

The art of bullying



NO STRINGS ATTACHED
AASHA MEHREEN AMIN

It is perhaps a primal instinct in all animals, to exercise control and power over the weak and the helpless. It is pretty much how the world has worked in the last few thousand years. Even among the earliest humans, it was the stronger group or tribe that dominated the physically less able, sometimes even eliminating entire communities to gain territorial control. Throughout history the annihilation of civilisations has occurred by invading marauders with superior fighting skills, not to mention a ruthlessness and greed to take what is not theirs, exploiting their victims' gullibility. Thus, the merciless elimination of indigenous peoples all over the world by looting invaders who have often come in the guise of friends or traders but ended up being the conquerors and colonisers.

But was it really because they were just more 'fit' or had superior intelligence? One can argue it was because of their extraordinary physique that made them seem like supernatural beings with supernatural powers, psychologically leaving their victims in awe and fear of them. And it was not just the clever (and lethal) devices they brought with them but also the art of cunning and bullying that they used to perfection. One can

argue that this rather unsavoury combination has allowed the rich and powerful to completely control the poor and powerless. This applies to nations and individuals alike, for governments are not abstract entities – they are made of a cohesive group of people, a group that share the same ambitions, sometimes even the same prejudices. Hence the 'upholding of human rights', 'protecting the world from being blown to smithereens by the mad and uncivilised', can be used to legitimise all kinds of atrocities – genocide, occupation, racial discrimination and ethnic cleansing.

So why state the obvious, you may ask? Well let's just look into what the basis of power is in the modern world. It is not necessarily better knowledge, or even what is conventionally called 'better physical appearance' that yields power although those factors certainly help to open doors and ensure a smooth path ahead. The ultimate weapon of the 21st century is the ability and desire to be a big bully.

Let's start with the ability part. In school, for instance, the bully is usually the kid who is bigger in size so he/she uses sheer physical strength to intimidate the victims – pushing heads down toilets, eating their tiffin, shoving them while passing by and of course, saying things to belittle their targets. The bully usually has a coterie of minions whose only sense of identity is based on their blind allegiance to the bully (who may have a rich and influential father), sometimes causing

them to go the extra mile by independently victimising the victim on the boss's behalf. Thus you have the concept of 'hate clubs' and 'mean girls' from primary to secondary schools to even colleges. Psychologists have often alluded to a deep sense of insecurity or even inferiority complex as being the primary ingredient that induces the bully to bully – because he feels better by making other people feel small and worthless.

Which is why this predisposition may be carried onto adulthood. It is during this time the desire to be a bully reaches its zenith, for it is catalysed by insatiable greed for money and power. These bullies believe that their only source of power is through humiliating and 'neutralising' perceived opponents in any way possible. This will invariably mean unleashing their lackeys on the victims to do whatever they want and when that doesn't work, do the job themselves.

Paranoia, fuelled by whisperings of ill advisors, a blind spot as far as logic is concerned and the constant bootlicking of sycophants may morph into a quagmire of mindless hatred and megalomania. This will lead to taking recourse of any kind of falsehood that may help to humiliate and destroy the apparent thorn in the flesh.

Sadly, what is not recognised is that by listening to their opportunistic lackeys, they are in fact isolating themselves and putting themselves in grave danger. For sycophants are not friends, they are parasites - chameleons who will take on the colour of the moment and

will sacrifice/devour/abandon their host for a more nutritious one. Ironically, they do not realise that the victims they choose to pulverise may well be really the only real friends they have left – for they are the only ones who will give them the good news and the bad with equal sagacity.

Meanwhile the poor, powerless victims may

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have to suffer extreme anguish. But if they have the courage and tenacity to prevail and only rely on the path of truth, they may come out even stronger than before. This is because people, ordinary people, eventually get tired of the fear factor. And that perhaps, is the silver lining in the cloud.

The writer is Deputy Editor, Editorial and Op-ed, The Daily Star.

Nepal's plight: Land locked or India-locked?

ZIAUDDIN CHOUDHURY

AFTER months of a chill in Indo-Nepal relationship, there is new sign of things warming up and India's loosening of the vise on Nepal. The Prime Minister of Nepal signed several treaties with India in his latest visit to Delhi early February, but only after his country had agreed to amend the recently adopted Nepalese Constitution that apparently had caused the Indian resentment, and put Nepal in the wrong end of the stick.

Nepal's Constitution was the product of years of debate to reconcile the various positions of more than 100 ethnic groups claiming rights, and some even demanding their own provinces under the new federal structure. Satisfying everyone was a daunting task for a country that had installed democracy after years of monarchy and fighting a terrorist war with the Maoists. The good result was that the Constitution was backed by more than 90 percent of the elected Constituent Assembly. The Constitution paved the way for a federal structure with seven states.

The new Constitution, although generally hailed by most Nepalese upset a few groups, notably the Madhesis who live on the Indian border in the Terai. The Madhesis and a few other indigenous people feel that that the new Constitution fails to address demands of marginalised communities and supports status-quo of the ruling groups. They protested over the federal delineation of new states as proposed in the Constitution, fearing existing demarcation could affect their political representation.



Nepal's Prime Minister Khadga Prasad Sharma Oli and his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi.

PHOTO: AFP

just adopted its new Constitution. The Nepalese felt that the blockade lasted because Indian establishment was busy supporting the agitating Madhesi parties who were rejecting the new Constitution.

It is ironic that this anti-Indian sentiment would surface in Nepal within a year of Prime Minister Modi's visit to Nepal, the first foreign country he travelled to after assumption of office. Modi, who was the first Indian Prime Minister to visit Nepal in the last 17 years, pleased Nepal by declaring that India had no intention to interfere in the internal affairs of Nepal, nor dictate it on any subject. He urged the Nepalese to complete their Constitution. Yet, the greater irony is that the blockade was a consequence to adoption of the Constitution that India did not look upon favourably.

There is a lesson to be learnt from this latest fracas involving smaller countries of South Asia and their big neighbour. It is not possible to ignore India and its interests even when an issue is completely internal to the country, not even after loud rhetoric of non-interference from India's leaders. India will look after its own interests first and then its neighbour's. Sri Lanka could not have ended its two decades of civil war if India had not stopped support to the separatist Tamil rebels. Bangladesh faced a similar situation with rebel groups in the Hill Tracts in the eighties and nineties that faded only after the rebels stopped getting shelter in India.

But unlike Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, Nepal is in a unique relationship with India. India has always viewed Nepal as a part of its larger security envelope in relation to China. Similarly, Nepal has viewed India as its only access to outside world, a fact that was once more demonstrated by the five-month land blockade. Some observers see Nepal as not landlocked but "India-landlocked." On three sides Nepal borders India, while another neighbour, China, is separated by the Himalayas, including Mount Everest itself. However much Nepal may want to get out of Indian influence in its politics, with its geographic situation and large bi-national presence in both countries, it will never be able to ignore the presence of India's oversize impact on its economy and politics. This is a reality Nepal will have to live with. As for the other neighbours, ignoring or snubbing India will be at their own peril.

The road blockade brought enormous economic difficulties for Nepal, as traffic from India carrying goods was stopped at the border, starving the landlocked country of essential supplies in Kathmandu and other places. Within a week of the blockade started by the disgruntled Madhesis, Nepali economy came to its knees. The Nepali customs at the major border areas failed to generate any revenue, and long queues of consumers formed in front of petrol and LPG stations across the nation. Public and private transport systems went haywire, and food stores ran out of stock.

Most Nepalese believe that the blockade had support from India, as the resentful Madhesis were of Indian descent and they had cross-border relationship with India. The new Constitution did not accord them a special status. The Madhesis wanted an

amendment to the Constitution. India's open support for Madhesis makes many Nepalese believe that the blockade by the Madhesis had backing from India.

The event put Nepal in a quandary. Historically, Nepal had steered its course in international politics carefully, choosing cautiously its relationship with other countries so as not to annoy India. As close neighbours, India and Nepal share a unique relationship of friendship and cooperation characterised by open borders and deep-rooted people-to-people contacts of kinship and culture. There has been a long tradition of free movement of people across the borders. This forms the bedrock of the special relations that exist between India and Nepal. Under the provisions of the India-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship of 1950,

the Nepalese citizens have enjoyed unparalleled advantages in India. India played a very important role acting as host for the understanding reached between the seven party alliance and the Maoists in 2005.

Despite decades of friendship and apparently benign Indian treatment, the Nepalese always suffered from a dependency complex. There was a sense of resentment of Indian domination in Nepalese politics and economy in the mind of many Nepalese. The blockade newly created the negative image on Nepalese, who perceive India as a hegemonic neighbour wanting to dominate and micromanage the affairs of its small neighbour through overt and covert blockades. The blockade sent anti-Indian waves soaring high in many parts of Nepal, because the blockade arrived at a time when the nation had

just adopted its new Constitution. The Nepalese felt that the blockade lasted because Indian establishment was busy supporting the agitating Madhesi parties who were rejecting the new Constitution.

It is ironic that this anti-Indian sentiment would surface in Nepal within a year of Prime Minister Modi's visit to Nepal, the first foreign country he travelled to after assumption of office. Modi, who was the first Indian Prime Minister to visit Nepal in the last 17 years, pleased Nepal by declaring that India had no intention to interfere in the internal affairs of Nepal, nor dictate it on any subject. He urged the Nepalese to complete their Constitution. Yet, the greater irony is that the blockade was a consequence to adoption of the Constitution that India did not look upon favourably.

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The writer is a political commentator and analyst.

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QUOTABLE Quote

FRANZ KAFKA

We are sinful not only because we have eaten of the Tree of Knowledge, but also because we have not yet eaten of the Tree of Life. The state in which we are is sinful, irrespective of guilt.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Chest muscles, for short
- 5 Half of a '60s rock group
- 10 Conjure up
- 12 Before, in Brest
- 13 Singer Tucker
- 14 African republic
- 15 Lupino of films
- 16 Unthrifty sort
- 18 Sore
- 20 Bonanza stuff
- 21 Revered person
- 23 Spectrum end
- 24 Swain
- 26 Somewhat
- 28 Greek consonants
- 29 Noggin
- 31 Wagon puller
- 32 Sex
- 36 Svelte
- 39 Binary digit
- 40 Camp craft
- 41 Dwelling
- 43 Promptly
- 44 Like some jackets
- 45 Prom group
- 46 Sleep sites

DOWN

- 1 Small, to Simone
- 2 Steer clear of
- 3 Role for Arnold
- 4 Blue hue
- 5 Walk nervously
- 6 Stratford's river
- 7 Famed box opener
- 8 Steamed
- 9 Put away
- 11 Abated
- 17 NFL player
- 19 Day in Tijuana
- 22 Sideways pass
- 24 Restricted part of a street
- 25 Gist
- 27 Kayo count
- 28 Team symbol
- 30 Historic time
- 33 "Lorna."
- 34 Concluded
- 35 Oboe parts
- 37 Sentence subject, usually
- 38 Ruby and Sandra
- 42 Shirt protector

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

H	A	G	R	I	D	A	N	D	I
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G	L	A	N	C	E	O	F	F	S
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