



Sorrowful song

Even as relief is rushed for the Assam floods, longer-term measures must be taken up

Assam's *Bihugeet* songs celebrate the many colours of the Brahmaputra and its life-sustaining character, with stirring renditions by Bhupen Hazarika in praise of the grit of its people in their most challenging moment — when the river turns furious during the monsoon and floods the plains. That season is once again upon the State, and the death toll has crossed 40. Lakhs have been put off their normal stride, with tens of thousands displaced from their homes. The deluge has circled vast parts of the Kaziranga National Park, dispersing its wildlife into towns. There are dramatic images of a rhinoceros walking through the streets. A return to normalcy must now await abatement of the rising waters, and the drafting of a comprehensive relief plan by the Assam government with help from the Centre and the specialised units of the disaster response forces. Yet, short-term measures can have no lasting impact on the Brahmaputra's course each year, as several factors influence its tendency to overrun its banks in the June-July season. Studies done after the 2012 floods, which affected some 2.3 million people, show that the river's course from the Himalayan ranges has been bringing lots of sediment, raising its bed above the level of the plains. The Brahmaputra has the second highest sediment transport per unit of drainage area in the world. With aberrant climate and intensive monsoonal flows, flooding poses a major challenge.

Assam receives a massive amount of rain every year, and an estimated average of 230 cm is recorded in the Brahmaputra basin. Combined with the characteristics of the river — it enters the State as a single channel but has a wide, braided course later and shrinks near Guwahati before expanding again — such high precipitation produces aggressive floodwaters. Its course has been studied extensively after the 2012 floods, providing insights into how remote sensing can help identify the most vulnerable areas and where remedial measures could work most effectively. Considering that the Assam elections in 2016 were strongly centred on environmental concerns, and the BJP-led government in the State has earlier spoken against big dams, getting a scientific understanding of the flooding phenomenon to inform policy is vital. On the ground, previous attempts at finding solutions appear to suffer from lack of attention to longer-term measures, such as better river management. The focus of civil society has been confined to immediate relief and rehabilitation. The government, on its part, must go beyond the necessary restoration of infrastructure such as embankments, bridges, buildings and communications structures. Relief measures will have to sensitively handle the tensions around identity conflicts between those claiming ethnicity *vis-à-vis* settled Bengalis. Also, Kaziranga needs better protection. Several wild animals have died in the floods, bringing back memories of the dreadful losses of 2012, when over 500 hog deer, 19 rhinos and 22 sambar perished.

Coach Shastri

The manner of his appointment was odd, but his credentials are sound

Ravi Shastri's appointment as the Indian cricket team's head coach was a foregone conclusion ever since the strained equation between skipper Virat Kohli and the then coach, Anil Kumble, forced the latter to resign. Kohli has always had a comfortable working relationship with Shastri, who was the team director from 2014 to mid-2016, a phase during which India emerged as the number one Test team besides qualifying for the 2015 World Cup semi-final in Australia. Yet, the manner in which the latest transition was effected has left much bitterness. It raises the question whether a captain should have such overwhelming influence in picking the team's coach. There is no doubt that it was Kohli's view that prevailed on who should be out of the reckoning and who in. This does not reflect well on the three parties involved in picking the coach — the Board of Control for Cricket in India, the Committee of Administrators and the Cricket Advisory Committee featuring eminent former players such as Sachin Tendulkar, Sourav Ganguly and V.V.S. Laxman. With Shastri billed as the favourite, a seemingly token selection procedure was undertaken, with Virender Sehwag being one of the candidates to have been interviewed on Monday. Subsequently it was stated that the CAC would check with Kohli, but the CoA stepped in on Tuesday and ordered an immediate announcement. What started as speculation on the wires, followed by a denial, became a fact when a BCCI mail arrived in the inboxes of cricket correspondents at 10.58 p.m.

The manner of Shastri's appointment does appear odd, but there is no denying his credentials. His commentary stints tend to overshadow his days as a doughty cricketer, when he excelled as a promoted-opener and a tight left-arm spinner. A former India captain, he has Test hundreds across the globe, including one in the West Indies, a mighty force during his playing days in the 1980s. He is an astute thinker of the game and, most importantly, it helps that he has Kohli's confidence, for now. It is heartening that Shastri has among his support cast Rahul Dravid and Zaheer Khan as batting and bowling consultants, respectively. Dravid is a legend and Zaheer has always been a fine mentor to young bowlers. It is good that the trio got a contract till the 2019 World Cup in England, as it will allow better strategising. India embarks on an overseas season later this month with a tour of Sri Lanka and another of South Africa towards the year-end. Having got his way in the appointment of the coach, there will be immense pressure on Kohli to deliver, both as a player and as the captain. The road ahead is a challenging one — and it is time to end the whisper campaign against Kumble unleashed by sections of the team and the BCCI.

Game of chicken in the high Himalayas

With no thaw in sight, much will now depend on wider geopolitical factors. But the costs of conflict are high



ZORAWAR DAULET SINGH

Another face-off at the Himalayan border has surprised few. Since 2010, nearly 2,500 Chinese "transgressions" have been recorded on the Line of Actual Control (LAC), the undefined border between India and China. But this is not a typical stand-off. The point, or area, of discord is unrelated to the India-China territorial dispute. The present stand-off is near the India-China-Bhutan trilateral junction, and in an area where both China and Bhutan hold competing territorial claims.

The significance

According to the External Affairs Ministry's June 30 press release, Indian involvement is aimed to prevent China from changing the status quo by building a road on territory claimed by Bhutan, India's closest ally in the subcontinent. By upholding the rights of its ally, Indian actions are intended to convey the importance Delhi attaches to its special relationship with Thimphu as well as to signal that it intends to preserve its traditional military advantages in the overall Sikkim sector.

Beijing's motivations have been speculated to range from big power bullying as part of a general pattern of China's approach to its periphery, and driving a political wedge between India and Bhutan, to more mundane operational anxieties in a sector where India has traditionally held the higher ground. What makes the crisis particularly dangerous compared to previous episodes on the border is the absence of an agreed definition of what is at stake. For China, it is about "territorial sovereignty"; for India, it is about "security implications" emanating from a potentially deeper Chinese foothold in the



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lower Chumbi valley.

There are two broad schools of punditry. One argues that the unresolved Himalayan dispute, China's sensitivity over Tibet and the ensuing security dilemma is the main cause of recurring friction; the other claims that wider geopolitics and threat perceptions have converted the frontier into an arena of competition to keep the other side off balance. Ideally, conflict management strategies should seek to address both these levels of the India-China dynamic. But with the level of mistrust and animosity at record highs, it seems improbable that either side is interested in reassurance gestures. The indivisibility of the object of discord — in this case China's territorial claims and India's conception of security in the Northeast — makes an exit ramp or de-escalation difficult. As it stands today, both sides have dug in their heels and signalled a commitment to their respective positions, the Chinese more explicitly and through a flurry of official pronouncements.

Breaking the stalemate

Where do we go from here? By interposing itself in close proximity to Chinese border guards, India has created a stalemate that can only be broken via one of three ways: one side backs off, either side tries to dislodge the other by force, or quiet diplomacy allows both sides to save face. The first scenario seems im-

probable given the crescendo of rhetoric surrounding the crisis. Rolling back the opponent's position is also unviable because it would produce an escalation, whether in the local Sikkim theatre or along a wider front on the 3,488 km LAC. Some commentators have been thinking in highly tactical terms where India's local military advantages are deemed to provide the ingredients of a compellence posture. However, unlike in the eight disputed pockets of the LAC where brinkmanship can be entertained, coercing the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in an area where Beijing is convinced of its sovereignty and India's own territorial stakes are not even at play would almost certainly involve fierce reprisals in the form of vertical or horizontal escalation in military and other domains. So we are left with a prolonged stand-off with little prospect for a thaw. Much will now depend on wider geopolitical factors and how each side evaluates its relative position in the international environment.

The Chinese seem to exude more confidence on this front. Beijing's relationships with its main rivals, the U.S. and Japan, seem to be stabilising. While Washington is a divided entity today, the relationship with China has robust bipartisan support with little traction for a new adversarial posture. Dense economic interdependence and a renewed awareness of security in-

terdependence in northeast Asia imply that the Sino-American equation will maintain its complex stability. More broadly, American grand strategy remains focused on the Eurasian heartland threat from Russia rather than a rimland challenge from China. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's bilateral encounter with Chinese President Xi Jinping at the G20 summit was also instructive. Mr. Abe is reported to have responded positively to China's Belt and Road Initiative. Japanese officials noted that Mr. Abe held a "very friendly" meeting with Mr. Xi and Beijing had shown "goodwill from the top level" towards Japan.

The calculations

In sum, while China's eastern front remains a zone of geopolitical competition, Chinese leverage in East Asia has reached a threshold where it can blunt a containment posture from the U.S.-Japan alliance. As Chinese scholar Long Xingchun confidently opines, "Though the U.S. and other Western countries have the intention to contain China through supporting India, they have a wide range of common interests with China." The West is unlikely to "unconditionally stand on the side of India". When combined with the strategic depth that China enjoys because of a stable strategic equation with Russia, the international environment from Beijing's eyes seems comfortable and a far cry from the isolation China faced in the lead-up to the 1962 war or even the 1967 border crisis.

Ironically, the reasons for China's reluctance to escalate the crisis emanate from its strength and rising international profile. Outbreak of hostilities on the Himalayan border would taint China's image and undermine the internationalism surrounding the Belt and Road discourse. It would also fuel anti-Chinese sentiment in India, which both Washington and Tokyo would almost certainly profit from. Even on a sub-regional level, a conflict with India would steer China further towards an irredentist Pakistan as its sole partner, a sub-

optimal outcome for Beijing, which prefers a wider profile in the subcontinent.

From Delhi's vantage point, calculating India's relative position is less straightforward. Too be sure, policymakers have successfully navigated the uncertainty around Indo-U.S. relations after the interlude of suspense since January this year. The bilateral relationship is stable and poised to grow. The ongoing Malabar exercises involving the Indian, Japanese and U.S. navies in the Indian Ocean also offer psychological comfort to Delhi in the backdrop of the continental stand-off in the north. Some observers, however, exaggerate the geopolitical setting and impute a wider dimension to Indo-U.S. ties that might have faded since the Obama period. Further, with the U.S. inclined to resist Iranian and Russian influence in Afghanistan and further west, a Himalayan Cold War would be a distraction from more pressing geopolitical challenges elsewhere.

The situation in the subcontinent is equally complex. Given Pakistan's unabated proxy conflict in Kashmir, an escalation with China will truly bring the two-front situation back into play after decades. On the other hand, the rest of the neighbourhood would prefer a stable India-China equation. Each of India's neighbours has adopted a dual track foreign policy where special or friendly ties with India are supplemented by geo-economic linkages with China. A Sino-Indian conflict disrupts this triangular dynamic and impels these states to make choices they would rather not make. This sub-regional reality cannot be wished away by India, or for that matter China.

It should be clear that both countries have much to lose in an armed clash and a new Cold War in the region. Hopefully, the virtues of restraint would be obvious to both Delhi and Beijing.

Zorawar Daulet Singh is a Fellow at the Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi

Don't fly into the same storm

If the mistakes of the past are a guide, the purpose of the Air India sale bid should shape the rules



PUJA MEHRA

Air India's disinvestment, first attempted by the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government, is being revived. The sale bid the last time was a flop, shelved prematurely after all the bidders were either disqualified or dropped out. The many factors that were and may still be at work against the sale are not widely understood. Unless overcome, they may again endanger the sale.

In May 2000, bids were invited for a 40% stake in Air India, with a cap of 26% on foreign investment. The airline had reported losses for six straight years, had \$70 million debt on its books and was fast losing traffic. More than 18,000 workers were on its rolls for a fleet of just about two dozen planes. Its employee-aircraft ratio, 750, was among the worst. Singapore Airlines, in contrast, had 91 employees per aircraft. Inefficiency, typical in a government-controlled set up, was bleeding Air India. Yet, the quantum of stake on offer made it clear that the government intended to retain a crucial stake, ap-

point its own directors and continue to have a say in running the business. Put off by the substantial degree of control the government wanted to retain in the airline after the disinvestment, several potential bidders stayed away from the sale, including, possibly the worthiest contender. Plus, in a sale carried out through competitive bidding, reduced interest can impact the valuation.

Doomed from start

The sale's stated purpose was to bring on board a strategic partner who would turn around Air India. But the sale's rules were loaded against candidates with a proven track record — foreign airlines. Lufthansa, Swissair, Emirates, British Airways and Air France-Delta in combination were among those to have expressed interest formally in buying the stake. However, a bidding rule that required foreign airlines to team up with a local partner forced them to opt out. Singapore Airlines, which had also expressed interest formally, roped in the Tatas to proceed with its bid.

Those who remained in the fray had their expressions of interest evaluated; those ineligible were disqualified. In the end, the contest was down to two bidders — the Hinduja group and the Singapore Airlines-Tata joint venture. Both were invited to inspect Air India's



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books. The Hinduja's bid was already under fire from the Opposition over allegations related to the Bofors arms scandal. After studying Air India's financial records, the group presented to the government a whole set of conditions on management control, threatening to withdraw if these were not met. The government barred the Hinduja from pursuing its bid, leaving a sole bidder: the Singapore Airlines-Tatas combine.

Private airline owners who had so far orchestrated resistance to the sale from the background, now openly pointed out that the majority stakeholder in Singapore Airlines was a foreign government. The unmasked attack made Singapore Airlines pull out. The airline said in a statement that the intensity of opposition to the privatisation from political groups and the trade unions had surprised it and

that in such an adverse climate, it was not confident it could play a useful role.

The then Disinvestment Minister, Arun Shourie, clarified that the Tata group, Air India's erstwhile owner before its nationalisation in 1953, could proceed with its bid without a partner. But the Tatas too withdrew, forcing the government to abort the disinvestment.

If the government was eager to retain its hold over Air India, the private airline owners were anxious that foreign airlines should not gain control over it. Both the motives succeeded. The back story of how the mood against foreign airlines was whipped up was retold at a public meeting by Mr. Shourie. A Delhi-based chamber of commerce wrote to the Prime Minister lobbying against foreign investors being allowed to acquire more than 25% stake in Air India, as this was the rule in the U.S., China, Thailand and Mexico. Senior parliamentarians had sent similarly-worded recommendations. The comparison sought to be drawn was unfair. Under Indian law, investors owning fewer than 26% shares cannot move special resolutions, a restriction that did not apply in the countries the letters cited. After the sale was scrapped, private airlines flourished. Although Air India's fleet — which includes its subsidiaries —

has now grown to around 150 aircraft, it has lost traffic and market leadership to competition.

A level playing field

If the mistakes of the past are a guide, the sale's purpose should guide the sale's rules. Air India's debt, now about \$8 billion, is growing unsustainably. It was bailed out with \$5.8 billion of taxpayer money in 2012. The sale's purpose should be to compensate taxpayers for shouldering the burden of keeping the national carrier afloat. Air India's disinvestment could deliver this if it results in reduced government interference and increased competition. Remember, most taxpayers are also flyers.

Competition in the air travel market will not increase if Air India gets acquired by a private airline in India. The rules should provide foreign airlines a level playing field. Sharp scrutiny of objections can expose and thwart hidden vested interests.

Selling only a part of the government's holding will not free Air India of the ills of public ownership. The government will have to exit the airline cleanly and completely. The reform demands political courage, economic wisdom and business-like shrewdness.

Puja Mehra is a Delhi-based journalist

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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A saffron agenda?

It is unrealistic to expect a secular foreign policy from a government that is guided and sustained by the Hindutva ideology and at a time when every facet of life in the country is becoming saffronised. A foreign policy founded on an illusory notion of past glory cannot effectively respond to the dynamic and fast-changing geopolitical environment and will prove to be disastrous. The chinks in the BJP government's foreign policy are already visible in fast-deteriorating ties with almost all countries in the neighbourhood ("Paint the united colours of India", July 12).

MANOHAR ALEMBATH,
Kannur, Kerala

India is a land of diversity and the world knows this fact. Therefore, it is strange that a certain class of intellectuals still thinks that

our system is governed on the lines of communalism and continues to attribute a communal angle to every step taken by the government. How is the UAE's gesture of giving land for a temple linked to a Hindutva agenda, and why can't a Prime Minister tweet and thank a government of another nation if it is doing something in favour of the people of a religion endemic to India? Why can't the Prime Minister wear saffron and a *rudraksh* while visiting a temple in Nepal? Foreign tours by Indian leaders are for the country's welfare and not to fulfil personal agendas. If that had been the case, why is the Prime Minister getting such an overwhelming response abroad?

TUSHAR HARI,
Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh

Terror unabated

Ever since the BJP came to power, one of its central

themes has been the fight against terror, a message that even the Prime Minister articulates during his numerous overseas visits. But surprisingly, in India, terrorist activities continue unabated — an inexcusable incident being the attack on pilgrims during the Amarnath yatra. The government has virtually failed in ensuring the safety and security of pilgrims despite intelligence inputs about attacks in crowded and public spaces. The wounds in Jammu and Kashmir need a healing touch and a dialogue with all players in the Kashmir tangle is a must, failing which the situation will only be aggravated further.

S.K. KHOSLA,
Chandigarh

GST impediment

It is a harsh and sad reality that when bindis and bangles are tax-exempted in the GST regime, personal

hygiene products for women attract a hefty 12%. Data that only 12% of women use sanitary napkins show that much needs to be done. Apart from reducing the tax bracket on these essential products, there should be a move to promote the use of eco-friendly material in the manufacture of these products. The stigma around such products must be tackled so that people are made aware of the benefits that such products have in ensuring the well-being of girls and women ("Getting GST right", July 12).

MEDHA ANAND,
New Delhi

A social campaign such as "Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao" is fine, but the same government needs to understand that ensuring better access to personal hygiene products for women will eventually lead

to the "betis" of both rural and urban India being saved. The objective of initiatives such as "National Iron Plus" initiative that was started to address iron deficiency among all age groups — as anaemia leads to poor reproductive health — will not be reached if essential products are taxed at 12% under the GST. The GST Council was created to revisit rates based on the impact they create. So why the inaction?

ARCHANA VENKATA MADHVA RAJ,
Thoothukkudi, Tamil Nadu

If the writer was genuinely concerned about the well-being of women, she should have worked to ensure the supply of the product for free or at a subsidised price. Many political parties promise several freebies — from grinders, TVs, bicycles to laptops — but not one of the most essential items for women. State governments should procure such

products for free, or subsidise supply by the PDS or in government schools. It should also be ensured that such a scheme should not become a scam perpetrated by politicians and their kin.

K.R. UNNITHAN,
Chennai

The next coach

One's personal attitude, especially the ability to manage a spectrum of players, is a fundamental requirement for being a good cricket coach. Ravi Shastri is one such figure, respected within the team, which is important for the team's harmony. He may not have a sharp cricketer's mind, but the ability to bond well with the players is more important ("Sport" page - "Shastri confirmed as head coach", July 12).

NAGARAJAMANI M.V.,
Hyderabad

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Too early to settle the Aryan migration debate?

With genetic data currently available, it is difficult to deduce the direction of migration either into India or out of India during the Bronze Age



K. THANGARAJ
G. CHAUBEY

On June 17, *The Hindu* published an article by Tony Joseph (“How genetics is settling the Aryan migration debate”) on current genetic research in India and stated that “scientists are converging” on the Aryan migration to the Subcontinent around 2000-1500 BC. This conclusion was mainly based on the results obtained from the paternally inherited markers (Y chromosome), published on March 23, 2017 in a scientific journal, *BMC Evolutionary Biology*, by a team of 16 co-authors including Martin P. Richards of the University of Huddersfield, which compiled and analysed Y chromosome data mainly from the targeted South Asian populations living in the U.K. and U.S. However, anyone who understands the complexity of Indian population will appreciate that Indians living outside the Subcontinent do not reflect the full diversity of India, as the majority of them are from caste populations with limited subset of regions.

Under-representation

A recent paper by Dhriti Sengupta and colleagues (*Genome Biology and Evolution* 2016; 8:3460-3470), showed that the South Asian populations included in the “1000 Genomes Project” under-represent the genomic diversity of the Subcontinent. Tribes are one of the founding populations of India, any conclusion drawn without studying them will fail to capture the complete genetic information of the Subcontinent.

Marina Silva/Richards et al. argued that the maternal ancestry (mtDNA) of the Subcontinent is largely indigenous, whereas 17.5% of the paternal ancestry (Y

chromosome) is associated with the haplogroup R1a, an indication of the arrival of Bronze Age Indo-European speakers. However, India is a nation of close to 4,700 ethnic populations, including socially stratified communities, many of which have maintained endogamy (marrying within the community) for thousands of years, and these have been hardly sampled in the Y chromosome analysis led by Silva et al., and so do not provide an accurate characterisation of the R1a frequencies in India (several tribal populations carry substantial frequency of haplogroup R1a).

Equally important to understand is that the Y chromosome phylogeny suffered genetic drift (lineage loss), and thus there is a greater chance to lose less frequent R1a branches, if one concentrates only on specific populations, keeping in mind the high level of endogamy of the Subcontinent. These are extremely important factors one should consider before making any strong conclusions related to Indian populations. The statement made by Silva et al. that 17.5% of Indians carry R1a haplogroup actually means that 17.5% of the samples analysed by

them (those who live in U.K. and U.S.) carry R1a, not that 17.5% of Indians carry R1a!

Genetic affinities

Indian genetic affinity with Europeans is not new information. In a study published in *Nature* (2009; 461:489-494), scientists from CSIR-Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB), Hyderabad, and Harvard Medical School (HMS), U.S., using more than 5,00,000 autosomal genetic markers, showed that the Ancestral North Indians (ANI) share genetic affinities with Europeans, Caucasians and West Asians. However, there is a huge difference between this study and the study published by Silva et al., as the study by CSIR-CCMB and HMS included samples representing all the social and linguistic groups of India. It was evident from the same *Nature* paper that when the Gujarati Indians in Houston (GIH) were analysed for genetic affinities with different ethnic populations of India, it was found that the GIH have formed two clusters in Principal Component Analysis (PCA), one with Indian populations, another an independent cluster. Similarly, a recent study (“Neurology Genetics”, 2017; 3:3, e149) by Robert D.S.

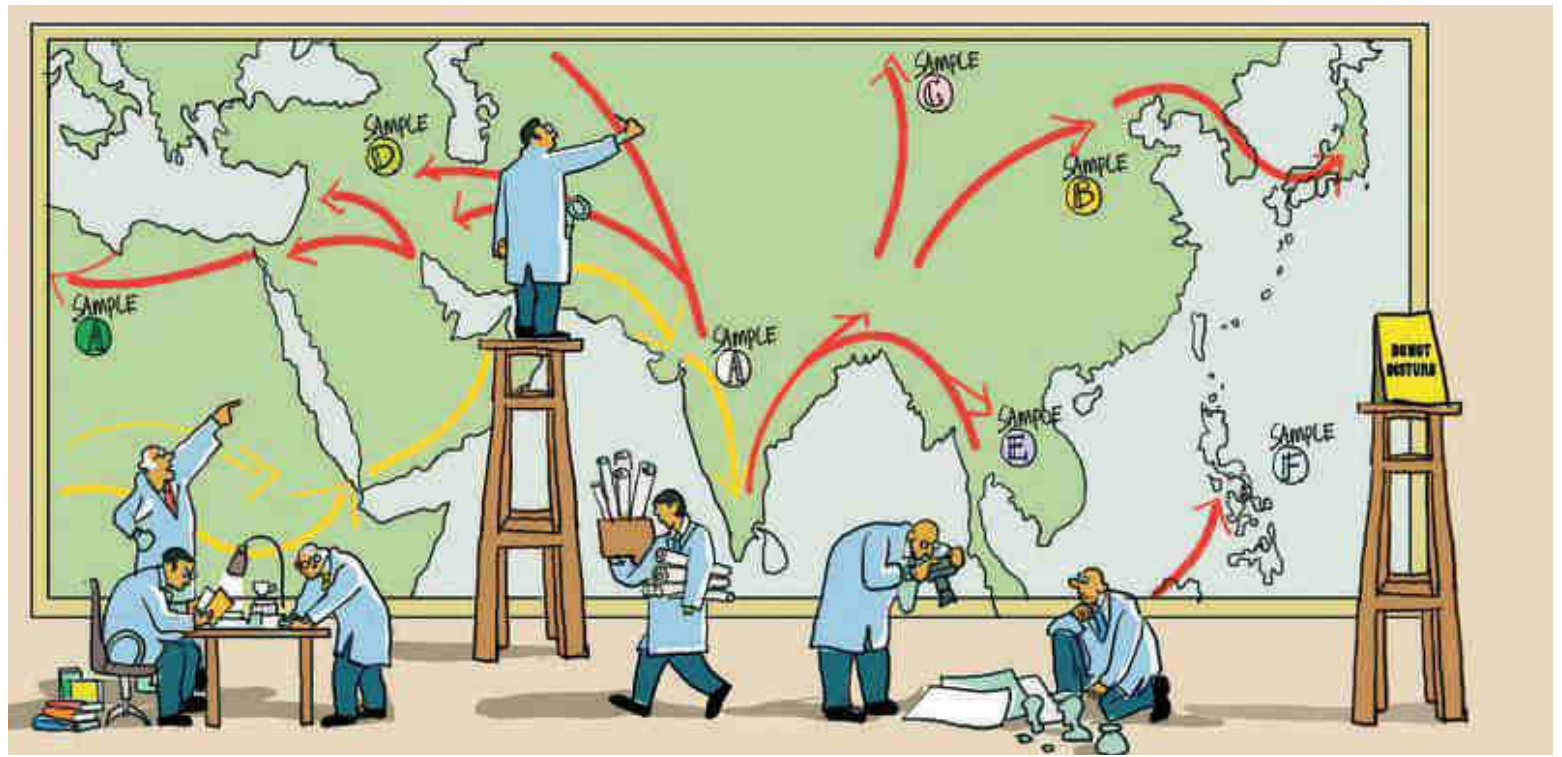


ILLUSTRATION: DEEPAK HARICHANDAN

Pitceathly and colleagues from University College of London and CSIR-CCMB has analysed 74 patients with neuromuscular diseases (of mitochondrial origin) living in the U.K. and found a mutation in RNASEH1 gene in three families of Indian origin. However, this mutation

was absent in Indian patients with neuromuscular diseases (of mitochondrial origin). This mutation was earlier reported in Europeans, suggesting that these three families might have mixed with the local Europeans; highlighting the importance of the source of samples. An

other study published in *The American Journal of Human Genetics* (2011; 89:731-744) by Mait Metspalu and colleagues, where CSIR-CCMB was also involved, analysed 142 samples from 30 ethnic groups and mentioned that “Modeling of the observed haplotype diversities sug-

gests that both Indian ancestry components (ANI and ASI) are older than the purported Indo-Aryan invasion 3,500 YBP (years before present). As well as, consistent with the results of pairwise genetic distances among world regions, Indians share more ancestry signals with West than with East Eurasians”.

We agree that the major Indian R1a1 branch, i.e. L657, is not more than 5,000 years old. However, the phylogenetic structure of this branch cannot be considered as a derivative of either Europeans or Central Asians. The split with the European is around 6,000 years and thereafter the Asian branch (Z93) gave rise to the South Asian L657, which is a brother branch of lineages present in West Asia, Europe and Central Asia. Such kind of expansion, universally associated with most of the Y chromosome lineages of the world, as shown in 2015 by Monika Karmin et al., was most likely due to dramatic decline in genetic diversity in male lineages four to eight thousand years

ago (*Genome Research*, 2015; 4:459-66). Moreover, there is evidence which is consistent with the early presence of several R1a branches in India (our unpublished data).

The Aryan invasion/migration has been an intense topic of discussion for long periods. However, one has to understand the complexity of the Indian populations and to select samples carefully for analysis. Otherwise, the findings could be biased and confusing.

With the information currently available, it is difficult to deduce the direction of haplogroup R1a migration either into India or out of India, although the genetic data certainly show that there was migration between the regions. Currently, CSIR-CCMB and Harvard Medical School are investigating a larger number of samples, which will hopefully throw more light on this debate.

K. Thangaraj is with the CSIR-Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology, Hyderabad, and G. Chaubey is with the Estonian Biocentre in Tartu, Estonia

Tony Joseph responds:

There is a technical point in suggesting that the South Asian populations included in the “1000 Genomes Project” under-represent the complete genomic diversity of the Subcontinent and, therefore, the 17.5% R1a frequency the “BMC Evolutionary Biology” study arrived at may not be precise.

That a sample under-represents the complete genomic diversity of India could be said of virtually any study whatsoever, including the studies that the authors of the rejoinder have done. The point about the Marina Silva/Martin P. Richards et

al. study is that its conclusions about the chronology of multiple migrations into South Asia are not dependent upon the precise percentage of R1a population – they remain robust whether the R1a percentage is 12.5% or 17.5% or 22.5%. The precision of the percentage or the impugned under-representation would have been an issue if the study were to make detailed conclusions about, say, how the Bronze Age migrations spread across different regions in India. Since it is not doing that, under-representation ceases to be a material issue. In an email to me on May 29,

weeks before my article was published, this is what Prof. Richards said about the sample: “It’s true that some of the 1000 Genomes Project (IKGP) sequences that we analysed for genome-wide and Y-chromosome data were sampled from Indians in the U.K. and U.S., and lack tribal groups, which might well be an issue for a detailed regional study of the Subcontinent (our mtDNA database was much larger). But we are simply looking at the big picture across the region (what was the role of Palaeolithic, Neolithic and Bronze Age settlement, primarily) and the signals we describe across the five IKGP sample

sets are clear and consistent and also fit well with the lower-resolution data that has been collected in the past (e.g. for R1a distributions). By putting everything together, we feel the sketch of the big picture that we propose is very well supported, even though there will certainly be a huge amount of further analysis needed to work through the regional details.” The second argument that the rejoinder makes, as summed up in its last paragraph, is that “Out of India” is a possible explanation for the genetic spread that we observe. This is helpful insofar as it accepts that the genetic

spread that we observe does need an explanation. But the problem with proposing “Out of India” as that explanation is the following: it is not as if the “Out of India” hypothesis is new; it has been around for decades. But the rejoinder makes no reference to a single peer-reviewed genetic study that makes a serious case for “Out of India”. If the hypothesis weren’t tenable at all, shouldn’t there have been many peer-reviewed papers by now making the case and fleshing out the details?

Tony Joseph is a writer and former editor of *BusinessWorld*. Twitter: @tjoseph0010

SINGLE FILE

The hunted ones

Implementation of terror designations needs to be constantly challenged

V. SUDARSHAN



The designation on June 26 of Hizbul Mujahideen leader Syed Salahuddin as a ‘Specially Designated Global Terrorist’ by the U.S. set off a fresh round of signalling. Pakistan’s Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan spoke up in support of Salahuddin. New Delhi pinned its hopes on the designation choking Salahuddin’s movements and his financing. The day after Salahuddin was so designated, both the United States and India put the development in perspective in the joint statement, after Prime Minister Narendra Modi had met President Donald Trump. It enlarged the scope of cooperation on terrorism to include standing shoulder-to-shoulder against, among other terrorist entities, Jaish-e-Mohammed, Lashkar-e-Taiba, D-Company and their affiliates.

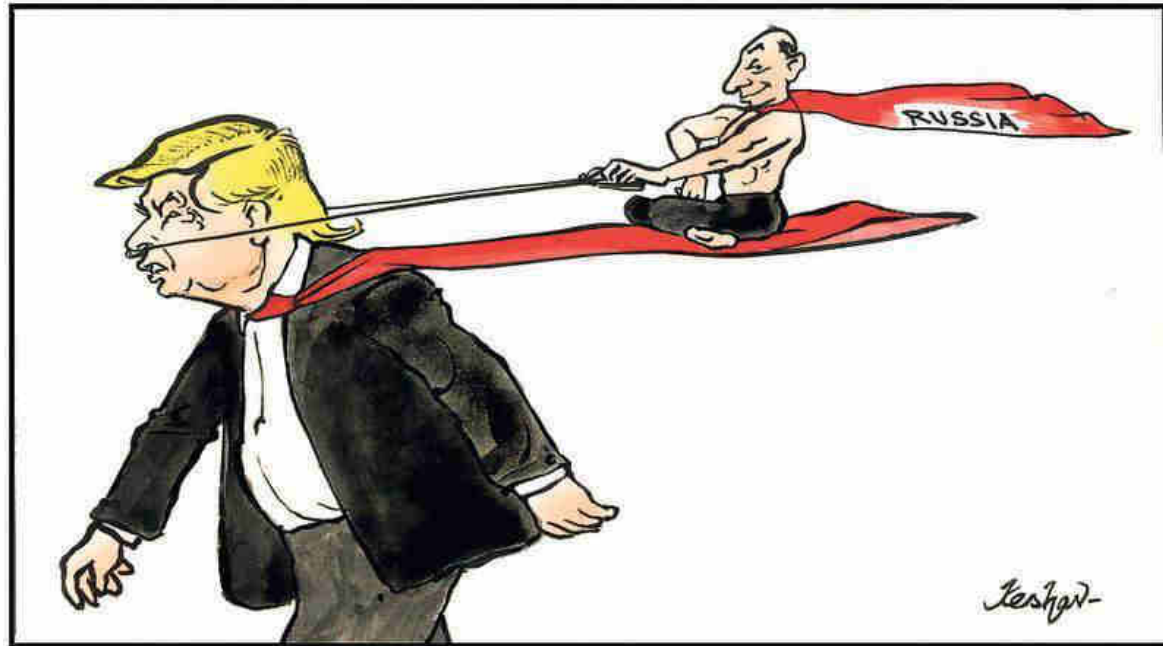
Exactly how much all this will affect the situation on the ground is uncertain. But considering that Salahuddin was emboldened enough to participate soon thereafter in a long and indulgent television interview, where he leisurely promised more terrorist attacks and pooh-poohed any deleterious effect the American characterisation might have, boasting that he could source any kind of arms to further his activities, the difficulties ahead for New Delhi cannot be overstated.

Masood, Hafiz Saeed precedents

Salahuddin has obviously made a careful study of the effect of such designations. The Jaish-e-Mohammed, for example has been on the U.S. State Department’s list since December 2001; as has been the Lashkar-e-Taiba. For over a decade and a half, despite being designated terrorists, both Masood Azhar of JEM and Hafiz Saeed of LeT have thrived, as have their organisations. Meanwhile, the attacks in Jammu and Kashmir continue. It is also established that most terrorist organisations have organic linkage with other similar organisations. Salahuddin is able to function without any impediments from both Rawalpindi, the headquarters of the Pakistan Army, where he maintains his house, as well as from Muzaffarabad, where the interview was conducted.

Where this leaves the intention in the Modi-Trump joint statement that “(the) leaders stressed that... terrorist safe havens (must be) rooted out in every part of the world” is open to interpretation. Safe havens are areas where terrorists are able to operate in assuredly secure circumstances, recruiting, training, planning, raising funds and carrying out attacks. All this Salahuddin and people of his ilk are able to do with such ease.

Yet, the intentions of such designations cannot be in doubt. It is the efficacy with which they are implemented that needs to be constantly challenged. Is Mr. Trump going to lean on Pakistan heavily enough? Can that alone be the central plank in India’s war on terrorism? China, Pakistan’s biggest backer, has repeatedly stymied diplomatic efforts to have terrorists inimical to India proscribed by the United Nations. All this underlines a certain inadequacy in the strategy. If the cat isn’t catching the mice, it may well be time to change the method by which the mice need to be caught.



CONCEPTUAL Veblen good ECONOMICS

A good for which demand increases when its price increases, and vice versa. Luxury goods like diamonds, whose appeal depends on their exorbitant price, are an example. It is named after American economist Thorstein Veblen. Veblen goods are considered exceptions to the law of demand, which states that the demand for a good must decrease as its price increases, and vice versa. Some economists disagree, saying that the law applies only to goods that are truly identical. Cheap diamonds, for instance, may be an inferior good in the eyes of the consumer when compared to expensive diamonds; hence they are not truly comparable.

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FAQ Oceanic games

China’s growing military strength has lent greater weight to Malabar naval exercises

DINAKAR PERI

What is Malabar?

Malabar is an annual military exercise between the navies of India, Japan and the U.S. held alternately in the Indian and Pacific Oceans. It began in 1992 as a bilateral exercise between India and the U.S. and permanently expanded into a trilateral format with the inclusion of Japan in 2015. Malabar 2017, which began on July 10, is being held in the Bay of Bengal.

This year is also witnessing the largest participation to date with 16 ships, two submarines and over 95 aircraft taking part from the three countries. The 10-day games will have two phases, an initial harbour phase in Chennai and a sea phase later which will be held over an area of 5,00,000 sq. miles spread across the Bay of Bengal and the northern Indian Ocean. In another first this year, all three

countries fielded carriers for the exercises. India’s sole aircraft carrier *INS Vikramaditya* will join U.S. aircraft carrier *USS Nimitz* and Japan’s largest helicopter carrier *JS Izumo*.

What is its importance?

With China’s growing military strength and its increasing presence in the Indian Ocean, Malabar has assumed greater importance as it is a platform to improve interoperability between the navies. Some of the drills which will be honed during the exercises are submarine familiarisation, high-value unit defence, air defence exercises, anti-submarine warfare, surface warfare exercises and communications exercises.

There is special focus on anti-submarine warfare (ASW) operations in the backdrop of increasing submarine forays by the Chinese Navy. Both India and the U.S. operate the Boeing P-8I long-range

maritime patrol aircraft and are keen on improving their submarine hunting capabilities in the warm waters of Bay of Bengal.

Why is China concerned?

China has always viewed Malabar as a grouping to contain it and the fears have been exacerbated with Japan being included and Australia keen to join as well.

In September 2007, the Navies of Australia, Japan and Singapore joined India and the U.S. in the Malabar exercises. China had issued a demarche to New Delhi questioning the intent behind the war games, which forced India to abandon the expansion at that time. Australia has been keen to join the games on a permanent basis, which has so far not fructified due to India’s reluctance. Canberra had requested for observer status at this year’s games which was rejected by New Delhi.

FROM The Hindu ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO JULY 13, 1967

Police swoop down on rebel hide-outs

Police to-day [July 12, Naxalbari (Siliguri)] arrested 72 “rebels”, mostly tribals, in a surprise early dawn raid on the Hatigisha group of villages in Naxalbari, the main hide-outs of the extremists. Huge quantities of weapons were also seized during the raid. This was the first major action against the rebels following the recent decisions of the West Bengal Government on police measures in Naxalbari. But in to-day’s raid none of the ring leaders could be traced. There was no resistance from the rebels. Among the houses searched was that of the 34-year-old Khokan Mazumdar alias Abdul Halim, one of the “big four” of the “rebel high command”, who it is believed, escaped into the outlying jute fields. But he left behind his red card issued by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) signed by the Secretary of the State Committee.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JULY 13, 1917

Books without paper: Edison’s nickel substitute.

The period is very timely for the prophecy that the books of the future will not be printed on paper but on pages of nickel or steel. The reason has nothing to do with the paper famine caused by the war, but with the fact that the world’s forests cannot last for ever. The prophet in this case is Thomas A. Edison. The inventor of the phonograph said to an interviewer: “By an electro-chemical process I can make sheets of steel, copper or nickel that will absorb printer’s ink. Of the three metals I consider nickel to be the best substitute for paper. It is possible to produce a sheet of this metal one twenty-thousandth of an inch in thickness and make it cheaper, tougher and more flexible than ordinary book paper”. As he said this Mr. Edison strolled over to one of the shelves and returned with a book with a thickness of about two inches.

DATA POINT

Kept in the dark

In 2014, about 15% of the world’s population, or 1.1 billion people, had no access to electricity. Nearly half of them lived in rural areas of Sub-Saharan Africa and about a third in rural regions of South Asia. Four countries — India, Nigeria, Ethiopia and Bangladesh — were home to about half of those who lack access to electricity

