In Brief:

New wave of democratic struggles - reflections on Burma

After the third wave of the movement for democracy from authoritarian rule, almost a decade passed, when a lull came in. It was a lull before a storm. Vibrant movements began, beginning with Georgia and encompassing a large number of countries, culminating in Kyrgystan. The focus is on restoration of Rule of Law, the overthrow of the tyrants and establishment of constitutional rule. Even in the quiet Islamic countries like Egypt, Lebanon and Palestine a new stir is discernible. In the eighties when the democratic wave was unleashed by Poland, Burma had already pioneered 8.8.88 uprising although it did not meet with success.

A short summary of peoples' struggles is given below to show that the tyrants in Burma should change their mindset, release Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and enter into a dialogue for peaceful change.

Iraq

After America's occupation of Iraq, there were doubts as to whether power could be handed over to pro-democracy Iraqis. The constitutional process however proceeded against great odds like insurgency, infighting, and the international community keeping its distance. Iraq had its watershed election two months back and presently it is locked up in a deadlock over formation of a new government. Malnutrition among young Iraqi children since the US-led invasion of Iraq has shot up remarkably and has become a serious concern. Food situation, political instability and disharmony among its people are causing serious problems to put in place a constitutional rule. However, American occupation, like it or not, is also witnessing the ongoing constitutional process and hopefully the democratic forces in Iraq will be able to forge acceptable constitution and establish a democratic government. But the international community has to get in-

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volved not withstanding the fact that the initial occupation of Iraq was illegal.

Egypt

Egypt's pro-reform protesters are finding growing courage to make their voice heard and for the first time are challenging the once veteran President Hosni Mubarak. Opposition took to the streets in an unprecedented coordinated nationwide push directly targeting the old ruler. Egypt has not yet seen a people's revolution of the type that recently swept Ukraine and Lebanon. There is a great feeling that a country's silent majority will take its destiny in its own hands. Opposition has called on Mubarak to step down after 24 years at the helm of the nation. After a quarter of century of unchallenged autocratic rule, Mubarak and his regime are facing unprecedented political upheaval stemming from both internal and international pressure.

Palestine

In spite of lawlessness plaguing the Palestinian territory, Palestine president Mohammad Abbabbes is making progress to restore peace and make Palestine state a reality. Abbabbes has used dialogue instead of confrontation in his dealings with anti-Israeli militants. After the death of Arafat, although an unclaimed leader, the Palestinian movement took a new direction. The help of international community became more assertive with the emergence of new leadership which could cope with its own militants. The path of violence was abandoned but peaceful resistance continued to worry the Israeli hawks. Hopefully the state of Palestine will be born in time on rule of law.

Lebanon

After a long spell of calm Lebanon has made the headlines. The assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri threw Lebanon into turmoil. Massive demonstrations forced the government to resign, accelerating the withdrawal of Syrian troops Lebanon is without a government for 4 weeks. Caretaker Prime Minister Omar Karami has been asked by opposition to step down and to form a national consensus government in order to hold the elections on time.

United Nation's security council resolution 2004 demanded complete withdrawal of Syrian troops. Lebanon was a civil war arena between the Muslim majority and the Christians. United Nations' intervention helped withdrawal of Israeli and restoration of civil administration. Rule of Law has again come on the agenda of Lebanon.

Kyrgyzstan

The veteran leader, deposed president Akayer Finally, opted to resign after he had fled to Moscow. The resignation followed a wave of opposition protests fuelled by flawed parliamentary polls. Kyrgyzstan is a mountainous state of 5 million bordering China, almost unknown to outside world, a sleeping country. Bakiyer, the opposition leader who became the acting president accused Akayer and his family of ruling illegally and of running a corrupt business empire. "We have got used to living in an authoritarian state and we need to adapt to the fact that there will be competition between political parties. There is no one boss" said Baysalor.

The presidential election has been set for June 26. Under the constitution, new poll must be held within 3 months of the resignation of the previous leader. The protesters said that the way has now been opened for democratic election and new hope for the country. The message is clear and loud. A country as small as Kyrgyzstan raised the banner of protests and paved the way for peaceful change.

Burma's National Convention

In Burma the National Convention which the junta tried to market proved a failure. Devoid of representative character, transparency and accountability it has shrunk more into a hole. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's house arrest and denial of NLD's participation have become a reality. Worse is that the leader of UNLD, U Khun Htun Oo, has been put on trial for high treason. Some cease-fire groups made demands to liberalize the constitutional making process and stayed away. On the excuse that farming season was on, the National Convention, which was reconvened on February 17 after 7 months hiatus, has been adjourned indefinitely. This process of holding and postponing will go on and reduce it to a mockery. The international community has already dubbed it a sham.

Significantly, ASEAN has become assertive. The parliamentarians in these countries are moving resolutions in their respective parliaments for release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and denial of Burma to chair the ASEAN conference scheduled in 2006 at Yangon. None of the Asian countries have military dictatorship ruling and they rule by constitution. It is high time that Burma junta resumes dialogue with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi for a political reform in a time frame and not pursue its fake National Convention for the larger interests of the people and country. Burma's ruling junta has to bend if not break. Burma's neighbors have voiced growing frustration over the slow pace of democratic reform and rampant human rights abuses.

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