

# Lessons for Kashmir from the Kuriles

India and Pakistan can learn from Japan and Russia on seeking innovative solutions to disputes



KRISHNAN SRINIVASAN

The Second World War left behind many problems inherited from history, not least in Asia in respect of multiple disputed territories. One of them concerns four islands in the Kurile chain that are claimed by Japan but occupied by Russia as successor state of the Soviet Union. Despite the passage of over 70 years, this dispute has defied solution and prevented the conclusion of a Russo-Japanese peace treaty to draw a final curtain over the detritus of the war.

## Claims and counterclaims

The Kuriles are an archipelago of some 56 islands spanning about 1,800 km from Japan's Hokkaido to Russia's Kamchatka. All of them are under Russian jurisdiction but Japan claims the two large southernmost islands, Etorofu and Kunashiri, and two others, Shikotan and Habomai, as its 'northern territories'. These islands were occupied by the Soviet Union in August 1945, after which the entire Japanese population, numbering less than 20,000, was evicted. The islands are now populated by the various ethnic groups of the former Soviet Union, but only eight of them are actually inhabited.

The prime value of the islands, however, is strategic. The Russians have deployed missile systems, plan a submarine project there, and intend to preclude any American military use of the islands.

Public opinion in both countries is totally averse to any concession. Russian memory recalls the Japan-Russia war (1904-05) and the Japanese intervention with the U.S. and Europe during the early years of the Russian Revolution. Moscow's legal claim is based on the post-war settlements of Yalta and San Francisco, whereas the Japanese claim is founded on the Russia-Japan treaties of 1855 and 1875. Leaders in both Russia and Japan are aware that their domestic political positions would be severely at risk from right-wing and conservative circles were they to suggest even the slightest compromise.



"Although Russia has for long been Japan's hypothetical enemy, Japanese PM Shinzo Abe's wish to engage with Moscow stems from the rapid rise of China." Russian President Vladimir Putin (left) with Mr. Abe in Moscow in 2013. ■AFP

Among hyper-nationalist circles, territorial issues have always been questions of utmost sensitivity. While the Japanese government's official position is that it has "energetically been continuing negotiations with Russia", the reality is that it was only after the advent to power of President Vladimir Putin in Russia and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in Japan that there has been any forward movement. After Mr. Putin's visit to Japan in 2016, both leaders have embarked on some joint undertakings on the islands without calling in question the claims and legal positions of either side. In two summits last year, they agreed to joint field surveys and joint economic activities with the identification of specific projects, the enterprises that would undertake them, and three levels of supervision. These proposals cover marine species and aquaculture, greenhouse strawberry and vegetable cultivation, development of package tourism, wind power generation, and the reduction and disposal of garbage. They also agreed to scheduled visits by Japanese families who sought to visit the graves of their ancestors, and two such visits have already taken place. The Japanese have further proposed safe opportunities for fishing salmon and trout without using prohibited driftnet methodology, and cooperation in disaster prevention. These may seem small steps, but underlying them is a serious purpose: to build trust. Sum-

mits and Foreign Ministers' meetings have become commonplace.

Moscow is concerned about Tokyo amending Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution, which disallows Japan from maintaining a military force or using force to settle international disputes, and views with anxiety the fact that Japan is among the world's biggest spenders on defence and has a very powerful military. Japan plays host to American bases and missile systems, and plans to spend \$240 billion up to 2024 on cruise missiles, missile interceptors, fighter jets and aircraft carriers. Responsible for this military build-up are trepidations about threats from China and North Korea. South Korea for its part has similar apprehensions and, apart from being the world's 11th major economy, has now become the 12th strongest military power. Moscow cannot be unaware that Japan and South Korea seem to be inching towards a future of relative independence from the U.S. in wartime operations, especially in the context of the projected American decline in world status, and the political uncertainties among Washington's political circles.

Although Russia has for long been a hypothetical enemy of Japan's, Mr. Abe's wish to engage with Russia stems from the rapid rise of China, which spends three times more on defence than Japan, and the perceived threat from North Korea, which recently fired two ballistic missiles over Japan as a taunt to the U.S.

Russia is now seen in Japan as the lesser enemy, and improving relations with Moscow might drive a wedge in the growing quasi-alliance between Russia and China, a break-up desired by the U.S.-led Western alliance. Tokyo notes that the Russian far east is endowed with plentiful natural resources which are in need of investments, but is hampered by a small population, whereas China has 100 million citizens along that shared land border. Japan has no territorial or demographic ambitions in Russia other than the Kuriles, and has the capacity to transform the vast contiguous areas of Russia.

## Towards greater collaboration

Therefore, it is hardly surprising that both Japan and Russia see merit in pursuing greater collaboration, although the U.S. has made no secret its displeasure at Japan's accommodating attitude towards Russia. At Vladivostok last September, Mr. Abe declared that Japan-Russia relations held "unlimited potential" and that the absence of a peace treaty was "an abnormal state of affairs". Mr. Putin agreed, noting that the Russian and Japanese militaries had cooperated for the first time, and urged the immediate conclusion of a peace treaty without preconditions. Japan demurred on the grounds that the Kurile islands dispute had to be settled first before the issue was foreclosed. Nonetheless, Mr. Abe stated that "Japan-Russia relations are advancing at a degree never seen before."

The interactions between Japan and Russia probably hold scant interest for the Indian public. Nevertheless, although no two international problems are analogous, there are important lessons to be drawn from the manner in which traditionally hostile neighbours can identify common interests and explore unorthodox avenues along which to proceed in search of innovative solutions to apparently insoluble disputes. This requires strong leadership and a bold imagination. Neither India nor Pakistan lacks either attribute. Kashmir is essentially a territorial dispute of almost equal vintage as the Kuriles. But if both sides keep waiting for the most propitious time to make the first move, it will never come about.

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## FROM THE READERS' EDITOR

# The Sabarimala coverage

A response to the newspaper's critics



A.S. PANNEERSELVAN

When faith comes in conflict with the Constitution, journalism becomes complicated. Ever since the Supreme Court ruling on the entry of women of all ages into Sabarimala, questions of patriarchy, equality, constitutionality and tradition have been raised. In an emotionally charged environment, people tend to read reports wearing ideological blinkers. I received complaints from both the critics of the Supreme Court ruling and supporters of the rights of women about *The Hindu's* coverage of the ruling and the developments thereafter.

## Various objections

The critics felt that some of the reports were one-sided. For instance, one reader felt that the report titled "Sabarimala 'purification' rites violate SC verdict" (Jan. 3) contradicted another report, "Supreme Court refuses to grant early hearing on 'contempt' plea against Sabarimala temple chief priest" (Jan. 3), and said the newspaper is deliberately misleading its readers. The first report explained what the majority of the five-judge Constitution Bench observed on the concept of purity and pollution. It did not contain the reporter's personal comments; it only cited the written observations of the judges. The second was a report filed from the court. It stated that a five-judge Bench is listed to hear 49 review petitions and a range of applications regarding the September 28 verdict of the Constitution Bench in open court on January 22. I don't understand how stating facts is misleading.

Another reader took strong objection to the editorial "Breaking barriers", which appeared after two women entered the temple, and termed it "Hindu phobic". He felt that an impartial editorial would address the issue of gender discrimination across all religions in the country. He may not be aware of the governing values of this newspaper. In 2015, in a column titled "Living values" (Jan. 26), I had documented the consistent stand of this newspaper in its opposition to all forms of obscurantism and how it has spared no group, irrespective of religion, when the actions of that group threatened the peace-

ful coexistence of religions and people.

There was also an angry note from Kavita Krishnan, Secretary of the All India Progressive Women's Association and Polit Bureau member of CPI(M), regarding a local report in the Kerala editions headlined "A first for Sabarimala Ayyappa temple", which explained the so-called cleansing ritual after the entry of the two women. Her contention was that the report smacked of Brahmanical patriarchy. I am at a loss to understand this outrage. Isn't it important to report the level of obscurantism that is prevalent here? Is it right to pull out one short report of 200 words, which is a part of a large package of stories, and arrive at such a conclusion? The package also contained the following stories: "Tantri should have quit if verdict unacceptable: CM"; "Sangh Parivar scaring women, says CPI(M)"; "Traders put loss of business at ₹1,200 crore"; "CM promises protection to women devotees"; and "Operation was kept under wraps to ensure safe passage".

## Reporting disturbing realities

*The Hindu's* reportage on Sabarimala has been exhaustive. No issue has been overlooked. In fact, on the day of the judgment, the newspaper's report headlined "Sabarimala women entry ban an 'essential practice'", says dissenting judge Indu Malhotra gave the lone dissenting judge due space. A later report (October 9, 2018) documented how the Sabarimala review pleas take Justice Malhotra's line. The newspaper also carried a dissenting view from a former judge, Markandey Katju, who feared that the judgment might open a Pandora's box.

This column, like this newspaper, does not discriminate against one form of hatred over another. In fact, it equated the killings of Narendra Dabholkar, M.M. Kalburgi and Govind Pansare in India with the assassinations of Governor Salman Taseer and Minorities Minister Shahbaz Bhatti in Pakistan and the killings of secular bloggers Nazimuddin Samad, Niloy Chakrabarti, Avijit Roy, Washiqur Rahman and Ananta Bijoy Das in Bangladesh, and fearlessly declared that these deaths are grim reminders of majoritarian ruthlessness in the Indian subcontinent.

If journalism has to remain an effective interlocking public, it has to report everything, including some very unpleasant and disturbing realities.

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VIDEO GRAB

## SINGLE FILE

# India's Atlantic challenge

Trump's 'America First' policy and the Brexit deal could pose more challenges this year

MARTAND JHA



While 2019 is a year of hope and perhaps provides an opportunity for a reset in some areas of policy for India, a lingering concern is that the choppy waters of the Atlantic Ocean may throw up many economic challenges that might rock India's boat of stable economic growth. This is because, first, U.S. President Donald Trump's 'America First' policy could lead to more tariff and subsidy hiccups, culminating in protracted trade battles, in the context of protectionism. And second, if the U.K. has a 'hard Brexit', India may be looking at unexpected complications regarding trade adjustment, and a U.K.-India Free Trade Agreement (FTA) may be out of the question.

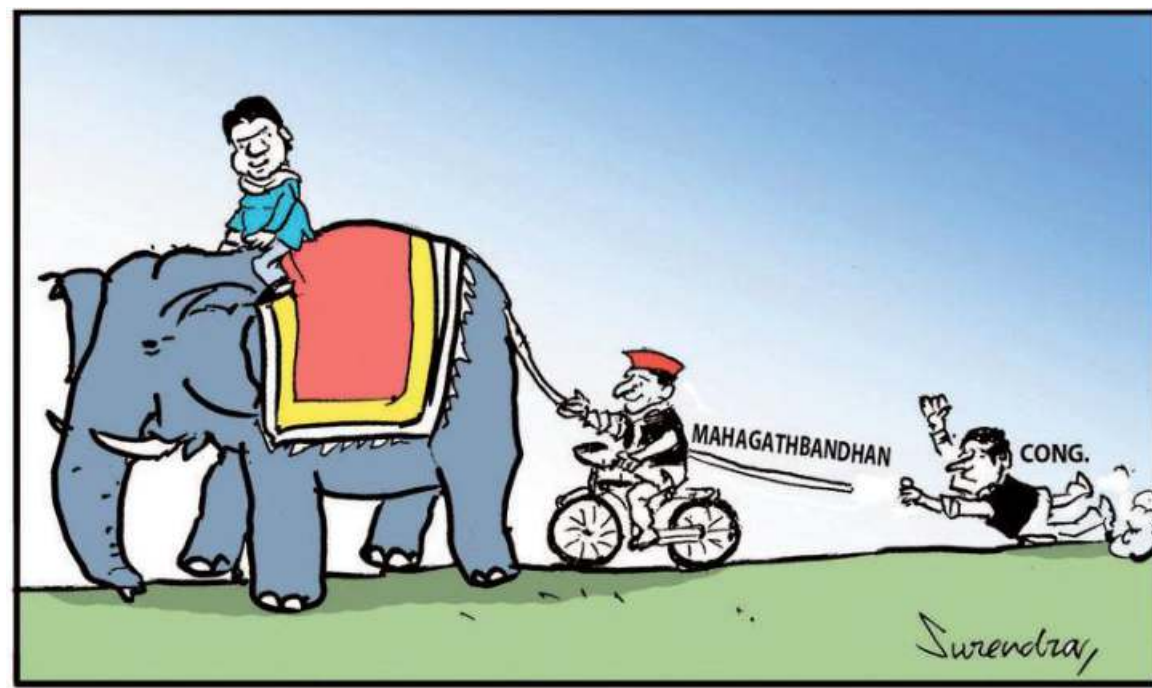
Considering the U.S. first, the Trump administration is attempting to replace the rules-based trade order with a bilateral trade agreements and sanctions network, a system that has distinct disadvantages for India. The trade experience of 2018 provides a sense of what could happen in 2019 vis-à-vis India-U.S. trade relations. Last year, when Mr. Trump gave the green light to start a trade war by escalating tariffs between U.S. and its three main trade partners - the EU, China and NAFTA - a relatively small yet strategically significant tariff spat broke out between Washington and New Delhi.

Both countries engaged in a tit-for-tat tariff policy, giving momentum to global trends towards trade protectionism. When India was denied an exemption by the U.S. from increased tariffs on steel and aluminium imports, it reciprocated by hiking import duties on 29 American export products, including pulses and iron and steel products. This show of strength against Washington's deep-pocketed lobbies was, however, at odds with India's original stand on this issue, which was pro-globalisation. Indeed, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's speech at Davos in January 2018 gave considerable time to the reasons why trade protectionism was a worrisome phenomenon.

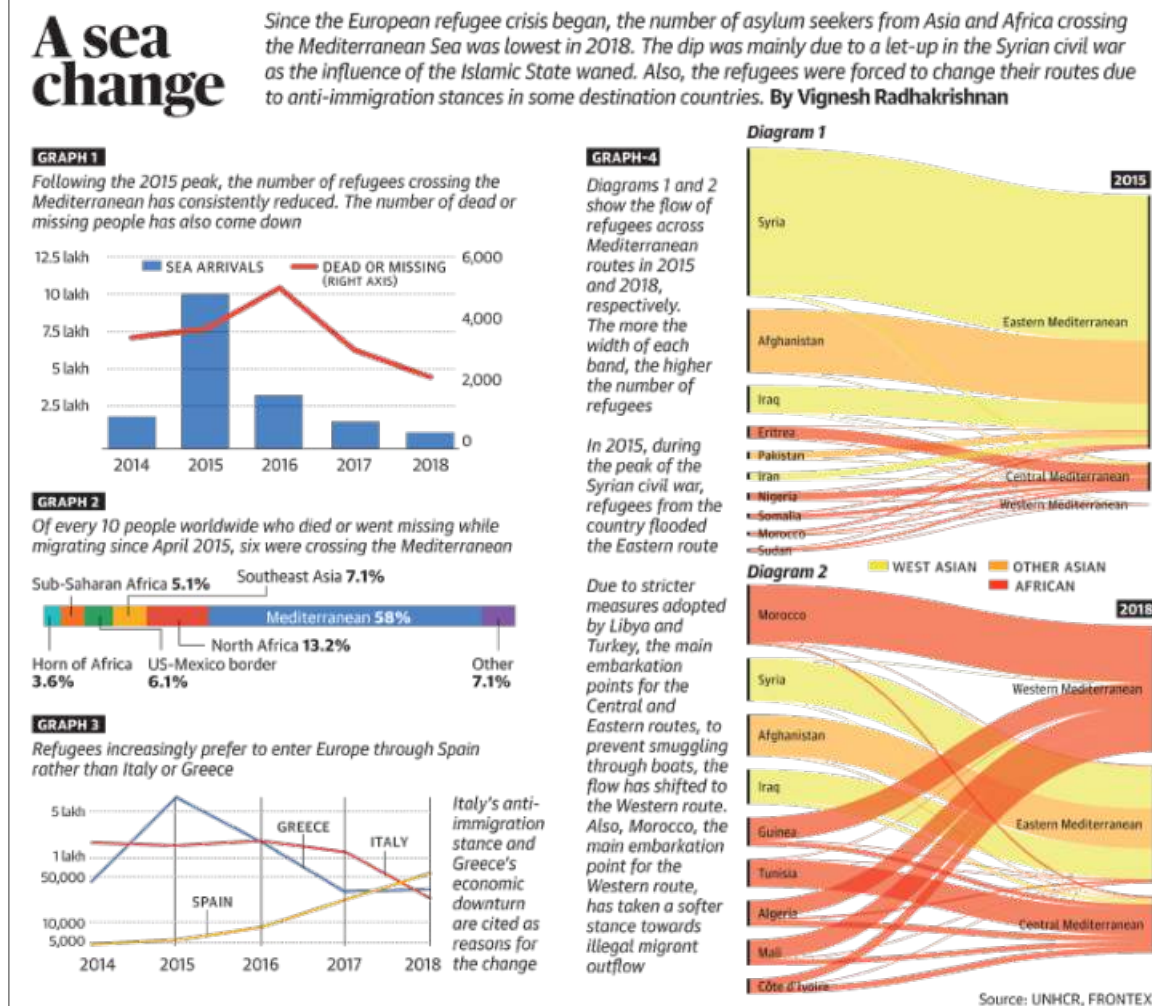
A broader disadvantage for India of a spiralling trade war with the U.S. is that it could easily spin out of control and create rifts in other areas such as security and diplomacy. If that happens, it may be of considerable benefit to China, which India - and ironically the U.S. too - wants to contain.

With the U.K., India's trade in 2019 depends on the twists and turns of Brexit politics, both in London and in Brussels, with the March 29 deadline for the same looming ever closer. However, for India to secure its trade interests, it needs to renegotiate with both the EU and the U.K. for goods and services. Also, the discussion on FTA with the EU must be resumed and a similar conversation must be launched with the U.K. If these negotiations are managed carefully, Brexit may even emerge as an opportunity for India to recalibrate the legal terms of its trade with the U.K. and the EU, at the multi-lateral level, and through free trade agreements.

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## DATA POINT



## FROM THE HINDU ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO JANUARY 7, 1969

### Lord Denning's call

Lord Denning, Master of the Rolls (U.K.), called upon the lawyers of the Madras Bar to uphold the dignity, independence and integrity of their profession. He said they should present their cases courageously and honestly and not suggest anything that was untrue. Lord Denning told a packed gathering of Judges of the Madras High Court and advocates how both England and India had a common heritage because in their systems of law they depended on the proper practice and procedure. They called it common law; they could not talk of individual and personal freedom without this common law. It was their duty to uphold freedom to every man. How could they do it except by rule of law? he asked. He explained how they were protected by rule of law and said in India they had shown that rule of law or rule of courts was superior even to the legislature. But they had not done it in England. He hoped that they in England would follow it.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JANUARY 7, 1919.

### Opium Smuggling in China.

The 'Times' [of London] learns from Shanghai that Indian opium to the value of 16,000 dollars has been seized on board the Chinese customs revenue cruiser, on which Sir Francis Aglen, Inspector-General of Maritime Customs, was returning to Shanghai from a visit of inspection to Southern ports. The Chinese crew clearly imagined that any ship in which the Inspector-General was travelling would be safe from troublesome investigation. The value of the opium indicates that the crew were merely agents of a bigger organisation. Indeed the extent to which opium smuggling is now practised is scandalous. In nearly every ship from South China and Vladivostok some opium is found, occasionally running to enormous figures. Opium is extensively cultivated in Korea while recently established factories in Formosa are doing big business in exporting morphia to China, principally through the Japanese Post Office which the Customs are unable to touch.

## CONCEPTUAL

### Life-cycle hypothesis

ECONOMICS

This suggests that individuals even out their consumption in the best possible manner over their life cycles. The hypothesis is that people who are young usually have several years of productive employment ahead of them, so they tend to borrow money to fund their education and consumption needs, while people who are older tend to be more conservative about their borrowing and spending habits as they have fewer years of productive employment ahead of them. The life-cycle hypothesis was proposed by Italian economist Franco Modigliani and his student Richard Brumberg in 1957.

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