

The Hindu & BL Editorials

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Testing times



Holding both Class 10 and Class 12 boards can be risky in Covid times. The first can be scrapped

With the Covid threat still at large and the 'UK strain' on the prowl, the Centre should pick a leaf out of what it did in some measure in the last academic year — do away with the CBSE board exams for Class 10 and spare resources, human and physical, for the more crucial school-leaving examination. In 2019-20, Class 10 students could not complete all their papers. The lockdown intervened, as a result, exams were rescheduled for July 1-15, only to be scrapped later. Even as students' anxiety mounted over the fate of the exams, a group of parents moved the Supreme Court praying for cancellation, citing safety concerns arising out of the pandemic. The CBSE cancelled the remaining exams, but notified that for Class 12 an optional exam would be conducted in all subjects. As for Class 10 students, their results were declared on the basis of an assessment scheme devised by a committee set up by the Board.

For this academic year, the Centre can scrap the Class 10 exam and assess students on an internal assessment formula, allowing for considerations such as urban and rural locations, tele-density of a region and its access to electricity among other such socio-economic indicators. This might sound clumsy, but it is safer than going ahead with exams and undertaking the risk of a resurgence of the pandemic.

It must also be kept in mind that Europe's Covid resurgence coincided with the opening of schools. India's strategy worked last year. Since the optional exam was only conducted for Class 12 students, the Board had the elbow room to increase the number of examination centres by over three times — from about 5,000 centres for 11,92,961 Class 12 students prior to the pandemic to nearly 15,000 centres during the pandemic, i.e., in September this year. This was possible largely because the Board did not have to accommodate 18,85,885 students who had registered for Class X exams in 2019-20. Indeed, the number of exam centres required for Class 10 students, even in normal times, is in the region of 5,300.

The shortage of centres in the event of both exams being held in the same period can be well imagined in the context of Covid. Questions about the relevance of the Class 10 examination have been raised in the past, on the grounds that it merely adds to the stress levels of students, without being a school leaving exam. Its significance lies in the choice of streams, for which students' aptitudes can be ascertained later. The counterview here is that making this exam optional lowers standards. Be that as it may, this year is too unprecedented for normal parameters to apply. The Class 10 board exam can be cancelled after putting in place the necessary assessment systems, while the Class 12 exams can be held across an expanse of centres with the necessary precautions.

Himalayan manoeuvres: On India and the Nepal political crisis

India did well not to meddle in the political crisis unfolding in Nepal

By sending a senior delegation of the Communist Party of China to Kathmandu within days of Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli's controversial decision to dissolve Parliament and call for elections, Beijing has sent a worrying message that it is prepared to intervene in Nepal's politics. The team led by the Vice Minister of the CPC's International Department, Guo Yezhou, met political leaders and called on President Bidya Devi Bhandari and Mr. Oli, with a stated mission to try and reverse the split in the party and convince Mr. Oli and his rivals Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' and Madhav Nepal to effect a patch up. But Mr. Oli has shown no signs of budging from his decision to mount what has been described a "constitutional coup", calling for elections without discussing alternative government formation options, rushing through an endorsement from President Bhandari, and carrying out, as caretaker Prime Minister, a cabinet reshuffle. Mr. Dahal and Mr. Nepal are clear that they will not reconsider their move to split the unified Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) and apply to the Election Commission for control of the whole, unless Mr. Oli backtracks and restores the Pratinidhi Sabha (Lower House). While it is surprising that both factions have been willing to meet with the Chinese delegation at a time like this, it is even more curious that the Chinese

leadership would risk losing face and lose popular goodwill with a move that sparked protests in Kathmandu.

In contrast, **India has chosen to be more pragmatic and restrained**, possibly due to a historical understanding of the main players in Nepali politics, and their penchant for political brinkmanship. This is not the first-time politics has been brought to the precipice since **Nepal adopted its new Constitution** in 2015; **Mr. Dahal walked out of a coalition government** with Mr. Oli in 2016. While **Mr. Oli's moves of December 20** seem irreversible, there are still compromises possible. Much will depend on whether the **Supreme Court**, that has given the Nepali PM until January 3 to explain his actions, will stay the election process, and whether the Parliament Speaker will persuade the President to convene the Lower House despite its dissolution. While it is clear that India is not playing its traditional leading role in Nepal, neither is it facing the odium for playing spoiler. Both Mr. Oli, who has reached out to India after months of the **map controversy**, and Mr. Dahal, who has been a closer Indian ally during this period, are engaging the government. The positive situation gives New Delhi a little more space in which to consider its moves, and how to avoid instability in its Himalayan neighbour's polity, something that is crucial to their relations and in the long term, to their closely inter-linked prosperity.

No show: On Rajinikanth

Rajinikanth seems to have realised that there are no short cuts to power

Veteran Tamil actor, Rajinikanth, has again revealed his mercurial character by **dropping his plan to float a political party** in January 2021. His decision came as an anti-climax to his **hyped-up political venture**, after **his announcement on December 3**. Even though his reasons, including his fragile health and the threat of the new COVID-19 strain, are well-known, **his supporters** had been hoping that the septuagenarian-actor, who has had a kidney transplant, would provide a credible third political force in Tamil Nadu, where duopoly has been the norm for over 40 years. The State's political landscape will **now continue to be dominated by the two established players**, the ruling AIADMK and the DMK, which together cornered around 63% of votes polled in 10 Assembly elections held since 1977. Smaller parties will now be forced to operate within this limited space. The BJP, which was perceived to be the one that was behind Mr. Rajinikanth's political venture, is **hopeful of getting his endorsement** at the time of Assembly election, slated for April-May 2021. But even if he does back any front, it is unlikely to be a decisive factor, as his statement against former Chief Minister Jayalalithaa was during the 1996 Assembly election. His support to the BJP-AIADMK front during the 2004 Lok Sabha election failed to convince voters when the **DMK-led combine won all the 40 seats in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry**.

The episode is an opportunity for those seeking to build a viable alternative to the Dravidian parties to look beyond the film industry. Cinematic charisma cannot make up for the lack of political acumen and grass-roots work. Any political movement will

have to be built up by articulating public grievances and livelihood concerns, and representing popular aspirations and the desire for progressive change. Mr. Rajinikanth had no concrete programme to offer other than a vague promise of 'spiritual' politics and a crusade against corruption. Although Tamil Nadu is well placed on development indicators, it has had its share of chronic issues: inter-district variations in maternal mortality ratio and infant mortality ratio, intra-district inequity in access to health care, a gap in income between districts and a rising urban population. The pandemic has exposed the vulnerability of the economically weak. These issues, which are being addressed by the established parties, could have been the basis for the politics of a third formation. But, evidently, the actor was hoping to take a short cut to power by riding on the back of his fan clubs, whose members were from different social milieus. Such a strategy was bound to fail. And, Mr. Rajinikanth, looking for power to be handed over to him on a platter, must have realised his years in the film industry had hardly prepared him for the rough and tumble of political life where very little goes according to the script.