

MYANMAR ELECTIONS LONG ROAD TO DEMOCRACY

ZIAUDDIN CHOUDHURY

"It is not power that corrupts but fear. Fear of losing power corrupts those who wield it and fear of the scourge of power corrupts those who are subject to it." --Aung Suu Kyi

Suu Kyi has reportedly said that she would control the future government even though she cannot be President, but she did not elaborate how she would square that circle.

ALL'S well that ends well, but we cannot say that yet with confidence about Myanmar and its iconic leader Aung Suu Kyi since the history of the country has been anything but straightforward. But so far Myanmar and Suu Kyi's quest for democracy seem to be on the right path. Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) has won enough seats in the two houses of the parliament for her party to elect the next President and form a government on its own without the need for coalition. More importantly, she has been congratulated by the current President, and her main opposition, the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), has conceded defeat.

Despite the impressive results of the elections in Suu Kyi's favour the lurking sense of discomfort arises from an unfortunate turn of events in that country following a similar massive win by Suu Kyi and her NLD some twenty-five years earlier. In the 1990 general elections NLD won more than 80 percent of parliament seats and 59 percent of total votes. But no sooner were the elections over that the military junta scrapped the elections and put Suu Kyi and several of NLD leaders behind bars. For over fifteen years she would remain either in prison, solitary confinement or house arrest, while the junta would try every means to keep both her and her party under tight control muffling any movement for democracy.

For Suu Kyi and the people of Myanmar the wounds are too recent and are yet to heal. Even though her victory has been widely reported, and



apparently been accepted by her staunchest opponents, the fears of a reprisal are not without foundation. Since its independence in 1948, the country more commonly known as Burma, saw only a brief period of popular democracy. The country has been ruled by the army since 1962 after the military staged a coup under General Ne Win. As in the case of many Asian countries in the neighbourhood a prime reason for the military's coup was weak democracy, corrupt leadership, and in Myanmar's case unabated ethnic tensions and civil wars.

Civil wars have been a constant feature of Myanmar political landscape since independence in 1948. These wars are predominantly struggles for ethnic and sub-national autonomy, with the areas where the most dominant ethnic group

Bamars reside (they represent 60 percent of total population). In fact there are two major reasons why the military was successful in holding onto power for a long period. One is the ethnicity of the military forces (who are largely Bamar), and the other is the civil wars between the ethnic Bamars and other groups. In October 2012 the number of ongoing conflicts in Myanmar included the Kachin conflict between the Pro-Christian Kachin Independence Army and the government; a conflict between the Rohingya Muslims, and the government and non-government groups in Rakhine State; and a conflict between the Shan, Lahu and Karen minority groups, and the government in the eastern half of the country. In addition, armed conflict between ethnic Chinese rebels and the Myanmar Armed Forces resulted in the

Kokang offensive in February 2015. The conflict had forced 40,000 to 50,000 civilians to flee their homes and seek shelter on the Chinese side of the border.

In 2010 the military government made an abrupt change in its total suppression of popular will. In its first ostentatious reform the military allowed general elections to its two houses of parliament albeit in a very controlled manner. The army-backed USDP formed the first civilian government through elections that were largely termed as highly manipulated by foreign observers. Yet, in the fifty-year history of Myanmar this was the first time a civilian government replaced the army junta although the new President was an Army Commander. This would pave the way for a more participatory election in 2015.

It is still very unclear, however, what the road to democracy for Myanmar and Suu Kyi will look like even under this apparently fair election. Under the constitution the military will control twenty-five percent of the seats in both houses. And under the constitution Suu Kyi cannot become the new President even if her party elects her because the Myanmar constitution forbids anyone who has a foreign spouse or children who are foreign nationals to be elected President. Suu Kyi has two sons who were born to her British husband (now deceased). Suu Kyi has reportedly said that she would control the future government even though she cannot be President, but she did not elaborate how she would square that circle. She with her parliamentary majority cannot amend the constitution without military support, and she knows that.

For now however, we can all gather to cheer Suu Kyi for her ultimate success in forming a government and give democracy a chance. This has been a long struggle for her and her people. She has shown her faith in her words, "When you decide to follow a certain path, you should follow it to the end and not be diverted from it for personal reasons." These are words our own politicians perhaps may do well to follow.

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FAMILY PLANNING

Access equals development

BABATUNDE OSOTIMEHIN and CHRIS ELIAS

TWO months ago, world leaders met at the United Nations and adopted a set of ambitious goals that have the potential to advance health and human progress faster than at any time in history. Now, we must begin the hard work of translating these Sustainable Development Goals into action. Women and girls will be a driving force behind this global push, and their rights and well-being must be our top priority.

Ensuring that every woman has the information and services she needs to decide when and how many children to have is a critical first step. We have seen firsthand the huge gains for women, families and communities when there is equitable access to voluntary family planning and contraceptive services, and the devastating effects when there is not.

The benefits of family planning extend far beyond the individual. Access to a full range of contraceptive options will significantly reduce maternal and infant deaths and improve the overall health of families. Allowing young women to plan whether and when they want to start their families gives them the option to stay in school, join the workforce or pursue other dreams. This virtuous cycle that begins with empowering one woman can lift entire communities out of poverty. There is compelling evidence that increasing the number of healthy, educated and productive women will shift the economic well-being of countries like Bangladesh. This shift will only occur if countries pair their economic and social policies with strong voluntary family planning programmes.

To support efforts already under way to bring these benefits to all communities, the global community pledged at the 2012 London Summit on Family Planning to ensure 120 million additional women and girls in the world's poorest countries get access to



voluntary family planning by the year 2020. Family Planning 2020, or FP2020, is a global partnership that was launched at the London Summit to carry this momentum forward.

Earlier this month, FP2020 partners released a report on the progress we have made against the 2020 goal. The report shows that, worldwide, family planning programmes are reaching millions more women than ever before. Since 2012, 24.4 million additional women have been using modern contraceptives – an additional 981,000 in Bangladesh alone. In the past year, access to modern contraceptives has prevented 6,000 maternal deaths in Bangladesh.

While successes like these should be applauded, it is no time to be complacent. The data show that we are falling behind and

that millions of women are not yet being reached. Three years have passed since we set our ambitious goals in London. With only five years left until our 2020 deadline, we must act with greater urgency to speed up progress.

Thankfully, we know what works. We have a wealth of high-quality data and evidence on effective interventions, such as investing in youth, particularly adolescent girls, expanding access in both rural and urban settings, and improving the quality of services and number of contraceptive options that women have available to them. These solutions provide a strong base to inform our efforts moving forward. In order to reach more women and girls, we can look to innovative programmes like those in Bangladesh.

The government of Bangladesh has demonstrated its commitment to increasing access to contraceptives by establishing 13,000 community clinics around the country, which provide free family planning services. The government has also taken important steps to ensure that young people have the information they need to make decisions about when to start their families by incorporating sexual and reproductive health education into the national school curriculum for grades six to twelve. These are the types of successful, locally owned programmes that are the cornerstone of family planning progress.

The launch of the third annual FP2020 progress report provides an opportunity for advocates, partners and government leaders to celebrate progress made, identify areas

where we are falling behind and collectively recommit to the FP2020 goal. However, this is only the start of the conversation. Countries such as Bangladesh must continue to share their successes and learn from each other's experiences. We must also search for new solutions – using the evidence available to drive decision-making. This will require identifying innovative sources of financing

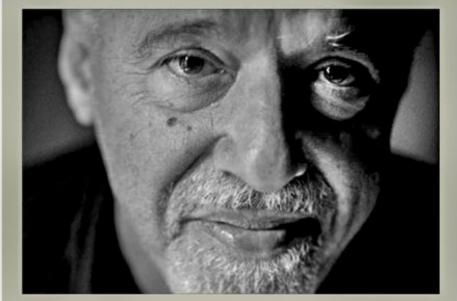
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and building on effective in-country programmes so that we don't leave women and girls behind.

Now is the time to re-evaluate where we stand, ask hard questions and chart a path forward. The stakes are high. If we fail to meet our family planning goals, we will be putting the broader development agenda at risk. The global goals adopted at the United Nations in September represent a vision of a better world. Ensuring access to voluntary family planning so that every woman and girl has the means to invest in her future is the best way to make good on that promise.

The writers are United Nations Under-Secretary-General & Executive Director of UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, and President of Global Development Programs at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation respectively. They are the Co-Chairs of the FP2020 Reference Group.

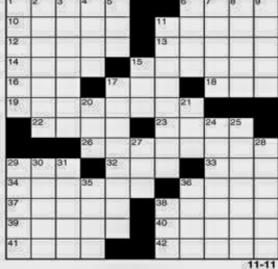
QUOTABLE Quote



PAULO COELHO
TEARS ARE WORDS THAT NEED TO BE WRITTEN.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 1 Caesar's land
 - 6 Dogsled command
 - 10 Exhaust
 - 11 Devilfish
 - 12 Corduroy feature
 - 13 "Cats" creator
 - 14 D.C. team, familiarly
 - 15 Clash
 - 16 Can. neighbor
 - 17 Singer Damone
 - 18 Agreeable answer
 - 19 Appeared unexpectedly
 - 22 Dapper
 - 23 Deceitful one
 - 26 Energized
 - 29 Chowded down
 - 32 "The Crying Game" star
 - 33 "CSI" topic
 - 34 GI ID
 - 36 GI meal
 - 37 Ohio city
 - 38 Wine grape
 - 39 Mike of "Shrek"
 - 40 Excessive
 - 41 "..... and -- bed"
 - 42 Trounces
- DOWN**
- 1 Come to light
 - 2 Football's Boomer
 - 3 Piles of paper-work, perhaps
 - 4 Floor covers
 - 5 Big galoot
 - 6 Brewing need
 - 7 Together-ness
 - 8 Purloined
 - 9 Despises
 - 11 Guilty admission
 - 15 Auction action
 - 17 November 11 honorees
 - 20 Soft food
 - 21 Cobbler's cousin
 - 24 Book extras
 - 25 Expires
 - 27 Coat rack part
 - 28 Wallops
 - 29 Second president
 - 30 Honshu city
 - 31 Wading bird
 - 35 Matador's foe
 - 36 Ore source
 - 38 Place for a pint



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER
C A N I S S A D A T
A T O N E A M I G A
P A R A D O X I C A L
E L S A D O T I E
S L E P T I N I N N
S P E N D P A N T S
T A R T B I N
E L I P A N G R A M
P E T O L E A G E
P A R A S I T I C A L
E L E C T A D E P T
S E A T S R O S E S

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker



BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott

