



Sabre-rattling

Direct talks are the only way out to de-escalate the crisis in the Korean peninsula

North Korea's adventurism continues unabated. On Sunday, it tested what it claims was a "hydrogen bomb", its sixth nuclear weapons test, cocking a snook at non-proliferation and international test ban laws, as well as at U.S. President Donald Trump. Even as the tests drew global condemnation, this was clearly a response to Mr. Trump's sabre-rattling rhetoric claiming that the U.S. would rain "fire and fury" over the country and implying that its nuclear weapons were "locked and loaded" to respond to any threat from North Korea. Mr. Trump's response to Sunday's development was to ratchet up threats, besides calling out U.S. ally South Korea for "appeasement" and threatening to cut trade ties with countries that conduct any form of business with the North Koreans. Clearly the tough talk is not working – it is only pushing North Korea's totalitarian regime to take even more provocative steps in a quest to attain the status of a *de facto* nuclear power. In response to the exacerbated tensions in the region, South Korea and Japan have significantly enhanced their defence capabilities, including spending on missile defence. South Korea's new President Moon Jae-in, who is in favour of talks, has now accepted the U.S.'s missile defence system, THAAD, which is opposed locally by many South Koreans.

North Korea relies on increasing militarisation and show of missile and nuclear prowess for various reasons. Part of its ploy is to convince its impoverished and isolated citizenry of the need for the country to attain military parity in light of the presence of the U.S. military shield in South Korea and Japan. Another part of it is to justify the years of the Kim family rule, as these tests add to the myth of strong leadership by its 33-year-old, third-generation dictator, Kim Jong-un. The unpalatable prospect of the escalation of a possible military conflict into a nuclear war is also a way to stave off any external intervention against the dictatorship, the likes of which were seen in Iraq and Libya. Mr. Trump's latest Twitter threat against nations doing business with North Korea is clearly targeted at China, the only regime with some degree of influence – though it is not clear exactly how much – over the North Korean regime. The Chinese, however, seem to be willing to live with a nuclear North Korea as opposed to applying drastic trade sanctions that could lead to a crippled economy and a refugee crisis besides other unpredictable responses by a beleaguered regime. In light of all this, it is important to de-escalate the conflict by having direct talks involving the U.S., China, South Korea and North Korea. Multilateral talks are, in fact, by far the best option, given the trigger- and Twitter-happy supreme leaders in Pyongyang and in Washington DC.

Down but not out

The failed PSLV attempt to launch a navigation satellite is unlikely to affect future missions

After 39 consecutive successful launches, the Indian Space Research Organisation had almost made it appear that launching satellites was indeed child's play when it used its workhorse rocket, the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle. But the PSLV, which has been placing satellites in their respective orbits for the past 24 years, faced a setback on August 31. The PSLV-C39 rocket carrying the eighth satellite of the Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System (IRNSS) had a normal lift-off and flight events but ended in an unsuccessful mission. The heat-shield failed to separate, resulting in the satellite separation occurring within the shield. This is just the second instance when the PSLV has had an unsuccessful mission in all of its 41 launches; the first setback was back in 1993. Over the years, the PSLV has played a pivotal role in ISRO's programme, and this February it set a world record by launching 104 satellites in one go. With such an enviable track record, the failure of the mission this time almost comes as a surprise. This is especially so as the lift-off and the stage separation of the first and second stages, which are the most challenging parts of the mission, went off smoothly. In comparison, the heat-shield separation is a relatively minor operation which takes place once the rocket crosses an altitude of 100-110 km, and the temperature in the absence of the heat-shield will no longer damage the satellite. The failed mission serves as a reminder that utmost care and scrutiny are required before every single launch. While scientists are working to identify the cause of the anomaly in the heat-shield separation event, the failed mission should have no impact on future launches involving the vehicle.

The failure of the mission is particularly disheartening as the IRNSS-1H satellite was jointly assembled and tested by ISRO and a Bengaluru-based private company, the first time a single private company, rather than a consortium, was involved in building a satellite. The satellite was in no way to blame for the failure of the mission. The space organisation has thrown open its doors to private companies to build as many as 18 spacecraft a year beginning mid or end-2018. The IRNSS-1H satellite was launched as a replacement for the IRNSS-1A satellite, which became inoperational in terms of surveillance following the failure of all three atomic clocks. As only six of the seven satellites are operational, there are gaps in the navigation data sent by the IRNSS. With the failure of this mission, India will have to wait for some more time before the next mission to send a replacement for the IRNSS-1A satellite is ready. The IRNSS was created so that the country would not need to rely on American-based GPS data – the encrypted, accurate positioning and navigation information provided by the system will make Indian military operations self-reliant.

Making up for lost time

In the past half century, India and Myanmar have lost the habit of thinking of themselves as neighbours



GAUTAM MUKHOPADHYAYA

Prime Minister Narendra Modi embarks on an official bilateral visit to Myanmar from September 5. This follows upon his earlier ASEAN-related visit in November 2014 and former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit in May 2012. Though overdue, taking into account Mr. Modi's 'Neighborhood First', 'Act East' and diaspora policies, international and domestic developments since then have clarified the political context of the visit to an extent not possible earlier. These include the impact of elections in Myanmar in November 2015 and in the U.S. in late 2016 that brought Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) to power in Myanmar and Donald Trump in the U.S.; the finalisation of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and its assertiveness in the South China Sea; the India-China border stand-off; and Myanmar's travails over the peace process, the Rohingya issue and the economy.

The Rohingya crisis

The visit is taking place amidst some of the worst violence involving Rohingya militants and the Myanmar security forces ever resulting in a full-fledged international crisis triggered by large-scale, co-ordinated attacks by Rohingya militants under a recently formed Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA, now designated as 'terrorists') against government and security outposts in northern Rakhine state on August 25-26.

The attacks and clearance operations against it have resulted in some 400 (and mounting) deaths, mostly Rohingya; widespread arson and burning of villages allegedly by both sides; displacement of thousands within Rakhine state and across the Naf river to Bangladesh; and severe disruption in food and humanitarian supplies. The Modi government has unequivocally condemned the "terrorist" attacks at a time when the security forces and Ms. Suu Kyi herself face heightened international criticism on the handling of the issue. This is likely to resonate in Mr. Modi's favour in Myanmar.



The visit is also taking place against the backdrop of uncertainties in the future India-China relationship caused by the now defused Doklam stand-off and the BRICS summit. Sensitive to its location between the two Asian giants, Myanmar is keen to leverage the growth potential of good relations with Asia's two fastest growing economies. But it is also wary of its economic dependence on China, characterised by a largely extractive relationship focussed on natural resources and access to the Bay of Bengal where it already has an oil and gas terminal, concession to build a Special Economic Zone and seeks a possibly controlling stake in a natural deep sea harbour at Kyaukpadaung that could form part of its ambitious BRI. The shadow of China is thus likely to loom large over the visit. Myanmar would welcome closer economic ties with India to balance and offset its dominating ties with China.

Characterisations of a 'Great Game East' between India and China are, however, greatly overstated.

Focus on basics

Beyond these topical issues, and the issue of Indian insurgent groups in Myanmar, which remain a matter of concern, the optics of Mr. Modi's much anticipated visit will most likely be taken up by the fundamentals of the bilateral relationship: the substantive development partnership, trade issues, and revival of cultural and people-to-people ties. Defence relations too have been growing steadily, especially between the two armies and navies. Security related talks have been taking place at the National Security Adviser (NSA) level.

A number of bilateral agreements in the areas of capacity building, health, culture, and development, and one on maritime security are on the anvil, building on India's nearly \$2 billion development partnership with Myanmar so far. These cover large directly funded and executed connectivity infrastructure projects like the Trilateral Highway, the Kaladan Multi-modal Transport and Transit Project; high value capacity and human development projects like the Myanmar Institute of Information Technology in Mandalay; more modest ones in industry, IT, health, entrepreneurship and language training; small border area development projects in Chin and Nagaland areas of Myanmar; and soft lines of credit for other infrastructure projects amounting to nearly \$750 million. Much of this still remains to be utilised.

Though this may not be adequately realised even in Myanmar, few countries are undertaking such large infrastructure and human development projects out of government funds as India is. When they are all completed and fully operational by about 2020, they will amount to a substantial mass and base for an expanded relationship.

Lamentably, the same cannot be said of commercial trade and investments. Both stand on narrow bases, primary agricultural and forest products from Myanmar in the case of trade, and oil and gas in case of investments, underlining a strong need to expand, diversify and upgrade commercial ties in ways that also contribute to Myanmar's development needs and meet India's \$3 billion trade target set in 2012.

To an extent not often realised, trade has been the keystone of our post-independence relationship that survived both the nationalisation of the 1960s by the military government of Ne Win and the Western economic sanctions since the crackdown on democratic aspirations starting from the 1980s. Critical to this trade are Indian imports of beans and pulses that play a vital part in our food security and Myanmar's economy. Standing at around a million tonnes and \$1 billion in value, over 90% of which is exported to India, it is vital to Myanmar's farmers and foreign exchange earnings, greater even in the value of its exports of rice to China that are prone to periodic restrictions, tough inspections and crackdowns on informal trade at the Myanmar-China border. Past attempts to open a limited market for Myanmar rice in India as an alternative to China, have floundered on vested public distribution interests in India and should be re-opened.

Unfortunately, the recent decision to impose quantitative restrictions on the trade in pulses does exactly the opposite, notwithstanding recent relaxations on orders already paid for. In part, this is because of our own concerns *vis-à-vis* speculative global trade in pulses that has resulted in incentives to increase and protect domestic production in India and induce Myanmar to move towards a government-channelised trade to stabilise prices and in part on account of resistance to such a move in Myanmar.

Older ties

Underlining our strong cultural, people-to-people and diaspora relationship, Mr. Modi will also visit

Bagan where the Archaeological Survey of India is in the final stages of a face-lift to the venerated Ananda Temple and where the Cabinet has approved Indian assistance for the restoration of pagodas damaged by the powerful 2016 earthquake; and Yangon, where he will address the Indian-origin and Indian community and visit places religious, cultural and historical importance.

In his official meetings with President Htin Kyaw and State Counsellor Suu Kyi in Nay Pyi Taw, Mr. Modi is likely to forge a bold strategic vision for bilateral relations, taking advantage of the consensus cutting across political parties and civil and military pillars of Myanmar's polity towards stronger ties with India and project India's economic and strategic footprint in the region between the Bay of Bengal to the South China Sea.

Key elements of this vision could be greater attention to emerging political forces, ethnic states and the peace process as part of our democratic political outreach; converting our investments in the Trilateral Highway and the Kaladan to fuller trade and investment corridors and use Indian investment in the Greater Mekong Sub-region as an arm of our foreign policy with a focus on agriculture, agro-industries and light industry; a broader development partnership reaching to the grassroots with the help of civil society; specific prongs in our 'Act East' policy through the North-east and Bodh Gaya as a pilgrimage centre; and a new political approach to the IIG issue (Indian Insurgent Groups) beyond an intelligence-based approaches. These could perhaps find expression in a joint document sooner or later.

The objective should be to restore the balance in Myanmar's relations between East and South Asia that has been lost with the eastward tilt in Myanmar's external relations over 50 years of insular military rule during which the two countries have forgotten the habit of thinking of themselves psychologically as immediate neighbours.

Gautam Mukhopadhyaya was Ambassador to Syria, Afghanistan and Myanmar before retiring from service in May 2016

Mind the mandate

The BJP walks a tightrope in Assam to reconcile its wider agenda with subnational aspirations



ABDUS SALAM

Who has the greater authority to interpret an electoral mandate? Is it the commentator with their post-haste explanations? Or is it the politician at the centre of it all who criss-crossed constituencies and waded into the crowds on the poll stump? Senior Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, the putative number two in the Assam Cabinet and widely credited as one of the architects of Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) first ever win in the State in the Assembly elections last year, thinks it's decidedly the latter.

Mr. Sarma, especially, and Sarbananda Sonowal, now Chief Minister, mounted the BJP's campaign on the rallying cry of 'jati, mati, bheti' (community, land and home), which resonated with the Assamese population and resulted in a landslide for the National Democratic Alliance, ending 15 years of Congress rule. But attempts to inject a Delhi-Nagpur agenda in the State, from the now-on-hold plan to introduce Sanskrit in schools to the Ganga-like deifica-

tion of its arterial river during the government-organised Namami Brahmaputra festival, have sparked some unease.

The latest government salvo is the setting up of 22 Deen Dayal Upadhyaya colleges in the State, which led to an outcry of excess, and the counter-question of whether Assam didn't have enough home-grown luminaries to be acknowledged and memorialised.

A new interpretation

As the State government brazens it out, it is Mr. Sarma as Education Minister who is leading from the front. He has clarified just what 'jati, mati, bheti' he was talking about during the electoral campaign – of an inclusive, pan-Indian identity where Assam, as part of the national mainstream, becomes an exemplar among Indian States; and definitely not a parochial son-of-the-soil pitch for the Assamese populace. Moreover, he reasoned, the BJP's rich haul of 61 seats – and 88 for the NDA – wasn't courtesy the (Assamese-dominated) Brahmaputra Valley alone; the party won handsomely in the Bengali-dominated Barak Valley and other parts of the State as well.

If Mr. Sarma's recourse to redefining – or restating, as he sees it – the mandate appears to betray the government's discomfiture, at the heart of it is the disparate nature of



electoral vote banks the party tapped into during its successful campaign.

Assamese dominance

Barring the Janata wave of 1978-79, the State had been a Congress preserve until the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) swept to power in 1985 on the back of the six-year-long Assam agitation. The BJP, prior to its spectacular performance in the 2014 general election in which it won seven of the State's 14 Lok Sabha seats, had made inroads in the Barak Valley as early as the 1990s apart from urban concentrations such as Guwahati. While the Hindu Bengali voter has had a longer history of going with the party, her Assamese counterpart's overwhelming support is of recent vintage, 2014 constituting the point of departure. Part of the reason why the BJP was compelled to tie up with a weakened AGP in the last Assembly elections was the urgency of not

splitting this ethnic Assamese vote base, some of which still retained its loyalties to the regionalist agenda. Thus the BJP was able to mount a successful campaign that melded its Hindutva agenda with Assamese subnational aspirations. The dissonance inherent in this force-fitting is however something an electoral campaign can paper over but which everyday governance must negotiate.

Governments in Dispur have historically tended to pander to the Assamese caste Hindus, to the marginalisation of significant sections of the population, to the extent that even prominent leaders from other communities such as the late Santosh Mohan Dev from Silchar, and Paban Singh Ghatowar from Dibrugarh – both Congressmen and from the Bengali and tea tribe communities, respectively – have often had to chart out a ministerial career at the Centre instead of Guwahati. It is this hubris of jatiyotabad (regionalism) and 'Assam for Assamese' that the BJP is running into as it seeks to sublimate that sentiment into the broader rubric of a Hindutva identity.

Balancing act

The project has already weathered choppy waters in the Centre's attempt to extend citizenship to minorities persecuted in India's neighbouring countries, a Bill cur-

rently being examined by a joint parliamentary committee. Aimed in part at rehabilitating Hindu migrants from Bangladesh, the proposal is being vociferously opposed by regional (read Assamese caste Hindu-dominated) outfits including the AGP, the All Assam Students' Union and Asom Jatiyatbadi Yuva Chhatra Parishad. It is telling that on this issue, the ethnic Assamese fronts are united in opposition with Badruddin Ajmal's All India United Democratic Front – a party largely seen as espousing the cause of the State's Bengali-origin Muslims – although from very different standpoints.

The State government has demurred, suggesting that this Malthusian burden be shared by other parts of the country too. Meanwhile, an interim report of a committee tasked with protection of land rights of the indigenous people has recommended that the base year for reservation of land for indigenous people and granting of land rights to citizens should be 1951. The underlying principle behind these proposals – of protecting the indigenous population – is at loggerheads with the new expansive spin to jati-mati-bheti. But since when did contradictions come in the way of a juggling act?

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

Reshuffle 2017

While Nirmala Sitharaman's appointment as a full-fledged Defence Minister is a moment to celebrate, one looks forward to a time when such events no longer make news ("In Cabinet rejig, PM Modi rewards performance" Sept. 4). Insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir and the Northeast, territorial disputes with China and Pakistan combined with growing ties between China and Pakistan, China's influence over India's neighbours, the need to modernise the Army, increase the defence Budget in terms of GDP, and also ensure more transfer of technology from the West are tough issues she faces.

SHREYASHI PANJA, New Delhi

■ The rejig reaffirms the fact that the Prime Minister does

not have many political compulsions to contend with. In the absence of the required talent pool in the party, he has endeavoured to enhance the performance levels of the Cabinet by infusing known bureaucratic talent. Only time will tell whether this experiment proves successful or not. While the promotion of the talented and articulate Ms. Sitharaman is to be appreciated, to interpret this as women's empowerment is erroneous. Though we have had many women in important positions, even as President, Prime Minister and Speaker, there has not been much improvement in the conditions of millions of Indian women.

KOSARAJU CHANDRAMOULI, Hyderabad

■ Our memory is not short in remembering that soon after assuming power, the Prime Minister said that there would be "less government and maximum governance". More than three years have passed since the BJP government took over from the Congress, but most of the promises made by the party remain to be fulfilled. Vested interests, reportedly enjoying the patronage of the present dispensation, are bent on disturbing communal harmony. Economic reforms have not yet gained speed while the issue of unemployment remains unsolved. More tellingly, the RBI's report on demonetisation has denied the government's claims of its having fulfilled its purpose.

JAYANT MUKHERJEE, Kolkata

■ The reason for the reshuffle was supposed to be with a focus on the 2019 Lok Sabha election. The non-performers have been shunted out, but most of the changes are baffling. Why was Suresh Prabhu, who was doing good work, removed and given another portfolio? The induction of a few retired bureaucrats is bizarre. Does it mean with so many elected BJP members, Mr. Modi couldn't rely on them and so he had to call for outside talent? Ms. Sitharaman might be a good speaker but is this a reason enough to have her head such an important portfolio overlooking the claims of other senior and experienced persons?

D.B.N. MURTHY, Bengaluru

■ The move to have Alphonso

Kannanthanam, bureaucrat turned politician, is a clever political formula to build up the BJP in Kerala. The focus on minority representation is with a plan in mind to showcase the party as one with a pan-Indian presence ("Why not an inclusive Cabinet: Kannanthanam", September 4).

B. VEERAKUMARAN THAMPI, Thiruvananthapuram

The reader in mind?

The Readers' Editor's column, "Verification is a pre-publication process" (September 4), made me check the "Terms of Reference" governing the RE's appointment. I find

that the aims of the weekly RE's column to be something entirely different. The trend, in this column, to discuss issues concerning the general practices of contemporary journalism instead of specific issues concerning *The Hindu* has been going on for long. *The Hindu* is certainly welcome to carry content of the type the RE creates, yet isn't this better done by someone else? The RE is supposed to be in a purposeful position, addressing readers' issues.

DEVRAJ SAMBASIVAN, Alappuzha, Kerala

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CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

A Sports page report on tennis superstar Serena Williams becoming a mother (Sept. 3, 2017) was erroneously accompanied by a picture of Venus Williams.

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Who were the first settlers of India?

New research has pushed back the date for human occupation of Australia and South-east Asia. This is sparking a fresh debate on when our ancestors arrived in India first



TONY JOSEPH

When did our species, Homo sapiens, first set foot in India? There are two competing versions of the answer: let's call them the 'early version' and the 'late version'. The 'early version' says they arrived 74,000 to 120,000 years ago from Africa through the Arabian peninsula with Middle Stone Age tools such as scrapers and points that helped them hunt their prey, gather food, or make clothes. The 'late version' says they arrived much later, around 50,000 to 60,000 years ago, with upgraded technology such as microlithic (tiny stone) tools that might have been used to give sharp tips to arrows and spears.

A geological event separates the two versions: the supervolcanic eruption at Toba in Sumatra, Indonesia, about 74,000 years ago, dumped tonnes of ash all over South-east Asia and South Asia, causing much stress to all life in the region. The 'early version' says migrants reached India before Toba; the 'late version' says the opposite.

Two new studies

Until two months ago it looked like the late version had all the momentum. But two new studies, published in July and August, may have changed that. The first study, led by Professor Chris Clarkson of the University of Queensland, established that modern humans were in Australia by between 59,300 and 70,700 years ago, or, if you take the midpoint, 65,000 years ago. That is about 15,000 years earlier than previous estimates. Prof. Clarkson and his colleagues used the latest techniques to date things left behind by humans at the Madjedbebe caves in Australia's Northern Territory: mortars and pestles, ground-edge axes, and painting material.

The second study, led by archaeologist Dr. Kira Westaway of the Macquarie University, palaeontologist Dr. Julien Louys of the Australian National University, and others had equally remarkable results. They reinvestigated two teeth that had been found in the Lida Ajer caves in Indonesia's Sumatra island more than a century ago, but whose dating and provenance were disputed. Using the latest multidisciplinary techniques, they have confirmed that the teeth belonged to modern humans who

lived 63,000-73,000 years ago, thus pushing back the dates for modern human occupation of South-east Asia by about 20,000 years.

The Sumatra and the Madjedbebe findings point in the same direction, says Dr. Louys: that Out of Africa (OOA) migrants made it into South-east Asia before 60,000 years ago. In fact, he says, they could have been in the region for much longer because "it is incredibly likely we're not sampling the very first humans in Sumatra and Australia."

But if people were already in Australia and South-east Asia by 65,000 years ago, then they would have had to have left Africa and reached India much earlier (India having been a key corridor for the OOA migration). And that would put the 'late version' in jeopardy. Professor Ravi Korisettar of the Karnatak University, a well-known archaeologist who has worked extensively on early modern human migrations in South Asia, concurs. "These findings support our argument for an earlier migration," he says.

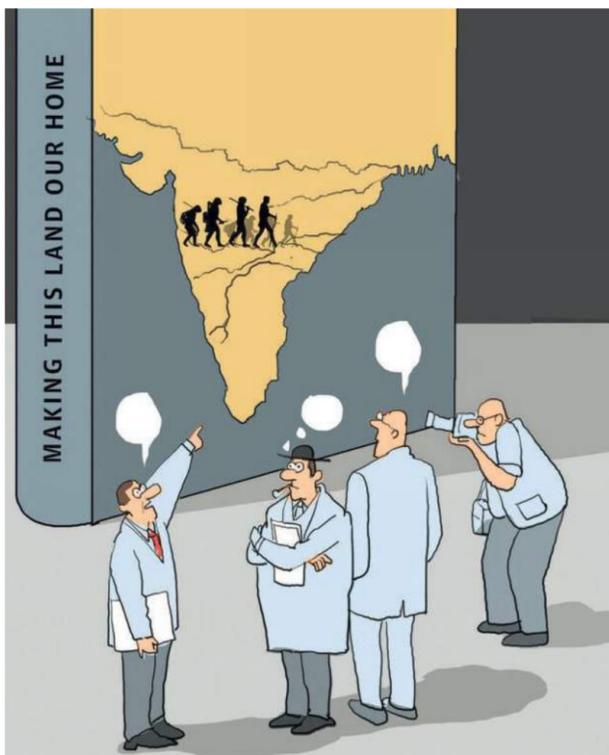
At least from about 35,000 years ago, there is incontrovertible evidence of modern humans in South Asia, while evidence for earlier presence is circumstantial.

Why should we care?

But wait a minute, why should anyone care? How does it matter when a group of hunter-gatherers first walked into India? The simple answer is that human history in the subcontinent begins with them. But there's also another reason. The first settlers of India are our direct ancestors: about 50% to 60% of Indian genetic ancestry today comes from the first settlers, with the rest contributed by later migrants from West Asia, East Asia, and Central Asia. So, the deeply held belief that only tribals (about 8.6% of the population) carry the ancestry of the original settlers couldn't be more wrong. The first settlers of India are, indeed, the bedrock of our population and civilisation. Without getting their story right, we cannot get the rest of our history right.

Jwalapuram and the early version

So, to get back to our story, there's a reason for Prof. Korisettar to feel vindicated. He was instrumental in discovering the Jwalapuram site in Andhra Pradesh, which posed the first big challenge to the 'late version'. Jwalapuram lies in the Jurreru river valley and its significance is in the fact that



*DEEPAK HARICHANDAN

the river basin holds layers of volcanic ash left behind by the Toba eruption. The archaeologists who excavated Jwalapuram more than a decade ago, including Prof. Korisettar and Prof. Michael Petraglia, then of Cambridge University, found something remarkable at the bottommost layer: Middle Stone Age tools dated to around 77,000 years ago and were made by what they believe were modern humans. Those findings created a stir because they frontally challenged the 'late version'. Prof. Korisettar and Prof. Petraglia, in fact, went on to argue that modern humans could have been in India as early as 100,000-120,000 years ago. "Ever since our paper was published in *Science* magazine in July 2007, we have been suggesting pre-Toba expansion," says Prof. Korisettar.

The Jwalapuram findings did not go uncontested, though. Middle Stone Age tools were made by both modern humans and archaic hominins such as Homo erectus and are, therefore, diffi-

cult to assign to one or the other. And India has had archaic hominins at least from about 1.5 million years ago. But Prof. Korisettar argues that the Jwalapuram artefacts are remarkably similar to those made by Middle Stone Age modern humans in Africa. That argument now finds strong support from Dr. Louys who says "it makes sense" to think modern humans were in Asia before the Toba eruption.

The late version

The problem is that this suggestion bumps up against genetics. All humans belong to haplogroups or lineages (Y-DNA haplogroups for males, and mitochondrial or mtDNA haplogroups for females), and by studying current populations using genetic markers and mutation rates, geneticists can create global family trees and estimate the age at which two haplogroups shared a common ancestor. These techniques have improved by leaps and bounds, so it's no surprise that there's now near-

consensus about the history of human migrations. It goes something like this: Homo sapiens originated in Africa over 200,000 years ago, started range expansions into the Levant and West Asia between 120,000-100,000 years ago, and started on a colonising journey of the world around 70,000 years ago, reaching South Asia by 60,000 years, Australia by 50,000 years, and Europe by 45,000 years ago.

All non-African populations in the world are descendants of a single, small group of migrating Africans (perhaps numbering no more than a thousand).

All non-African populations in the world, therefore, are descendants of a single, small group of migrating Africans (perhaps numbering no more than a thousand). Because of this bottleneck, the entire non-African world population belongs to just three mtDNA super-haplogroups M, N, and R (and C, D, and F in the case of non-African Y-DNA). The common ancestor of M, N, and R is a parent haplogroup called L3, which still has many lineages in Africa. Given this, it is reasonable to conclude that OOA migrations could not have happened earlier than the emergence of L3. And genetic studies say the earliest possible date for the emergence of L3 is 70,000 years ago. In other words, there is no way that an OOA migration could have happened before the Toba eruption of 74,000 years ago!

Those who argue this also put forward other reasons why the 'early version' cannot hold. One of them is that genetic records show that the first migrants had spread across South Asia, South-east Asia, and Australia within a brief period of time before too many mutations could accumulate. And that means it must have been quite a sprint, in historical terms. The only way this could have been accomplished is if they took a coastal route from West Asia to India to South-east Asia and then, finally, Australia. A coastal route meant two things: one, the beach-hopping migrants could use the same skill sets to survive on marine resources such as fish and crustaceans all along their journey. Two, their march got an unintended directionality, taking them inexorably towards Australia.

What lends support to this chronology is that at least from about 35,000 years ago, there is incontrovertible evidence of modern humans in South Asia, while evidence for earlier presence is

circumstantial. The earliest modern human fossil in the region is from the Sri Lankan cave of Fa Hien, dated to 33,000-30,000 years ago. (Sri Lanka was then linked to the Indian landmass, as sea levels were lower). In India too, there is abundant evidence of microlithic tools from around the same time.

Squaring the circle

There is an attractive parsimoniousness to the 'late version' and until now there hasn't been abundant, securely dated evidence against it. Moreover, every recent genetic study has further confirmed the late version, the latest being "A genetic history of aboriginal Australia", the lead author of which is Dr. Michael Westaway of Griffith University. "Our study added a lot more detail to the understanding of early migrations," says Dr. Westaway. Co-author Dr. Sankar Subramanian acknowledges the difference between the findings of their study and that of the Madjedbebe study. "The age of the common ancestor estimated in our study is younger, about 40,000 years (as against 65,000 years of the Madjedbebe study)," he says, adding that the difference could be either because some of the early lineages have gone extinct and therefore do not show up in the genetic studies, or simply because the genetic study did not include samples from the Northern Territory, the area where Madjedbebe caves are located.

So, how does one square this circle? The 'late version' cites genetics to say that OOA could not have happened before 70,000 years ago. But archaeological evidence says humans were already in Sumatra by around then. There are two ways of looking at this. The first is that the new findings do not really overturn the 'late version', but only stretch it to the maximum. The lower end of the Madjedbebe study puts the age of the artefacts at 59,300 years; that of the Sumatra study puts it at 63,000 years. Theoretically, both could fall within the extreme range of possibilities, with OOA migrants reaching Australia by 59,000 years ago, after having left Africa by 70,000 years ago. Another possibility is that the Madjedbebe and Sumatra people went extinct long ago, leaving behind artefacts and a couple of teeth, but without leaving a mark in the genetic pool as it exists today.

The new studies may have given new wind to the early version of OOA, but it will take new fossil finds with older dates for a new consensus to emerge.

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SINGLE FILE

Don't pigeonhole me

Identity is powerful unless it becomes an everyday entitlement

RAHEEL DHAATIWALA



Travel experiences, even if distasteful, can provide real-time education in identity, nationalism, and equality.

Recently, while flying from Amsterdam to Delhi, I was detained overnight on the Kazakhstan border and treated with measured disdain and, at times, explicit ridicule by the airline by which

I was travelling. It was all because of the airline's own mistake. Transiting through Kazakhstan doesn't need a visa, the airline staff said. Well, it does. Once the Kazakh security forces descended on me, all the sociological theory of my professional life suddenly came alive. I was a proud Indian whose identity became a cause célèbre: I was the only person on board who was not exempted from the transit visa because I was Indian.

Visa laws are one of the legitimised controlling methods of modern nation states to keep out the 'undesirables'; a type of modern-day colonisation. Spending a night in the security stronghold of a remote town in Kazakhstan also coerced me to think about my own identity as a law-abiding Indian and its value within both an ultra-nationalist India and other parts of the world. That pride in one's identity may be an utterly meaningless emotion because there's always another identity that (erroneously) self-assesses itself to be relatively superior.

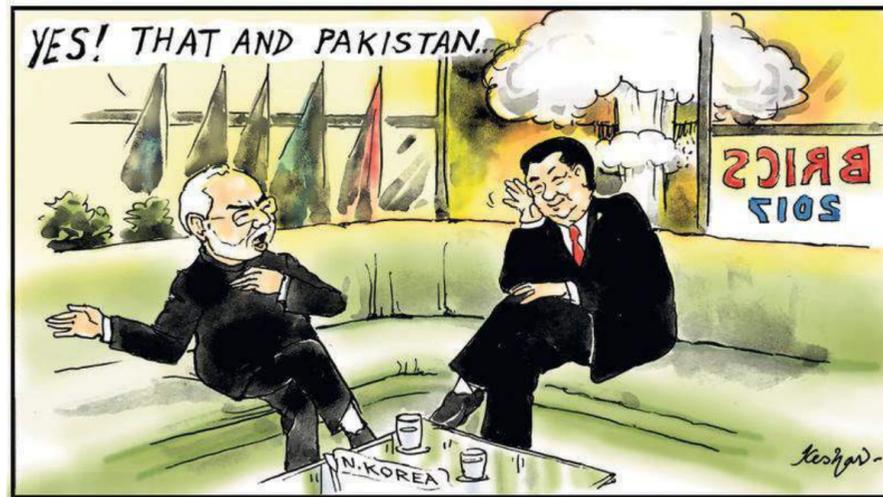
Human>Animal. European>Indian. Indian>Muslim. Sunni Muslim>Shia Muslim. Syed Sunni>Sunni Bohra>Sunni Pinjara. Man>Woman... It's an equation of hierarchical endlessness.

The logic is not difficult to understand. Once identities are perceived as opaque boxes, we begin to create and sustain stereotypes: the negative stereotype of the Gujarati stealthily finding ways to sneak into a foreign country, or of the skull-capped Muslim queuing up to be the next jihadi. Worse is the positive stereotype of the scrupulous white man, or the fastidious Indian nationalist who sings the national anthem in the movie hall and beats up anyone who doesn't.

When German Chancellor Angela Merkel welcomed Muslims fleeing the Syrian war into the country, an interesting interplay of negative and positive stereotypes became conspicuous: Muslims? Therefore, terrorists and "bad". Muslims? Therefore, refugees and "good". Neither is true, of course. Why not welcome them as humans? Else, there emerges what may be called the 'elite refugee', an educated, economically well off individual who is undesired by her own country for being a less demonstrative nationalist than what the (positive) stereotype demands, and undesired by a foreign country for being, in our case, Indian.

Pigeonholing people is easy. Studies of group threat have shown how easily we tend to prejudice someone who's not like us because we reduce them to monolithic identities. Others do the same to us. Psychologist Gordon Allport once noted a student saying, "I despise all Americans but have never met one I didn't like." The individual is often lost in an ocean of identities. Historically there has been a purpose in instilling pride in monolithic identities – the might of the 'Indian' against the colonisers, for instance. With pride comes reflexivity. Identity is powerful unless it becomes an everyday entitlement.

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CONCEPTUAL

Urban revolution

ARCHAEOLOGY

This refers to the historic transition of small agricultural societies into large urban societies. It was coined by Australian archaeologist V. Gordon Childe in his 1936 book *Man Makes Himself*. In his 1950 paper on the same subject, Childe came up with ten qualities, including the size of settlements, social stratification, wealth distribution and trade relations, that helped distinguish urban societies from agricultural societies. The urban revolution, he believed, was brought about by the advent of modern technology which helped to improve overall production capabilities and living standards in these societies.

MORE ON THE WEB

For Rohingyas, there is no place called home

<http://bit.ly/rhngya>

ABSTRACT

The selfish way to combat inequality

Collectivist societies fail to achieve economic equality

PRASHANTH PERUMAL J.

A common belief, even among economists, is that inequality is greater in individualistic societies than in collectivist ones. Individualistic societies are generally considered to be selfish and uncaring towards fellow human beings, which, it is believed, should cause them to suffer greater economic inequality. It is further said that in the absence of wealth redistribution by the government, individualistic societies will tend to aggravate inequality.

"Are individualistic societies less equal? Evidence from the parasite stress theory of values", a 2017 paper by Boris Nikolaev, Christopher Boudreaux, and Rauf Salahodjaev published in the *Journal of Economic Behaviour and Organization*, however, comes to a different conclusion. The authors find that income distribution is actually more equitable in individualistic

societies than in collectivist ones. While this sounds counter-intuitive, it makes sense when the actual causes of economic inequality between people are considered.

What differentiates individualistic societies from their collectivist counterparts is their belief in individual freedom. So, while the population of an individualistic society might believe, for instance, that people are entitled to the fruits of their labour, collectivist societies put more emphasis on the collective welfare of society. For the same reason, individualistic societies prefer a smaller government that imposes lower taxes and regulations on everyone, while collectivist societies prefer a larger government to impose a greater burden on the rich.

Interestingly, however, the creation of a larger government to redistribute wealth and uphold social justice does not lead to less inequality. In fact, a

larger government provides greater opportunities for special interest groups to capture it and forward their own agenda. This results in fewer economic opportunities for the wider population, which results in lower competition and greater economic inequality. Obviously, this is the opposite of what supporters of a collectivist government want, but reality works against their wishes.

On the other hand, under the rule of a smaller government, economic opportunities are available to a much wider population. Special interest groups have fewer opportunities to exploit the powers of the government, as there is less reliance on the government to guide the economy in the first place. This leads to greater competition in individualistic societies, which translates to lower levels of economic inequality, as confirmed by the study.

FROM The Hindu ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO SEPTEMBER 5, 1967

Orissa's rice bowl hit by floods

Balasure and Mayurbhanj districts, considered the rice-bowl of Orissa, have been hit by floods described by the State Chief Minister, Mr. R.N. Singh Deo as the "worst in living memory." Emergency relief operations have been set in motion in these areas. No loss of life has so far been officially reported. With about 1200 square miles submerged in both the districts, the Orissa Government has approached the army authorities for boats for rescue and relief operations in the affected areas. Flood water has submerged the railway track, inundating portions of the national highway and damaging a large number of thatched houses in the affected areas. Train services between Howrah and Madras and between Howrah and Nagpur have been disrupted.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO SEPTEMBER 5, 1917

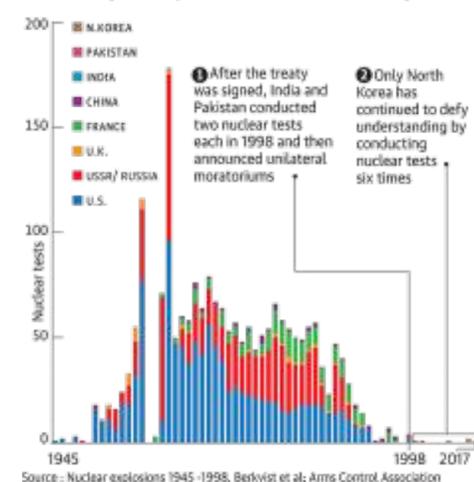
Fall of Riga and threat to Petrograd

A Russian wireless Communique [accessed in London] says, the Riga region has been abandoned owing to the threatening situation westward of Riga. We have retired to the Line Bilderingh of Medem Dalen. In the direction of Ikskul the enemy has penetrated positions on the Jaegel river. Some of our detachments voluntarily left their positions and retired northwards. We repulsed attacks with heavy losses in the direction of Focsani. The crossing of the Dvina seems to have been effected eighteen miles above Riga.

DATA POINT

Crossing the threshold

Close to 2,056 nuclear tests have been conducted since 1945. Of them, only ten came after a de facto moratorium on such tests was established by the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty in 1996



Source: Nuclear explosions 1945-1998, Berkovist et al; Arms Control Association