

With 3 Finger Salute, Burma Is ‘Catching Fire’

By Gopal Dhok

Author is a researcher at Forum for Integrated National Security.

The last battle for democracy in Burma

Since seizing power through a coup in early February, the Myanmar military has gunned down more than 300 peaceful protesters while arresting thousands of them. The peaceful democratic protest that started in major cities of Burma is spreading across the country including border regions that are already engulfed in decades-old ethnic conflicts.

There have been several armed clashes between the military and Kachin Independence Army (KIA) in Kachin. Kachin, a northern state bordering the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh and **China**, is rapidly emerging as a new front in the crisis. **Myanmar Now**, one of the few functional (online) independent news outlets, reported that KIA has captured a military post. All media outlets, newspapers like Myanmar Times, 7 Day News have been closed by the military regime.

People are defying military rule and organising a peaceful protest for the restoration of democracy in different cities. Public defiance and anger is heightening against the February coup across Burma. A frenzied crackdown by the military is adding fuel to public vexation. Author has interviewed Burmese activists to understand the recent coup from people’s perspective and their determination for democratic Burma. Protesters believe it is the last chance to save democracy in Myanmar and they will not stop until democracy is restored.

Democracy and internet

‘Can you send your army (sic) to kill them?’ said May Phyo Han, a Burmese woman of Chinese origin, when asked about what international community can do for Burmese people! Underneath these emotional words, there is entrenched anger against the military leadership for keeping Burma underdeveloped and disconnected from the world. ‘They have denied us economic opportunities for too long and we don’t want that again, said Moe Sat Lay. Another young activist Yan Naing Oo said ‘This is the last hope for democracy and we don’t want to give up on that goal. No matter what it costs.’

Zin Thu Phyo said ‘We need the United Nations Peacekeeping Mission to protect people from being murdered by the military. He understands that China will block every attempt of that sort in the United Nations Security Council. However, his desperation for the future of Myanmar and his fellow citizens is evident. For these supporters of democracy, every support and help coming from outside is valuable.

‘In the last five years of NLD rule, people witnessed economic growth. Improvement in rail connectivity has benefited people directly. The standard of education has been improving steadily due to increased expenditure by the government, said May Phyo Han.

'In Myanmar, a mobile sim card used to cost \$5000 (Year 1998). Now we can buy a sim card for just \$2. For the military, it was an easy way to keep people disconnected and isolated' said Zin Thu Phyoo.

As democracy took roots in Myanmar, the entry barrier (cost) to communication has gone down. Only 0.2 per cent of the population had internet connectivity in 2010. In Vietnam, another ASEAN country, internet penetration was 25 per cent in 2010. Now 30 per cent of the Burmese population is connected to the internet with 80 per cent smartphone penetration. Today 1GB of internet data costs 999Khyat (approximately ₹51).

Low-cost internet has allowed youth to connect within and outside of the country on various issues including politics. One best example of what the internet can do is **#MilkTeaAlliance** (online expression of pro-democracy, anti-China feeling) connecting Thailand, Taiwan, Burma and India in a common political thread.

Thwe Lae Soe, an IT professional, said 'For the military junta, the internet and people connecting over the internet is a major threat. They don't worry about poverty, unemployment and pandemic. They want a totalitarian system like North Korea in Burma. The military is collaborating with China to build china like internet firewall and internet censorship'. There have been several reports about the Myanmar military implementing **a censorship firewall** to block social media, important websites and news outlets with the help of China.

[Read complete article on FINS website...](#)

Opinion: At What Point Does 'Civil Society' Begin to Admit That Farmer Protests Have Gone too Far?

By Abhishek Banerjee

Author grew up with a passion for mathematics. After graduating from Indian Statistical Institute in Kolkata, he obtained his PhD in Mathematics from Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland. He began his career with a faculty position at Ohio State University and was also Maître de Conférences Associé at Collège de France in Paris. He is now an Assistant Professor at Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore.



Farmers have been protesting against the three Central laws for months now.

So what even if someone met with Khalistanis to prepare a toolkit for influencing global opinion about India? Show us the criminality in the strategy document itself or else there is nothing wrong about what happened. If you have to put up that kind of technical defense for your side, you have probably already gone too far.

It is a bit like an agent giving you a hundred reasons why their hot new investment opportunity is not a pyramid scheme. If they are at the point that they have to make that argument, you should probably stay away.

And yet, with zero self-awareness, a section of civil society has been making a very similar argument ever since Greta Thunberg accidentally let out the now infamous toolkit on Twitter. In newspapers, online portals and on television, they make their case based on technicalities, excuses and a refusal to see the big picture. They always assume the best of intentions on behalf of each accused individual. At worst, they say, the activists made an innocent mistake. How do they know that? Only one strategy document has come out so far, that too entirely by accident. What if there are others? Stop investigating, they say. Stop caring about the Khalistani angle. Makes you wonder why someone would be so eager to give benefit of doubt to Khalistanis like Mo Dhaliwal?

Let us look at the timeline of these protests. They began gathering 'national' attention somewhere around the end of November. We were told that these are just citizens who are protesting peacefully against a couple of new laws. As is their right. No disagreement there.

From the very beginning, people spotted disturbing images of Bhrindanwale and incendiary speeches invoking separatist sentiments. But, we were assured, those are just exceptions.

Then, the protesters blocked all the arterial highways around Delhi. The arguments in favor shifted immediately. The right to protest peacefully was quickly expanded to include the right to deny highway access to everyone else. The blockade caused extreme hardship to common people and thousands of crores of business losses. That too at a time when the economy was just trying to recover from Covid. But, they said, they've blocked some highways. So what?

Soon after, the attacks on mobile phone towers began. Bands of supposed protesters across Punjab and parts of Haryana started destroying telecom infrastructure. But, their apologists assured us, there is nothing to worry. So a few of them have turned to vandalism. So what?

Not surprisingly, ignoring such criminality and/or actually pandering to it made things worse. On Republic Day, we saw swords being used against the police. In one particularly shocking video, we saw policemen being chased into a ditch as so called protesters ride their big wheels in pursuit of them. Even that failed to shake the conscience of the apologists. So a few of them have turned violent. But, they said, so what?

Then, the so called protesters stormed the ramparts of the Red Fort, where they raised another flag. The mental gymnastics used to defend this were truly baffling. Some insisted that the national flag had not been disrespected at all, because the protesters had mounted an empty flagpole. It happened to be the one where the Prime Minister raises the flag on the 15th of August every year, but so what?

Then, February arrived. And with it, global celebrities focusing international attention on it through their tweets. When the government and its sympathizers appeared to react, they were mocked. Some foreigners expressed their opinions about India, but so what?

Then, we learned there was a toolkit and hence a coordinated campaign. The defense mechanism was adjusted immediately. Even if there was a coordinated campaign from abroad, so what?

Then, people began to read through this toolkit. It became clear that the target was not any specific policy, but India as a whole. Disrupt the 'yoga and chai' image of India, it said. Neither yoga nor chai has anything to do with party politics or government policy. They have to do with how Indians are perceived as people. The defenses were updated. Even if there is a coordinated campaign to destroy India's image, so what?

When the police decided to investigate who was behind the toolkit, they were mocked again. As it turns out, the toolkit was linked to Khalistani groups who could not have been up to any good. This was egg on the face of those who did not want the case to be investigated, but it still didn't matter. Like a ponzi scheme, the defenses continue, discarding yesterday's argument for a new set of excuses.

So far, the protesters have blocked the highways, stormed the Red Fort, turned swords on policemen and chased them into a ditch. How much of turning the other cheek is enough? The government has also suspended the farm laws themselves for 18 months and invited the protesters to discuss the matter clause by clause during this period. How much of an accommodating stance is enough? At which point do they accept that the government is not 'fascist'? Will they ever?

Only the courts can decide who is guilty. But the way we perceive things and let the narratives continue says a lot about us as a society.

West of Diego Garcia, India is Building an Island Base of its Own

By Samuel Bashfield

Author is a PhD candidate and research officer at the Australian National University's National Security College.

The small, remote Mauritian island of North Agalega, located in the south-western Indian Ocean, 700 miles north of Mauritius, is currently a hive of construction activity. India sought access to the islands in 2015 to develop as an air and naval staging point for surveillance of the south-west Indian Ocean – in a sense redolent of facilities other nations operate, such as the joint US-UK base at Diego Garcia.

Satellite imagery shows major airfield and port developments are well underway, reportedly worth some \$87 million. Comparing the most recent images from Google Earth to the same location as seen in 2014 **shows** a new 3000-meter runway – capable of hosting the Indian Navy's new Boeing P-8I maritime patrol aircraft – and considerable apron overshadows the existing airfield in the middle of the island. India regards the new base to be essential for facilitating both air and surface maritime patrols in the south-west Indian Ocean, and as an intelligence outpost. This recent satellite imagery now indicates the scale and capabilities of this new facility.

The project entails a new airport, port and logistics and communication facilities and – potentially – “any other facility related to the project.” So far, project details have been tightly held by both India and Mauritius.

The imagery shows what looks like barracks and fields which could be used as parade grounds or sporting facilities located near the north end of the runway. These images do not readily show evidence of fuel storage facilities, or communications and intelligence installations – such as radomes. Such equipment and facilities are expected to be visible in future imagery.

North Agalega Island is some seven miles long and one mile wide, with a total population of less than 300 people. Until recently, it was virtually cut off from the world, with a rudimentary jetty and a small airfield barely fit for light aircraft.

The island is a former slave plantation, and the name of its main town of Vingt Cinq (twenty five in French) is thought to refer to the number of lashes slaves would receive as punishment.

The jetty and port facilities India is constructing are also noteworthy. A port is being constructed at the north end of the island (which now includes accommodation for up to 430 Indian workers and it is assumed that these buildings will be retained and repurposed once construction concludes). The latest images show the original jetty in addition to the considerable port development (two longer jetties) stretching closer to the deep water.



North Agalega 2016



North Agalega 2020

India's Ministry of External Affairs stated the agreement with Mauritius inked in 2015 would "go a long way in ameliorating the conditions of the inhabitants of this remote island" – while also enabling Mauritian Defence Force operations. India had also hoped for a similar arrangement in the Seychelles.

This development is a manifestation of Modi's 2016 vision for the Indian Ocean, articulated as "Security and Growth for All in the Region" (SAGAR). Under SAGAR, New Delhi aims to work together with Indian Ocean regional governments to "engineer virtuous cycles of cooperation".

But more importantly, this facility in Mauritius will provide an important staging point for India's new P8I fleet, which recently conducted its first joint patrol with France from nearby Réunion. This was followed by India signing an agreement with Japan which provides India access naval facilities at Djibouti. Agalega will also facilitate maritime patrols over the Mozambique Channel – now a popular passage for large commercial ships, particularly oil tankers.

The staging point will also allow the Indian Navy to observe shipping routes around southern Africa, which now account for a significant portion of China's energy imports.

The island will presumably also provide a useful location for communications and electronic intelligence facilities.

India has long had a close security relationship with Mauritius, anchoring its prominent role in the south-west Indian Ocean. The relationship is bolstered by ethnic ties and a shared Hindu religion with many Mauritians. This has led commentators to describe Mauritius as the "Little India" of the south-west Indian Ocean – evidenced in part by Indian funding of major infrastructure projects, and provision of lines of credit. Indian officials also occupying some key security positions in the Mauritian government, including the roles of National Security Advisor and head of the Mauritius Coast Guard.

In recent years, India has sought to further develop its military access to the south-west Indian Ocean and Mozambique Channel by building a new naval and air facility on Seychelles' remote Assumption Island. In 2015, Modi signed an agreement with the Seychelles President to develop Assumption Island for military use. But the deal generated considerable political opposition in the Seychelles. A revised deal was signed in 2018, but the recently elected Seychelles President Wavel Ramkalawan has canned the project over sovereignty and environmental concerns. These developments will only bolster India's resolve to militarize Agalega.

Parallels with the Chagossian experience – a people forcibly removed from the Chagos Archipelago in the early 1970s to make way for the joint UK-US military base on Diego Garcia – sound alarms for ethnic Creole Agaléens and their supporters.

As the Chagos example tragically demonstrated, in the eyes of some military planners, "islanders and a base would not mix." How Mauritius manages the construction and eventual Indian military use of Agalega will have immense consequences for the Agaléens.

This base on Agalega will cement India's presence in the south-west Indian Ocean and facilitate its power projection aspirations in this region. As new imagery of Agalega is publicly released in the coming months the full scale and capabilities of this facility will be better understood.

Courtesy: The Maritime Executive

The IAS Have Brought This upon Themselves

By ARUN BHATNAGAR

Author was formerly in the IAS and retired as a secretary, government of India

Over the years, the fall of the IAS has been precipitous and such that it now requires a root and branch overhaul, including at the induction stage.

In 1994, the last ICS cabinet secretary in the government of India, N.K. Mukarji, topper of the final intake to the Service in 1943, opined, several years after hanging up his boots:

"Bureaucratic arrangements must fall in line with the multi-layered character of the polity. The Central, State and Local government bureaucracies must be placed squarely under the control of the elected rulers at each level. A suitable way needs to be found to close the IAS shop."

Much has been said, in recent weeks, about the apparently disparaging observations of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in regard to the IAS. For once, the PM's critics seem to outnumber the defenders. It is possible that N.K. Mukarji subscribed, in some measure, to a view that his Indian seniors in the ICS did not, by and large, measure upto the nation's needs and expectations

in the early years of Independence and that Sardar Patel had overestimated their capacity and commitment.

More importantly, they failed to ensure a durable base on which the IAS could have developed on sound and progressive lines. Consequently, a steady decline of the IAS (and the civil services generally) had already set in before Mukarji himself retired around 1980.

Under the British, the prestige of the ICS was so jealously guarded that any member straying from the true path was liable to be ruthlessly ejected. Jawaharlal Nehru had then been sure that “no new order can be built in India so long as the spirit of the Indian Civil Service pervades the administration” Later, the ICS Indians were invited to stay on; as one senior Congressman remarked “this would be unbelievable were it not true”.

The ICS tradition not only survived, it prospered. In due course, quite a few members of that tribe chose to be involved in arranging lucrative assignments – at home and abroad – for sons, sons-in-law and relatives who were often of the IAS; for those relatively less endowed, jobs were found in corporate houses and private companies. Instances of illegal monetary gain also arose, one of the first of this type resulting in the conviction of the then secretary, ministry of commerce and industry in the 1950s.

In Nehru’s day and for some years thereafter, anti-corruption drives usually focused on “big ticket graft” and malfeasance. It was gradually recognized that unchecked corruption erodes governance and destroys trust. Today, India’s ranking on the Corruption Perception Index-2020 has slipped by 6 spots to the 86th rank; the Index released annually by Transparency International grades 180 countries by their perceived levels of public-sector corruption.

Since the 1960s (even earlier), the Kashmiri kinsmen, the Tamil Brahmin brotherhood, the Allahabad University chums and the Kayastha cousins have all jockeyed for the plum bureaucratic positions, with a few Bengalis, Maharashtrians and others thrown in. Once the key persons backed by a certain lobby are in place, they are required to put other “clan colleagues” into coveted posts.

During V.P. Singh’s prime ministership, a lobby led by an Allahabad contemporary, a Kumaon Brahmin, was dominant. Two exceptionally capable IAS civilians (Rajasthan cadre and Madhya Pradesh cadre) --- both Kayasthas --- wielded great influence in the Narasimha Rao regime. The Tamils bounced back with the support of P. Chidambaram and other ministers.

P.V. Narasimha Rao is, arguably, the only PM – after Jawaharlal Nehru, Lal Bahadur Shastri and Indira Gandhi – to have exercised decisive control over matters of state and in maintaining a certain standard, despite the lack of a Lok Sabha majority.

The period between 1999 and 2014 has been described, perhaps rightly, as India’s “wasted years” characterized by loose coalitions, unprincipled politics and a bureaucratic apparatus riddled with nepotism and ineptitude.

Over the years, the fall of the IAS has been precipitous and such that it now requires a root and branch overhaul, including at the induction stage, not mere tinkering by way of more specialization and training. The wide-ranging civil service reforms promised after the 2014 polls did not materialize and precious little has been achieved towards toning up the administration. There has, however, been noticeable improvement in some of the “delivery systems”.

But there is many a square peg in a round hole. Integrity and probity have taken a severe beating.

Taking into account the diverse factors at play, the dream of responsive governance could remain a distant one for the Indian people. As a beginning, the one step that needs to be implemented with determination is to enforce accountability and responsibility at senior levels that is, to the secretary of a ministry or the head of a department and not handed down the line.

In other words, an additional secretary or joint secretary should be held accountable, not an undersecretary or a section officer, as has routinely become the practice; in the field, a divisional commissioner or a district magistrate rather than a tahsildar or naib tahsildar.

The screws have to be tightened at the top.

Many IAS men (the Gujarat cadre is more than well-represented here) have been working closely with the Prime Minister who did not pull back from amending an Act in order that a handpicked retiree may occupy a critical post. Apart from the PMO, the favoured civil servants populate the cabinet secretariat, the Niti Aayog and crucial ministries, not to mention constitutional bodies. These bureaucrats – superannuated or serving – are the ones who ought to be introspecting in the aftermath of the PM’s statement in Parliament.

When all is said and done, it is the political executive that will need to take more direct charge and lead from the front. In so doing, they may find the words of Warren Buffet (American business tycoon, investor and philanthropist, primarily through the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation) of relevance and value:

“Look for three things in a person – intelligence, energy and integrity. If they do not have the last one, don’t even bother with the first two.”

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors. They do not purport to reflect the opinions or views of the FINS or its members.

Nation is Indebted to:

Smt Neera Arya

The brave woman who let her “Breast” cut-off” to protect Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose!



Smt. Neera Arya was Born on 5 March 1902 in the then United Provinces’ Khekra Town in Baghpat. Her father Seth Chhajumal, was a distinguished businessman with base in Calcutta and having business spread across India. She studied in Calcutta and was married to Srikant Joiranjon Das, CID Inspector in the British police. While Neera Arya was a true nationalist her husband was a true British servant. Being a patriot Neera joined the “Rani Jhansi Regiment” of Indian National Army led by Neta ji. She was accused by the English government of being undercover. Neera’s husband Inspector Srikont Joironjon Das was spying on Neta ji and he once opened fire on Neta ji but fortunately, he escaped unhurt but his driver was injured.

In order to save Subhash Chandra Bose, Neera stabbed her husband to death. After this incident, she was given the name Neera Nagini by Neta ji.

However, after surrender of the I.N.A. a trial took place (Nov-1945 & May-1946) in the Red Fort Delhi. All the prisoners were released, except Neera. She was sentenced on the murder charge of her husband and imprisoned in Cellular Jail, Andaman, where she was tortured every day.

In her words as written in her biography, "After I was locked in all women cell, next day a Blacksmith came to remove the Iron Chains & Fetters and he intentionally cut-off a bit of my skin and hit my legs with a hammer 2-3 times. I endured the excruciating pain."

The Jailer who was watching the sadistic game offered to release Neera, if she reveals the whereabouts of Subhash Bose. Neera replied that Bose died in a plane crash and the entire world knows about it. The Jailer refused to believe and replied "you are lying & Bose is still alive". Thereupon she said "Yes, he's alive, he lives in my heart!" The jailer got furious and said, "Then we will remove Bose from your heart". The jailer touched her inappropriately & tore her cloths apart and ordered the blacksmith to chop off her breast. The blacksmith immediately took the breast ripper & started crushing her right breast. The savagery didn't stop there; the jailer held her neck & said I'll take off both your 'breasts' out of your chest. He further said with a barbaric smile "this breast ripper is not heated or else your breast would've already been chopped off".

There are many such brave stories of our "Veer Yodhas" who contributed to this country which was instrumental for freedom of India. Unfortunately, they never got recognition in our textbooks or in official communications.

Neera Arya spent her last days selling flowers on the streets of Bhagyanagar (Hyderabad) and lived in a small cottage in Falaknuma. But her cottage was also demolished by the Govt as it was constructed on a Govt land. In her last days she was living a destitute life. As she was not keeping good health, she was admitted in Usmania Hospital near Charminar by a local journalist. Neera Arya left this world on 26 July 1998. Her last rites were performed by that local journalist and few of his friends.

Neera's story leaves us to think, why we as a society have failed to recognise such people who left every comfort of life and joined freedom struggle. Is there any answer to this? Readers to ponder over it in all earnest.

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