



School ranks

The Union Education Ministry has been attempting to get States into a competitive mode in upgrading their school education system by recognising progress with a Performance Grading Index (PGI) that assigns them a score.

Education and social transformation:

1. It can be argued that countries and State governments use school education as a transformative tool most effectively where the political imperative is strong.
2. The Centre's effort with the PGI scoring system has been to try and nudge all States using a hall of fame approach. In the latest set of scores and grades for the pre-COVID-19 year, 2019-20, the Andaman and Nicobar islands, Chandigarh, Kerala, Punjab and Tamil Nadu have performed the best, although they still fall short of the 951-1,000 points slab, the highest possible.
3. It should be heartening to 33 States and Union Territories that their PGI scores have improved over the previous year, and in the case of Andaman and Nicobar, Punjab and Arunachal Pradesh, by a noteworthy 20%.
4. Several middling States continue to make marginal progress, some have improved merely by tweaking their data, while Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh actually regressed, although the PGI scheme is now three years old.
5. The score is derived using databases on 70 parameters such as access, equity, governance processes, infrastructure and facilities, and learning outcomes that are mostly self-reported by the States but vetted by the Centre, with National Achievement Survey data also being incorporated.
6. On some parameters, such as uneven learning outcomes between students from deprived communities and others, bridging the gap earns a better score.

Best Practices and Sharing:

1. The Centre, with its transparent scores and data for each parameter and sub-topic made available in the public domain, seeks to create a resource-sharing system that low-performing States can tap into.
2. This initiative is laudable, but it can work only if governments and Opposition parties see value in strong and open school education, and work to strengthen



access, equity and infrastructure by budgeting fees and funds for universalisation.

3. It is such commitment that led Southeast Asia to carry out a renaissance in school education in the later decades of the last century, on the lines of Meiji-era Japan.
4. India's school system has to contend with not just patchy access and infrastructure, but major equity issues that have come to the fore during the pandemic.
5. Clearly, the shadow of COVID-19 will persist over the education system for the foreseeable future, and further progress on all parameters will depend on bridging the gaps, particularly on digital tools, infrastructure and subsidies for access.
6. The PGI scores show that the southern and western States are on firm ground to achieve this, while those in central India and parts of the east and Northeast are less resourced.
7. What is evident from the Education Ministry analysis is that governance processes are the weakest link in some States. A new deal for schools can transform them as the Right to Education law envisages.

Belligerence and pushback

As the Quad gains momentum, states in the Indo-Pacific and South Asia are more likely to resist Chinese largesse.

Wolf warrior diplomacy

1. In May, in another brazen display of its 'wolf warrior' diplomacy, China issued a strange warning to Bangladesh, a nation that it has tried to cultivate assiduously over several years.
2. While suggesting that China considers the Quad to be a minor anti-China initiative, the Chinese Ambassador to Bangladesh, Li Jiming, warned Dhaka that there will be "substantial damage" in bilateral ties between China and Bangladesh if the latter joins the Quad.



3. It was an extraordinary statement by a diplomat in a host nation but it had all the chutzpah that Chinese diplomats think they deserve to embed in their seemingly non-diplomatic outpourings.

Revealing fault lines

1. As was expected, Bangladesh Foreign Minister promptly and publicly challenged the Chinese envoy's statement, underlining categorically that Dhaka pursues an independent foreign policy.
2. This episode captures the emerging fault lines in South Asia and the wider Indo-Pacific in ways that are both revealing and challenging. As the tectonic plates in the Indo-Pacific shift, major players are making their moves and testing the waters.
3. For all its attempts to play down the relevance of the Quad, Beijing realises that the grouping, with all its weaknesses, is emerging as a reality and there is little it can do to prevent that. It tried but failed.
4. And so, it is agitated about Quad's future role and its potential success in offering the regional states an alternative to its own strong-arm tactics.
5. The Quad member states are busy in figuring out a cohesive agenda amongst themselves and there are no plans for an expansion. There is a desire to work with like-minded nations but that can only happen if the four members of the Quad can build a credible platform first.
6. No one is sending out invitations to join Quad and no one has shown an interest. But Beijing wants to ensure that after failing in its initial attempt to prevent the Quad from gaining any traction, its message is well understood by other states who may harbour any desire of working closely with the Quad members to uphold a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific.
7. With its message to Dhaka, Beijing was laying down a marker that nations should desist from engaging with the Quad.

The growing momentum of Quad

1. This is just the beginning. As the Quad gains more momentum and the churn in the waters of the Indo-Pacific lead to new countervailing coalitions against China, Beijing's belligerence can only be expected to grow.

08.06.2021

Tuesday



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2. For many regional states in South Asia and the Indo-Pacific, it has been a smooth ride so far with China being the only game in town.
3. For all the criticism China has heaped on the Quad's members for trying to create an exclusive clique, it will be Beijing that is likely to demand clear-cut foreign policy choices from its regional interlocutors. And states are more likely to push back than become subservient to Chinese largesse.