Weberian bureaucracy

1. Traditional bureaucracy is still stuck with the leadership of position over leadership of function.
2. The leadership of function is when a person has expert knowledge of a particular responsibility in a particular situation. The role of the leader is to explain the situation instead of issuing orders. Every official involved in a particular role responds to the situation rather than relying on some dictation from someone occupying a particular position.
3. Weberian bureaucracy prefers leadership based on position. Bureaucracy has become an end in itself rather than a means to an end. Further, the rigid adherence to rules has resulted in the rejection of innovation. It isn't surprising to see COVID-19 aid getting stuck in cumbersome clearance processes even during the pandemic.

New Public Management not suited:

1. The reform often suggested in India is new public management. This as a reform movement promotes privatization and managerial techniques of the private sector as an effective tool to seek improvements in public service delivery and governance.
2. But this isn't a viable solution, not the least in India where there is social inequality and regional variations in development. It renders the state a bystander among the multiple market players with accountability being constantly shifted, especially during a crisis.
3. Further, COVID-19 has shown that the private sector has also failed in public service delivery.

Collaborative governance

1. The most appropriate administrative reform is the model of new public governance. This model is based on collaborative governance in which the public sector, private players and civil society, especially public service organisations (NGOs), work together for effective public service delivery.
2. There is no domination of public bureaucracy as the sole agency in policy formulation and implementation. As part of new public governance, a network



- of social actors and private players would take responsibility in various aspects of governance with public bureaucracy steering the ship rather than rowing it.
3. During the pandemic, we see civil society playing a major role in saving lives. As part of new public governance, this role has to be institutionalised.
 4. It needs a change in the behaviour of bureaucracy. It needs flexibility in the hierarchy, a relook at the generalist versus specialist debate, and an openness to reforms such as lateral entry and collaboration with a network of social actors.
 5. All major revolutions with huge implications on public service delivery have come through the collaboration of public bureaucracy with so-called outsiders.
 6. These include the Green Revolution (M.S. Swaminathan), the White Revolution (Verghese Kurien), the Aadhaar-enabled services (Nandan Nilekani) and the IT revolution (Sam Pitroda). New public governance is the future of governance, especially public service delivery.