

## This outrage must stop!

*Government's denial of extra-judicial killings dents its credibility*

HOME Minister Sahara Khatun's assertion that no extra-judicial killings have taken place under this government flies in the face of reality. The minister's denial simply does not tally with the facts. As the human rights body Odhikar puts it, no fewer than 127 individuals lost their lives at the hands of the security forces last year alone. It is therefore surprising, even appalling, that the minister and her deputy have chosen to look away from what the rest of the country has been seeing for a long time. And then the minister contradicts herself when she says that steps are being taken against such occurrences. That is quickly followed by the suggestion that law enforcers can kill in self-defence. To our knowledge, there is as yet not a shred of evidence that those killed in any way attacked or in any way threatened the security forces. No sign has there been of any exchange of fire and not a hint has come of the 'associates' of the murdered men pouncing on the law enforcers.

It is beyond our comprehension why the government, despite all the evidence to the contrary, must go on saying things that no one believes. Are we to conclude that the minister remains blissfully unaware of the severe dents made in the credibility of the government through such denials? At a time when rights organizations at home and abroad, along with news reports in foreign countries, are busy excoriating the government over the human rights violation by its security forces, it makes little sense to insist that the allegations are all false. What has truly been happening is that the forces have increasingly operated in the manner of death squads, something that is absolutely indefensible in a democracy. Besides, assuming that those killed were criminals, it is a tenet of the law anywhere that even criminals have a right to due process and must be judged in open court. No one, no matter how powerful, has the right to take the life of a citizen.

It is time the government put a stop to this outrage. Matters have gone far enough. One expects a great sense of responsibility from those who wield authority in the state. Before going public with their denials on the extra-judicial killing issue, ministers and other government functionaries must examine the facts and weigh the ramifications of their opinions. Over the last many years, Bangladesh has taken flak from the outside world over its human rights record. This damage to our reputation cannot go on forever.

## Monstrous barbarity

*Culprit must face the full force of law*

THIS is a poignant story of a helpless schoolgirl of class VIII, who fell victim to sexual assault by her nearly middle-aged neighbour. The victim is now fighting death with serious burn injuries at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital's burn unit. All because the perpetrator of the crime would not take the responsibility for the consequent pregnancy now in its seventh month caused to the girl.

The manner in which the crime has been committed is a stark reminder of the abominable length to which the criminal and his accomplice, a distant aunt of the victim, had gone to impel the girl to leave her home on the pretext that her father had met with an accident. Actually, her father was out for the esha prayer.

No sooner had the girl stepped out of the house than the criminal duo gagged her and doused kerosene on her before setting her afire.

It's a typical case of how vulnerable a young girl from a poor family can be in the rural setting to the lustful exploits of free wheeling rogues. In fact, there is a message for the community and law-enforcers in that despite being sexually exploited, the girl still wanted to be the second wife to the man who already had two children by his first marriage.

The utter sense of outrage felt over the incident demands expeditious apprehension of the perpetrator and make him an example of most deterrent of punishments law can hand him down. The criminal's accomplice Josna is in police's hands, which should be of help to ferret out the culprit.

At this stage, what is imperative is that the girl and her parents should get the protection against any intimidation and threat on their personal security.

The victim girl should not only get all kinds of medical treatment to save her life, but also receive adequate legal aid so that justice is done to her. Under no circumstances, the culprit should be allowed to escape the long arm of the law.

# Manipulation being manipulated?

MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

IN Shakespeare's Macbeth, the eponymous general in Duncan's army hired assassins who killed Banco, a fellow general and a potential threat to his lust for power. On a stormy night the witches summoned the apparition of eight kings who passed Macbeth, followed by murdered Banco himself carrying a mirror. Seeing this fearsome parade of ghosts, Macbeth fainted in terror.

A similar scene was enacted lately when the witches in our stock market conjured a series of crashes, followed by angry investors taking to the streets and carrying the reflection on their faces of how murderously the market was manipulated. Better than fainting, our finance minister confessed. He was quick to admit that mistakes were made.

That, however, wasn't the case even a few days ago. Then the minister was haughty and critical, scoffing the investors for being a silly bunch who rejoiced when the market went up and resorted to vandalism when it went down. Going back further, the minister was shockingly overzealous and confident. He rushed in where the presidents of two bourses feared to tread (trade?). Last October, the honourable minister ruled out that the market was overheated. It was just a little volatile, he said. Immediately after his comment, the shooting index shot up further.

In all fairness, the minister wasn't alone in his excoriation of the small investors. The economic advisor to the prime minister was even more acerbic when he said that he had no sympathy for people who expected to make money without contributing anything to the economy. One wonders if he meant to say that those who contributed to the economy had the right to plunder it at their will.

From what we hear and from what common sense tells us, that is what has been happening. We hear about certain names from the business com-

munity who are going around milking the market, who being adept at manipulation are treating this share market like a fan regulator, turning on to a full or low speed at their own convenience. How come none of our Einsteins of economics bothered to ask before why that was happening?

*In 1927 Werner Heisenberg had published a theory, which proposed that focusing on a system would change it. With this stock market getting so much intervention, rightly or wrongly, it cannot run on its own track.*

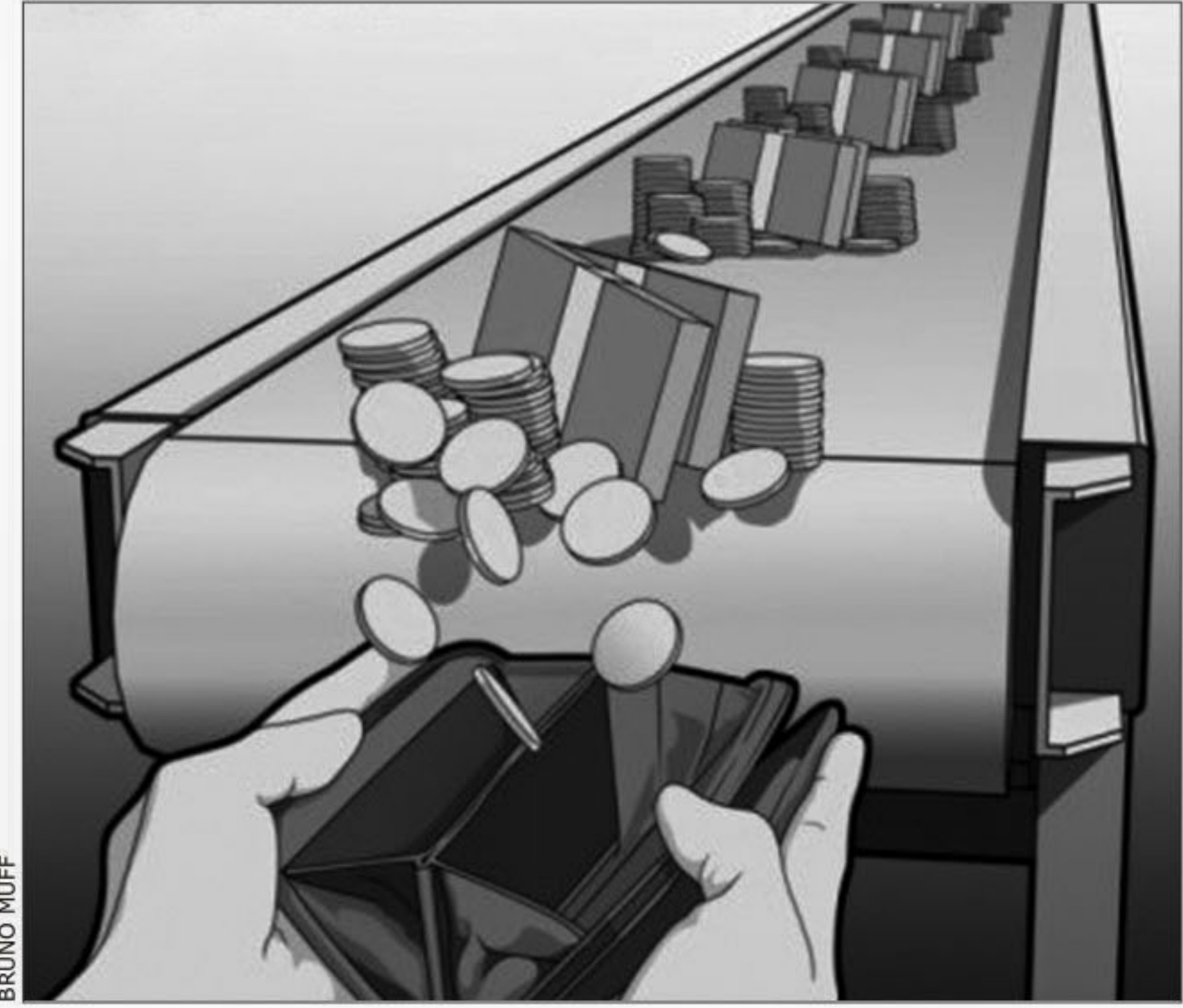
Instead, they took the easy way out and ganged up on the little guys, adding insult to injury. I mean the small investors are the ones who have lost money, left holding the bag after they were swindled out of the last penny. What is their fault? They got greedy. Yes they did, but their greed has not cost anyone but themselves. They haven't victimised others. In the worst sense, they have become their own victims.

But does that mean the government can wash its hands off them? After all, it was the Securities and Exchange Commission which allowed brokerage houses to branch out all over the country. It was Bangladesh Bank which allowed banks to offer loans so that people could buy shares. And more importantly it has been our financial fuhrers, who played cheerleaders to the market. Left and right they said things that only encouraged people to go headlong further into

this madness.

After creating all the commotion that fishermen do to drive fish into the net, it was obscene to criticise the investors once they were trapped, betting their bottom taka in this mar-

regulators will try to fix it, how can this market retain its own pace? In 1927 Werner Heisenberg had published a theory, which proposed that focusing on a system would change it. With this stock market getting so



ket. What did the government do to help these investors? Did it launch any awareness campaign? Did it try to caution them? Instead, when the presidents of Dhaka and Chittagong Stock Exchanges had pleaded with investors not to invest in an overheated market, the finance minister contradicted them.

Last Sunday there was a *loya jirga* of the country's financial chieftains and a number of decisions streamed out of it. While most of those decisions are meant for experts, a layman would look at two things. The minister said the stock market would move at its own pace, which couldn't be further from the truth. Once again, he has shot himself in the foot.

Because, after there has been so much manipulation and now that the

much intervention, rightly or wrongly, it cannot run on its own track. Not in the near future at least.

The second thing is the probe committee. American comedian Fred Allen once said that a committee was a group of people who individually could do nothing but together could decide that nothing could be done. Even after putting hope against experience, one cannot escape doubts whether this horse will make a good jumper.

Meanwhile, an alleged manipulator came on television to throw down his gauntlet. It brings a new turning to the witchcraft. Is it possible the manipulation is being manipulated?

Mohammad Badrul Ahsan is Editor of weekly First News and a columnist of The Daily Star. Email: badrul151@yahoo.com

## The New York Times EXCLUSIVE

# Tunisia: Likely domino effect

ROGER COHEN

LIBERATED Tunisia has done away with its Ministry of Communications, really the Ministry of Censorship, and also seems to have dispensed with all but the most cursory immigration controls, to judge by the relaxed, wave-you-on-your-way scene at the airport. These are heady days in the Arab world's fragile democratic bridgehead.

An independent "republic" was born here 54 years ago. Since then

Two high school teachers spoke to me, one in French the other in English, and their message was identical -- the thieves must go, blood had not been shed only for some of the same ministers to endure. A chant rose, the French acronym for the hated party, "We'll accept bread and water but never the R.C.D!"

The atmosphere was relaxed, with baton-wielding police looking on from a distance, but political tensions are sharp. The frayed interim authorities, headed by a holdover, Mohamed Ghannouchi, are scrambling for cred-

No wonder the Libyan leader Muammar el-Qaddafi has lost it, raving about Bolshhevik and American revolutions in the streets of Tunis. No wonder anxiety is high in Egypt, where the distinguished Nobel prize winner and potential game changer, Mohamed ElBaradei, tweeted on the lesson of Tunisia: "Regime in Egypt must understand that peaceful change is only way out."

I can't see President Hosni Mubarak, who's headed that regime for three decades, facing less than upheaval if he tries to hand power to

as Syria.

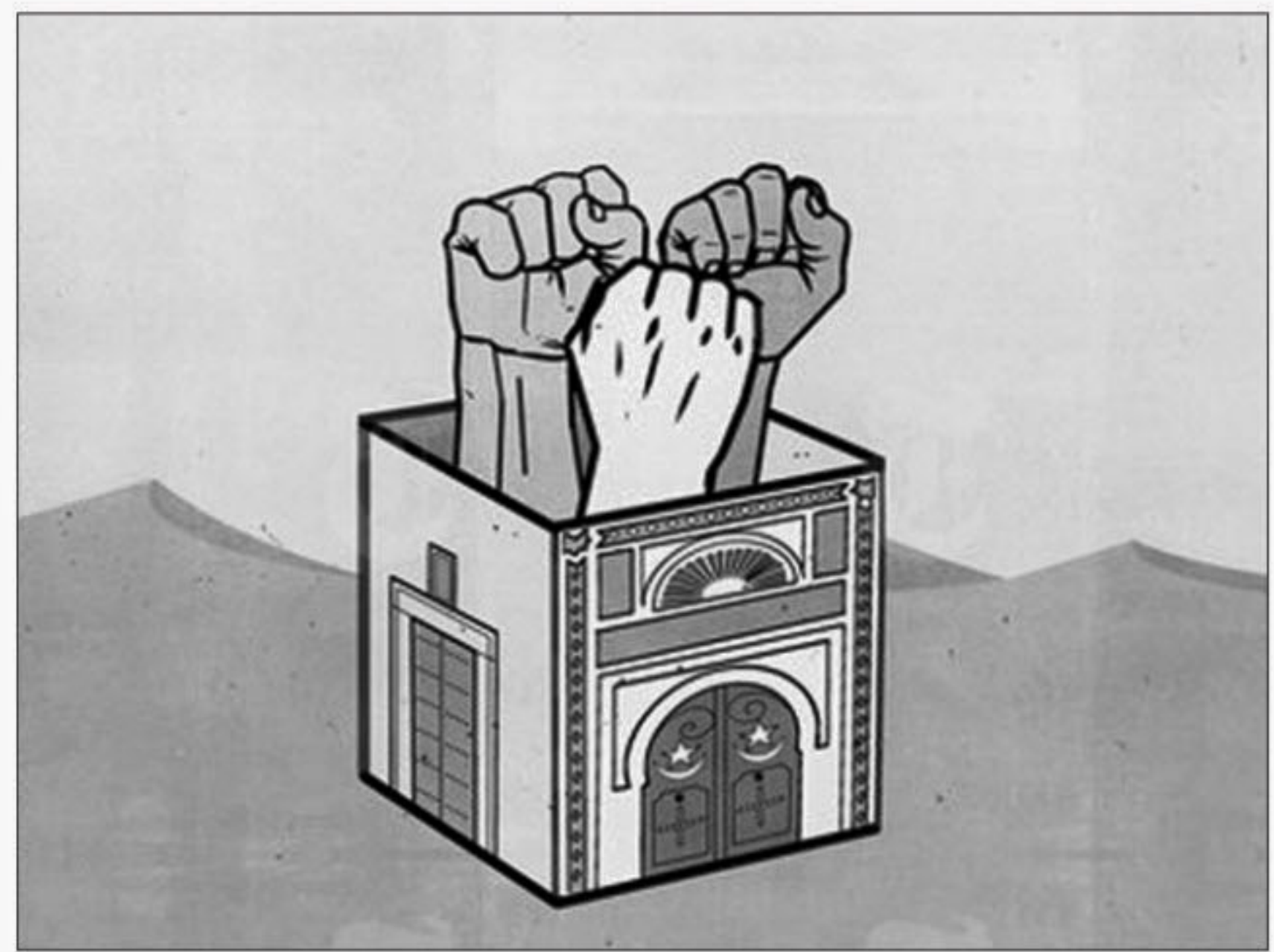
So I'd bear with Ghannouchi so long as his government works for rapid presidential and then legislative elections. As Slim Amamou, a former dissident blogger released from jail a week ago and now youth minister, put it to the BBC: "Not everybody can be a novice in politics in government like me."

That's right: chaos cannot prepare a credible vote. This is a nation where the most significant legal opposition group, the Progressive Democratic Party, boasts 1,000 members. Ahmed Bouazzi, a member of its executive committee, said: "We are walking on eggs." The interior minister has blood on his hands, the defense minister once did sweet deals for the former first lady, the P.D.P. underplayed its hand in joining the government with a single minister -- for regional economic development. Should the party now push for more?

Through an open window a shout came up accusing the P.D.P. of selling out. "That's good -- free speech!" said a party member. There are going to have to be painful trade-offs if Tunisia is to demonstrate -- finally -- that nothing in the Arab genome means one dictator must follow another.

Tunisia has a lot going for it in this quest: high levels of education, emancipated women encouraged over decades to use birth control, manageable size, and an Islamist movement that Michael Willis, a North Africa expert at St. Antony's College, Oxford, described as "perhaps the mildest and most pragmatic around." Their exiled leader, Rached Ghannouchi, has been multiplying conciliatory statements. A democratic Tunisia can do the Turkish thing.

There will, in coming weeks, be agents provocateurs bent on the worst, and the usual Muslim-hating naysayers. Arab democracy is threatening to a host of vested interests and glib clichés. It is also the only way out of the radicalising impasse of Arab klepto-gerontocracies and, as such, a vital American interest.



there have been just two presidents, both of whom applied an iron fist and neither of whom left office voluntarily, so a touch of Tunisian giddiness at finding themselves sans strongman and free to speak out is understandable.

I breezed from the airport to downtown in 10 minutes. Tanks stood at the entrance to Boulevard Bourguiba (known wistfully as the Champs-Élysées of Tunis) where several hundred protesters had gathered to hurl abuse at the deposed dictator's party -- the neither constitutional nor democratic Constitutional Democratic Rally party -- and tell this misnomer to get the heck out of government.

ability, promising a "clean break" and investigations of the vast wealth of the ousted Ben Ali family. Police have shown new restraint, curfew has been pushed back and the press operates unshackled as Ghannouchi's crew engage in the usual post-revolutionary rush to don new clothes.

Unseemly, perhaps, but a lot is at stake. If Tunisia can become the Arab world's Turkey, a functioning democracy where Islamism is part of the electoral mosaic rather than a threat to it, the tired refrain of all the Arab despots that they are the only bulwark against the *jihaddists* will be seen for the self-serving lie it has become.

*There's more than a touch of "We're all Tunisians now" among misruled Arabs right now. They're talking Tunisian domino effect. That's cause for Tunisia to take great care to get this right -- as I believe it can. Sure, it's tempting to go with the baying crowd: off with all their heads!*

his son, Gamal, in the current environment. There's more than a touch of "We're all Tunisians now" among misruled Arabs right now. They're talking Tunisian domino effect.

That's cause for Tunisia to take great care to get this right -- as I believe it can. Sure, it's tempting to go with the baying crowd: off with all their heads! But Iraq showed the dangers of overnight dismantlement of a system -- party, security forces and all. The hundreds of thousands of people affected don't disappear; they nurse vengeance. And Tunisia, like Saddam Hussein's Iraq, if with milder veneer, was a police state under Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, as subtly ferocious