

Daily Editorial Analysis 28 August 2025

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The ASI is Facing a Credibility Crisis

Context

- **Archaeology**, as a scientific discipline, aims to **reconstruct the past through material evidence and objective analysis**.
- Yet in India, **it has often become a contested field**, where historical narratives are shaped as much by politics as by empirical findings.
- The **recent controversy surrounding the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and the Keeladi excavations** highlights not only the **struggle between scientific inquiry and political agendas**, but **also the institutional limitations of the ASI** in sustaining credibility and scholarly integrity.

The Keeladi Excavations: A Challenge to Established Narratives

- **The Objective of Keeladi Excavations**
 - The Keeladi excavations in Tamil Nadu, initiated in 2014, **quickly emerged as one of the most significant archaeological projects in India**.
 - With over **7,500 artefacts unearthed in its early phases**, the findings pointed to the existence of a literate, urban, and secular society in South India during the Early Historic Period.
 - By potentially **bridging the historical gap between the Iron Age (12th-6th century BCE) and the Early Historic period (6th-4th century BCE)**, Keeladi **questioned the prevailing narrative of India's second urbanisation** being centred solely around the Gangetic plains.
- **The Politicisation of Keeladi**
 - The project's trajectory, however, was disrupted when its lead archaeologist, K. **Amarnath Ramakrishna, was abruptly transferred in 2017**.
 - The **ASI simultaneously dismissed the site's significance** and halted further excavation, fuelling suspicion that institutional decisions were motivated by political sensitivities rather than scientific considerations.
 - **This intervention provoked both scholarly criticism and political confrontation** between the Tamil Nadu and Union governments.
- **Intervention of Madras High Court**

- The **Madras High Court eventually transferred the project to the Tamil Nadu State Department of Archaeology**, which expanded the scope of discovery by **unearthing over 18,000 artefacts**.
- The **handling of Keeladi underscores a central issue**: archaeology in India is not merely about uncovering the past, but about negotiating which versions of the past are permitted recognition.
- **By downplaying Keeladi's implications for Dravidian antiquity, the ASI demonstrated how state institutions can constrain alternative historical narratives**, even in the face of rigorous scientific evidence such as stratigraphic sequencing and Accelerator Mass Spectrometry dating.

Challenges Faced by the ASI

• Methodological Inconsistency and Selective Rigor

- The Union government has argued that **isolated findings cannot substantiate sweeping historical revisions** without broader validation.
- While such caution ostensibly reflects methodological rigour, **the ASI's track record reveals glaring inconsistency**.
- **At Adichanallur, one of the earliest archaeological sites in Tamil Nadu**, the rediscovery of Iron Age artefacts in 2004 **was met with prolonged neglect**.
- Despite evidence suggesting a 3,000-year-old civilisation, **the ASI delayed publication of results for over 15 years, requiring court intervention**.

• Selective Caution

- This **selective embrace of caution** or speculation suggests that the ASI's commitment to rigour is often **subordinate to ideological or political considerations**.
- On one hand, **findings that complicate dominant narratives (such as Keeladi's evidence of Dravidian urbanism)** are dismissed as inconclusive; on the other hand, sites that reinforce mytho-historical or nationalist narratives are promoted with little hesitation.
- **Such double standards weaken the ASI's credibility** and reveal what scholars describe as methodological nationalism, an approach that privileges a singular, state-sanctioned vision of India's past.

Institutional and Structural Weaknesses

- **Scholars such as Avikunthak, Verma, Menon, and Chakrabarti have long criticised the agency for arbitrary personnel decisions**, reliance on outdated methods like the Wheeler system, and absence of comprehensive research frameworks.
- These factors contribute to **the production of fragmented, poorly contextualised data**, rather than coherent historical interpretations.
- Equally troubling is the ASI's insularity.
- **Unlike global counterparts** such as the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut in Germany or the Institut National de Recherches Archéologiques Préventives in France, **the ASI rarely publishes findings in peer-**

reviewed academic journals.

- Instead, **it circulates knowledge internally through monographs and bulletins**, limiting scholarly scrutiny and international engagement.
- **This lack of transparency fuels suspicion, stifles debate**, and prevents Indian archaeology from contributing fully to global scholarship.

The Way Forward: Toward Reform and Renewal

- To restore its credibility, **the ASI must undergo comprehensive reform.**
- First, **structural changes are needed** to reduce bureaucratic interference and ensure financial and intellectual autonomy.
- Second, **methodological innovation must replace outdated excavation techniques**, accompanied by robust peer review and international collaboration.
- Third, **transparency in publishing findings should become a priority**, enabling global scrutiny and engagement.
- Finally, **archaeology in India must embrace a plural epistemic framework**, one that acknowledges the diversity of the subcontinent's past rather than subsuming it into a monolithic national narrative.

Conclusion

- The controversies surrounding the ASI and the Keeladi excavations are **symptomatic of larger tensions within Indian archaeology.**
- **Unless the ASI reorients itself toward openness, rigour, and inclusivity, it risks further eroding its legitimacy and credibility as the custodian of India's archaeological heritage.**
- **At stake is not just the fate of individual excavation sites**, but the very possibility of reconstructing India's past in all its complexity and plurality.

The ASI is Facing a Credibility Crisis FAQs

Q1. What did the Keeladi excavations reveal about ancient Tamil society?

Ans. The Keeladi excavations revealed evidence of a literate, urban, and secular society that bridged the gap between the Iron Age and the Early Historic period.

Q2. Why was archaeologist K. Amarnath Ramakrishna's transfer controversial?

Ans. His transfer was controversial because many believed it was an attempt to suppress Keeladi's findings that challenged dominant historical narratives.

Q3. How has the ASI shown inconsistency in its treatment of excavations?

Ans. The ASI delayed publishing results from sites like Adichanallur but readily promoted speculative claims about the Saraswati River and the Mahabharata period.

Q4. What structural problems weaken the ASI's credibility?

Ans. The ASI faces issues such as outdated excavation methods, lack of transparency, bureaucratic interference, and limited publication in peer-reviewed platforms.

Q5. What reforms are suggested to improve the ASI's functioning?

Ans. Reforms include ensuring autonomy, adopting modern methods, promoting transparency, fostering international collaboration, and embracing India's plural historical past.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

Integrated Air Defence Weapon System (IADWS) - India's Maiden Test of Indigenous Air Defence System

Context:

- The Defence Research and Development Organisation (**DRDO**) conducted the **maiden flight test of the Integrated Air Defence Weapon System (IADWS)** off the coast of Odisha.
- This marks a significant step in **India's quest for self-reliance** (Atmanirbhar Bharat) in advanced defence technology.

Key Features of IADWS:

- **Three-layered defence structure:**
 - Quick Reaction Surface-to-Air Missile (**QR-SAM**): Range 30 km.
 - Very Short Range Air Defence System (**VSHORADS**): Range up to 6 km.
 - Directed Energy Weapon (**DEW**): High-power laser with range 2-4 km.
- **Operational mechanism:**
 - Controlled by a Centralised Command and Control Centre, developed by DRDL (Defence Research and Development Laboratory).
- **Maiden flight test:**
 - Successfully neutralised three different aerial targets (UAVs and drones) in flight tests.

DRDO's Technological Evolution:

- The IADWS missile defence system **incorporates multiple technologies** that the DRDO has developed over time, in different labs.
- **For example**, India began this technological synergising with the **Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme (IGMDP)** that was set up in **1983** by **A P J Abdul Kalam**.
- The IGMDP's "**missile cluster**", which is mainly located in Hyderabad, includes 5 specialised labs:
 - **ASL (Advanced Systems Laboratory)**: Developed Agni and Prithvi ballistic missiles, which were developed into a highly advanced –
 - Anti-ballistic missile (ABM) shield,

- Anti-satellite (ASAT) missile system, and
- Multi independently targetable re-entry vehicle (MIRV)
- **DRDL (Defence Research and Development Laboratory):** Developed tactical missiles like Trishul, Akash, Nag.
- **Research Centre Imarat (RCI):** Specialises in navigation, guidance, homing, command and control, high-temperature materials.
- **Terminal Ballistic Research Laboratory:** Specialises in warhead design.
- **Young Scientists Laboratory:** Works in the field of emerging tech (AI, quantum computing).
- **Public-private synergy: Transfer of DRDO technology to the private sector,** for example, Carborundum Universal Limited (CUMI) licensed for manufacturing ceramic radomes (critical for missiles and aircraft under extreme heat).

Global Collaborations and Strategic Partnerships:

- **Lessons from Israel:**
 - **Israel's multi-layered air defence:** Iron Dome (up to 160 km); David's Sling (300 km); Arrow-3 (2,400 km); US-supplied THAAD (200 km).
 - **The technology challenge** involves integrating the individual elements of the missile shield.
 - **Israel demonstrates integration** of radar, interceptor missiles, and command systems.
 - **Cost-effectiveness:** The Tamir (missile, that is the primary component of Iron Dome) initially cost about \$1,00,000 each to produce, but the Israeli industry brought down the price to \$40-\$50,000.
- **India's approach to joint development:**
 - **Collaboration principle:** Share strengths, complement weaknesses.
 - **For examples,**
 - **BrahMos with Russia:** India developed navigation and mission control.
 - **Long Range Surface-to-Air Missile (LR-SAM) like Barak 8 with Israel:** India built the rear section and integration, Israel provided the seeker and front section.
 - **Rule:** India avoids collaborations for systems that already exist; prefers joint development of **new technology**.

Strategic Significance of IADWS for India:

- **Self-reliance:** Advances Atmanirbhar Bharat in defence.
- **Synergised R&D:** Integrates multiple labs' expertise into battlefield-ready systems.
- **Geopolitical leverage:** Enhances India's ability to deter combined threats from Pakistan and China.
- **Industrial growth:** Public-private partnerships (PPP) foster indigenous defence manufacturing.
- **Future scope:** Scope for international collaboration in advanced air defence systems.

Conclusion:

- The successful test of the IADWS signals **India's steady progress** towards building a multi-layered, indigenously developed air defence architecture that **reduces external dependence**.
- Going forward, synergising public-private capacities with selective global collaborations can enable India to evolve into **a major hub for advanced defence technologies and strengthen its strategic autonomy**.

Integrated Air Defence Weapon System (IADWS) FAQs

Q1. What are the key features of the IADWS recently tested by DRDO?

Ans. The IADWS is a three-layered air defence system, controlled through a centralised Command and Control Centre.

Q2. How does the IGMDP illustrate India's path towards missile self-reliance?

Ans. The IGMDP fostered the development of Agni, Prithvi, Akash, Nag, MIRV, ASAT and ABM capabilities, laying the foundation for India's indigenous missile strength.

Q3. What is the significance of PPP in India's defence technology ecosystem?

Ans. Public-private collaboration enables technology transfer, facilitating indigenous production of critical components such as ceramic radomes.

Q4. In what ways can international collaboration enhance India's air defence capabilities?

Ans. Partnerships, such as with Israel in LR-SAM or Russia in BrahMos, allow India to co-develop systems suited to its operational needs without dependence on existing foreign models.

Q5. What is the strategic significance of the maiden test of IADWS for India's security environment?

Ans. The successful IADWS test strengthens India's layered air defence against combined threats from Pakistan and China, and enhances Atmanirbhar Bharat in defence.

Source: **IE**

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