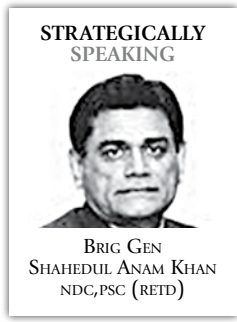


America under siege from within!



STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING
BRIG GEN SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN NDC, PSC (RETD)

FINALLY President Trump has accepted the inevitable, but not before wreaking havoc, as we had predicted he would four years ago, both at home and abroad.

come when Americans would see such an act perpetrated on their own parliament, something that their own government has instigated in so many second and third world countries in the past. In these countries, changes were manipulated by US intelligence agencies with the help of local quislings to overturn election results in order to put people of their own choice in power who would further US interest in that country and region; the so called regime change tactic.

The last time the US Capitol was stormed and burnt down was in 1814, by the British. This time the symbol of US democracy was stormed by an American mob, driven to frenzy by the sitting US president, spewing venom and lies which his gullible supporters believed too easily. According to some of the arrested arsonists, they were responding to their president's call, prepared to kill to "reclaim our country".

Trump has lived up to his promise to not let go of power come what may. And he exercised all options to cling to power till the very end; the last of his vainglorious effort was to set his supporters on the US Capitol. The attack was generated by the president himself, instigated by his words and actions since the end of the US presidential elections.

What is surprising for an outsider is that a country like the US, that boasts of its intellectual achievements and educational excellence should countenance a Goebbels-like propaganda of "stolen election", day in and day out, touted by its president, and believed too by a large number of Americans. Trump has destroyed democracy. By constantly questioning the election results and the election



What one witnessed on January 6 was a third world script being played out on a first world stage by first world actors.

PHOTO: REUTERS

process he has caused a large majority of his supporters to really believe in his lies, and, more damagingly, lose faith in the democratic institutions. However, the institutions prevailed; the legislature, much to the dislike and in spite of the best efforts of the large majority of Republicans in the Congress to overturn the election result, certified Biden's victory.

It proves once again Goebbels' notorious statement that, "if you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it." And if it is uttered by the president of a country, all the more believable would that lie be. And so it was. He further said, "Truth is the mortal enemy of the lie" and thus a threat

to the people in power. Trump could not accept the truth since it posed an existential threat to him.

The insurrection reveals a few other interesting aspects of US society and its state of governance. It has also several ramifications for the US, both at home and abroad, apart from it becoming a Black Day in US History.

After January 6, 2021, the US has lost all its ethical moorings to launch its armies against another country to "bring democracy" to that country, like it has tried, but failed so miserably, in Afghanistan. It has lost all moral authority to "fix" democracy in other countries. The various US NGOs, many of them appendages of the US intelligence agencies (not

acknowledged openly though) would need to look inwards rather than sally abroad to "help" establish democracy and repair democratic institutions in other countries. It has much to worry about democracy on its own soil. This has been a classic lesson in radicalisation and extremism. And that is what the US shall have to focus on, rather than deploy its vast military machine outside its border to address extremism and radicalisation. Extremism and radicalisation comes in many shades. January 6 saw the manifestation of one such shade. American society is afflicted by fissures, and after more than 200 years of independence, America is in dire need of nation building which its leaders would do well to address urgently.

The US is literally under siege—from within. There are more troops guarding the Capitol, 20,000 National Guards, than there are presently deployed in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria combined; the US capital resembles Kabul, according to journalists. All the other State Houses and capitals have taken similar measures in view of threat warnings from the FBI. America is on high alert for more attacks—not from al Qaeda or Taliban or the IS but from its own people—the far-rights, the QAnons and other radical groups and white supremacists. All because of a megalomaniac perpetuating a blatant lie backed up by the blind subservience and genuflection to him by the Republican Congressmen and women, barring a few brave and honourable exceptions.

It is time for reckoning. Welcome to the real world America!

Brig Gen Shahedul Anam Khan, ndc, psc (Retd), is a former Associate Editor of The Daily Star.

Whoever thought that a day would come when Americans would see such an act perpetrated on their own parliament, something that their own government has instigated in so many second and third world countries in the past.

The physical assault on the pantheon of American democracy described variously as a coup, insurrection and mob uprising, was not Trump's only parting gift to his country. He is leaving in his wake a dented democracy bereft of its spirit. It was an attempt to overturn the US election, by the US president himself, of all people. But it was not totally unexpected.

The siege has already resulted in the second impeachment of Trump, a unique distinction that only he could lay claim to. With every passing day, newer and newer information regarding the siege of the Capitol is coming to light. When Joe Biden says that those who stormed the Capitol are not the real face of America, he may be right, but one cannot deny also that they represent the views of a significant portion of Americans.

What one witnessed on January 6 was a third world script being played out on a first world stage by first world actors in the biggest democracy in the world. It could not happen in America! At least that was what the rest of the world was given to understand for so long, and that was what came to one's mind while watching the frenzied mob invading the US Capitol on television. Whoever thought that a day would

2021: Year of living dangerously?



JOMO KWAME SUNDARAM

GOODBYE 2020, but

unfortunately, not good riddance, as we all have to live with its legacy. It has been a disastrous year for much of the world for various reasons, Elizabeth II's *annus horribilis*. The crisis has exposed previously unacknowledged realities, including frailties and vulnerabilities.

For many countries, the tragedy is all the greater as some leaders had set national aspirations for 2020, suggested by the number's association with perfect vision. But their failures are no reason to reject national projects. As Helen Keller, the deaf and blind author activist, noted a century ago, "The only thing worse than being blind is having sight, but no vision."

After JFK's assassination in November 1963 ended US opposition to western intervention in Indonesia, President Sukarno warned his nation in August 1964 that it would be "living dangerously", *vivere pericoloso*, in the year ahead. A year later, a bloody western-backed military coup had deposed him, taking up to a million lives, with many more ruined.

Further economic slowdown

Lacklustre economic growth after the 2009 Great Recession has been worsened in recent years by growing international tensions largely associated with US-China relations, Brexit and slowing US and world growth although stock markets continued to bubble.

Economic growth has slowed unevenly, with Asia slowing less than Europe, Latin America and even the US. With effective early pre-emptive measures, much of East Asia began to recover before mid-2020. Meanwhile, most other economies slowed, although some picked up later, thanks to successful initial contagion

containment as well as adequate relief and recovery measures.

International trade has been picking up rapidly, accelerating rebounds in heavily trading economies. Commodity prices, except for fossil fuels, have largely recovered, perhaps due to major financial investments by investment banks and hedge funds, buoying stock and commodity prices since late March.

Very low US, EU and Japanese interest rates have thus sustained asset market bubbles. Meanwhile, new arbitrage opportunities, largely involving emerging market economies, have strengthened developing countries' foreign reserves and exchange rates, thus mitigating external debt burdens.

Unbiased virus, biased responses

The pandemic worsened poverty, hunger and vulnerability by squeezing jobs, livelihoods and earnings of hundreds of millions of families. As economic activities resumed, production, distribution and supply barriers, constrained fiscal means, reduced demand, debt, unemployment, as well as reduced and uncertain incomes and spending have become more pronounced.

While many governments initially provided some relief, these have generally been more modest and temporary in developing countries. Past budget deficits, debt, tax incentives and the need for good credit ratings have all been invoked to justify spending cuts and fiscal consolidation.

Meanwhile, pandemic relief funds have been abused by corporations, typically at the expense of less influential victims with more modest, vulnerable and precarious livelihoods. Many of the super-rich got even richer, with the US's 651 billionaires making over USD 1 trillion.

On the pretext of saving or making jobs, existing social, including job protection has been eroded. But despite hopes raised by vaccine development, the crisis is still far from over.

Don't cry for me, says Argentina

Meanwhile, intellectual property blocks

more affordable production for all. Pharmaceutical companies insist that without the exorbitant monopoly profits from intellectual property, needed tests, treatments and vaccines would never be developed. Meanwhile, a proposed patent waiver for Covid-19 vaccines has been blocked by the US and its rich allies at the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Hence, mass vaccination is likely to be very uneven and limited by intellectual property, national strategic considerations ("vaccine nationalism"), prohibitive costs, fiscal and other constraints. Already, the rich have booked up almost all early vaccine supplies.

The main challenge then is fiscal. Economic slowdowns have reduced tax revenues, requiring more domestic debt to increase spending needed to ensure the recessions do not become protracted depressions. Meanwhile, rising debt-to-GDP ratios and increased foreign debt have long constrained bolder fiscal efforts.

But despite the urgent need for more fiscal resources, we are told that if the richest are required to pay more taxes, even on windfall profits, they will have no incentive to "save" the rest of us. Nevertheless, new wealth taxes have just passed in Argentina.

This time is different

As the pandemic economic impacts began to loom large, International Monetary Fund Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva quickly offered debt relief for low-income countries on terms much better than the G20's miserly proposal.

Unlike well-meaning debt-fixated researchers and campaigners, even new World Bank chief economist, erstwhile debt hawk Carmen Reinhart has urged, "First you worry about fighting the war, then you figure out how to pay for it".

Nobel laureate Amartya Sen is concerned that "in the policies against the present pandemic, equity has not been a particularly noticeable priority... Instead, the focus has been on drastic control and sudden lockdowns...with little attention paid

to labourers who lose their jobs or the many migrant workers, the poorest of the poor, who are kept hundreds of miles from their homes".

Covid-19 may still bring major reforms, such as Roosevelt's New Deal response to the Great Depression. But now, it seems likely to usher in a world where insecurity and unpredictability define the new normal. While professing to protect victims' interests, ethno-populism blames "Others" as the enemy responsible.

Still, many hope for a silver lining. Sen suggests that "a better society can emerge from the lockdowns", as happened after World War Two, with greater welfare state provisioning and labour protections in much of the west and agrarian reforms in East Asia. But there is nothing to guarantee a better "new normal".

Beyond neoliberalism?

For many, Joe Biden's election to succeed Trump is being celebrated as a resurgent triumph for neoliberalism, enabling the US and the rest of the world to return to "business as usual".

Incredibly, another Nobel laureate Michael Spence has even called for structural adjustment programme conditionalities for countries seeking help from the Bank and Fund, repudiating the Bank's Growth Commission he once chaired, i.e., which found that seemingly fair, often well-intentioned conditionalities had resulted in "lost decades" of development.

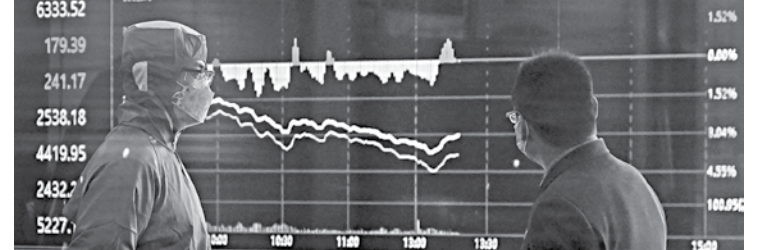
But thankfully, there is widespread recognition that all is not well in the world neoliberalism and western dominance created. Incredibly, Klaus Schwab, transnational capitalism's high priest, has conceded, "the neoliberalist... approach centres on the notion that the market knows best, that the 'business of business is business'... Those dogmatic beliefs have proved wrong".

Instead, he advised, "We must move on from neoliberalism in the post-Covid era", recognising: "Free-market fundamentalism has eroded worker rights and economic security, triggered

a deregulatory race to the bottom and ruinous tax competition, and enabled the emergence of massive new global monopolies. Trade, taxation, and competition rules that reflect decades of neoliberal influence will now have to be revised".

Will we ever learn?

The philosopher Santayana once warned, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." Hegel had observed earlier that history



The value of Asian stocks have decreased dramatically as a consequence of the coronavirus outbreak.

PHOTO: REUTERS

repeats itself, to which Marx added, "the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce". Nevertheless, hope remains an incurable disease that keeps us all striving and struggling.

As FDR reminded his supporters, no progressive policies will come about simply by relying on the goodwill of those in authority. Instead, they will only be enacted and implemented thanks to popular pressure from below. As Ben Phillips has put it, "the story of 2021 has not yet been written: we can write it; we can right it".

Jomo Kwame Sundaram, a former economics professor, was United Nations Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Development, and received the Wassily Leontief Prize for Advancing the Frontiers of Economic Thought in 2007.

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QUOTABLE Quote

ANNE BRONTË
(1820-1849)
English poet and novelist.

It is better to arm and strengthen your hero, than to disarm and enfeeble your foe.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Secure, as a climbing rope
- 6 Farm machine
- 11 Superior group
- 12 Tolerate
- 13 Donated
- 14 Chops up
- 15 Compass point
- 17 Spring period
- 18 First person
- 20 Chef's need
- 22 Holm of "The Hobbit"
- 23 Lettering aid
- 26 Eminem collaborator
- 28 High-maintenance
- 29 Minimally
- 31 Finger count

DOWN

- 1 Entreat
- 2 Yale rooter
- 3 1973 James Bond movie
- 4 Group of top players
- 5 Urges
- 6 Naughty
- 7 Chisholm Trail
- 32 Writer Buchanan end
- 33 Cajole
- 34 Essence
- 36 Urban oasis
- 38 Southern range
- 40 Train supports
- 43 Ordeal
- 44 Bay
- 45 Run-down
- 46 Hold up
- 25 Bobcat's kin
- 27 Lucy, for one
- 30 Tree's blood
- 33 Origami creation
- 34 Tender touches
- 35 About
- 37 Like a dessert
- 39 Wily
- 41 Michele of "Glee"
- 42 Porker pen

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

T	A	M	P	S	C	A	L	I	A
O	M	A	R	L	I	V	E	R	S
Y	O	K	E	A	G	A	T	E	S
S	K	E	L	E	T	A	L		
C	A	I	M	R	O	M	A	N	
C	A	L	M	S	S	N	A	K	E
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U	N	S	E	E	N	Z	I	O	N
B	A	S	E	S	T	S	T	O	P

BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER

BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT