

What underlies alliances



TICKER

MIHIR S SHARMA

Many years ago, I had lunch with Christopher Hitchens. It was an entertaining lunch, and given that I wasn't paying for it, I viewed his consumption of one and a half bottles of wine during it with some equanimity. Hitchens, as he did when faced with an appreciative (and young) audience, had become expansive; and, since this was before his turn to the right after 9/11 had solidified, his conversation and reminiscences ranged well beyond his later obsession with Islam and Muslims. He talked of many things: PG Wodehouse, George Orwell, the American fascination with Winston Churchill, the fate of the Old Bolsheviks under Stalin. But what I remember most clearly were his remarks on Israel.

I felt a certain sympathy for Israelis and their state — particularly its leftist, communitarian roots — came through. But, in the end, he said that it would have to grow indeed to outlive its "original sin". I thought he was speaking of the expulsion (flight?) of the Palestinians during Israel's war of independence; but, in fact, he had something else, more basic in mind. He asked which state Israel had most in common with — and then answered his own question, saying "Pakistan". They were both, he explained "confessional states": founded to succour the followers of a particular faith. Such states, he insisted, would never be able to truly embrace liberalism, however liberal many of their individual citizens might be.

Last week, Narendra Modi became the first Indian prime minister to visit Israel. This trip is overdue; our two countries have had diplomatic relations for 25 years, and our cooperation across sectors, if especially in defence, has only grown. It is a little absurd that fear of a domestic political backlash has kept Indian leaders from visiting a country that is one of our stronger supporters, and Modi and his government deserve praise for breaking that long drought. No realist would think otherwise.

What's also interesting, however, is the source of the excitement within the ranks of the Hindu nationalist right, which idolises Modi. For these men (mostly men, of course) seem to have a closer, more personal identification with the more extreme and exclusionary versions of Zionism. For them, Israel is not just a country that "threw out" its Muslims; it is the purest form of the religio-national, but modern, state that they aspire to turn India into. It is not Israel's stubborn history that is central to their admiration; nor is the historical context as the last and final refuge for a people who were everywhere a persecuted minority. These two may matter for admirers of Israel in the West and elsewhere, even those who are otherwise very liberal. What matters to these men, however, is Israel's apparent muscularity, and that they see it as the enemy of their enemy. What matters for them is exactly what other sympathisers of Israel deplore — that country's decades-long drift to the right, the rise of streams of xenophobic nationalism in its politics, its exaltation of a defiant distant military past, even the resurrection of a sacred language as the language of everyday life.

They are not alone in their instincts. For votaries of the new, hyper-nationalist world order everywhere, bilateral links are no longer driven by realist requirements, but by notions of common "civilisational" traditions or priorities. Speaking in Poland at almost the same time as Modi and Benjamin Netanyahu strolled along the Mediterranean, Donald Trump highlighted this search for civilisational links. He finally endorsed Article 5 of Nato, which calls for a common defence; but he pivoted to a startling defence of the white, European Christian West as the writers of symphonies, the makers of innovation and the defenders of art. This is a language familiar to white nationalists in the US — but also to their counterparts in Eastern Europe, including some within Poland's ruling party. And, yes, it is not uncommon in today's Russia, either.

Perhaps, the new nationalists are right, and such ties are indeed a stronger basis for international politics than such things as the idealism that underlay the Non-Aligned Movement or even the realism that is preferred by much of the traditional foreign policy establishment. And some on the left, who hate liberal interventionism more than they hate right-wing ideology, seem to think that this new world order will lead to greater peace and less bombing. Bashar Assad, who called Vladimir Putin "the defender of Christian civilisation" after Russia's warplanes came to his aid, may not agree.

But either way, it must be a source of satisfaction for the Hindutva supporters who have long admired Israel not just to see their greatest hero visit the foreign country they most admire, but also to see that their notions of what should underlie alliances become so strong a challenger to the established thinking on the subject. For me, however, I just remember Hitchens' words. A world such as they want would not, I suspect, create a hundred Israels. It is more likely to create a hundred Pakistans — including here at home.

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Sauce for the goose isn't sauce for the gander

Israelis should know better than anyone else that one man's freedom fighter is another man's terrorist



WHERE MONEY TALKS

SUNANDA K DATTA-RAY

The bonhomie between Narendra Modi and Benjamin Netanyahu and the oozing unctuousness of TV commentators reminded me of Golda Meir's tart comment when Israel's sixth prime minister, Menachem Begin, Egypt's Anwar Sadat, and Jimmy Carter were proposed for the Nobel Peace Prize. "I don't know about the Nobel but they certainly deserve Oscars," she remarked.

I asked Meir once at a lunch in London whether she wanted diplomatic relations with India. Instead of replying directly, she said she knew Indira Gandhi. They had met

at some jamboree in East Africa. Then she added somewhat bitterly, "India is so huge, we are so small, you don't need us!" Little can that tough old Yiddisher grandmomma have known that Gandhi would seek Israel's military help only a few years later when the Bangladesh war broke out. Jawaharlal Nehru had similarly appealed to Begin in 1962. Even if thanks to Modi, such approaches become part of the normal diplomatic give and take, one hopes India won't again be plunged into a crisis necessitating emergency assistance.

From the way in which he stumbled over my old friend Jake's name (Gen J F R Jacob), Modi is even more ignorant about "Indian" Jews than Gandhi, who was stumped when Ed Koch, New York's mayor, asked her about them. He can't understand the difference between Bnei Menashe and Beni Israel or know that today's Cochini Jews are not the Paradesi Jews, who created an independent state there after Jerusalem fell. Sally Solomon, descendant of Shalom Aaron Cohen of Aleppo, who founded Calcutta's Jewish community in 1797, asked in her delightful memoirs, *Hoogly Tales: Stories of Growing Up in Calcutta under the Raj and Where Rivers Meet: Memories of Madras 1948-1972*, "Are we English? Are we Indian?" She

didn't feel either. Nor could she relate to European Jews, who had suffered the Holocaust. When emigrating to Britain in 1972, Sally made her husband promise to buy a house in India. But visiting Madras in 1998, she knew it was no longer home. She also realised that being a Jew wasn't enough to be an Israeli.

We are told the new relationship is not so much about weapons, agriculture or water management as a guard against terrorism. That sounds commendably pious but Israelis should know better than anyone else that one man's freedom fighter is another man's terrorist. My Jewish friends always boasted that the Balfour Declaration committing Britain to a Jewish homeland would have achieved nothing if militant Zionist groups like the Irgun Zvati Leumi (National Military Organization), Lehi (popularly known as the Stern Gang) and Haganah hadn't fought British and Arabs alike. The Polish-born Begin was Irgun's leader with a £10,000 price on his head.

I wonder if anyone told Modi of the 1948 Deir Yassin massacre when around 120 Irgun and Lehi fighters attacked a Palestinian village of 600 men, women and children near Jerusalem. Women were raped and civilians

decapitated or disembowelled. Prisoners were paraded through Jerusalem's Jewish quarter before being murdered. It was a forerunner of the even more gruesome 1982 Sabra and Shatila massacres of Arab refugees by Lebanon's Christian Falange militia under Israeli military supervision. Modi may not even know that on July 22, 1946, Jewish freedom fighters (terrorists?) blew up the King David Hotel in Jerusalem where he stayed, killing 91 people. The King David unearthed a tea cosy for Modi's comfort. Staying there 46 years ago, I ordered bed tea at 6.30 to the wonderment of the hotel management because the dining room was already open.

Disguised as Arab workmen and waiters, Irgun guerrillas planted bombs in the basement of the hotel, which housed British administrative and military offices. Weeping heavily, Chaim Weizmann, the Zionist leader and Israel's first president, told the British Labour politician, Richard Crossman, "I can't help feeling proud of our boys. If only it had been a German headquarters, they would have gotten the Victoria Cross."

Three days later, Britain's prime minister, Clement Attlee, wrote to US President Harry Truman, "I am sure you will agree that the crime committed in Jerusalem on July 22 calls for the strongest action against terrorism but having regard to the sufferings of the innocent Jewish victims of Nazism this should not deter us from introducing a policy designed to bring peace to Palestine with the least possible delay."

cific term to being thrown around for anything you don't like. It brings to the fore the role of trust in journalism.

There is dramatic polarisation happening in the US and many other countries. Where are the fora for people to come together for a sincere exchange of views? Journalism creates places for people to reason and progress. The way we challenge ourselves at the BBC is inviting rather than forcing our audience to a different view. It is very easy to patronise Trump voters. But why were so many people thinking he is the right candidate? Life is more complicated. And people committed to serious journalism have to stick to it," he says.

We have eschewed dessert to keep things light after all that lamb. But the Masala Library guys bring us some levitating chocolates, which fascinate Egan no end. He takes a video of them for his four kids. What are the big gaps in the BBC Global News portfolio? "We would like to be more available in China. It is frustrating because it is a policy, not a commercial issue. We have been successful with getting Chinese advertisers wanting to export. The economics (of BBC Global News) was always hard and is getting harder, though the audience is getting bigger," he says.

The network reaches 433 million homes globally, in addition to all the other platforms (mobile, airlines, hotels etc) through which it reaches people. Egan says he beats the stress with open water marathon swimming and "playing the guitar in a bad rock band".

Speaking of which, what about the competition from India's loud, judgmental and partisan TV news channels? This is where Egan surprises me. In revenue terms India is the fourth-largest market for the BBC Global News after the US, Canada and Australia and the third-largest in reach after the US and Nigeria. "We have been very fortunate, never paid carriage fees and we get meaningful distribution revenues in addition to advertising," he says.

Delhi is by far the BBC's number one international bureau with over 120 people. This will more than double to 300 by autumn as the language expansion begins. The BBC is all set to produce daily newscasts in Telugu, Gujarati, Punjabi and Marathi (in addition to the existing Hindi, Tamil and Urdu), which will be distributed through local TV partners. It will also be expanding its online presence in these languages.

"A lot of people in India tell us 'My grandfather used to watch the BBC'. But we don't want to be remembered by what we were, but what we are," says Egan. Well, the BBC is a 94-year-old news brand that stands for credible news globally. That is not a bad place to be in these days.

The tyranny of summer vacation Not very English, after all



PEOPLE LIKE THEM

GEETANJALI KRISHNA

The other day I read a social media post on how we've all become slaves to our summer vacations. How we spend the summer has become, like one's car, clothes and address, criteria upon which we're judged, by ourselves as well as by others. Consequently, leisurely holidays in Mussoorie, Shimla and Nainital have become passe, and people are looking to travel to more distant shores. I realised that the summer vacation is extending its tyranny beyond the upper middle class, when Rakesh Singh, an Uber driver and owner of two taxis, had a long conversation with me about Thailand as a tourist destination, when we were stuck in traffic jam on a rainy afternoon.

"This year when the summer holidays begin, I thought I'd give my children a sur-

prise," he told me. Instead of spending the summer as they always did, in their village near Amritsar, Singh wanted to treat his family, especially the boys, to something new. So, he planned to take them on a pilgrimage to Hemkund Sahib in the Himalayas. Reached by a day-long road journey followed by a 12-km trek, it promised to be an exciting experience. "My late mother always wanted to go there and I couldn't fulfil her wishes," he said. "I wanted to say a special prayer for her at the holy shrine."

However, his sons, aged 12 and 16, were not very excited by the idea of going for a pilgrimage during their summer break. Both studied in Kendriya Vidyalaya in a prosperous part of west Delhi, and many of their friends were going to exotic destinations, some even to foreign locales, during the summer. They, too, aspired for more. Could they not go to Goa instead, or maybe, if their father was feeling generous, he could take them to visit their uncle in Dubai?

Singh was nonplussed. His household income was about ₹55,000 a month, of which only his wife's schoolteacher salary of ₹20,000 was fixed. "While our daily lives are comfortable, I'm always conscious that my income as a taxi owner is variable," he said. "So I'm careful to keep a nest egg for contingencies." Singh had calculated that the five-day pilgrimage would set them back by about ₹40,000. "Spending more

than that, while not impossible, won't be prudent, I felt," he said.

The children were adamant about not going on the pilgrimage. Singh was adamant about not spending any more on their vacation. The wife was adamant about not going to Singh's native village to spend the summer with sundry in-laws. The ensuing stalemate resulted in their spending the entire vacation in Delhi. "While I know what I did was right," said Singh, "I feel guilty every time I look at their faces." So the Uber driver has decided to work a couple of extra hours a day, to add funds to his ₹40,000 summer vacation kitty, to plan a big vacation to Thailand next year. "It's cheap, has beaches and is a foreign country so the boys will be satisfied," he said. "Also, no one in my family has been abroad for a vacation, so we'll be the envy of all."

Singh's only worry was that the Thai vacation would set the bar too high for the future. "I'm already working for some extra hours," he mused. "Perhaps, my wife could look for a better-paying job or take tuition classes." If that happened, they might be able to put aside enough to visit Dubai the following year, he said. His children's aspirations would get bigger and Singh would end up blowing up his annual savings on exotic foreign holidays, I pointed out. "True," he said thoughtfully. "But at least they will all be happy."



PEOPLE LIKE US

KISHORE SINGH

What's summer in London about when temperature that hovers around 30 degrees for five days on a trot is declared a heat wave? It makes you wonder how the poor dears managed to survive India not just with its heat but also its dust and grimy collars. The *dhoabi* and *ayahi* may have compensated, but still... Fortunately for me, London's Indian summer has been replaced by English weather so it's sunny one moment, wet the next, and when you're indoors, it hardly matters at all except that it's still light till 9.30 at night, making it seem negligent to have a sun-downer any earlier. In India, it would appear rude to be seen with a drink in one's hand at least until the sun has dipped over the horizon. Unless

it's a gin-and-tonic, of course!

Which probably explains why a G&T is currently everybody's favourite in London. Almost no one drinks gin in India any more, once the preserve of the *burra sahibs*, its reputation as "Mother's Sorrow" having been tarnished by prohibition in — surprisingly — Britain itself. Which is why, in our gymkhana and other venerable clubs, it has been replaced by vodka. Possibly because it doesn't have a taste, and mothers — sorrowful or otherwise — can't smell it on your breath.

But right now, it's more than just gin season in England with its pubs and bars spilling out on to roads as beer brims over hastily topped-up glasses while people gaze at football games on TV screens. It's easy to tell the locals from the visitors. The commuters meeting up at a pub for a pint — beginning unusually early, since offices down shutters punctiliously at 5 pm — are the loudest and quite drunk by the time you show up for your reservation, Indian Standard Time, and stand by the side as they're evicted to make way for you, their jolly "Oh darlings" giving way to racial slurs at this discourteous hoisting. The visitors, where it's a little bit less crowded, are more likely to have their children along, mostly glued to their books or phones and unmindful of the crowds.

It's also horse-racing season in the

city, and though I missed it by a whisker, the effect of the Royal Ascot continues to linger with gentlemen in tailcoats and women in flamboyant hats showing up at Masterpiece, the preserve of the really rich with change to splurge on baubles that cost a million and a bob, or two. But Wimbledon is on, inviting you to spare a morning or afternoon at the grass courts at a friend's box, complete with champagne and strawberries. The strawberries are available everywhere these days, in supermarkets and at cafeteria counters. They're neatly packaged, but the charm of devouring strawberries — with or without cream — out of a plastic take-out box instead of in fine china isn't, somehow, the same. A little like England itself these days.

For England may be clinging to its English ways but it's rapidly running out of English people. Wherever you look — in restaurants and in shops, at taxi drivers or on the streets — the people are likely to be from places far removed from the island. English, as she is spoken, is changing too, and at my hotel the interns, ever-friendly with road maps and directions, seem uncertain about how to pronounce the names of places in the neighbourhood. Exiting the European Union might be a political decision, but doesn't No 10 realise the Europeans (and some others) are already here?

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WEEKEND RUMINATIONS

T N NINAN

Be careful what you wish for

The India of the 1980s and 1990s had many dreams: Private TV by satellite or cable, instead of drab old Doordarshan with its government propaganda; modern corporate hospitals that looked like hotels, just like those in America; world-class highways built by private construction companies and not by the CPWD (Central Public Works Department); and efficient, privately run power stations that would give the state electricity boards a run for their money. We also wanted private phone services, and flight services that were better than what Indian Airlines could offer. We wondered why we couldn't get passports in days, rather than weeks and months. And we wanted private insurance companies, instead of the painfully bureaucratic Life Insurance Corporation. I am sure you could add to this list — like quality housing from private developers, instead of sand-in-your-face flats built by the DDA (Delhi Development Authority) or MHADA (Maharashtra Housing and Area Development Authority).

Well, we have got a lot of what we wished for — and then some. But do we really prefer R-nub to old Doordarshan? At least DD was/staid and restrained, not like an attack dog barking in your drawing room. We mouthed the public-private-partnership mantra, but the private infrastructure companies that have been building power stations and highways are neck deep in debt, some of them plain bankrupt. They have pulled banks into the mess, undermining credit growth and destroying hopes of an economic recovery. And (how can we forget?), permitting the private sector access to natural resources led to scandalous asset grabs.

Meanwhile, private insurance companies resorted to mis-selling policies, duping many unsuspecting customers. And how many have been left in the lurch by private builders — with delivery deadlines long forgotten, quality promises honoured in the breach, and building regulations violated? Still, disillusionment can be slow to set in. We go in large numbers to the private hospitals, even though we know that we are being hopelessly over-charged and made to undergo procedures that are not needed — because doctors get their cut on the bills. It should not surprise that doctors have lost their haloed status, so we have a new trend of patients attacking them physically when things go wrong. Some doctors recently took to wearing helmets, as a mark of protest!

In fairness, there is the brighter side, and some of it has turned out exactly how we might have envisioned it. No more queues for phones, for instance; and the phone services are highly affordable. Also, a choice of airlines with much greater frequency of flights, vastly improved airport terminals and, once again, affordable tariffs — though even the best operators treat you like cattle sometimes. The metro networks sprouting in various cities are middle-class dreams come true (Why only middle-class? Because the rich don't use them and the poor can't afford them; they walk or cycle).

So why have some things worked out well, and others not? The two-word answer is: Proper oversight. Markets need to be regulated. Businesses need freedom to operate but also careful monitoring of everything from quality and safety to environmental practices. And customer protection laws have to be effective. The insurance regulator took its sweet time before it cracked down on mis-selling in the insurance business. In the media, the sector regulator (such as it is) is asleep when there is border-line hate speech being broadcast, along with rampant war-mongering. Key customer-centric components of power sector reforms have been sabotaged by private vendors. And while everyone knows of rampant hospital malpractice, the government has not looked beyond the price of stents!

Short point: There is no escape from building state capacity. It is not enough to say the public sector can't deliver, so let the private sector handle it. Because the private sector needs to be regulated, and proper regulation needs state capacity too, lest you run the twin risks of poorly-framed rules and regulatory capture. Ignore this, and you will end up rapping along with Eminem, "This is what I wished for...Just isn't how I envisioned it."

ILLUSTRATION BY BINAY SINHA



Breaking the two and a half front siege

A powerful nation's army must be able to fight on multiple fronts. The question is must it be made to do so?

General Bipin Chandra Rawat's statement that his army is prepared for a two and a half front war has drawn a fair bit of comment. The fact is, India has faced multiple and multi-layered threats since 1959 and its army has been the political leadership's go-to option. With one exception, 1962, it has delivered each time.

Many questions, however, arise from this, particularly now when the second front, China, has sprung to life after decades and the language coming out of Chinese official media will embarrass panelists on our commando-comic TV channels.

The first question is, almost 60 years after the two and a half-front challenge first developed, how come it hasn't altered, after three full wars, the break-up of Pakistan, many peace accords in the Northeast, the end of the Cold War, and nuclear weaponisation? No other major nation has continued to have the same combination of threats for six decades.

The second, is this remarkable continuity in existential military threat a result of India's diplomacy and strategic thought processes, or in spite of them? The question that follows: Does military power guide Indian diplomacy and strategy is subservient to it, or is it the other way around? The first was a Cold War phenomenon, especially for the Soviet Bloc, and it is widely acknowledged now that that ideological and intellectual battle was lost simply because the Warsaw Pact power collapsed under the weight of its armies and militarised thinking. Noted historian Niall Ferguson has indeed argued that the Cold War ended not because Ronald Reagan's America got the better of the Soviet Bloc, but because the latter succumbed to its Afghan (invasion) misadventure.

And third, if even after 60 years and in an altered world, our enemies and enmities still remain unchanged, as do our responses, does it not imply that our political leadership has failed on this most important touchstone of national interest?

Modern history also tells you no nation can successfully fight a two-front war and we aren't just talking about Adolf Hitler's Russian blunder. Diplomacy, therefore, has to have three priorities. First, avoid conflict while furthering the national interest. Two, achieve the desired resolution by the implicit leverage of military power without using it. And third, when war is thrust on you as in 1962 and 1965 or is tempting as in 1971, ensure that all other fronts are kept quiet, leaving your army free to deal with one.

There were fears of a new front opening in each one of our wars, and governments used different methods to prevent that. In 1962, when India faced its first two-and-a-half front situation, Jawaharlal Nehru reached out to the US and Britain to lean on Pakistan to stay calm. The price for this was having to concede a high-level, serious (but insincere) negotiation with Pakistan over Kashmir (Swaran Singh-Zulfikar Ali Bhutto talks, 1962-63) with plenty of "third party" intervention.

Little footnote needs to be added. In 1962, the fractional front in the two-and-a-half was Nagaland. As the army retreated to the plains from NEFA (Arunachal Pradesh), Nagaland was abandoned for the time being. A second front was successfully avoided, and the half abandoned to focus on the bigger threat.

In 1965, yet again, the Lal Bahadur Shastri government was careful not to open a second front with Pakistan in the east. This despite evident tactical superiority there and Pakistan's logistical challenges. The Chinese were not to be given an excuse to jump in.

And when they did, towards the third week of that 22-day war as it wasn't going Pakistan's way at all it was time to accept ceasefire. My generation heard the word "ultimatum" for the first time when the Chinese accused the Indian army of having "kidnapped" four Tibetan graziers and "stolen" 59 of their yaks and 800 sheep and threatened dire consequences if these weren't returned forthwith,



NATIONAL INTEREST

SHEKHAR GUPTA

along with two bits of territory. There was a lighter side to India's response too, when some younger Congressmen took a "peace" procession to the Chinese mission in New Delhi, 800 sheep in tow, some with placards reading "eat me, but don't destroy the world". More seriously, of the lands China wanted "returned", one (Jelep La) was mysteriously abandoned. Indian accounts, including by Major General Sheru Thapliyal who served thereabouts as a young officer, confirm that nobody quite knows who decided to leave this position and why. But since it was vacated, you could make an educated guess that the Shastri government took a tough call to avoid even the whiff of a second front at all costs. This, by the way, was in the general Sikkim area in contention just now.

Our last big war, 1971, was the only one that India planned to fight in advance. And Indira Gandhi had the foresight to pre-emptively avoid the kind of Chinese threat that challenged her predecessor. Her treaty of "peace, friendship and cooperation" with the Soviet Union guaranteed that one-enemy, one-front situation, leaving Sam Manekshaw's army to achieve all military objectives within just 13 days.

It is India's historical and geographical fate that the end of the Cold War and the rise of global anger over Islamic terror have not altered its two-front situation. The China-Pakistan relationship has not only survived these changes, it has become stronger. As a rising China challenges the new world's wobbly post-Donald Trump unipolarity, Pakistan becomes a more useful ally as CPEC shows. India is therefore a unique nuclear-weapons power facing direct threat from two nuclear and contiguous powers.

Every Indian leader has tried to address it. Rajiv Gandhi and Atal Bihari Vajpayee made a substantive outreach to China and it resulted in very useful thawing. But it hasn't moved much further since in spite of some progress under Dr Manmohan Singh. His view was that China saw no urgency in settling with India because Pakistan was its cheap proxy to "triangulate" India.

His approach to break out of this triangulation was radical: Find peace with Pakistan first. He also believed that the rest of the world, particularly the US had a strong interest in calming and changing the nature of the Pakistani polity. That's why he went out of his way to seek peace with Pakistan in spite of 26/11 and took a truly audacious leap of faith with the Sharif-E-Sheikh declaration. He was thwarted by his own party, and abandoned the project.

To his credit Narendra Modi had a robust beginning with both Pakistan and China. Optimism flickered briefly on both sides and then disappeared. He, and his strategic team, need to analyse why. I would submit that the Pakistan relationship has been messed up because of the incompetence of the Jammu and Kashmir coalition, Bharatiya Janata Party's own lack of conviction in this alliance of ideological adversaries and then the weaving of the Pakistan factor in the party's national politics.

China may be partly seizing an opening to help an old ally, and partly also responding to some of the recent actions and statements it finds provocative: Increased presence of officials of the Tibetan government in exile and Taiwan in official and party functions (beginning with the swearing-in ceremony of the Modi government), a higher than usual pitch for Dalai Lama's visit to Arunachal (with a minister present) and the odd statement like the one from Arunachal chief minister asserting he shared his borders with "Tibet, not China". We don't know if all these were well-thought-out and deliberate. But we need to reflect on the wisdom of a strategy that lights up both major fronts at the same time while a new one flares up in Maoist-hit east-central India.

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Why Hindutva hates Aryan Invasion Theory



VIEWPOINT

DEVANGSHU DATTA

Did the Aryans originate somewhere in Central Asia and migrate to (or invade) an already-settled India? Or, were they among the original settlers of the subcontinent? (The human species originated in Africa).

The "Aryan Invasion Theory" arose in the 19th century. Historians cited linguistic connections between Sanskrit and other Indo-European languages and visual physical similarities between North Indian and Central Asians. Other historians argued that the Aryans were original settlers.

Y-chromosome DNA testing is a relatively new technology. A haplogroup is a set of genes inherited from a single parent. The haplogroups in Y-chromosome DNA can identify a single male line of descent. A lot of Indians – about 17.5 percent, or one in six – have the R1 haplogroup, which is widely distributed across Eurasia. This R1 haplogroup appears earlier west of the subcontinent.

A key new study in the multi-author peer-reviewed paper "A genetic chronology for the Indian Subcontinent points to heavily sex-biased dispersals" (published in *BioMed Central*) suggests that the Aryans were also invaders/migrants and not

groups came into India relatively later, while maternal mitochondrial DNA indicates that female lines of Indian descent come from earlier settlers.

This would gel with the idea of invasion/migration initiated by male bands of warriors, who then settled and married into local populations. Earlier studies, including the ongoing Indian genome project, suggest that there has been a great intermingling of genes over the past few millennia. The genes of the ancestral south Indian group and the ancestral north Indian group started mixing several thousand years ago. Again, that is fairly consistent with waves of migration.

The conclusions of these studies are tentative and may well be refined, or changed, as the understanding of genetics improves.

Indeed, ongoing studies mentioned in *The Guardian* ("Rakhigarhi: Indian town could unlock mystery of Indus civilization") and *The UNZ Review* ("The Dravidian Migration Theory Vindicated") investigating Indus Valley DNA could even indicate that Dravidians were also invaders/migrants and not

original settlers.

Similar research has taken place across the world. In most places, this sort of genetic detective work is considered arcana of special interest only to academics working in areas such as genetic research, archaeology and history. However, India has seen howls of protest from the Hindutva brigade at the thought that the "Aryan Invasion Theory" might be true.

Why should anybody outside that specialised band of academics care about the ancestry of Indians? On the surface it sounds really strange since most Indians would be hard put to name their great-grandparents. So, why would anybody care about intercultural sexual arrangements of the dim-distant, prehistoric past?

Ancient Indians had little sense of history. Despite being superb mathematicians and making extremely accurate calculations of astronomical (and astrological) data, they did not bother to record history, or to create dating systems. The dating of Indian history really begins with Alexander's invasion in 326 BCE because the Greeks did

keep dated records. From then on, odd data points are provided by travellers such as Faxian (399-414 CE) and Xuanzang (7th century).

The recording and maintaining of continuous dated records only started with the influx of Muslims in the seventh century. The Muslims kept meticulous records tied to the Hijrah (622) as base-date.

That word, "invasion" gives us a clue. In the toxic ideology of Hindutva, "invader" is often used as a code word to indicate Muslims. Christianity came to India circa 30CE with the apostle Thomas. But Christians are also called "outsiders" since they are followers of an "alien" religion, which did not originate in the subcontinent.

The "aliens" and "invaders" of minority religious groups is cited as ample and sufficient reason for communal hatred. The "justification" for such a majoritarian communal ideology will be badly diluted if it turns out that the "pure" Vedic Aryans and even the Dravidians were also invaders.

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only one aspect of it, the BJP's unforgivingly permissive attitude towards mob violence and atrocities against Indian citizens whose only fault is that they are Muslims.

Where economic tyranny is concerned, the Congress choked off India's economic prospects in the name of socialism. We are still living with its statist legacy, which the BJP seems to love but is relinquishing reluctantly.

As to political tyranny the Congress once took it to another level altogether. The 38th amendment to the Constitution in 1975 empowered the government to remove the fundamental rights of the citizen. The 39th amendment, also in 1975, placed the president, vice-president, prime minister, and the Lok Sabha speaker beyond the jurisdiction of the courts, for everything including perhaps murder. And the 42nd Amendment — which came to be known as the "Constitution of Indira" — reduced the powers of the courts to pronounce on the constitutional validity of laws. It also spelt out our "Fundamental Duties".

The same Congress today likes to talk about the idea of India. The BJP only needs to lose 12 seats in 2019 to lose its majority in Parliament.

Social tyranny and zeitgeist

This form of tyranny is absolutely the hardest to handle because it is not the government but a violent mob that makes demands on citizens while the government does its catalysing act by its non-participation in the process. It's exactly like an indulgent parent ignoring an unruly offspring who is smashing your TV.

In the three years since 2014 this has become a very real problem. The government has denounced such tyranny — once in a while. But its supporters in North India bash on regardless, literally. The more intellectual amongst the government's supporters have tried to deny this with the support of data.

But the question is not about data; it is about what the German philosophers call zeitgeist, or the spirit of the times. Arrests after the event don't change the zeitgeist.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi must recognise this huge blot on his three-year stewardship of the country. The political costs are enormous: The BJP only needs to lose 12 seats in 2019 to lose its majority in Parliament.

Rights and wrongs

EYE CULTURE

SHREEKANT SAMBRANI

The most basic human right is that to life itself, not merely in terms of simple physical existence, but a life of some meaning and dignity. This must be informed by the realisation that one is not alone in exercising this right. The Bible says, "No man is an island." Therefore, our individual pursuit of this right must be guided by the overwhelming consideration that in doing so, we do not harm anyone else's right, either intentionally or accidentally. If we transgress, we must face its consequences. This is the basis of all ethical systems governing civilisation, albeit at its simplest. It also defines moral behaviour. Such consideration leads to the quest for human and humane values for individuals and societies alike. An abiding adherence to it would also ensure sustainable development.

All of us wish to celebrate whatever gives us joy. In India, these celebrations have been taking an increasingly raucous form and causing disruptions. If the celebrants were to concede the right of reasonable peace and quiet to their neighbours, their joy would not diminish; they would also not earn the ill-will of those disturbed.

There is also a disturbing, somewhat militant, tendency in the observance of certain religious or social practices. Those who defend them claim that it is their right to do so, ignoring or defying a similar right of the others. The upshot is a confrontation, with possibly disastrous results. Our society has long recognised the perils of such behaviour. Hindu religious processions accompanied by musicians would mute their instruments while passing mosques. This respect led to amity and peace between the communities. Pre-eminent masters of musical instruments considered most auspicious by Hindus, the *shehnai* in the north, and the *nadaswaram* in the south, Ustad Bismillah Khan and Sheikh Chinna Moula respectively, were devout Muslims and revered by the Hindus for their virtuosity.

This noble behaviour, which went beyond just tolerance and epitomised mutual respect, was enshrined as *sarvadharma samabhava*, equal respect for all faiths. It implies that my existence as a devout and pious religious being is only enhanced if I respect your right to do so. Our ancient sages said "ekam sat vipra bahudu vadanti," — the truth is one, but its seekers interpret it differently. How can we accept a dogma, which calls for acceptance of one interpretation above all and defines those who do not subscribe to it as infidels?

Religion is but one trait where intolerance manifests itself. We come across "chosen" races, communities, political ideologies, economic systems, all lending themselves to discriminatory arrangements, which trample the rights of those considered beyond the pale of whatever is the favoured calling.

Being so divided into groups, we subordinate our human rights to those of the group and its narrow identity. The group does not

necessarily respect its individual members, thinking that the group is larger at all times than any of its constituents. More often than not, the group justifies its distinct identity in confrontational terms with those of others, justifying the exercise of our basic rights at the expense of others. This violates the very basis of all ethical systems. Our rights must always be informed and circumscribed by a respect for those of the others.

Mahatma Gandhi took no joy in celebrating Indian independence, for which he had struggled all his life, because it was marked by unprecedented communal carnage in Bengal and Punjab. He went instead to some of the worst hit areas of what was then East Pakistan, to heal the wounds of the victims. When Indian government contemplated withholding payments due to Pakistan in view of mounting tensions between the two countries, Gandhi opposed it as immoral. He stood his ground and the government abandoned the plan. This is among the finest examples of unqualified and absolute adherence to basic human rights and human values as the guiding principle of all our behaviour, individual and collective. At the end of the last century, one had feared horrendous bloodbaths after the collapse of the apartheid regime in South Africa. It required Nelson Mandela to help usher in an era of harmonious peace in the rainbow civilisation, notwithstanding the great suffering of his people and his own self.

Humanity is one and indivisible. Narrow sectarian interests have never achieved any worthwhile results. All great discoveries of science and technology, advances in philosophy, achievements of creative and performing arts did not arise from anything other than human values. We do not consider Einstein Swiss, Shakespeare English, Lincoln American, Mozart Austrian, Picasso Spanish, Gandhi Indian, da Vinci Italian, Kant German, Bradman Australian, Descartes French, Lao