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1. The Mystery of the Indus Script: Over 100 Failed Attempts

Introduction to the Indus Script

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin has announced a \$1 million prize for deciphering the enigmatic script of the Indus Valley Civilisation. This script has puzzled experts for over a century since Sir John Marshall's discovery of the Bronze Age culture that thrived between 3300 and 1300 BCE. Despite over 100 documented attempts by archaeologists, linguists, and historians, the script remains undeciphered.



New Study Suggests Connections to Tamil Nadu

Stalin's announcement follows a study by Tamil Nadu's Department of Archaeology, which identified parallels between more than 90% of graffiti marks found on pot shards in Tamil Nadu and the Indus script. The study analyzed 15,000 pot shards from Tamil Nadu and 4,000 Indus Valley artifacts, identifying 42 base signs, 544 variants, and 1,521 composite forms.

Features of the Indus Script

The Indus Valley Civilisation (2600–1900 BCE) was a sophisticated urban culture spanning 800,000 sq km across present-day Pakistan and parts of India.

- **Inscriptions and Symbols:** Seals and terracotta tablets from Indus sites feature human, animal motifs, and symbols believed to represent a script. However, scholars disagree on the number of symbols, with estimates ranging from 62 (S.R. Rao) to 676 (Bryan K. Wells).
- **Scholarly Disagreements:** Key debates revolve around the script's structure, its linguistic roots, and the possibility of it representing a full language.

Debates Over the Language

Efforts to link the Indus script to Sanskrit, often part of a nationalist narrative, have been controversial.

- **Rao's Sanskrit Theory:** Archaeologist S.R. Rao argued that the script was a precursor to Sanskrit, challenging the Indo-Aryan migration theory.

- Parpola's Dravidian Hypothesis: Finnish Indologist Asko Parpola, however, concluded that the script had Dravidian roots. He proposed that the Indus script was a logosyllabic system, where symbols like the fish sign represented homophones (e.g., "fish" and "star" in Dravidian languages).

Is It a Script at All?

In the early 2000s, some scholars questioned whether the Indus script was a language-based system.

- Non-Linguistic Symbols Hypothesis: A 2004 paper by Steve Farmer and colleagues argued that the symbols represented nonlinguistic political or religious markers.
- Criticism and Counterarguments: This claim was criticized, with Parpola and others pointing out that short inscriptions are not unique to the Indus script (e.g., Egyptian hieroglyphs).
- Alternative Views: Recent studies suggest the symbols might have served as a hallmarking or commercial system rather than a script for recording language.

The Importance of Deciphering the Script

While the script might primarily provide commercial information, its decipherment could offer valuable insights into the Harappan economy and society.

- Commercial Records: Similar to how deciphering Linear B revealed ancient Greek palace records, the Indus script could shed light on trade, taxation, and governance in the civilisation.

Conclusion

The Indus script remains one of archaeology's greatest unsolved mysteries. Whether a language-based script or a system of symbols, its decoding could transform our understanding of the Indus Valley Civilisation and its cultural and economic practices.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper I; Culture

Source: Indian Express

2. India and U.S. to Jointly Produce Sonobuoys for the Navy

What Are Sonobuoys?



Sonobuoys are advanced undersea instruments designed to detect submarines operating deep in oceans. These devices play a crucial role in undersea domain awareness (UDA), helping navies track submarine movements effectively.

India-U.S. Collaboration

India and the United States have announced a partnership for the co-production of sonobuoys, marking a significant step in their defense collaboration. This move comes amid concerns about the growing Chinese naval presence in the Indian Ocean Region.

Partnership Details

- **Key Players:** The collaboration involves U.S.-based Ultra Maritime (UM) and India's Bharat Dynamics Limited (BDL).
- **Technology Sharing:** The two companies will work together to develop and produce sonobuoys that meet U.S. Navy standards.
- **Production Locations:** Manufacturing will be split between the U.S. and India, aligning with India's "Make in India" initiative.
- **Advanced Features:** The sonobuoys will incorporate new technologies to enhance their acoustic performance, tailored for the unique conditions of the Indian Ocean.

Strategic Importance

- **Interoperability:** The sonobuoys will be interoperable across U.S., Indian, and allied platforms, including P-8, MH-60R, and MQ-9B aircraft.
- **Quad Collaboration:** This initiative aligns with broader defense cooperation among Quad members (India, U.S., Japan, and Australia) and their joint maritime exercises like the Malabar Naval Exercise.

Indian Navy's Expanding Capabilities

India has been steadily enhancing its maritime capabilities with acquisitions from the U.S., including:

- **P-8I Aircraft:** Long-range maritime patrol planes.
- **MH-60R Helicopters:** Multi-role helicopters for maritime operations.
- **MQ-9B Drones:** Advanced drones for surveillance and strike missions, with deliveries set to begin in 2029.

Key Statements

- **Ultra Maritime:** CEO Carlo Zaffanella emphasized the company's commitment to delivering world-class sonobuoys and addressing unique undersea challenges.
- **Bharat Dynamics Limited:** Chairman A. Madhavarao reiterated the alignment with the Indian Navy's operational demands and the focus on "Make in India."
- **Strategic Significance:** Rear Admiral Mark Kenny (retd.) highlighted the interoperability of these sonobuoys, enhancing coordination between allied forces.

Conclusion

The joint production of sonobuoys reflects deepening India-U.S. defense ties and underscores their shared focus on enhancing maritime security in the Indo-Pacific.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Bilateral Relations

Source: The Hindu

3. India-Taliban Talks: Key Developments and Strategic Context

Background

India's engagement with the Taliban, marked by Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri's meeting with Taliban-ruled Afghanistan's acting Foreign Minister, Amir Khan Muttaqi, reflects a significant shift in Delhi's foreign policy approach. While avoiding official recognition of the Taliban government, India aims to safeguard its national and security interests amidst evolving regional dynamics.



Five Reasons Behind India's Engagement

1. Changing Dynamics with Pakistan

○ Initially supportive of the Taliban, Pakistan's relationship with the group has soured. Recent Pakistani airstrikes in Afghanistan have strained ties further, creating a window for India to engage without immediate Pakistani influence over Taliban policies.

2. Iran's Reduced Influence

○ Iran, previously critical of the Taliban's actions, is preoccupied with domestic challenges and regional conflicts, especially after setbacks involving its proxies like Hezbollah and Hamas. With Tehran distracted, its pressure on the Taliban has waned.

3. Russia's Shifting Focus

○ Engaged in the Ukraine war, Russia has turned to the Taliban as a counter-terrorism ally. Moscow's softened stance includes legislative moves to delist the Taliban as a terrorist organization. This aligns with broader geopolitical shifts in the region.

4. China's Growing Presence

○ China has made strategic inroads in Afghanistan, exchanging ambassadors and supporting development projects. Its active engagement, including access to Afghanistan's resources through the Belt and Road Initiative, has positioned Beijing as a significant player in Kabul.

5. Potential U.S. Policy Shift

○ With Donald Trump set to return to the Oval Office, a renewed U.S.-Taliban dialogue is likely, given his administration's role in initiating past peace talks. India seeks to preemptively secure its interests in this changing scenario.

India's Strategic Goals

• Security Concerns:

- Prevent Afghan soil from being used by anti-India terrorist groups.
- Maintain vigilance against the Islamic State Khorasan Province.

• Safeguarding Investments:

- Protect Indian projects worth \$3 billion over two decades.
- Ensure security for Indian interests, including embassy facilities.

• Humanitarian Engagement:

- Support development and humanitarian projects welcomed by the Taliban.

India's Previous Engagements

• Initial Steps:

- First official meeting in 2021 between Indian Ambassador Deepak Mittal and

Taliban representatives in Doha

- Deployment of a technical team at the Indian embassy in Kabul.

- Progressive Dialogue:

- Multiple meetings led by senior Indian officials with Taliban leaders.

Conclusion

India's engagement with the Taliban, driven by a pragmatic assessment of regional shifts, reflects a careful balance between safeguarding its interests and avoiding premature recognition of the regime. By engaging now, India aims to maintain its influence in Afghanistan and counteract adversarial moves by regional powers like China and Pakistan.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Bilateral Relations

Source: Indian Express

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