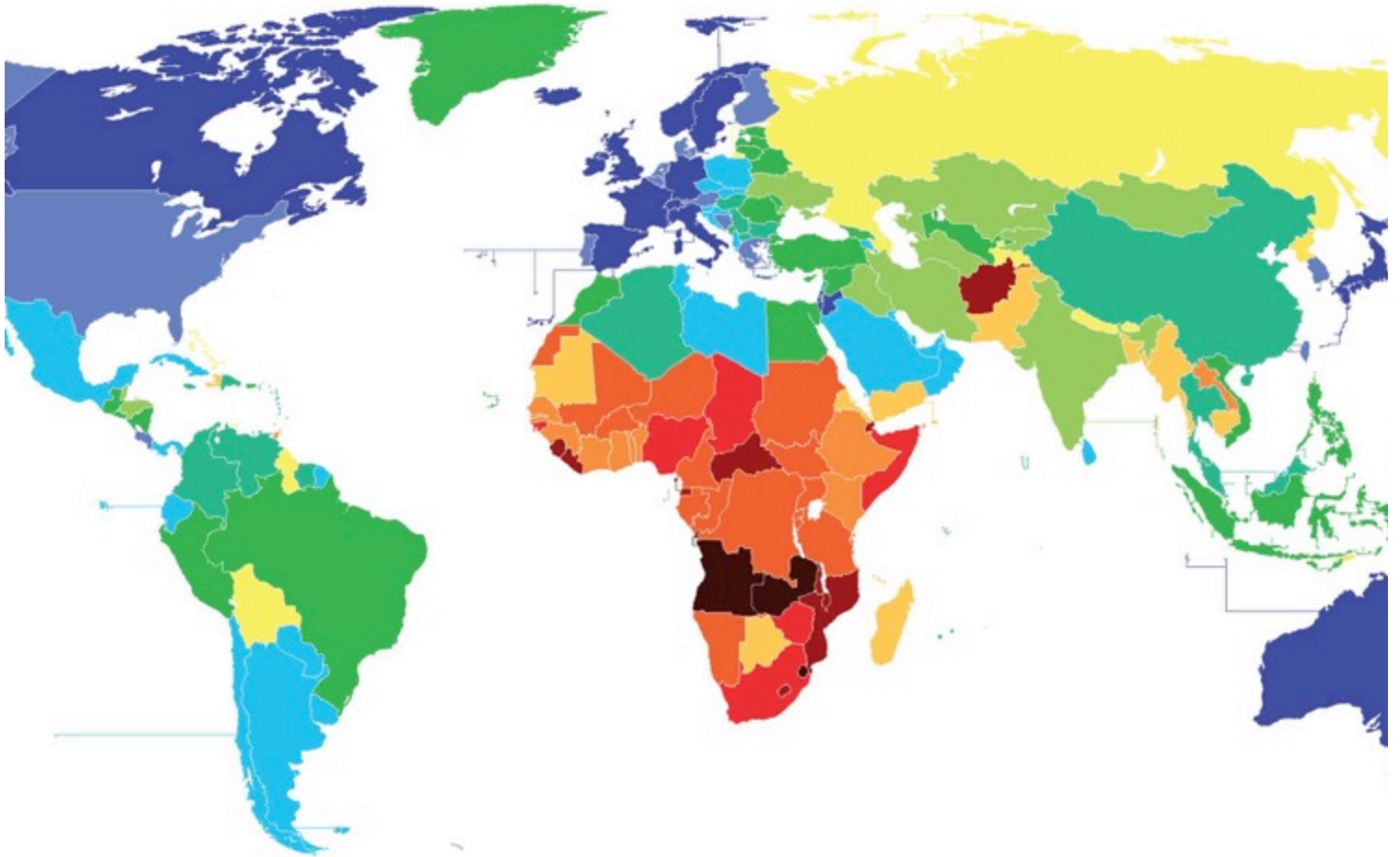


UNDER THE MACROSCOPE



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**U.S. AND CHINA AGREE ON
PROPOSAL FOR TOUGHER NORTH
KOREA SANCTIONS**

**SINGAPORE'S LOWER INFLATION
VIEW COULD BRING MORE EASING**

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Headlines

U.S. AND CHINA AGREE ON PROPOSAL FOR TOUGHER NORTH KOREA SANCTIONS



Secretary of State John Kerry and Foreign Minister Wang Yi of China at the State Department in Washington on Tuesday.

The United States and China reached an agreement to impose tougher sanctions against North Korea, in what appeared to be a diplomatic shift by Beijing regarding its intransigent ally.

The proposed resolution is the product of intense negotiations between the two nations over the last seven weeks, since

Pyongyang tested a nuclear weapon it claimed was a hydrogen bomb. It was circulated to members of the United Nations Security Council on Thursday, and diplomats said it could come up for a vote in the coming days.

Diplomats said the fact that Washington and Beijing had agreed on a set of measures increased the international pressure on the North Koreans. In the past, after previous nuclear tests condemned by the Security Council, China agreed only to banning weapons transfers and limited sanctions against those linked to the nuclear program.

Whether the proposed new sanctions will succeed in curtailing Pyongyang's nuclear ambitions remains to be seen. Past efforts to halt its nuclear program have not been fully carried out, nor have they prevented North Korea from pursuing a nuclear arsenal. Whether China would follow through on tougher sanctions was also a key question.

United States officials declined, without explanation, to provide the text of the resolution.

The proposed measures, according to a United States official, would ban the trade of conventional weapons, luxury goods like jet skis and Rolex watches, and aviation fuel to North Korea, which could effectively ground its national airline. It would also place prohibitions on dozens of new companies and individuals accused of trafficking in illicit nuclear material.

In what may be the toughest proposed measure, all North Korean cargo entering or leaving a country must be inspected by that country.

The mandatory cargo inspection applies to “anything going to and from the D.P.R.K.,” according to an American official who spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the delicacy of the talks. “If it is on your territory, in your ports or in your airports, there’s a requirement to inspect cargo to and from the D.P.R.K.,” the official said, using the initials for the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea.

In addition, 31 ships that have been known to traffic in illegal nuclear goods are to be banned from docking in any port. It is impossible to verify whether countries sending or receiving North Korean goods will carry out the inspections. However, they will be legally binding if the resolution is adopted.

Significant loopholes remain. North Korea would still be able to buy oil and sell its coal and iron ore, as long as it is not being used to fund its nuclear weapons program — which would be difficult to prove. China, North Korea’s main trading partner and diplomatic backer, is its main supplier of oil.

The draft resolution would also prohibit North Korea from exporting gold, titanium and rare earth minerals. It would ban countries from sending any item to North Korea that could be used by the North Korean armed forces, like trucks that could be rejiggered for military purposes.

Samantha Power, the United States ambassador, called the draft document “a major upgrade” to existing sanctions against North Korea, which are aimed mainly at those linked to the nuclear program. “These sanctions if adopted would send an unambiguous and unyielding message to the D.P.R.K. regime — the world will not accept your proliferation,” she said Thursday.

The Chinese envoy to the United Nations, Liu Jieyi, declined to comment on the specifics of the draft on Thursday but said he hoped the council would reach a consensus. "The resolution should pave the way for a negotiated solution down the road, not be a stonewall," he said.

The new sanctions come as the United States is in talks with officials in Seoul about the possible deployment of an American missile-defense system in South Korea, a development Beijing strongly objects to. It also follows stepped-up United States sanctions against North Korea.

Kelsey Davenport, a North Korea expert at the Washington-based Arms Control Association, pointed out that even tough sanctions would not alone curtail Pyongyang's nuclear ambitions without what she called "sustained diplomacy."

"China's agreement to support additional U.N. sanctions sends a strong message to North Korea that it cannot count on Beijing to shield it from the costs of flouting international law," she said. "However, China's support for additional sanctions may not translate into the political will necessary in Beijing to enforce restrictions on the books. Without stringent enforcement, North Korea's complex illicit trafficking networks will continue undeterred."

Reuters quoted the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman, Hua Chunying, as saying, "We hope and believe this new resolution can help effectively constrain North Korea from further developing its nuclear missile program." The draft contains language that notes the "grave hardships" that North Korean citizens are subjected to, but says nothing about human rights abuses that have been painstakingly documented by a United Nations Commission of Inquiry.

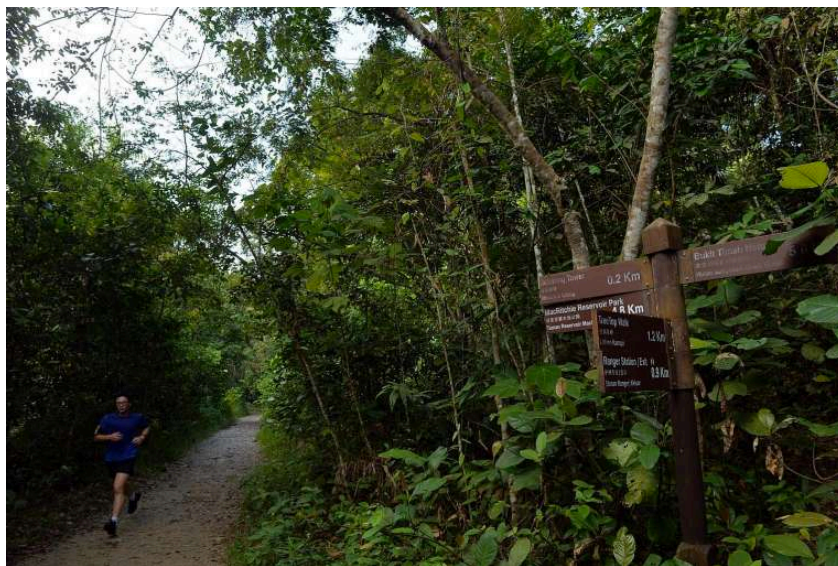
John Sifton, the deputy Asia director for Human Rights Watch, described Pyongyang's nuclear program as "inextricably linked" to its record of repression, including forced labor and torture. "Sanctioning North Korea's nuclear proliferation should go hand in hand with condemning the devastating human rights abuses that persist on a massive scale across the country," he said.

By The New York Times

Environment

EXTRA \$2BN FOR CROSS ISLAND LINE TO SKIRT NATURE RESERVE LIKELY TO BE FRACTION OF TOTAL COST: EXPERTS

Estimated extra cost for Cross Island MRT line to skirt around nature reserve will likely make up small part of total cost: Experts



Having the Cross Island Line cut through the Central Catchment Nature Reserve involves building a 2km tunnel approximately 40m deep beneath the reserve's MacRitchie area. There would be no physical structures on the surface. Nature groups had earlier raised concerns that construction work would have a negative impact on the reserve.

The additional \$2 billion that will be incurred by building the proposed Cross Island Line around the Central Catchment Nature Reserve instead of across it is likely to be a fraction of the total cost of the MRT project.

The Land Transport Authority (LTA), which had given the \$2 billion figure in response to proposals for the line to skirt around the nature reserve, said yesterday it is unable to estimate the total cost of the 50km Cross Island Line

as studies on the entire line have not been completed, but industry experts estimate that the cost of the project could be as much as \$40.7 billion.

This is based in part on calculations for past and ongoing MRT projects, which show that each kilometre of MRT tunnel costs about \$350 million to \$400 million to design and build.

New MRT lines: How they stack up

	Length	Train type	Cost	Cost/km
Downtown Line	42km	Three-car	\$20.7 billion	\$493 million
Thomson-East Coast Line	43km	Four-car	\$24 billion	\$558 million
Cross Island Line*	50km	Eight-car	\$40.7 billion	\$814 million

NOTE: *Estimates based on assumption of eight-car train with express track.

Compiled by ST STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

Costs could go up by 25 per cent if eight-car trains are used, compared with the three- or six-car trains used currently.

The introduction of an express service, among other things, could also increase costs by up to 40 per cent owing to the need to build an additional track.

So the extra \$2 billion for building the Cross Island Line around the nature reserve could work out to less than 5 per cent of the total cost of the project.

Nature groups had earlier raised concerns that construction work on the Cross Island Line, expected to stretch from Changi to Jurong, would have a negative impact on the Central Catchment Nature Reserve, Singapore's largest nature reserve. This is especially so if the line cuts across the nature reserve instead of skirting around it.

Having the Cross Island Line cut through the nature reserve involves building a 2km tunnel approximately 40m deep beneath the nature reserve's MacRitchie area. There would be no physical structures on the surface level.

Some members of the public The Straits Times spoke to felt that the additional cost was justified if it helped ease Singapore's transport crunch.

Those who have proposed routing the Cross Island Line round the reserve said the line would serve residents in the area and avoid disrupting the flora and fauna in the reserve.

Dr Vilma D'Rozario, an associate professor at the National Institute of Education, said: "Routing around the reserve to pick up more commuters along the way would certainly help ease road traffic congestion and sardine-packed train conditions."

Financial consultant Johnson Long, 70, believes that the additional cost can be recouped with increased ridership over the years.

Residents who live in the estates that could be affected by the skirting alignment have voiced concerns that their homes would be acquired by the state for the building of the line.

Mr Anthony Oei, 82, who has lived in Yew Lian Park for more than 50 years, questioned the need to divert the line.

"Will we have to give way to wildlife?" he asked.

Others said the possible environmental impact of the line going through the reserve should not be ignored.

Commenting on some suggestions thrown up by the public, a spokesman for the LTA said it is not possible for the stretch of Cross Island Line in question to run under Upper Thomson Road, which is near the nature reserve, owing to limited space caused by construction work on the upcoming Thomson-East Coast Line.

By The Straits Times

Environment

IN ZIKA EPIDEMIC, A WARNING ON CLIMATE CHANGE



Smoke from a brush fire in a deforested part of Brazil's Amazon basin. The Zika virus, which is an epidemic in Brazil, is transmitted mainly by mosquitoes.

The global public health emergency involving deformed babies emerged in 2015, the hottest year in the historical record, with an outbreak in Brazil of a disease transmitted by heat-loving mosquitoes. Can that be a coincidence?

Scientists say it will take them years to figure that out, and pointed to other factors that may have played a larger role in starting the crisis.

But these same experts added that the Zika epidemic, as well as the related spread of a disease called dengue that is sickening as many as 100 million people a year and killing thousands, should be interpreted as warnings.

Over the coming decades, global warming is likely to increase the range and speed of the life cycle of the particular mosquitoes carrying these viruses, encouraging their spread deeper into temperate countries like the United States.

Recent research suggests that under a worst-case scenario, involving continued high global emissions coupled with fast population growth, the number of people exposed to the principal mosquito could more than double, to as many as 8 billion or 9 billion by late this century from roughly 4 billion today.

"As we get continued warming, it's going to become more difficult to control mosquitoes," said Andrew Monaghan, who is studying the interaction of climate and health at the National Center for Atmospheric Research in Boulder, Colo. "The

warmer it is, the faster they can develop from egg to adult, and the faster they can incubate viruses.”



A 3-month-old baby born with microcephaly, suspected to be the result of Zika, was examined by a neurologist in Campina Grande, Brazil.

Already, climate change is suspected — though not proved — to have been a factor in a string of disease outbreaks afflicting both people and animals. These include the spread of malaria into the highlands of eastern Africa, the rising incidence of Lyme disease in North America, and the spread of a serious livestock ailment called bluetongue into parts of Europe that were once too cold for it to thrive.

In interviews, experts noted that no epidemic was ever the result of a single variable.

Instead, epidemics always involve interactions among genes, ecology, climate and human behavior, presenting profound difficulties for scientists trying to tease apart the contributing factors. “The complexity is enormous,” said Walter J. Tabachnick, a professor with the Florida Medical Entomology Laboratory, a unit of the University of Florida in Vero Beach.

The epidemics of Zika and dengue are cases in point. The viruses are being transmitted largely by the yellow fever mosquito, *Aedes aegypti*. That creature adapted long ago to live in human settlements, and developed a concomitant taste for human blood.

Cities in the tropics, the climate zone most favorable to the mosquito, have undergone explosive growth: Humanity passed a milestone a few years ago when more than half the population had moved to urban areas. But spending on health care and on basic public health infrastructure, like water pipes and sewers, has not kept pace. Mosquito control has also faltered in recent decades.

The mosquito lays its eggs in containers of water, of a sort that are especially common in the huge slums of Latin American cities. With unreliable access to piped

water, people there store water in rooftop cisterns, buckets and the like. Old tires and other debris can also become mosquito habitat.

Water storage near homes is commonplace in areas where Zika has spread rapidly, like the cities of Recife and Salvador in northeastern Brazil, and where dengue experienced a surge in 2015, like São Paulo, Brazil's largest state.

Altogether, dengue killed at least 839 people in Brazil in 2015, a 40 percent increase from the previous year. Worldwide, dengue is killing more than 20,000 people a year.

Several experts said in interviews that a main reason for the disease outbreaks was most likely the expansion of the number of people at risk, through urbanization, population growth and international travel. They see the changing climate as just another stress on top of a situation that was already rife with peril.

While they do not understand to what degree rising temperatures and other weather shifts may have contributed to the outbreaks, they do understand some of the potential mechanisms.

The mosquitoes mostly live on flower nectar, but the female of the species needs a meal of human blood to have enough protein to lay her eggs. If she bites a person infected with dengue, Zika or any of several other diseases, she picks up the virus.

The virus has to reproduce in the mosquito for a certain period before it can be transmitted to another person in a subsequent bite. The higher the air temperature, the shorter that incubation period. Moreover, up to a point, higher temperatures cause the mosquitoes to mature faster.

With rising temperatures, "You're actually speeding up the whole reproductive cycle of the mosquitoes," said Charles B. Beard, who heads a unit in Fort Collins, Colo., studying insect-borne diseases for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta. "You get larger populations, with more generations of mosquitoes, in a warmer, wetter climate. You have this kind of amplification of the risk."

Aedes aegypti is present across the southern tier of the United States. Brief outbreaks of dengue have occurred recently at the warmest margins of the country, and one is underway in Hawaii. But with pervasive window screens and air-conditioning, the risk of disease transmission is far less for most Americans than for people in poorer countries.

The mosquito does not thrive in areas with cold winters. Some research suggests that continued climatic warming could allow the mosquito to colonize more of North America in coming decades, though how much of a disease risk that would represent is anybody's guess.

The yellow fever mosquito competes with a cousin, the Asian tiger mosquito, that has also colonized the United States, and is more tolerant of cold weather. Whether one would beat out the other in a hotter climate is unclear. Likewise, it is unclear how effective the Asian tiger mosquito might become at transmitting Zika or dengue viruses.

In principle, the risk from continued global warming applies not just to temperate countries, but to cities at high altitude in tropical countries. Researchers are keeping a close eye on Mexico City, for instance.

With 21 million people in the city and its suburbs, Mexico City is the largest metropolis of the Western Hemisphere. While the lowlands of Mexico are plagued by yellow fever mosquitoes and the viruses they transmit, the country's capital sits on a mountain plain that has — up to now — been too cold for the mosquitoes.

But temperatures are rising, and the mosquitoes have recently been detected in low numbers near Mexico City. "The mosquito is just down the hill, literally," Dr. Monaghan said. "I think all the potential is there to have virus transmission if climatic conditions become a bit more suitable."

By The New York Times

Economics

SINGAPORE'S LOWER INFLATION VIEW COULD BRING MORE EASING

Transport and housing costs declined, while food prices rose

Singapore's government and central bank lowered their inflation forecasts for 2016, possibly pointing to more easing in the coming months, as the city-state grapples with falling prices and slower growth.

The lower inflation projections follow the release of monthly data showing consumer prices continuing to fall in January compared with a year earlier. Revised gross domestic product figures due Wednesday are also expected to show softer-than-estimated growth.

The Monetary Authority of Singapore has its next scheduled policy meeting in April and several analysts predict the central bank will follow the lead of other central banks in Asia and ease policy to support the nation's export-dependent economy in the face of decelerating global growth, especially in China, Singapore's biggest export market.

Singapore's authorities now expect the consumer price index to range between zero and a 1.0% fall this year, versus a previous estimate putting the change in the CPI in a -0.5% to +0.5% range. The 0.6% slide in prices in January, the same pace as in December, marked the 15th consecutive monthly drop.

The authorities said the lower inflation estimate follows a "significant step-down in global oil prices in recent months" and a bigger-than-expected fall in the prices of cars at the start of the year.

Growth and inflation are the two main considerations for the central bank in its currency policy, said Song Seng Wun, an economist at CIMB Private Bank.

The Monetary Authority of Singapore uses currency as its main policy tool given that trade flows dwarf the island nation's economy.

"One of the conditions to warrant an easing move has been fulfilled," Mr. Song said. The GDP data will also be an important consideration, he added.

Analysts predict a downward revision to preliminary figures showing 2.0% year-on-year growth for the fourth quarter.

Among other factors putting downward pressure on prices are cheaper certificates of entitlement for buying cars and a cooling of the real estate market and rents following an increase in supply.

Still, not all economists are convinced an easing move is in the cards in April, since the central bank gives greater weight to its core inflation measure, which inched up to 0.4% on year in January, from 0.3% in December. The authorities maintained their forecast of between 0.5% and 1.5% growth this year.

The core measure strips out the costs of items that aren't included in the monthly shopping lists of average Singaporeans.

"While calls to ease policy are rising, the MAS should stand pat in its April meeting," Jeff Ng, Asia economist at Standard Chartered Bank, wrote in a note.

Mr. Ng pointed to a "modest recovery" in core inflation and said the consumer price index decline were mainly driven by supply-related factors in the housing and transport segments.

By Global Finance

Science and Technology

HOW CAN WE FIX UNCONSCIOUS RACISM?

Racial prejudice has its roots in children's natural drive to carve the world up into categories. Can research do anything to fix this?



It's easy to categorise people based on skin colour, because it's such a salient visual feature. But how can we tackle racial bias?

Racist stereotypes, at their root, come from quite a fundamental learning mechanism. Humans are able to learn and adapt so quickly because they are excellent at making generalisations about the world based on very limited experience. Take dogs, for example - a toddler might reasonably

conclude after meeting just two or three that all dogs are furry, bark and have tails that should be treated with some caution.

On the whole, stereotypes are often right – dogs do normally bark and wag their tails. The difficulty arises when this learning mechanism is applied to groups of people. Race is an easy mental category to fit people into because skin colour is a salient visual feature.

Babies are not born believing that any group is better than another but they do attend to race surprisingly early. From about 9-months, babies show a general preference for what is familiar: they are quicker to recognise faces and facial expressions of their own race than of other races.

If we don't have the opportunity to interact with individuals of a different race then the information we have to inform a racial category has to come from other sources

such as the media or people's opinions. As these can be biased in positive or negative ways, the stereotypes we form can also be biased and inaccurate. Depending how insistent and consistent these secondary sources are, they might even overwhelm our own personal experience.

This effect is compounded by some other low-level, unconscious biases. There is a strong tendency to favour our own group over other groups. It doesn't really matter how the group is specified: children remember more positive things about members of their in-group and more negative things about members of the out-group, even if group membership is specified by something as superficial and transient as t-shirt colour.

We (as a species) also have a tendency to think of members of the out-group as being all much the same while members of our in-group are all unique snowflakes. This enables us to create coherent categories and make predictions but can also lead to vastly inaccurate and damaging sweeping generalizations.

Young children are particularly sensitive to the use of generics in language to learn about the world as quickly as possible. If you say 'birds have wings' they will generalise this information to all expectations of birds in a way that they won't if you say 'this bird has wings'. Of course, the same is then true if they hear phrases like 'Arabs are violent.'

Insidious racism

So, it is an embarrassing and oft repeated finding that while the majority of people in Western countries these days are egalitarian believers in a fair meritocracy, on tests of unconscious racial bias about 70% show a preference for their own race. The classic test is the Implicit Association Test, which measures how quickly you are able to categorize photos of members of your own race with positive characteristics (wonderful, glorious) and members of a minority race with negative characteristics (horrible, nasty).

This conflict between people's dearly held explicit beliefs and their nasty little unconscious racial biases is troubling and has real-world consequences. For example, presented with identical, moderately good resumes attached to a picture of a white or black candidate, interviewers are significantly more likely to shortlist the white candidate for interview. This study was originally conducted in 1989 but the results were exactly the same when it was repeated in 2005.

The roots of racism

Explicit (conscious) racial biases start at about 5-years of age but, where they are not supported, tend to peter out from about 10-12 years. This is likely because children become more aware of principles of fairness and social justice that shape how they believe people should be treated. (If racial stereotypes are supported by the people around them then all bets are off. On the whole, garbage in, garbage out.)

Implicit (unconscious) racial biases, however, can develop as young as 3 years of age. Once established in the preschool years they are surprisingly resilient to change. While explicit racial prejudice drops off in most children, implicit racial biases usually remain consistent through to adulthood.

Changing unconscious racism

I was particularly taken then with a paper in this month's Developmental Science, which shows that a very simple intervention can disrupt young children's unconscious racial biases. Xaio and colleagues at Zhejiang Normal University in China repeated a common measure of implicit racial bias: the 'angry=outgroup' test. Here photos of faces were morphed so that it was ambiguous whether they were Chinese or African. Each face was presented twice, once looking angry and once looking happy, and respondents asked to decide what race the face was.

As in previous tests, Chinese adults and children tended to say that the happy faces were Chinese and the angry faces were African. This is the same pattern as for white American children and adults who tend to say that happy faces are white and angry faces are black.

The researchers then introduced a very quick intervention. Four, 5- and 6-year-olds were asked to discriminate between 5 African faces and had to remember what number went with each face before they could proceed to the next step. This task forced children to focus on the individual differences between the faces.

When the angry=outgroup test was repeated, the bias had disappeared. Children were just as likely to say that the angry faces were Chinese as African. This simple intervention seems to have disrupted what was previously considered a very deep rooted and difficult to change bias.

The study raises a lot more questions than it answers. Why does it work? How long do the effects last for? How do changes in implicit biases interact with explicit beliefs and behaviour?

But I like it for two reasons. First, it gets to the root of the issue of racist generalisations by tinkering with simple perceptual categorization. If racial prejudice is just a value judgment laid on top of unconscious perceptual and grouping biases then this seems a sensible level to work at.

I also like its simplicity. Very similar effects have been shown with adults but used hundreds of repetitions during the intervention stage. Xiao's intervention took no more than 15 minutes yet had significant short-term effects. Such a procedure could easily be adapted to a game or an app that, played regularly, might support longer-term change.

Being aware of implicit racial prejudice is important. We need to know it's there to guard against it influencing our behaviour and we need to shape society to minimise its effects. For instance, racial information is now excluded from job applications and kept confidential so as not to influence decisions at the shortlisting stage.

But tackling implicit racial bias is important too. Vigilance can only take us so far when battling against unconscious demons. Would you like to see how you fare on the Implicit Association Test? Have a go at <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/uk/> but don't despair if, like 70% of the population, you show an unwanted preference for your own race. Being aware of these biases can make a difference and help may be just around the corner.

By The Guardian



UNDER THE MACROSCOPE

Under the Macroscopic is a weekly summary of what's happening around the world and what's worth pondering. Stay on top of international and local news with this bulletin produced by the Raffles Economics and Current Affairs Society