



Setback in Myanmar

In one swift operation, Myanmar's military establishment has wiped out a decade of the country's democratisation process. By arresting President Win Myint, State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi and the rest of the ruling National League for Democracy (NLD) leadership, and declaring military rule under a state of emergency for at least a year.

Reason of coup:

1. The immediate reason for the coup was that the newly elected National Assembly was due to meet in Naypyidaw on Monday, despite the Tatmadaw (Army's) claims that the November general elections had several irregularities and its contestation of the NLD's landslide victory.
2. Ms Suu Kyi had refused to bow to Gen. Hlaing's demand that the results, which also saw the military-backed Union Solidarity and Development Party with reduced strength in Parliament, be set aside.
3. Clearly, the Army, which still nominates a fourth of the parliamentary seats and retains the important Defence, Borders and Interior portfolios, felt it was better to dismiss the NLD government before it increased its clout.
4. Gen. Hlaing is due to retire this year, and it is possible that the move was meant to extend his longevity in power.

Support Of China

1. Backed by a silent Beijing, the junta leadership may also have gambled that it was better to take drastic action against the democratic leaders before the new U.S. administration finds its feet.

Suu Kyi's mistakes

1. The return to Army rule was also helped to some extent by Ms Suu Kyi, who came to office in 2015, but has lost opportunities to put her country more firmly on the road to democracy.
2. She has accepted a dual power system in the state. Daw Suu, as she is known, has also failed to bring democracy to her party, and been criticised for her autocratic style. Her refusal to rein in the Generals when the Tatmadaw unleashed a pogrom on the Rohingya between 2016-17, had lost the Nobel Peace laureate much international support.



Geopolitical Implications for India:

1. Regardless of the reasons for the coup, the step is a setback for the international community's efforts to engage with Myanmar, after a strict sanctions regime.
2. For India, which had cultivated a careful balance between nudging along the democratic process by supporting Ms Suu Kyi, and working with the military to ensure its strategic interests to the North East and deny China a monopoly on Myanmar's infrastructure and resources, the developments are unwelcome.
3. The government will need to craft its response taking into consideration the new geopolitical realities of the U.S. and China as well as its own standing as a South Asian power, and as a member of the UN Security Council.
4. New Delhi's immediate reaction, to merely express "deep concern" and counsel following the rule of law and democratic processes, is unlikely to suffice as a long-term strategy.

The U.S. and India: a tale of two sieges

News: On January 6, 2021, the U.S. Capitol building was partially taken over by a violent mob comprising supporters of former President Donald Trump. Twenty days later, a rally planned on Republic Day in India led to violence after farmers protesting three new laws broke off from the planned parade and entered Delhi, including the premises of the Red Fort by breaking the gates.

There are both similarities and differences between the two episodes, each worth considering in turn.

Similarities

1. The common thread between the sieges on two major public buildings — the U.S. Capitol and the Red Fort — is that a discontented collective vented its anger about a recent political development through a mass rally.
2. A second similarity across the two sieges is the emergence of disturbing images on social media, showing a darker side of the mass rallies – a propensity for targeted or planned violence.



3. At the heart of both incidents is contested democracy. In the U.S., Mr Trump's clarion call for nativist populism and the white privilege reasserting its racist ethos into mainstream politics has found support with the 74 million-odd people who voted for him.
4. In India, contrarily, politics has tipped sharply over the past decade towards the saffron world view of the Bharatiya Janata Party, and its brute force majority in Parliament has empowered the government with the ability to refashion major policy paradigms as per this vision.
5. Yet the farm laws protests show that there is another India – the India of the poor, the lower castes and classes – which will not be silenced by majoritarian politics.
6. Even if we grant that to an extent there might have been political motives behind the farm law protests, that still shows that pockets of resistance to the government's laissez-faire or neoliberal economic policy leanings will continue to make their voices heard.
7. The same could be said of those who are excluded from the BJP's homogenising view of Indian culture – the southern States with their distinctive political and ethnic histories are prominent examples of stand-out cases in this context.

Discontent and confrontation:

1. In India, anger has been rising steadily since Parliament passed three laws reforming the way the mandi, or marketplace, the system works. This effectively cuts out middlemen and traders and empowers private entities to directly contract with agricultural producers, yet it also potentially endangers the historically entrenched minimum support price system that can be the economic backbone of small-scale farmers.
2. While farmers initially staged peaceful sit-ins in Delhi and its surrounding areas, braving the winter cold to demand that the government repeal the laws, the lack of forwarding movement on the negotiating table appears to have triggered the ugly Republic Day clashes.

Undermining democracy

The U.S. and India have been beacons of democracy in the modern world, but the political forces unleashed in the two countries during the past decade or more could eventually transform them into cautionary tales.