

CULTURE OF IMPUNITY

Suu Kyi wins big

A new beginning for Myanmar

MYANMAR'S voters have spoken in the first openly contested election after 25 years, and the National League for Democracy, the party headed by opposition leader and Nobel Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi is on the way to a landslide victory. We wholeheartedly congratulate her and the people of Myanmar whose long struggle has finally culminated in a new birth of democracy.

But the extent to which Suu Kyi will actually be allowed to lead the country is still uncertain. Myanmar's military imposed constitution reserves a quarter of the seats in parliament for unelected members of the military and includes a clause barring anyone married to a foreigner from being president. The clause was apparently added by the military junta that has ruled the country since 1962, specifically to keep Suu Kyi, whose late husband and two sons are British citizens, out of power. Nonetheless, she is still likely to play an important role, saying she will have an informal position "above the president."

Challenges before her are aplenty. The Rohingya issue will be a major test for her given her silence on the persecution of Rohingyas and the growing strain of virulent communalism that is gaining force in the country's politics. While the NLD appears to have performed well in several minority-dominated regions, the Rohingyas were disenfranchised under discriminatory voting laws.

Suu Kyi has more room to maneuver now that she has won a mandate from voters. Her win, we hope, will usher in a new era of inclusive policies in Myanmar and lead to enhanced cooperation with its neighbours, particularly in trade and commerce, human trafficking and anti-drug smuggling efforts.

Already more than 2000 arrested

Are they all criminals?

THE government's countrywide drive to arrest 'suspected troublemakers' in the wake of the recent killings of law enforcement agents and other subversive activities is giving out mixed signals. Already more than 2000 people have been arrested. While it is laudable that the government is going all out to catch alleged criminals and militants in a bid to restore security to the nation, that most of the arrested belong to members of the opposition parties, will raise questions. It is reminiscent of other similar drives in the past by whichever party has been power, during which the majority of those apprehended happened to belong to rival parties or were random passersby on the street.

If these individuals have criminal cases against them as law enforcers have stated, it begs the question: why weren't they caught before? Why wait for the situation to get so volatile before nabbing suspected criminal elements?

This is all the more concerning in the wake of the upcoming local elections as the large number of opposition men being arrested may be construed as a strategic clearing of the field and political victimisation. If that is the case, this drive will do precious little in improving the law and order in the country. It will also be detrimental to good governance.

We strongly recommend that such security drives be strictly limited to catching the real criminals who are trying to destabilise the country and not to squash political rivals.



KNOT SO TRUE
RUBANA HUQ

THREE days ago, in the heart of Madrid, while trying to get to the next street, I was stopped. There were at least twenty thousand people, mostly women protesting against violence against women. They marched, staged demonstrations and blocked streets. Sure, traffic was disrupted and people suffered inconveniences.

According to European Union, 13 million women suffered physical violence in Europe in 2013. So, people had gathered in the heart of the capital of Spain, crowded the busiest city centre spot in Sol and sent out a clear message to the world: Stop Violence. While I wondered if these protesters belonged to any association, union, or political party, I was pleasantly surprised to learn from a local that these were regular women who came from all ranks of the society and were not only from Madrid. Many had flown in from Balearic and Canary islands.

So this got me thinking. Maybe, just maybe, we protest a bit too less. Apart from Gonojagoron Moncho, and the students protesting on the streets against the imposition of VAT on their tuition fees, I cannot recall a single incident in recent times where a couple of thousand of women like us have left our homes to silently demonstrate against a crime. I often joke about the television camera crew taking shots from the bottom at a particular angle, which camouflages the real situation of a thin attendance. While headshots reveal the true picture, shots from below conceal reality. Somehow with every murder, every crime, only a few go out on the streets. Somehow there just aren't enough within us to say 'No' to what goes unpardonably wrong in society. Why, though?

The latest breaking news of a Bangladeshi court swiftly handing four men the death sentence over brutally killing 13-year-old Samiul Alam Rajon in the North Eastern city of Sylhet ushered in some public satisfaction. That two other men were also ordered to hang for the separate torture and murder of another 13-year-old, Rakib, whose body was pumped with air by the owner of a garage less than a month after Rajon's case, was also great news. But do notice that there is a pattern of criminals being apprehended. Few get caught, few escape, and few are allowed to evade arrest. 17-year-old Riyad Hossain was shot and killed by the owner of the Motijheel restaurant owner, Ariful Islam Sohel, on October 29 this year and he is still missing. Riyad was beaten and kept in bondage for three days and then finally shot to death. Police are yet to get him. Why, though?

On April 13 this year, the son of a powerful

lawmaker, in a drunken stupor, indiscriminately opened fire from his car near Dilu Road leaving rickshaw-puller Abdul Hakim and daily Janakantha's auto-rickshaw driver Yakub injured. The police pressed murder charges against Bakhtiar Alam Rony in a case filed over killing two people on the street, as there were a total of 37 people who were made prosecution witness in the case, which led to the Dhaka court finally taking cognizance of the double murder on August 14 of this year. That was heartening. But while the case takes time, one wonders if time favours the powerful and if the minute hands of the clocks run slower in the cases of people with deeper pockets. The Sagar-Runi murder case has still not seen the light of justice. Every year on February 11, a few journalists

family, but was kind to confirm that they had found alcohol in the SUV. No cases were filed. Why, though?

Most of the time, societies mirror each other and social trends are often the same. A blatant example of "showing off" is *Richkidsoftelran*, on the photo-sharing service Instagram, which attracted almost 100,000 followers, with its users saying they wanted to break away from the stereotypes perceived in the West. Ferraris, Maseratis, luxury watches, expensive residences were all photographed and put up on social media. That is when print media stepped in. *Hafta-Sobh* newspaper wrote about 'a class of young people who stubbornly and with the backup of their wealth' were recklessly having fun and the Iranian system could not 'touch them.' *Taadol* newspaper scorned 'a class of nouveau riche who cropped up like mushrooms' and became all powerful during Mahmood Ahmadinejad's presidency between 2005 and 2013.

Most of the time, the definition of the classes controlling power changes. For example, in the 1990s, a few business tycoons took advantage of their relationship with Boris Yeltsin's Kremlin by reaping the benefits of privatising its vast oil wealth. They were the same ones who bankrolled Yeltsin's re-election as president in 1996, controlled ministers and redefined government policy. Following that phase, oligarchy continues in Russia with Putin curtailing the power of other Yeltsin-era tycoons, by raising new groups of businessmen having deep ties with the old Soviet security services. One of them is Igor Sechin, head of Russia's largest oil company, and is undeniably the second-most powerful man after Putin.

In today's global system, coverage stems from self-glorification and instead of being photographed, one can easily take a "selfie", instead of being published, one can easily publish blogs, instead of being televised, one has YouTube channels to sing one's own glories, instead of being elected many autocrats rule without elections for years. This is how globally we are breeding monsters within ourselves. Aided by the growing disparity of wealth, many of us have just stopped being accountable to our own conscience and helped by the occasional lapses in the system, many are covering their tracks and protecting their sins with power and pride.

Taking lessons from history most certainly helps. References to contemporary mistakes perhaps may lead to a few quick corrections. Therefore, it is crucial to examine the culture of impunity in our own country and check why there are fewer voices to protest and why our patterns of violence and crime are almost becoming textbook examples. It is also worth being critical of many amongst ourselves who might have become beneficiaries of the system and have stopped being who we once were.

The writer is Managing Director, Mohammadi Group.

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hold rallies and protest, yet to no avail. Why, though?

Also in October, a teenager had posted "My life is > yours" as his social media status in an app called Snapchat. The app allows users to post pictures and express their feelings of the moments. At that particular moment, the sixteen-year-old boy had felt over-entitled about his life and had also felt that those around him mattered less. A picture of a bottle of whisky resting on the steering wheels was posted. The minor was drinking, driving, taking selfies and using social media to brag. In a spot at Road 74 of Gulshan, the boy apparently hit three people: a woman, a Grameen bank official and a rickshaw puller. The police rushed to the spot, picked the boy up and handed him over to his

PROJECT SYNDICATE

India's Sacred Cows and Unholy Politics



SHASHI THAROOR

THE headlines out of India in recent weeks have often made sickening reading. Startlingly, the central protagonist in most of these

stories is that most peaceable and innocent of animals, the cow.

A Muslim man was beaten to death by a mob in a small town an hour from New Delhi in response to rumours that he had slaughtered and eaten a cow, sacred to Hindus. Another man died after being attacked by villagers who believed he was involved in cattle smuggling. And a trucker was killed in Udhampur, in the state of Jammu and Kashmir, over rumours that he had been involved in cow killings. Three deaths in just three weeks.

Public officials, too, are getting in on the action. After the chief minister of Karnataka, a member of the opposition Congress party, recently declared that he would eat beef, a politician from the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) threatened to beat him if he follows through.

Likewise, 20 policemen stormed the canteen of the Kerala state government's outpost in Delhi, because it advertised a "beef fry" on its menu. Kashmiri legislator Engineer Abdul Rashid had his face smeared with black paint for throwing a "beef party." And the chief minister of BJP-ruled Haryana, Manohar Lal Khattar, declared that Muslims living in India would have to give up eating beef.

To be sure, there have been plenty of other repellent stories of intolerance that have nothing to do with cows. Two children from the impoverished Dalit community recently burned to death in their own home, in an arson attack by upper-caste goons. A prominent public intellectual had his face blackened with ink for organising a book release for a former Pakistani foreign minister in Mumbai. And Hindu zealots stormed a Cricket Control Board meeting to disrupt discussion of a possible India-Pakistan cricket series (which now seems

unlikely to take place).

But none of these incidents has acquired the toxicity of the assaults on those deemed insufficiently respectful of the holy cow. Indeed, a signal illiberal achievement of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's BJP regime has been the revival of the cow as an instrument of political warfare. And the recent spate of attacks reveals a serious problem with the country's trajectory under Modi.

Of course, the cow has long had a place in Indian politics: the country's constitution includes a provision explicitly urging a gradual movement toward full prohibition of cow slaughter

so long as relatively liberal or moderate officials (including an earlier BJP-led coalition government) were in power. The Modi government does not fit that description. Instead, it is full of leaders who seem more concerned with what goes into other people's mouths than what comes out of their own.

Modi's government has given voice to a peculiar kind of Hindu chauvinism, one that embraces activist assertion of a narrowly constructed version of the faith. It cannot be described as "fundamentalism," for Hinduism is a religion singularly devoid of fundamentals: it lacks a single sacred book, a single version of divinity,

state government or supported by any previous administration in New Delhi.

Such bans are not really about beef, but about freedom. Indians have generally felt free to be themselves, within their dynamic and diverse society. It is that freedom that the BJP's representatives and followers are challenging today.

The good news is that a backlash has already emerged. Nearly 40 distinguished authors and poets have returned their prestigious Sahitya Akademi (Literary Academy) awards to protest the silence of the academy and other government bodies following the killing of three intellectuals by suspected Hindu hardliners. A top scientist has now followed suit, returning his Padma Bhushan, the government's third-highest honor. As these gestures highlight the explosion of Hindu chauvinism, support for Modi has begun to erode.

When Modi came to power, foreign observers lauded him as just the kind of decisive, business-minded economic reformer that India needed in order to fulfill its massive potential. During the election campaign, he seemed to recognise that achieving good economic results was more important than the politics of religious identity for which his party had been notorious.

To the dismay of many, Modi has underperformed economically, while the zealots have run amok, hijacking his development agenda. And his silence in the face of it all confirms what many in India had feared: his economic sloganeering was merely a ploy to secure power. Now that power is becoming a tool of the unsavoury agenda pursued by the Hindu chauvinists who enabled his rise.

As a result, divisive politics is now overwhelming constructive economic policymaking. Unfortunately for India, this is likely to continue until the cows come home.

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Indian protesters shout slogans during a demonstration to condemn the lynching and murder of Mohammad Akhlaq who was attacked by a Hindu mob over rumours that he had stored and eaten beef.

PHOTO: AFP

– a ban that has already been implemented in most states.

For most of India's existence, however, the default approach has essentially been "live and let live" – make your own choice about beef, and let others do the same. I am a vegetarian myself, but I have never considered it my business what others eat. Where beef was legally available, it was consumed not just by Muslims and other minorities, but also by many poorer Hindus, who could not afford other kinds of meat.

But that response was possible only

and even the equivalent of a Sabbath day. In fact, Hindus who eat beef can, like those who abjure it, find support for their beliefs in the religion's ancient texts and scripture.

Rather, what Modi's government has fostered is a form of subjective intolerance, with supporters, emboldened by the BJP's absolute majority, imposing their particular view of what India should be, regardless of whom it hurts. The state of Maharashtra's recent beef ban – which threatens the livelihoods of a million Muslim butchers and truckers – would not have been imposed by any previous

COMMENTS

"Four to die for killing Rajon"

(November 9, 2015)

Tarek Mollah

Justice has been served. I am sure the killers would resort to all kinds of brutality if they were free. The police officer who abetted delaying justice and made way for the killer's escape should have been punished. But I am sure he got away with a disciplinary action and made his money anyway.

Sameena Hossain

The nation is waiting for the execution of the criminals.

Taifa Humayun

We welcome the verdict but this still doesn't compensate for the cruelty and suffering this poor little kid went through. He'll be in our hearts forever.

Saleh Chowdury

Justice served. Now we expect speedy trial of all other cases.

"Liton gets bail to join JS session"

(November 9, 2015)

Murtaza Haidar

Wow! A criminal is granted bail to attend JS session?

Marjanul Fattah Prapon

He doesn't deserve to be in the parliament.

Sadat Noman Khan

By granting bail on the day of Razon murder case verdict, the AL has shown how to divert the attention of the people!

Anwar Hossain Bablu

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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More hospitals needed in Chittagong

Chittagong is the second largest city of the country. But it is a matter of sorrow that in Chittagong there

is no specialised hospital for heart disease. We also need a specialised cancer hospital and an orthopedic hospital. The one and only government-run hospital always remains overcrowded with patients. Moreover, this hospital is understaffed. Many patients have to travel to Dhaka for getting better

treatment. We hope the government will take initiatives to build more hospitals in Chittagong, thereby alleviating the sufferings of the patients. Zabed Wali Chittagong