

Morsi and his predecessors

SYED BADRUL AHSAN

THE overthrow of Egypt's first democratically elected president by the nation's army raises the spectre of how vulnerable politics is in countries where dictatorship has long held sway. Mohammad Morsi may not have been an ideal leader. No one is, in these days of acute political sensitivities accompanied by rising popular expectations. That Morsi may have been trying to put in place an Islamist agenda in Egypt, that the one year he served in office was symbolised by growing public disenchantment with his government's policies, that he failed to reach out to all sections of the population may all be true and beyond refutation.

Nevertheless, Mohammad Morsi was elected by the people of Egypt in the excitement that followed the fall of Hosni Mubarak not long ago. It should have been for Egypt's political classes to stay away from doing anything that could imperil the slow, gingerly march to expanding democracy. By demonstrating utter disregard for the democratic process, Egypt's army has given people to understand that democracy will be as deep or as shallow as it wants it to be. That move revives once more in the minds of historians thoughts of the restlessness of spirit which has long kept the country going.

The spirit of modern-day Egypt properly commenced in 1952 when a band of young military officers led by Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser sent King Farouk out to pasture. The Cairo coup was the first broad measure taken in the interest of a society and from which leaders in other Arab nations would take inspiration. General Nequib, persuaded into assuming the

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presidency by Nasser at the onset of the revolution, was forced out in 1954. He was never heard of again; and the details of how he spent the rest of his life remain sketchy. In 1954, therefore, it was Nasser's opportunity to deepen his influence on his country's history. He became prime minister, in which position he remained till 1956.

And, to be sure, 1956 was a decisive year for Egypt. Nasser assumed the presidency of the

country and nationalised the Suez Canal. That last bit infuriated the British, the French and the Israelis, to a point where all three countries banded together to launch a war on Egypt's new, populist government. If the West had thought Nasser could be pushed over in the way the Mossadegh government in Iran was in 1953, it was mistaken. US President Eisenhower was furious with London, Paris and Tel Aviv and compelled them to put a stop to the conflict.

Nasser had his flaws, deep and often disturbing, of course. But he did give Egyptians a sense of self-esteem through his promotion of Arab nationalism. His closeness to the Soviets, initially through a deal over the Aswan Dam; and his role in the forging of the non-aligned movement, gave him a hero's status in the Middle East and beyond it. It was the horrific defeat inflicted on Egypt, Syria and Jordan by Israel in the six-day June 1967 war that left Nasser a diminished man. He would limp along for three years, till his death in September 1970.

Anwar Sadat, vice president under Nasser, took over as president after the latter's passing and quickly proved that he was his own man. He sent Nasser loyalists like the journalist Hasanein Heykal packing and steadily stamped his authority on the country. His moment in history came, though, when he declared war on Israel in October 1973, a move that would force the

Israelis into talks with the Arabs on the future of occupied Arab land. The Sadat era remains best known for the dramatic manner in which the president landed up in Jerusalem, to make peace with Israel. That was the moment that made Sadat a statesman, though it led much of the Middle East into reviling him as a traitor. It was this feeling of betrayal of the Arab cause which impelled some soldiers of the Egyptian army into assassinating him on the anniversary of the Yom Kippur War in October 1981.

If Nasser embodied Arab nationalism and Sadat was a player on the world stage, Hosni Mubarak, the former air force chief who succeeded Sadat, turned out to be a harsh autocrat as well as a kleptocrat. Compared to his two predecessors, Mubarak was a small man, with the prejudices that afflict men like him. He brooked no dissent; and he promoted his family in ways that good leaders never do. There was a very real danger, towards the end of his regime, that he would place his son in Egypt's presidency. The Arab Spring destroyed that dream.

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Thieves steal to order to cut costs

A FRIEND DESCRIBED landlords as "greedy, blood-sucking vultures", causing me to immediately make a secret note for the Mixed Metaphor Police. I pointed out that he himself was a landlord. "Exactly," he said. "That's how I know."

Like every decent human being, I think being a landlord is a heinous crime which should be punishable by death, like murder, genocide, listening to K-pop, etc. So I was delighted to hear that property-owners are being bypassed by one smart profession: thieves.

Burglars are getting into "steal to order" services to cut out storage costs.

I learned this from a Tokyo-based business executive who was clearly impressed by the thieves' professionalism, momentarily forgetting, as business executives do, about the troublesome existence of the law, morality, etc.

He sent me a cutting about a Tokyo thief who specialized in breaking into people's backyards and taking photos of sports bicycles to post on internet sales sites. When a buyer offered a good price, he would steal it to order.

After months of success, he was finally caught last week when he took so many bikes from a single victim that a detective took the case. The 'tec did an internet search to see if the bikes were for sale—and was astonished to find they'd all been advertised and sold BEFORE being stolen.

Meanwhile, a UK reader sent me a cutting about a woman caught shoplifting in the town of Spalding a few days ago. She was carrying four shopping lists, each in different handwriting. Yes, she too was stealing to order.

Then a reporter colleague told me about a gang of god thieves in China. They took photos of idols (stone ones, not singers) in Chengdu and Meishan, which they circulated to antique collectors.

When bids were made, the thieves would wait for bad weather. "They usually stole the statues on rainy days, when the supervision of authorities was found to be more lax," the Huaxi Dushi Bao newspaper reported. A drop of rain would fall and screaming guards would flee for shelter. With careful timing, the thieves god-napped 300 deities before they were caught last year.

When I was a young reporter in Hong Kong, a police unit called the Serious Fraud Squad uncovered a massive steal-to-order salad ring. (This is not joke.)

Restaurateurs listed their daily requirements of bak choy, lettuce and broccoli for thieves who made targeted veggie-heists at fresh food markets. (Oddly, this is the only serious fraud case which has never been made into a movie.)

In the UK last week, police warned householders in the town of Alsager that thieves have been locating homes containing dogs and then painting a "K" (short for "K9", as in "canine") on the front of them. Once buyers are found, thieves steal the dogs.

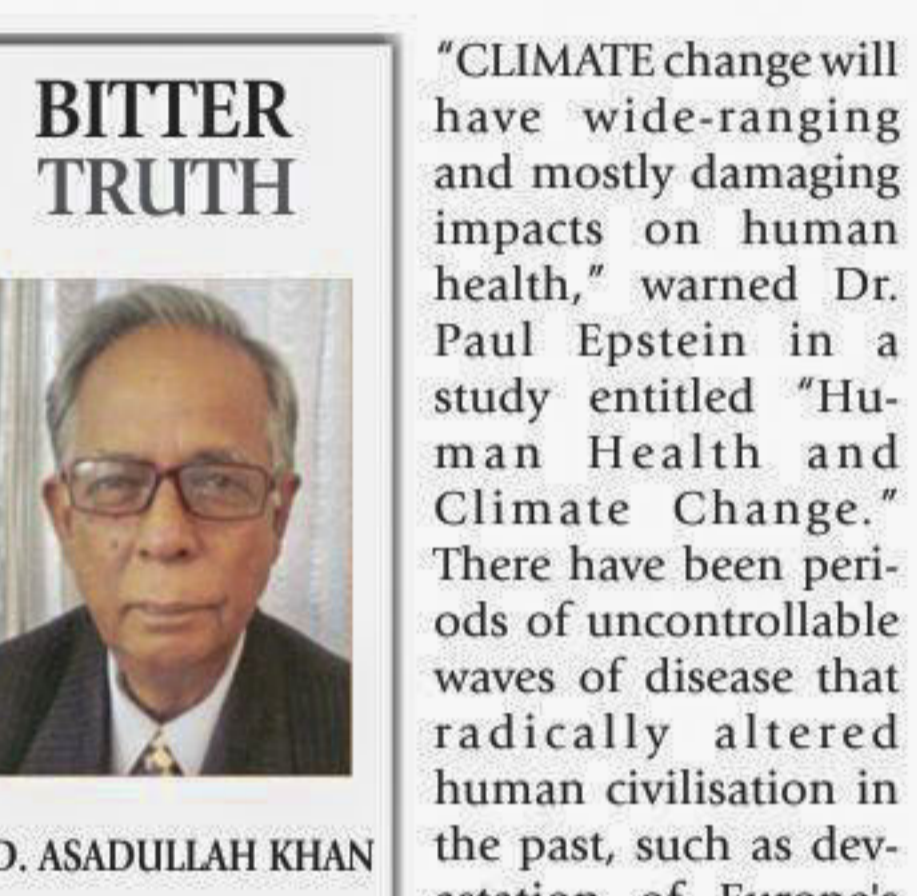
Reporting the thefts must be embarrassing.

VICTIM: "My house has been robbed." COP: "Have you thought about getting a guard dog, sir?"

VICTIM: "That's what they stole." Perhaps we can learn from the thieves? Thank you for reading this column. Now kindly forget every word of it. If I am having an off-day in a year or two, and need to re-use a column, I may steal it.

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Changing climate portends new diseases



MD. ASADULLAH KHAN

"CLIMATE change will have wide-ranging and mostly damaging impacts on human health," warned Dr. Paul Epstein in a study entitled "Human Health and Climate Change." There have been periods of uncontrollable waves of disease that radically altered human civilisation in the past, such as devastation of Europe's population by bubonic plague in the Middle Ages. Evidently, that problem was associated with population growth and urbanisation.

Now a warming climate, compounded by ecological changes, may be stimulating wide-scale changes in disease patterns, Epstein warned. His study seems to suggest that climate change could have impact on health in three major ways:

- Creating conditions conducive to outbreaks of infectious diseases;
- Increasing the potential for transmission of vector-borne diseases and the exposure of millions of people to new diseases; and
- Hindering the future control of disease. All indications suggest that the process has already begun.

Climate change and environmental degradation can create ideal conditions for the emergence, resurgence and spread of disease. The World Health Organisation (WHO) report states that at least 30 new infectious diseases have emerged in the last 20 years.

WHO, along with the World Meteorological Organisation and the United Nations Environment Programme released publications that focus on how climate change can disturb a variety of balances to eventually affect human health. The canvas is diverse. Old dis-

eases could stage a comeback, heat-related illnesses and deaths could proliferate, drinking water supplies could be affected and agricultural productivity could fall. The fears that haunt world leaders and scientists alike is that major climate change could aggravate health problems.

Another aspect of the warming is something like what the world saw in 1994: a long monsoon in Northern India followed by 90 consecutive days of 38 degree Celsius heat wave, which drove rats into the cities. They caused an outbreak of pneumonic plague in the Indian town of Surat.

Of all the infectious diseases humans have to contend with as the world gets warmer, malaria may be the worst. It is already the world's most widespread mosquito-borne disease. A 2 degree rise in global temperatures could also expand malaria's domain from 42% to 60% of the planet. As studies have revealed climate disruptions may be giving new life to such ancient scourges as yellow fever, meningitis, cholera, diarrhoea and dysentery. The large scale malaria epidemic in the hill districts of Bangladesh is a tell-tale sign of global warming phenomenon in our country. There is prevalence of malaria in about 13 districts of Bangladesh, and the prevalence among children is as high as 15% as a study conducted by ICDDRDB shows.

The same synergies that empower microbes also weaken our defences against them. Heat, increased ultraviolet radiation resulting from ozone depletion, and pollutants like chlorinated hydrocarbons all suppress the disease-battling immune systems—both for humans and other species. Epstein, who was one of the principal authors of the WHO study, showed that in recent years variants of the class of viruses that included measles have killed seals in the North Sea and lions in the Serengati.

In each case, abnormal weather had caused malnutrition, weakened immune systems and spurred the reproduction of viruses. Epstein

also notes that once ordinarily benign microbes invade weakened humans and animals they can become sufficiently deadly to invade healthy populations. The real threat for people, says Epstein, is not a single disease but armies of emergent microbes raising havoc amongst a host of creatures. The message he transmits for the wide world "is that diseases

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afflicting plants and animals can send ripples through economies and societies no less disastrous than those affecting humans".

A worrying trend which Epstein reports is the decrease in the number of predators, which also means an increase in pests as a result of climate change. Epstein emphasises the role of predators. He says healthy ecosystem with preserved predators/prey ratios provide the natural biological controls over infectious diseases and their carriers.

Freshwater fish, birds, reptiles and bats limit the abundance of mosquitoes, owls, and snakes help regulate populations of rodents. Some rodents are involved in the transmission of Lyme disease, hantaviruses, haemorrhagic fevers, and human plague. He provides exam-

BEETLE BAILY



by Mort Walker



QUOTABLE Quotes

"I have no ambition to govern men; it is a painful and thankless office."

Thomas Jefferson

ACROSS

1 — and call

5 Promptly

8 Despot

12 Verve

13 Rd.

14 Regulation

15 Not yet final, in law

16 — relief

17 Blind as —

18 Body art

20 Pack down

22 Half a fluid ounce

26 Short

29 Swiss canton

30 Tokyo, once

31 Bergman, in "Casablanca"

32 Action star

33 One

34 Mel of Coopers-town

35 Programmer's woe

DOWN

1 Crooked

2 Director

3 Kazan

4 Group of actors

4 Made a sweater, maybe

5 Biz big shot

6 Eggs

7 Oater

8 Chaplin persona

9 Court summons

10 — carte

11 Pensioned (Abbr.)

19 Lummox

21 "— was saying ..."

23 Playwright

32 Pirandello

39 Untrue

42 Took the bus

43 State with certainty

44 Gave temporarily

45 Garfield or Heathcliff

46 Blunder

48 Gun the engine

Solution time: 25 mins.

Yesterday's answer 5-30

CRYPTOQUIP

RWOAV W XHCV CVFN ZMIWAHZ

WQVHR HKMTL XVHFWOI

MFIHOR, NMT GWIXL QVRAFVKV

GV HR VHF - FHLWMOHZ

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: TRENDY HEALTH SUPPLEMENT THAT'S HELPFUL FOR PRODUCING EXTREMELY BIG BICEPS: FLEX-SEED OIL.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: N equals Y

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- A CGPA of at least 2.50 or 2nd class at undergraduate or graduate level in any previous public examination.
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- Acceptable score in the IUB Admission Test or combined score of 300 in GRE.

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