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PRINCIPAL'S MESSAGE

POLITICAL SCIENCE JOURNAL 2012

“TRANSITION”

Transition has at the root ‘hope’, a promise of something better, of something more meaningful. While nature takes its course as seen in evolution, changes in the socio-political scenario are initiated by people through political acumen or mighty military power as per the type of governance.

It is through keen observation of the changes in the world and the trends thereafter that the Political Science Department has chosen *transition* as their theme for this issue of the Department Journal.

I congratulate the Society President Arunima Bhattacharya, Vice-President Rachna Agarwal and the students of the department who have contributed articles under the guidance of their staff advisor Dr. Sujata Chowdhury.

We look forward to the fruit of further analysis in the years to come.

Sr. Christine Coutinho

Principal

March 2012

EDITOR'S NOTE ...

The year 2011 has been a year of upsurge, discontent, protest and transition in many countries around the world .It has been a year marked by popular rejection and diligent efforts of “the people” to make a change from a corrupt, supremely inefficient and self serving regimes, to a brand -new –yet to be tested system.

Across the world discontent and popular dissatisfaction led to protest movements like “Occupy World Street” in U.S.A. or “Arab Spring” in the Arab World and “Paribartan” in Paschim Bongo. The European debt crisis heading for recession, call for reforms in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Sudan and Tunisia, challenging the 35 years Left rule in West Bengal are a wide range of people’s initiatives from local to global to bring change, surfaced.

It is in the backdrop of this scenario the theme of the Political Science Journal 2012 has been chosen as “transition”. The articles contributed by the students have mainly focused on widespread change in the world. The contributors have analyzed and expressed views that are exclusively theirs and the volume as a whole is dedicated to the “spirit of the people” aspiring for “change” for a better society.

**Dr. Sujata Chowdhury,
Head of the Department,
March 2012.**

Arab Spring and the World Climate

Bidisha Ghosh, Farha Deeba Sohail, V.M. Vandana Mohan

Political Science (Hons.), Ist Year

The Arab world comprises more than 300 million people in 22 countries in the Middle East and North Africa. In the mid-20th century a majority of Arabs lived in monarchical states, some dating as far back as several centuries. However, by the 1960s, the monarchies of Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Iraq and Yemen had transformed into republics. Today, eight Arab monarchies remain, namely, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Jordan, Kuwait, Bahrain, the UAE, Qatar and the Sultanate of Oman. Three Arab autocrats who ruled their countries for decades have been ousted from power this year, and others are in danger of being overthrown. Yet no king or emir has suffered such a fate. All the three rulers who were removed from power in the revolution were autocratic leaders of republics, while protests have taken place in countries ruled by monarchs, including Bahrain, which had widespread demonstrations last spring. And after protests in Morocco and Jordan, the kings offered up limited political changes that have, at least for now, staved off any real threat to their rule.

Tunisian Revolution and its ramification

So what started the revolutionary wave of protests and demonstrations that reshaped the history of the Arab World? On 17 December, 2010, a fruit seller named Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire after a dispute with a government official. His act triggered the Arab Revolution, which was popularly tagged as the 'Arab Spring' or 'Arab Spring and Winter' and also 'Arab Awakening'. The very notion of the detail brings focus to the kernel of such an act. The Arab world has developed a culture of government corruption, nepotism, state involvement on every stratum of society, lack of freedoms, lack of jobs, lack of hope and opportunity on every level, then why did it begin in a small Tunisian

city?

Sidi Bouzid, a town of 40,000, does not get so much of a mention in the Tunisian guidebooks. Tourists do not come to the town. In this town, on the morning of Dec. 17, 26-yr.-old Mohammed Bouazizi was selling fruit from a cart as he did every day to support his family. He did not have a license. But very few of the vendors did. A municipal official, a woman, came by and confiscated his scale. It was worth \$100 and Bouazizi knew he would have to pay a bribe to get it back. Anyone who runs a business (small or large) knows what it is like to deal with government officials who do not bend. Bouazizi, who had such an event happen to him before, tried to pay the 10-dinar fine (a day's wages, equivalent to 7USD). In response, the police woman insulted his deceased father. A humiliated Bouazizi then went to the provincial headquarters in an attempt to complain to local municipality officials. He was refused an audience. Without alerting his family, at 11:30 am and within an hour of the initial confrontation, Bouazizi returned to the headquarters, doused himself with a flammable liquid and set himself on fire.

While many of us would not commit suicide like Mohamed Bouazizi did, but would certainly be in the front of every demonstration that would demand change. And that was the exact reaction of the people who witnessed the plight, beginning what the world would see as the ransack of one empire after another, putting an end to the nonchalance of dictators, establishing what the majority saw fits its claim, democracy. Public outrage quickly grew over the incident, leading to protests. This immolation and the subsequent heavy-handed response by the police to peaceful marchers caused riots the next day in Sidi Bouzid that went largely unnoticed, although social media sites such as Facebook and YouTube featured images of police dispersing youths who attacked shop windows and damaged cars. Bouazizi was subsequently transferred to a hospital near Tunis. In an attempt to quell the unrest President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali visited Bouazizi in hospital

on 28 December 2010. Bouazizi died on 4 January 2011. The protesters had gathered outside regional government headquarters to demonstrate against the treatment of Mohamed Bouazizi. Tunisian media limited the coverage of events. Police claimed they shot the demonstrators in "self-defence." Rapper El Général, whose songs had been adopted by protesters, was arrested on 24 December but released several days later after "an enormous public reaction". In January, 95% of Tunisia's 8,000 lawyers went on strike and the teachers joined them.

The then Tunisian President, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, after 23 years of uninterrupted rule faced the slogan Ben Ali Degage (Ben Ali Get out) and was ousted. On 14 January 2011, following a month of violent protests against his rule, he was forced to flee to Saudi Arabia along with his wife Leïla Ben Ali and their three children. The interim Tunisian government asked for Interpol to issue an international arrest warrant, charging him for money laundering and drug trafficking. He and his wife were sentenced *in absentia* to 35 years in prison on 20 June 2011. This was the first time that the working class and masses of workers have overthrown a tyrant in the Arab world. In reaction to the change that took the higher ground and demanded the front pages, a Russian wrote, "Our revolution brought untold misery to tens of millions of Russians for over 70 years. With revolution now sweeping throughout the Arab world, my only worry is that at the end this change may produce a situation even worse than what it was before."

The topics that now kept the debating ground burning were, if the revolution germ is to spread, what are the repercussions or whether the so-called Jasmine Revolution will produce fundamental change or a return to a cosmetically-modified status quo ante, democracy or a newly configured authoritarianism.

Egyptian Revolution and its ramification

"You say you want a revolution."

The delicate balance of the countries in the Middle East came crashing down, starting with the revolution in Tunisia which then spread to Egypt, Yemen and Jordan. The 25th of January marked the beginning of what will be a monumental change not just for the Middle East, but for the entire world. The most intense revolt broke out in Egypt, where people were rebelling against their President, Hosni Mubarak.

The US has poured \$60 billion over three decades into Hosni Mubarak's Egypt, which judging from the poverty of the population, was mostly spent on beefing security forces (and secret security forces), and handsome payoffs in the kleptocracy of Mubarak. "Mubarak has been in power for 30 years," said sophomore Ramsey El-Hady. "He is not doing anything to help the people; he is leaving the poor in poverty and making him and his friends rich." The economy in Egypt had recently declined dramatically while unemployment rates have gone up. The people were weary of broken promises and wanted to bring Egypt into an age of democracy. The promise was not to disperse until Mubarak is overthrown and get an opportunity to have real elections. Every Arab/Muslim commentator who were not entirely in the pockets of the US-Israeli network (and even a number of them who actually were) aglow at the sight that seemed an impossibility a week ago: a mass revolt in one of the most brutal dictatorships in the Middle East.

Interestingly, this was primarily a youth revolt—a swell of anger at blighted economic prospects, grinding oppression, and a maze of glass ceilings. The social media however had a crucial role to play with a Facebook page created in honor of Khaled Said, a young man who had been brutally beaten and killed by the police. Grievances of Egyptian protesters were focused on legal and political issues including police brutality, state of emergency laws, lack of free elections and freedom of speech, uncontrollable corruption, and economic issues including high unemployment, food price inflation, and low minimum wages. The primary demands from protest organizers were the end of the Hosni Mubarak regime and the end of emergency law; freedom, justice, a responsive non-military government, and a say in the management of Egypt's resources. Strikes by labour unions added to the pressure on

government officials.

On 1 February 2011, Mubarak made another televised address and offered several concessions. He pledged not to run for another term in the elections planned for September and pledged political reforms. With his refusal to step down, the protests continued and Mubarak supporters rode on camels and horses into Tahrir Square, the focal point of the revolution, reportedly wielding swords and stick. However, on 11 February Vice President Omar Suleiman announced that Mubarak would be stepping down as president and turning power over to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces. On 24 May, Mubarak was ordered to stand trial on charges of premeditated murder of peaceful protestors and, if convicted, could face the death penalty.

Libyan Revolution and its ramification

What began in Tunisia was no longer containable, as revolution swept through the Middle East, challenging whatever government lies in its path — including that of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, or the “mad dog,” as President Ronald Reagan once called him. The history of Libya under Muammar Gaddafi spanned a period of over four decades from 1969 to 2011.

Libya's oil wealth being spread over a relatively small population gave it a higher GDP per capita than in neighboring states. Libya's GDP per capita (PPP), human development index, and literacy rate were better than in Egypt and Tunisia, whose Arab Spring revolutions preceded the outbreak of protests in Libya. Libya's corruption perception index in 2010 was 2.2, ranking 146th out of 178 countries, worse than that of Egypt (ranked 98th) and Tunisia (ranked 59th). One paper speculated that such a situation created a broader contrast between good education, high demand for democracy, and the government's practices (perceived corruption, political system, supply of democracy).

More than 16% of families had none of its members earning a stable income, while 43.3% had just one. Despite one of the highest unemployment rates in the region, there was a consistent labor shortage with over a million migrant workers present on the market. *The New York Times* pointed to Gaddafi's relatives adopting lavish lifestyles, including luxurious homes, Hollywood film investments, and private parties with American pop stars.

Protests in Libya erupted on February 15, 2011 following the arrest of Fathi Terbii, a human rights Attorney who represented the “relatives of more than 1,000 prisoners allegedly massacred by security forces in Tripoli’s Abu Salim jail in 1996,” the BBC reported. According to witnesses, more than 2,000 people demonstrated overnight in the city of Benghazi, where Terbii was arrested. Protesters have also claimed much of eastern Libya under their control. Al Jazeera reported, “140 km from the Egyptian border, there was no presence of security forces.”

“Down with the enemies, down with them everywhere; down with the puppets everywhere, the puppets are falling, the autumn leaves are falling,” Gaddafi chanted, adding, “The puppets of the USA, the puppets of Zionism are falling.”

The United Nations Security Council passed an initial resolution, freezing the assets of Gaddafi and his inner circle and restricting their travel, and referred the matter to the International Criminal Court for investigation. In June 2011, Muammar Gaddafi and his son Saif al-Islam announced that they were willing to hold elections and that Gaddafi would step aside if he lost. NATO and the rebels rejected the offer and NATO soon resumed their bombardment of Tripoli. In July 2011, Saif al-Islam condemned NATO for bombing Libyan civilians, including his family members and their children, under the false pretence that their homes were military bases. He also stated that NATO offered to drop the ICC charges against him and his father if they accept a secret deal, an offer they

rejected. He thus criticized the ICC as "a fake court" that is controlled by the NATO nations.

But the Libyan Revolution, being the most violent of the three quandaries of the recent time that resulted in revolutions, the most dramatic of events were yet to come up. The capture of, son of Libya's late leader Muammar Gaddafi, was the just an addition in the series of events that had transformed the country. In March, U.S., Britain and France launched U.N.-mandated air attack over Libya to halt advances on civilians by Gaddafi's forces. On June 27, the International Criminal Court issues arrest warrants for Gaddafi, his son Saif al-Islam Gaddafi and intelligence chief Abdullah al-Senussi on charges of crimes against humanity. On August 20, rebels launched their first attack on the nation's capital, Tripoli in coordination with NATO forces. On October 20, 2011, Gaddafi is captured and dies in custody after NTC fighters take over his hometown of Sirte.

While, the killing of Gaddafi has been criticized by political thinkers and audience all over the world as an unjust death to a doer of injustice, to the Libyans it remains the symbol of its liberation.

Arab Revolution, the world and America

The wave of revolutions sweeping the Arab world started in a forgotten town in the flatlands of Tunisia. It was an unlikely place for history to be made. But so was Tunisia itself, the smallest country in North Africa, strategically irrelevant, with no oil and not much of an army. To point out the factors that picked up an incident from a petty place as such as that and made a revolution out of it, the mention of internet must come first. The social media helped to spread cognitive dissonance by connecting the thoughts of leaders and activists to ordinary citizens rapidly expanding the network of people who became willing to take action. Brian Solis describes this process as creating the necessary "density" of

connections, writing "If unity is the effect, density is the cause."

The protests have shared techniques of civil resistance in sustained campaigns involving strikes, demonstrations, marches and rallies and used social media to organize, communicate, and raise awareness in the face of state attempts at repression and internet censorship. A major slogan of the demonstrators in the Arab world has been ash-shab yurid isqat an-nizam ("the people want to bring down the regime"). As of November 2011, governments have been overthrown in three countries. Tunisian President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali fled to Saudi Arabia on 14 January following the Tunisian protests. In Egypt, President Hosni Mubarak resigned on 11 February 2011 after 18 days of massive protests, ending his 30-year presidency. The Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi was overthrown on 23 August 2011, after the National Transitional Council (NTC) took control of Bab al-Azizia. He was killed on 20 October 2011, in his hometown of Sirte after the NTC took control of the city.

As easy as it is to frame the incidents that led to the incredible shift in the world politics, the story of the protestors who stood facing the bullet nozzles to liberate their country is hard. And as history has its way of preserving the name of the front man in the name of a revolution, the heroes might be lost in paper and body. According to several observers who have taken part in protests in Cairo's Tahrir Square, the tear gas used by police had a devastating effect on protesters. Concerns over the substance's dangerous effects and its legality had spread rapidly on the Egyptian Web. These words and the humanity it has attached to it is bound to send waves of inspiration to the world at large as ruled by brutal forces throughout centuries of unspeakable violence, terror and injustice rained on its people as common occurrences, the Arab world is jittery with the idea of embracing a seemingly never-before-possible breath of freedom—an unlikely inhale of civilized self-dignity—an instinctual yearning for the previously unattainable, foreign concept of democracy: rule of the people, by the people, for the people.

The uniqueness of the situation in Egypt was that no one saw it coming. For more than

thirty years Mubarak's regime was portrayed by both friends and foes as stable and strong. The mercilessness with which the regime has been eliminating its opposition, the vast mineral and water resources, and the military might, have all contributed to Mubarak's image as an invincible dictator, yet a reliable ally for the US and the West. While the West, particularly the US, has always voiced concern over the regime's tactics and lack of democracy, it has always dealt with it as: "Better the devil you know," and has therefore had little interest in supporting any of Mubarak's opponents.

Suddenly, to be an Arab has become a good thing. People all over the Arab world feel a sense of pride in shaking off decades of cowed passivity under dictatorships that ruled with no deference to popular wishes. And it has become respectable in the West as well. Egypt is now thought of as an exciting and progressive place; its people's expressions of solidarity are welcomed by demonstrators in Madison, Wisconsin; and its bright young activists are seen as models for a new kind of twenty-first-century mobilization. Events in the Arab world are being covered by the Western media more extensively than ever before and are being talked about positively in a fashion that is unprecedented. Before, when anything Muslim or Middle Eastern or Arab was reported on, it was almost always with a heavy negative connotation. Now, during this Arab spring, this has ceased to be the case. An area that was a byword for political stagnation is witnessing a rapid transformation that has caught the attention of the world.

It is difficult to tell how much of the misinformation published about government and politics in the Arab world is the result of malice aforethought or just plain ignorance. Either way, it is extremely difficult to winnow out the wheat from so much chaff for those in the West seeking a better informed, more objective understanding of how Arab governments are actually run. This is particularly true of Arab monarchies. There is a predisposition in the West to view them with a combination, on the one hand, of fear and contempt toward what are perceived as "oriental despotisms" on which the West is

dependent for oil; and, on the other hand, of fascination with the glamorous image evoked of Rudolph Valentino in “The Sheik of Araby.” That way it is hard to, but impeccably essential to look into the West’s reaction to the transformation in the Arab world.

Just after the streets of Tunisia and Egypt erupted, China saw a series of “Jasmine” protests—until the government stopped them cold. Its methods were subtler than they had been at Tiananmen Square, and more insidious. At a time when the revolt from Tunisia and Egypt threatens to swallow the whole of the Islamic world, Pakistan cannot be seen as an exception. After all, US Vice President Joe Biden has already hinted that “a lot (is) going on across that part of the continent, from Tunisia into -- all the way to Pakistan.” In a bid to calm the hue and cry, Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani has dismissed the possibility of protests similar to the ones taking place in other countries, saying Pakistan’s “institutions are working and democracy is functional”.

The reaction of imperialism to the revolution in Tunisia has been an example of hypocrisy. Having pontificated on the importance of democracy against nations they consider enemies, the U.S. and the EU have adopted a totally different approach with respect to Tunisia. The EU and particularly France, the former colonial power in Tunisia, did not utter a word about the events that killed more than 50 youth. Having remained silent for a long time, earlier the U.S. and then the EU detected the imminent catastrophe of the Ben Ali regime and maneuvered to differentiate itself from the old regime. Obama, a hero to many, finally “applauded” the Tunisian people, but only after the fall of Ben Ali. Today, Obama's administration stands puzzled, reluctant, and much confused about the situation in Egypt. Obama and his advisors knew very well that it is not a good idea to bet on a dictatorship once it starts falling; even the USSR could not afford to support the Romanian president, Nicolae Ceausescu, when his people took to the streets against him. Can foreign assistance bolster the Arab Spring? Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, Tamara Wittes, writes, “As we know, the Middle East and North

Africa is in the midst of transformative change. This moment is one of enormous promise for people and societies long denied full freedom, dignity, and opportunity. And it presents for us a tremendous strategic opportunity – and responsibility – to respond in constructive and thoughtful ways that can help realize that potential.”

One of the less-discussed facts about the wave of uprisings in the Middle East is that the Arab monarchies are still relatively unscathed. The regimes most seriously challenged by popular protests – in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Libya and Syria – have all been republics. This may seem odd to Europeans whose revolutions over the centuries have been mainly about overthrowing kings. The proposal to enlarge the Gulf Cooperation Council to Jordan and Morocco, made at a council summit meeting in Riyadh last month, marks a profound change in the nature of the organization as it reaches its 30th anniversary. This decision, which went practically unnoticed in the West, is all the more worthy of attention in that it is likely to usher in long-term changes in the region’s political scenario.

Some tout Libya’s revolt as a vindication of what has been called President Obama’s strategy of “leading from behind.” To others, though, Libya’s armed uprising breaks ominously from the narrative of the Arab Spring—the ideal of youth-led, largely secular and nonviolent pro-democracy movements. Rightfully skeptical of the pretext of “responsibility to protect,” critics on the left are wary that oil-hungry Western powers simply want to replace Gaddafi’s reign with another government friendly to their interests. (Not long ago, the dictator was apparently a trusted ally in War on Terror, doling out brutality in partnership with Washington).

If one watched U.S corporate media outlets during Egypt’s 18 day revolution, one will find that they hesitated to analyze the root causes of the revolution in Egypt. This isn’t conspiratorial, it is simply documented. For example, only one news anchor called the protests in Egypt a ‘revolution’ for its first 15 days. They consistently opted for the word ‘crises’ in Egypt, rather than revolution. Why the media does this is the subject of a

future article, but there is something much more important that needs to be addressed.

The media still claims they can't analyze the crises in Egypt properly because it's unlike any revolution in history (citing Mubarak's shutdown of the Internet as an example). Of course, if you do a little research, you'll find that it's exactly what we could expect from a 21st-century revolution. To put the largest country in the Arab world's poverty in perspective, just compare it to the United States. The American economy is more unequal than at any time since 1920. Its per-capita income is still almost 8 times higher than Egypt's (\$47,000). Growing inequality isn't desirable or sustainable, and it makes America look like an awfully poor democratic model for the developing world.

America is called the policeman of the world for a reason and it marks her reaction, contribution or refraining from taking any action from all that takes place in this world. So, interesting is the American perspective of the Arab revolution. As the Arab spring has blossomed into the Arab summer, there has been an effort among the members of the conservative community to align the narrative of the Bush doctrine and the resulting endeavors in Iraq and Afghanistan with that of the Arab spring. While promoting his memoir, Cheney claimed that the Bush Administration and its subsequent doctrine that it prescribed in the Middle East are to thank for the eruption of empowerment and action witnessed today. But make no mistake: neither the Administration nor the President deserve any credit for the remarkable things happening now in Northern Africa and the Middle East. The only thing that the Bush Doctrine — defined by top-down, deregulated and contracted transplantation of one-size-fits-none “democracy” — deserves credit for is the “democratic” decrepitude that is so present in the leaders and institutions of Iraq and Afghanistan today. Afghanistan's crooked and corrupt state can largely be attributed to its President, Hamid Karzai. Chosen as interim president in 2002 by the Bush Administration. The company Karzai keeps isn't comforting either. One of the most feared and powerful opium and heroin traders in the Kandahar region happened to be Karzai's brother, Ahmed Wali. A specter is haunting the Arab world - the specter of

democratic revolution. All the powers of the old Arab world have entered into a holy alliance with each other and the United States to exorcise this specter: king and sultan, emir and president, neoliberals and Zionists. The Ben Ali regime has been gone for almost a year, but many Tunisians have yet to reap the benefits of "their" revolution. In Gafsa, one of the country's poorest regions, some say mounting discontent could soon lead to a second upheaval. While Marx and Engels used similar words in 1848 in reference to European regimes and the impending communist revolutions that were defeated in the Europe of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, there is much hope in the Arab world that these words would apply more successfully to the democratic Arab uprisings.

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Libyan Liberty

Zohra Khatoun

Political Science (Hons.), Ist Year

In February 2011, following a spate of protest in countries around the region, protest broke out in several areas of Libya challenging colonel Muammar Gaddafi's 42 years of rule. The government's response to these protest turned increasingly violent, the U.N. Security Council responded by passing Resolution 1970 to impose sanctions on Gaddafi and refer the situation in Libya to the International Criminal Court (ICC). Resolution 1973 marks the first time the Security Council passed a resolution to authorize the use of force with an explicit reference to the responsibility to protect.

On 24th February 2011, politicians, former military officers, tribal leaders, academics and business men held a meeting in the eastern Bayda. The meeting was chaired by former Justice Minister Mustafa Abdul Jalil, who quit the government a few days before. The delegates discussed proposals for interim administration with many delegates asking for U.N. intervention in Libya. On 26th February, it was reported that former Justice minister Mustafa Abdul Jalil was leading the process of forming an interim body, to be based in Benghazi. The efforts to form an alternative government have been supported by the Libyan ambassador in the United States, Ali Suleiman Aujali. The Libyan deputy ambassador to the United Nations, Ibrahim Omar Al Dabashi too has stated that he supported a new alternative government.

On 23rd March, the council established an Executive Board to act as a transitional government for Libya. Mahmoud Jibril, who served as chairman of the informal "executive team" since 5th march was appointed as chairman of Executive Board stating that council now serves as the "Legislative Body" and new Executive Board will serve as the "Executive Body". Jibril led the meeting and negotiations with French president Nicholas Sarkozy, a meeting that resulted in France officially recognizing the council as

the sole representatives of the Libyan people.

A national vote on Gaddafi's plan to disband the government and give oil money directly to the people was held in 2009, where Libya's people's congresses, collectively the country's highest authority, voted to delay implementation. An estimated 20.74% of Libyan citizens were unemployed. More than 16% of families had none of its members earning a stable income, while 43.3% had just one. Despite one of the highest unemployment rates in the region, there was a consistent labor shortage with over a million migrant workers present on the market. These migrant workers formed the bulk of the refugees leaving Libya after the beginning of hostilities. Dissent was illegal under Law 75 of 1973, and in 1974, Gaddafi asserted that anyone guilty of founding a political party would be executed. With the establishment of the Jamahiriya ("state of the masses") system in 1977, he established the Revolutionary Committees as conduits for raising political consciousness, with the aim of direct political participation by all Libyans rather than a traditional party-based representative system. In 1979, some of the Revolutionary Committees had eventually evolved into self-appointed, sometimes zealous, enforcers of revolutionary orthodoxy. During the early 1980s, the Revolutionary Committees had considerable power and became a growing source of tension within the Jamihiriya, to the extent that Gaddafi sometimes criticized their effectiveness and excessive repression, until the power of the Revolutionary Committees were eventually restricted in the late 1980s. Between 13th and 16th January, upset at delays in the building of housing units and over political corruption, protesters in Bayda, Derna, Benghazi, Bani Walid and other cities broke into, and occupied, housing that the government had been building. Protesters also clashed with police in Bayda and attacked government offices. By 27th January, the government had responded to the housing unrest with a €20 billion investment fund to provide housing and development.

Aims and Objectives

The "Declaration of the founding of the Transitional National Council" states the main aims of the council are as follows:

1. Ensure the safety of the national territory and citizen's co-ordination of national efforts to liberate the rest of Libya.
2. Support the efforts of local councils to work for the restoration of normal civilian life.
3. Supervision of Military Council to ensure the achievements of the new doctrine of the Libyan People's Army in the defense of the people and to protect the borders of Libya.
4. Facilitate election of a constituent assembly to draft a new constitution for the country, be put to a popular referendum.
5. Form a transitional government to pave the holding of free election.
6. Guide the conduct of foreign policy, and the regulation of relations with other countries and international and regional organizations, and the representation of the Libyan people. In another statement clarifying the goals for a post- Gaddafi Libya , the council has committed itself an eight-point plan to hold free and fair election, draft a national constitution, form political and civil institutions, uphold intellectual and political pluralism, and citizens' in alienable human rights and the ability of free expression of their aspirations. The council also emphasized its rejection of racism, intolerance, discrimination and terrorism.

Structure and membership

The National Transitional Council is recognized as the “only legitimate body representing the people of Libya and Libyan States.” Starting off with 33 members and with proposals to increase its size further to 75 or even 125. The identities of members of the council were not disclosed. Human Rights' lawyer Hafiz Ghoga was the spokesperson for the new council. The council declared that Jalil was the head of the council. The council has 61 members, of which 40 names have been released, the identities of several members has not been publicized to protect own safety. Only 3 of

the council members are women and one lady member, Salwa Fawzi El-Deghali's identity has been publicized.

An Executive Board of 15 members was announced on 23rd March 2011 but a minor recognition removed the post of military affairs from the council and created a successor position for Defence on the Board, expanding the bureau to 16 members. The executive board was dismissed on 8th August 2011 due to administrative mistakes in investigating the assassination in July of army Commander General Abdel-Fatah-Younes. Chairman Mahmoud Jibril was not fired but was tasked with forming a new board. In October 2011, a new cabinet was unveiled which included Mahmoud Jibril as Prime Minister, Ali Tarhouni as deputy prime minister and Jalal-al-Digheily as defence minister. On 23rd October, Jibril resigned as Mustafa Abdul Jalil declared an end to the civil war and Abdurrahim El-Keib succeeded him as prime minister on 31st October.

The opposition held Benghazi, a 15 member "local committee" made up of lawyers, judges and respected local people has been formed in order to provide civic administration and public services within the city. Residents have organized to direct traffic and collect refuse. A newspaper and two local radio stations have also been established. Similar "local committees" are being formed with other cities controlled by opposition groups. The Central Bank of Benghazi act as the "monetary authority competent in monetary policies in Libya." Libyan Oil Company acts as the "supervisory authority on oil production and policies in the country."

The National Liberation army formerly known as the Free Libyan Army is the NTC's military army, with the small Free Libyan Air Force operating assets including captured and defected fighter jets and helicopters. Omar El-Hariri was the first military affairs minister the NTC named, holding that position from 23rd March 2011. By 19th May 2011, however Jalal al-Digheily had replaced El-Hariri. The Libya Contact Group of representatives of many nations announced its participants' agreement to deal with the National Transitional Council as the "legitimate governing authority in Libya." The

council has also received the backing of the Arab League and European Union. On 16th September 2011, the United Nations General Assembly voted to award and recognise Libya's NTC. On 20th September 2011, the African union officially recognized the NTC as the legitimate representative of Libya.

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Rights of Women: Saudi Arabia

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The struggle to achieve equal rights for women is often thought to have begun in the English speaking world, with the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's, "A Vindication of the Rights of Women" (1792). During the 19th Century as the male suffrage was gradually extended in many countries, women became increasingly active in the quest for their own suffrage. In 1893, however the women of New Zealand achieved suffrage at the national level, Australia followed in 1902, but American, British and Canadian women did not win the same rights until the end of World War I. Nevertheless, with the passage of time till 1960s almost all countries in different parts of the world were quick to accord women the right to vote. Even then there are some countries that have not yet universally adopted or implemented women suffrage. Thus one can convincingly state that even today the belief that 'women are inferior to men' is alive.

Women's right in Saudi Arabia are defined by Islam and tribal customs. The Arabian Peninsula is the ancestral home of patriarchal nomadic tribes, in which '*pardah*' (separation of men and women) and '*namus*' (honor) are considered central.

Women in Saudi Arabia face discrimination in many aspects of their life, most importantly the justice system. Although they make up 70% of those enrolled in the universities, but for social reasons, women make up 21% of the workforce in the country. The treatment of the women in Saudi Arabia has been referred to as "sex-segregation" and "gender apartheid". Implementation of a government resolution supporting expanded opportunities for women met resistance from within the labor ministry, from religious police and male citizenry.

In many parts of Saudi Arabia, it is believed that a women's place is only in caring for her husband and family. Women's rights are at the heart of 'calls' for reform in Saudi Arabia- calls that are challenging the kingdom's political status quo.

A transition was witnessed in their rights with the violation of the driving ban imposed on the women of the country. Many Saudis believed that allowing women the right to drive could lead to western style of openness and an erosion of traditional values. Thus it was on the 5th of May,2011 that the authorities of Saudi Arabia detained a Saudi women after she launched a campaign against the driving ban for women in the ultra conservative kingdom and posted a video of herself behind the wheel on Facebook and Youtube in order to encourage others to copy her. Manal-al-Sherif and a group of other women started a Face book page called "teach me how to drive so I can protect myself", which urges authorities to lift the driving ban. She went on a test drive in the eastern city of Khobar and later posted a video of experience.

Later it was reported that Al-Sherif was detained by the country's religious police, who are charged with ensuring the kingdom's rigid interpretation of Islamic techniques. The campaigners of the revolt focused on the importance of women driving in times of emergencies and in the case of low income families. Al-Sherif said, unlike the traditional argument in Saudi Arabia that driving exposes women to sinful temptations by allowing them to mingle with policemen and mechanics, women who can drive can avoid sexual harassment from their drivers and protect their dignity.

Women in Saudi Arabia want to live as complete citizens, without any humiliation that they are subjected to every day because of being tied to a driver. According to the supporters of this campaign, "we are not here to break the laws or demonstrate or challenge the authorities, we are here to claim one of our simplest right".

Thus on September 25, 2011, Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah issued an historic decree granting women the right to vote. This was issued,two days later a judge in the port of Jeddah issued his own verdict on women's right sentencing the 19 year old , Shayama Jastania, to ten lashes for the sin of driving a car. The contrast between the two events, embarrassing to reformers in the arch-conservative kingdom, reflected a wider disjuncture. All the citizens across the Arab world, are busy empowering themselves to

speed up the wheels of change, but in the oil rich monarchies of the Gulf, the pace remains as ponderous and reverse prone as ever.

King Abdullah, by all account promised over a decade ago that he would "open all doors for Saudi women to enable them to make their fullest contribution to the nation, which is in great need of them", yet to this day Saudi women cannot work in most sectors. In 1961, the first elementary school for girls was opened ushering in an age of hope that women would be educated, would work and enjoy equal status. Fifty years later the promise is yet to be realized.

Based on such record, the promises of voting in 4 years carry little weight. If the king was serious, the change could be made much sooner. Moreover, how can a woman stand in the municipal elections and campaign when it remains illegal for Saudi women to display their faces in public? under strict Wahabian rules, they must cover their faces in public, as mentioned earlier. Thus the nominal participation of women in elections is a cosmetic change when Saudi women are still segregated in public from men, cannot travel without male chaperons inside or outside of the country, cannot inherit an equal rate to men, are not allowed to drive and remain forbidden from pursuing most occupations.

Voting right must come within a fuller and most urgent package of reform in Saudi Arabia: changing Saudi male and clerical attitudes toward women help the kingdom shift its approach toward scripture from liberalism and rigidity to pluralism and depth. This shift not only helps advance the status of Saudi Arabia's standing in the modern world, but it will also help heal the country's many ailments, including intolerance and extremism.

Yet while the discussion to give women, the right to vote came after months of protest, the same consideration was not granted to female drivers. Saudi Arabia needs to go much further. The whole system of women's subordination to women needs to be dismantled. Allowing the women to vote in council elections is well and good, but if they are still going to face being flogged for trying to exercise their right to freedom of movement then the King's much trumpeted "reform" actually will amount to very little.

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South Sudan: A New Beginning or Future Unsure

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Sudan used to be the largest country in Africa. It enclosed one million square miles and twenty-seven million people. Sudan's furthest boundaries encompassed Africa's two cultural regions: the Islamic north and the Christian south. The conflict in Sudan had varied faces. It was known by different names, sometimes the 'North-South' conflict, or 'the Darfur conflict' or an 'Arab-African' conflict. The reality in Sudan went much beyond this, rather is deeply complex, with several isolated and overlapping conflicts that confuse common perceptions. Beneath that, there are numerous tribal differences, and bitter oil related conflicts. This complicates the situation further. Such complexities make it almost impossible for outsiders to fully understand the core problems lying within the main problem. Some factions of scholars fear that the conflicts in Sudan have the potential to trigger a regional war, drawing in neighboring countries.

The declaration issued on July 9, 2011, splitting northern and southern Sudan occurred due to the tightening of grip by the Islamist regime over the entire Sudanese population, irrespective of cultural as well as ethno-racial considerations. The first Sudanese Civil War (1955-1972) was a result of clash between the northern and southern regions of Sudan, where the latter demanded more regional autonomy and more representation. The merging of the two separate areas into a single administrative region by the British government in 1946 without consulting with the southerners triggered the whole issue of conflict where the southerners feared being subjugated by the political powers of the larger northerners. As a result half a million people died during these 17 years of tragic war. The 1972 peace agreements failed to put an end to the conflict. The Government of Khartoum clearly intended to exploit the south's natural resources at any cost. This was

followed by the Second Sudanese Civil War (1983 to 2005), after not-so-peaceful years of ceasefire. By 1994, a significant grassroots peace movement began to emerge in the south. In 1996, several southern rebel factions signed a peace charter with the government of Sudan. The charter while never approved by the Southern Sudan Liberation Movement (SPLM) became the basis for subsequent peace talks. Thus, popular involvement, as well as popular will of the southerners was completely ignored. Since inception, the Northern leaders backed away from creating a federal government that would give the south substantial autonomy. In exchange for ending the conflict between the two regions, South Sudan was granted a single administrative region with various defined powers, through the Addis Ababa Agreement in the year 1972.

Different people cite different issues of relevance to highlight the root cause of the conflict. Some say that the conflict is a result of racism as the southerners mostly follow Christianity and the northern Sudanese are Arabic Muslims. The most serious consequence of the 1984 declaration of Sharia law is that it transformed the civil war into a jihad, throwing the full weight of northern religious passion and identity behind the political struggle to keep the people and resources of the south under tight northern control. But scholars like Douglas Johnson blame it on exploitative governance of the northern elites based on Khartoum. Further, the oil fields found only in the south are seen as another significant cause for the conflict between the two regions. About 70% of Sudan's export earnings are based on oil revenues.

After decades of conflict, On Jan 9th, 2011, two referendums were issued, one for the South Sudanese and the other for the people residing in the border area called Abyei, which is a conflict affected area. This marked the end of the 22 years of continuous life sucking war between North and South Sudanese. The final decision on the creation of the state was taken in a referendum where interestingly, 98.83% of the voters voted for the establishment of an independent state. In advance of the referendums, U.S. diplomats had worked to ensure the voting proceeds peacefully and that the Sudanese government,

faced with the prospect of losing its oil-rich southern territory, accepted what was widely expected to be a southern vote for independence. According to Jon Temin, Sudan program officer at the U.S. Institute for Peace, there are limited amount of leverage the U.S. government has available in Sudan. He explains that the referendums shall not be a permanent solution to other issues such as Darfur. For Darfuri diasporas, the shift in international attention away from their homeland is frustrating. They believe that this referendum will bring nothing new or positive for them. Rather, they believe, that the issue has successfully shifted the attention of the international community from the actual causes of the problems. Earlier too, Radio Dabanga broadcasts from Darfur in recent months paint a disturbing picture, with reports of civilians fleeing the government's aerial bombardments in the Jebel Marra area; the massacre of at least 49 civilians at a market in Tabra, North Darfur; government restriction of aid agencies' access to Kalma, one of the largest displacement camps in Darfur; government obstruction of UNICEF reporting on child malnutrition rates in Darfur; continued sexual violence and fatal clashes by Arab fighters. The Radio Dabanga is usually alone in issuing such reports about the current status of the Darfur. The lack of information coming out of Darfur is not only due to the Sudanese government's role in the restrictions on the media, but also a result of a general reduction in reporting by all of the external actors left in Darfur. Jehanne Henry, Sudan researcher at Human Rights Watch says that the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs stopped issuing public reports on Darfur in November 2009. In March 2004, Mukesh Kapali, the outgoing United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Sudan called Darfur, the "world's greatest humanitarian crisis." Thus, the issue of not being able to be heard is not new to the south Sudanese in particular. It has happened before, now no less.

South Sudan, Africa's 54th state is at the bottom of the developing world. While its oil resources are promised, there are disputes with North Sudan over how to share the oil revenues. Further, there are disputes about certain regions such as Abyei and especially over oil rich South Kordofan, bordering the new nation. This casts shadows over the

future of South Sudan. Most people live on less than \$1 a day. More than 10 % of children do not reach the age of 5. Some 75 percent of adults cannot read. An estimated 2 million people are believed to have died in the fighting or as a result of conflict-induced famine, 0.5 million persons are believed to have exiled to Kenya, Ethiopia and Uganda, and more than 5 million people have internally and externally displaced. Both Sudanese Government forces and the rebel Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) stand accused of serious human rights violations. One of the biggest problems of South Sudan includes inefficient healthcare system. 75% of the inhabitants of South Sudan have no access to basic healthcare concerns mainly for women and children. Globally, South Sudan has the highest rate of mortality among women and children. Another challenge includes huge deficiencies in education. The education system in South Sudan crashed between 1985 and 1990 due to the fact that both the teachers and the students were recruited for military purposes. It is estimated that only 30% of the children that should go to school attend lessons and that only 0.3% of those who attend the lessons finish eight classes of the primary school. Also, the migration of the people remains a problem in South Sudan. The referendum held in January 2011 resulted in the comeback of the over 300 thousand refugees who still suffer from economic and social problems and from no acceptance of local communities. Moreover, since the beginning of 2011, the conflicts between the tribes have given rise to the resettlement of over 200 thousand people. At present, the whole central area located between the northern and southern border of the country, show an alarming level of food deficiency between June and September, i.e. due to the rainy season. There is a desperate need for water and sanitary infrastructure as well, where 80% of the inhabitants have no proper toilets. There is a constant fear in addition, where it is felt that the country might plunge into war with the north unless the sides can settle disputes over the Abyei region and how to share oil revenue. The government of South Sudan has suffered from the falling price of oil, which means that almost their only source of revenue has dropped by about half over the past year. Money for the new roads, hospitals and schools has been replenished. Corruption has become an open secret in South Sudan. For example, the multi-donor trust fund which has drawn contributions

from a number of international bodies and states have only given out 10% of the possible funds intended to benefit the new state. Everyone seems to know about the government officials' houses in foreign countries or in other African capitals. Revenues have been siphoned off and channeled into personal accounts of some of the members of the ruling elite. The constant clashes between the tribal groups, even when the international NGOs have tried to revive the old arbitration systems, could not be stopped. None of the problems stated above bodes well for a peaceful national election, supposed to be the first time for four decades that the country has voted as one.

Now, it is upon the government to help better the living conditions in South Sudan today by providing or at least creating the atmosphere for development, inviting investors, creating more jobs, building health facilities, providing the people especially those living in the rural areas access to good drinking water, etc. it is not going to be easy for the new republic, but with focus and dedication, the republic of South Sudan has all it takes to be one of the greatest nations on earth. In 2010, over 155,000 children were provided quality education in schools supported by "Save the Children", up 88% from 2009, as reported. These organizations should receive full support from the Government of South Sudan as they have been able to reunite 150 children who were separated by conflict from their families, including some who were forced to be child soldier. Washington gave Juba \$300 million for education and housing and is promising more. International assistance should go forward only if South Sudan works constructively with Khartoum to bring stability to both countries. To develop the present state of matters in South Sudan, executive leadership should be strengthened and enhanced. Reforms on security sectors as well as rule of the land should be made to change the present situation of the area. Public administration should be given more importance. UNDP has helped South Sudan by sending 200 officials from neighboring countries to help develop the skills of the South's civil servants. According to valuable sources, road building has already been incorporated under the new state welfare programs in East Equatoria, Lakes, etc in the South. The International Development Association could grant more support to the

nation, if it is willing to co-operate and accept the help and work accordingly for the welfare of the nation. The Republic of Sudan should first solve problems related to the affected areas of Darfur, Blue Nile or South Kordofan to build a stable nation and work toward development. Israel's premier and president pledged their support for the fighting state of South Sudan in talks with visiting President Salva Kiir. So far this year, more than 1200 illegal migrants have sneaked across the Egyptian borders into southern Israel, the vast majority of them the economic migrants from Africa, prompting Israel to ramp up measures to stop the flow. On January 3, 2012, South Sudan has launched official passports and identity cards for the first time since its independence in July. Recently, on January 5, 2012, the Department Of Foreign Affairs (DFA) South Sudan in Africa and Bahrain has included South Sudan in the Middle East list of countries being monitored.

Thus, even when there are bright hopes for the future, the uncertainties weigh heavy on them. It is too early to comment on a sure note on the doomed future of the newest country in the block. However, its future definitely rests on a lot of hard work both in the civil, as well as political front. It is yet to be seen whether, South Sudan, is successfully able to shove away the shadows of its dark past and gear up to make the best of its newfound liberty. We are here, to wait and watch.

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Winds of Change: Occupy Wall Street

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The year 2011 has been the year of discontent, protests, upsurge and transition from a stagnant socio-political economic condition that has been prevailing in most of the countries across the world. Such a discontent also surfaced in the minds of the people of United States of America when one of the world's strongest economies has been adversely affected by debt crisis. The discontent gradually took the shape of a protest movement where the people were yearning for a transition compatible with their lives.

The 'economic crisis' or the 'sub-prime mortgage crisis' or 'the debt crisis' of 2008 in USA, which has its roots in the post world war II era, aggravated the disparity of income between rich and poor. The growing discontent soon took the shape of a protest movement in the New York's financial district- Wall Street, where around two thousand people gathered and turned Zuccoti Park into their temporary home which they addressed as "Liberty Square". The protest movement was captured in the slogan- "WE ARE THE 99%" which referred to the growing income and wealth inequality in U.S. The American Dream, the national ethos of the United States of America in which freedom included the promise of prosperity and success, the dream was nowhere close to the reality which was talking about "OCCUPY WALL STREET". There were no tanks, no guns but the movement got as much attention as the Arab Spring which had gripped the Middle East. The tyrant being protested against was the 1%- the 1% which controls 40% of the wealth in the country and has seen their income rise by 18% in the last decade. On analyzing the distribution of income in USA the figures clearly show the disparity between the 1% and 99%.[1] The top 1 percent of income earners have more than doubled their income over the last thirty years according to a Congressional Budget Office (CBO) report. The

was released just as concerns of the Occupy Wall Street movement were beginning to enter the national political debate.

It was the "Culture Jammers HQ" at Adbusters which issued a call to action: Occupy Wall Street! The goal stated was to gather 20,000 people to Wall Street, in New York, on September 17, 2011, beginning a popular occupation of that space for two months and more. This people-powered movement began in Zuccoti Park since it was private property and police could not legally force protesters to leave without being requested to do so by the property owner. New York's Wall Street district soon turned into the hotbed for the protest.

By September 28th 2011 the Wall Street movement gained a lot of support bases from the local unions such as Transport Workers of Union, American Federation of Teachers and Pilots. Even many students and immigrants such as African American Church Leaders, Transgender Liberation Activist and countless other oppressed section of the society who were struggling to improve their living condition joined in the protest movement. Soon the movement spread over the continent even the protestors in San Francisco occupied their financial district. The protest survived for a long time in most of the big cities and rural towns. The movement later in October included protestor's march from Forley Square to Liberty Square. Nearly 15,000 protestors marched to Times Square on the GLOBAL ACTION DAY. The Wall Street demonstrators also organized the first general strike since 1946; the port of Oakland was shut down. However the riot was not devoid of eviction attempt, police attacked with flash bang grenades and tear gas and eventually on November 15th 2011 the police raided the park in attempt to evacuate the protesters; this resulted in over 200 people being arrested. But this violent eviction could not strip the demonstrators of their determination, they fought back, they struggled and persevered for their attainment of perpetual livelihood.

President Barack Obama who was skeptical about this whole movement stated in one of his interview, "I think it expresses the frustrations the American people feel, that we had

the biggest financial crisis since the Great Depression". [2] Obama in his speech back in 2008 provided assurance to the American citizen regarding the reparation of the brewing glitch in the economy. But however for the last four years his endeavors could not mitigate the menace arising due to it. When on one hand congress support of Occupy Walls Street and tea party protest was growing in magnitude in 2011, the president was busy making rhetorical speeches. His actions had instigated a lot of men to harbor negative attitude towards him and his policies. House Democratic Leader Representative Nancy Pelosi said in support of the protest, "I support the message to the establishment, whether it's Wall Street or the political establishment and the rest that change has to happen. We cannot continue in a way (that) is not relevant to their lives." [3] Even 2012 Republican presidential candidate Ron Paul (R-TX) stated, "If they were demonstrating peacefully, and making a point, and arguing our case, and drawing attention to the Fed—I would say, 'good!'" [4] In an interview with The Washington Post, Former Democratic U.S. Senator Russ Feingold endorsed the movement on October 5 stating, "This is like the Tea Party—only it's real..." [5] The supporters of the protest are of the opinion that the 1% or the elitist section of the society needs to be stripped of their privileges and benefits and that they are deserve to be exposed to higher taxation.

The Occupy Wall Street protest movement has adversely affected the infrastructure of the financial district of New York City. It led to the shutdown of the K Street in Washington which was the home of the Wall Street lobbyist who controlled the politicians. Nonviolent blockades and other actions occurred at ports in Long Beach, San Diego, Oakland, Portland, Seattle, Vancouver, Anchorage, and in many other ports. On Dec. 17th 2011, after 2months of the initial protest movement OWS attempted to re-occupy a new home in Duarte Square, an empty lot in Manhattan owned by one of these churches -- Trinity Church on Wall Street. Thousands showed up in solidarity, and the protestors received tremendous support from religious leaders.

This is not the end of the struggle of the middle class American which constitutes the 99% of the population. The demonstration under the banner of occupy Wall Street

resonates the depleting condition of the many people in America. It shows the how a capitalist society metes out economic injustice and aggravates political grievances. As protests spread from Lower Manhattan to cities and towns across the country, they made clear that indignation against corporate greed and economic inequality is real and deep. The OWS protest movement does not only cast light on the quarrels between the republican and democrats and the falling fortunes of Obama administration, it also manifests the profoundness of the global economic crisis which is slowly engulfing the powerful economies of the world such as USA and Europe. The crisis not only founds its way into the lives of the people, but also created a deep hole in the political system of the countries. The leaders incapable of wrestling with the debt loads have to face a series of challenging protests.

Neil Ferguson a promising economist in his article “Dominoes of Doom” showed concern regarding the falling economy of USA, Europe and even China, which is soon expected to join the club of countries in political stalemate. He even predicted a historic power shift in the world where by 2020 “India and Russia will have joined China and Brazil in G7 ranks as the biggest economies in the world based on total GDP output” [6] along with USA and Germany but leaving Britain and France far behind. All these are considered as the long term effect of the global crisis.

The global crisis not only challenges the world’s strongest economies but also challenges the default ideology of liberal democracy, which has been adopted by most of the countries. Will Liberalism be able to wrestle with the challenges resulting in the synthesis of a new modified version of it, like it did after the Great Depression of 1929 or will there be an application of a complete different version of democratic ideology, is yet to be seen in the most apprehensive year of 2012.

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ECONOMIC MELTDOWN IN INDIA AND THE US

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Perhaps never before in recent history, has any economic development been so talked about as the ongoing '**economic meltdown**'. As it is clear no one person or institution ever understands the world economic network and functioning completely. Naturally, the fault could not be detected until the symptoms proved beyond repair. The sudden collapse of global finance giants like Lehman Brothers, AIG and battering of numerous other behemoths like Citi Corp triggered the collapse of the stock capital, affecting all US financial institutions, the effect spreading to European and Asian markets leading to worldwide credit crunch or lack of capital for daily operations, loans and expansions across all sectors and all markets. This present situation – of substantial loss of stock, money, shares being traded very low in all stock exchanges, high rates for borrowing money, and low productivity due to low demand is termed 'economic meltdown'.

How it started?

Actively supported by the government, large banks led by Citi Corp started encouraging the lower middle/lower class to seek loans to 'own a house' in America. While the banks wanted to cash in on the booming real estate market, the less affluent were lured by the idea of having their own houses. Since the boom in real estate appeared real and actually gave high returns, the banks forayed into lending to those incapable of repayment – the poor and the students. Loans to this category were known as NINJA loans or No Income No Jobs or Assets Loan. It was assumed, and here lies the 'core' of the storm the house shall always be worth more than the defaulted amount and therefore the banks would always yield profits – even in the 'default' case. As stated above, the US government

actively encouraged this arrangement as suited its welfare agenda of 'house for all'. Institutions like Fannie Mae and Freddie Ma, which gave unlimited mortgage based loans to individuals were supported by it. Since, this model appeared to yield high returns in less time, hedge funds started operations. The advent of huge and easy money for house loans made loan seeking very popular among the NINJA awardees. Till 2006 and early 2007, all gained. The poor had houses; the hedge funds went for a kill. The banks made sedate profits and the US was more socialist now, comfortable in the idea that in US, all will have a house of their own.

House owners who had no income had to default one day. This happened in 2007. Then this became a trend and suddenly hedge funds, which cannot tolerate losses for long, started withdrawing. The banks, which had given loans many times more than they should, couldn't do much to stop the fight out of funds. Since, the realty sector was earlier booming, investors had put in major capital in realty stocks plummeted, the realty sector no longer commanded premium. The worst point came when the houses themselves lost premium and were now worthless than the loans forwarded. This meant all loans ever forwarded were loss making. The banks themselves had taken loans to forward loans to retailers. As a result, in a free fall, all realty stocks crashed.

Role of investment banks (i-banks), hedge funds and HNI money

Generally, a bank has substantial 'liquid cash base' on the basis of individual and corporate deposits. This is safe and has continuous supply of cash which forms the base capital of all banking operations. Investment banks like Lehman Brothers, Goldman Sachs and JP Morgan are not the usual individual 'account holds type' of banks. They earn as returns on the investments. They assess and predict the profitability of a project, invest a huge amount and earn profits as returns. Hedge funds made capital or money suitable for investing in high-risk high-return projects. While the i-banks and hedge funds made the mortgage market huge, the losses too were vast. And since the same companies

also invest in other global projects, the crisis spread like wildfire. As the markets crashed, all investors who would have funded other equity projects, infrastructure works, construction activities, export oriented manufacturing across the globe went bust; all their projects collapsed.

Since the investor's money was completely wiped out, no other stock found purchasers, leading to all round loss across US exchanges. Since all major world companies had invested in US exchanges, all these companies lost hugely. There was heavy selling and no buying across all exchanges leading to collapse of the system. Short selling further added to the panic. Additionally, no money is now available to any new activity. In London, inter-bank loan rate was trading at unrealistically high levels. This was because no bank knew the level of losses of other banks and as reluctant to give loans to other banks. The distrust as complete. It was clear, just as in stampede, where all near the point of origin generally die, all major forwarding institutions were paralysed.

Immediate Impact

It is said that this crisis has wiped out 30% of bank assets in US. Lehman brothers were trading 30 times more than they should have. Citi Corp losses are in billions of dollars. Washington Mutual, Wachovia, Merrill Lynch, Goldman Sachs etc. are big names that orchestrated the world economy. Some of these company's total assets are higher than the GDP of many countries. Citi Bank's total assets equal a whopping \$2tn. Lehman Brothers' assets are pegged at \$300bn plus. They predicted, financed and rated future beneficial projects and were of that the core of all global loans. As they plunged same-day-same time, the world followed suit.

Long- term Impact

Capital for future projects are based on predicted future profitability of the project. In the present situation, investors will take the following considerations into account-

- a. There is no guarantee of increase in purchasing power as no new jobs are foreseen.
- b. Projects might suffer due to credit crunch, as banks have no excess money. Therefore the project might suffer delays and increasing cost overheads.
- c. There are little prospects for the share of the company rise in near future.
- d. No one knows when the global recession is likely to end.

Impact in India

The 'meltdown impact' on India has been moderate to heavy based on the sector/area. There is no uniform assessment across all sectors of our economy. The top ten Indian Companies have lost over 3 lakh crore rupees through stock capital losses, as of October 2008.

Broadly we must analyze the following activities-

1. Bank operations: Most affected. While e form interest on our saving or current deposits, banks themselves earn through speculation, futures trading and further investment. In the absence of these options, as of now, not much capital is available with the banks to grow. Though individual money is safe under government's strict regulation, banks are unlikely to offer easy money to individuals, companies and other banks leading to slack in manufacturing and trade. It is largely speculated that the ICICI bank has been particularly affected by the crisis owing to its heavy exposure to the world derivative market. As a result of this rumor, no bank was willing to supply credit to this bank, furthering its woes.
2. Sectors affected: Banks and all other financial institutions, real estate, construction, BPO, Aviation and Hospitality were seriously affected.

3. Job Market: projected 20% job cuts. Fresh hiring is negligible. Bonuses affected, most affected are IT, Finance, Banking, BPO, Real Estate and Construction. Some leading corporations like Tata Motors have temporarily closed down some of its plants to prevent the piling up of the inventory or previously produced unsold goods and material.
4. Not yet impacted: FMCG, Pharma, and Media
5. Stock Exchange: Plunged from a high of 21K Jan '08 to 6K by Oct '08. This is mainly because of global cues indicating slack future economic activity and withdrawal of foreign money by parent companies themselves affected by the losses.
6. Slack in demand of Indian goods leading to decrease in export volumes. This means no demands and therefore no work for Export Oriented Units.
7. Lack of tourist footfalls.
8. Decreasing business trips in India is already leading to slower growth in high-end luxury hospitality sector.
9. Slack demand for Indian Professionals in the US.
10. NRIs across the globe and particularly in the US may send lesser remittance back to India.
11. Possible job cuts as there could be delay in new international projects because of less economic activity in sensitive sectors like aviation.
12. Owing to fluctuations in dollar trade, the government leverage in regulating currency demand supply may be restricted.
13. Government has admitted to slow down in economic activity.

The government's reaction

The US government has meanwhile made available \$700bn to the ailing financial behemoths and for the general resurrection of the recessionary US economy. The US has

provided money to the banks to ease pressure on liquidity demands and other such purposes, subtly arranging and moving away from speculation based trading. Likewise the two major surviving investment banks (Goldman Sachs and JP Morgan Chase) have restructured themselves to regular banks. The government is keeping a close watch on all major economic activities and has banned short selling in the stocks for now. It bailed out mortgage banks Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac; bought majority stakes in AIG to make it government aided and helped in all bailouts and mergers.

India's reserve bank and the banker's bank, the RBI has made available more than a lakh crore rupees since the crisis to banks, by allowing them to keep less cash with the RBI. It is also encouraging banks to lend easy money to other banks by restricting call money market. The RBI is also easing off restrictions on stock trading through Participatory Notes, to infuse more foreign exchange.

In the long-term the government may look into banking reforms, liberalize foreign direct investment norms, further de-control industry and generally boost trade and investment.

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European Crisis

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Five years after the credit crisis began, Western economies are confronting the prospect of a lost decade of growth, and international diplomats are warning the damage could get even worse if Europe allows its sovereign debt crisis to fester much longer. The crisis in the euro area is turning into a panic and dragging the zone into recession. The risk that the currency disintegrates within weeks is alarmingly high. Month by month, the crisis in the euro area has crept from the vulnerable periphery of the currency zone towards its core, helped by denial, misdiagnosis and procrastination by the euro-zone's policymakers. Worse, there are signs that the euro zone's economy is heading for recession, Industrial orders fell by 6.4% in September, the steepest decline since the dark days of December 2008. The euro zone's sovereign debt crisis represents a huge risk to the world's economic health. G20 officials also say Europe must double the size of its rescue fund to \$1 trillion as a crucial step to stabilize financial markets and prevent the euro-zone crisis from spreading. The World Bank already sees the damage taking hold as European banks pull back their lending to emerging economies. It slashed its growth forecast more than one percentage point to 2.5 per cent for 2012, a pace not seen since 2008 when the world was last in a global recession. The possibility also looms that one or more countries will pull out of the euro zone -- the 17-nation bloc that use the euro currency, which has been around since 1999. Should any of the euro zone nations drop out of this group, it could lead to a rash of bank failures in Europe, and possibly in the United States as well. The crisis in Europe could end up affecting the U.S. in some very direct ways. American banks have billions of dollars at risk in European banks. And

while that's actually a relatively small fraction of U.S. banks' holdings, the indirect damage could be greater: U.S. business owners could be facing a credit crunch if overseas banks topple. In Europe, the picture looks equally bleak when compared to US, as the decline has been similar, 0.6 per cent drop against a 1.8 per cent pre-recession rate. The United Kingdom may be sliding into recession. It releases its Q4 GDP data and it is expected to show the economy shrank by 0.1 per cent after growing 0.6 per cent in Q3. The Royal Bank of Canada expects the Bank of England to expand its asset purchases by 50 billion pounds sterling in February to give the economy further help. The services index is seen remaining just below the 50 mark, which separates growth from shrinkage, little changed from the prior month. "The seeming inability of euro zone policymakers to get on top of the region's sovereign debt crisis is threatening to exact a toll on economic growth well beyond its peripheral economies," said Mark Cliffe, chief economist of ING Group. The collapse of Lehman Brothers in September 2008 can be also said to have triggered an economic and financial crisis that swept across the globe. While the recession of the late 2000 began in the United States, the crisis spread to Europe rapidly and has affected much of the region with several countries already in recession as of February 2009, and most others suffering marked economic setbacks. From late 2009, fears of a sovereign debt crisis developed among investors concerning rising government debt levels across the globe together with a wave of downgrading of government debt of certain European states. The economic crisis has prompted intense and sustained action by the EU's national governments, the European Central Bank and the Commission. All have been working closely together to support growth and employment, ensure financial stability, and put in place a better governance system for the future. Countries across the continent are struggling to find ways to cope with the growing financial crisis, from the nationalization of domestic banks to multi-billion cash injections into the capital markets, Europe's politicians, regulators, and market players are trying different approaches to deal with the mounting problems. While the sovereign debt increases have been most pronounced in only a few euro zone countries, they have become a perceived problem for

the area as a whole.

Causes- a blueprint

Robert Skidelsky wrote that it was excessive lending by banks, not deficit spending that generated this crisis. Moreover government's mounting debts are a response to the economic downturn as spending rises and tax revenues fall. However, the European sovereign debt crisis has been created by a combination of complex factors such as:

- The globalization of finance.
- A number of "appalled economists" are in the view that rising debt levels of European countries were caused by excess government spending, easy credit conditions during 2002-2008 that encouraged high-risk lending and borrowing practices.
- The root cause of the crisis is assumed to be the imbalance on the balance of payments.
- Real-estate bubbles that have since burst, have resulted in slow growth economic conditions 2008 and after.
- Fiscal policy choices related to government revenues, expenses and approaches used by nations to bailout troubled banking industries and private bondholders, assuming private debt burdens or socializing losses.
- Monetary policy inflexibility- Since Euro zone countries are not able to conduct their own monetary policy, they have a higher default risk than countries that can. In addition, when a country "prints money" it devalues its currency relative to its trading partners, which makes its exports cheaper, thereby increasing GDP and tax revenue while reducing its trade deficit.

- Contributing to lack of information about the risk of European sovereign debt was conflict of interest by banks that were earning substantial sums underwriting the bonds. The loss of confidence is marked by rising sovereign CDS prices, indicating market expectations about countries' creditworthiness.

The crisis begins with the significant increase in savings available for investment during 2000-2007. During this time, the global pool of fixed income securities increased from approximately \$36 trillion in 2000 to \$70 trillion by 2007. This "Giant Pool of Money" increased as savings from high-growth developing nations entered global capital markets. Investors searching for higher yields than those offered by U.S. Treasury bonds sought alternatives globally. The temptation offered by this readily available savings overwhelmed the policy and regulatory control mechanisms in country after country as global fixed income investors searched for yield, generating bubble after bubble across the globe. While these bubbles have burst causing asset prices (e.g., housing and commercial property) to decline, the liabilities owed to global investors remain at full price, generating questions regarding the solvency of governments and their banking systems. How each European country involved in this crisis borrowed and invested the money varies. The interconnection in the global financial system means that if one nation defaults on its sovereign debt or enters into recession that places some of the external private debt at risk as well, the banking systems of creditor nations face losses. For example, in October 2011 Italian borrowers owed French banks \$366 billion (net). Should Italy be unable to finance itself, the French banking system and economy could come under significant pressure, which in turn would affect France's creditors and so on, and this is referred to as **financial contagion**.

Evolution of the crisis

In the first weeks of 2010, there was renewed anxiety about excessive national debt. Frightened investors demanded higher interest rates from several governments with

higher debt levels or deficits. This in turn makes it difficult for governments to finance further budget deficits and service existing high debt levels. Elected officials have focused on austerity measures (e.g., higher taxes and lower expenses) which have contributed to social unrest and significant debate among economists, many of whom advocate greater deficits when economies are struggling. Especially in countries where government budget deficits and sovereign debts have increased sharply, a crisis of confidence has emerged with the widening of bond yield spreads and risk insurance on CDS between these countries and other EU member states.

Countries facing insolvency- an analysis

One of the central concerns prior to the bailout was that the crisis could spread to several other countries. The crisis has reduced confidence in other European economies as well. According to the UK Financial Policy Committee "Market concerns remain over fiscal positions in a number of Euro area countries and the potential for contagion to banking systems." Besides Ireland, with a government deficit in 2010 of 32.4% of GDP, and Portugal at 9.1%, other countries such as Spain with 9.2% are also at risk. From strikes in Italy to bailouts in Ireland, European countries' finances are seen in tatters as they face the headwinds of recession. Some of the countries struggling with bankruptcy or those who are on the verge of becoming insolvent are- **Belgium**- In 2010, Belgium's public debt was 100% of its GDP, was the third highest in the euro zone after Greece and Italy and there were doubts about the financial stability of the banks, following the country's major financial crisis in 2008-2009. **France**- France's public debt in 2010 was approximately U.S. \$2.1 trillion and 83% of its GDP, with a 2010 budget deficit of 7% GDP. **Germany**- the tax share index has lost 29% since the beginning of July – significantly worse than London's FTSE 100, while business confidence is tumbling at the fastest rate since the collapse of Lehman Brothers. New data showed a sharper than expected fall in industrial orders in July, especially from beyond the euro zone. **UK**- Bank

of England governor Mervyn King declared that UK is very much at risk from a domino-fall of defaults. This is because the UK has the highest gross foreign debt of any European country (€7.3 trillion; €17,580 per person). *Spain*- it has a comparatively low debt among advanced economies and it does not face a risk of default. The country's public debt relative to GDP in 2010 was only 60%, more than 20 points less than Germany, France or the US, and more than 60 points less than Italy, Ireland or Greece, Italy's deficit of 4.6 percent of GDP in 2010 was similar to Germany's at 4.3 percent and less than that of the U.K. and France. *Italy*- it even has a surplus in its primary budget, which excludes debt interest payments. However, its debt has increased to almost 120 percent of GDP (U.S. \$2.4 trillion in 2010) and economic growth was lower than the EU average for over a decade. This has led investors to view Italian bonds more and more as a risky asset. Analysts believe Italy could be the next Greece. *Greece*-As the world economy cooled in the late 2000s, Greece was hit especially hard because its main industries—shipping and tourism that were especially sensitive to changes in the business cycle. As a result, the country's debt began to pile up rapidly. In early 2010, as concerns about Greece's national debt grew, policy makers suggested that emergency bailouts might be necessary. The 2010–2011 Greek protests were series of demonstrations which sparked by plans to cut public spending and raise taxes as austerity measures in exchange for a €10 billion bail-out, aimed at solving the 2010–2011 Greek debt crisis. *Ireland*-the Irish sovereign debt crisis was not based on government over-spending, but from the state guaranteeing the six main Irish-based banks who had financed a property bubble. The economy collapsed during 2008. Unemployment rose from 4% in 2006 to 14% by 2010, while the federal budget went from a surplus in 2007 to a deficit of 32% GDP in 2010, the highest in the history of the euro zone, despite draconian austerity measures. *Portugal*- A report released in January 2011 by the Diário de Notícias and published in Portugal by Gradiva, demonstrated that in the period between the Carnation Revolution in 1974 and 2010, the democratic Portuguese Republic governments have encouraged over-expenditure and investment bubbles through unclear public-private partnerships and

funding of numerous ineffective and unnecessary external consultancy and advisory of committees and firms. The Prime Minister Sócrates's cabinet was not able to forecast or prevent this in 2005, and later it was incapable of doing anything to improve the situation when the country was on the verge of bankruptcy by 2011.

Some of the EU emergency measures taken-

European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF)-is a special purpose vehicle financed by members of the euro zone to address the European sovereign debt crisis. It was agreed by the 27 member states of the European Union on 9 May 2010, with the objective of preserving financial stability in Europe by providing financial assistance to euro zone states in economic difficulty.

European Financial Stabilization Mechanism (EFSM)-On 5 January 2011, the European Union created the European Financial Stabilization Mechanism (EFSM), an emergency funding programme reliant upon funds raised on the financial markets and guaranteed by the European Commission using the budget of the European Union as collateral.

Brussels agreement-On 26 October 2011, leaders of the 17 Euro zone countries met in Brussels and agreed on a 50% write-off of Greek sovereign debt held by banks, a fourfold increase (to about €1 trillion) in bail-out funds held under the European Financial Stability Facility, an increased mandatory level of 9% for bank capitalization within the EU and a set of commitments from Italy to take measures to reduce its national debt and also pledged was €35 billion in "credit enhancement" to mitigate losses likely to be suffered by European banks.

ECB interventions-The European Central Bank (ECB) has taken a series of measures aimed at reducing volatility in the financial markets and at improving liquidity:

- First, it began open market operations buying government and private debt securities in May 2010, reaching €211.5 billion by end of 2011, though it simultaneously absorbed the same amount of liquidity to prevent a rise in inflation.
- Second, it announced two 3-month and one 6-month full allotment of Long Term Refinancing Operations (LTRO's).
- Thirdly, it reactivated the dollar swap lines with Federal Reserve support.

Subsequently, the member banks of the European System of Central Banks started buying government debt.

European Stability Mechanism (ESM)-The European Stability Mechanism (ESM) is a permanent rescue funding programme to succeed the temporary European Financial Stability Facility and European Financial Stabilization Mechanism in July 2012. Such a mechanism serves as a "financial firewall." Instead of a default by one country rippling through the entire interconnected financial system, the firewall mechanism can ensure that downstream nations and banking systems are protected by guaranteeing some or all of their obligations. Then the single default can be managed while limiting financial contagion.

Other preventive measures include- Reform and recovery- lowering wages and taking steps to bring in more foreign capital investment, Eurobonds issued jointly by the 17 euro nations would be an effective way to tackle the financial crisis.

Conclusion

Economists associated with Modern Monetary Theory and other post-Keynesian schools condemned the design of the Euro currency system from the beginning because it ceded national monetary and economic sovereignty but lacked a central fiscal authority. Some

non-Keynesian economists, such as Luca A. Ricci of the IMF, contend the Eurozone does not fulfil the necessary criteria for an optimum currency area, though it is moving in that direction. As the debt crisis expanded beyond Greece, these economists continued to advocate more forcefully, the disbandment of the Euro zone. Whereas Jim Rogers in an interview with the BBC responded to the assertion that the euro was responsible for the crisis saying, "the world needs the euro or something like it to compete with the US dollar". But there also arose some doubts about the effectiveness of non-Keynesian policies. There has been some criticism over the austerity measures implemented by most European nations to counter this debt crisis. Some argue that an abrupt return to "non-Keynesian" financial policies is not a viable solution and predict the deflationary policies now being imposed on countries such as Greece and Italy might prolong and deepen their recessions.

Over 23 million EU workers have become unemployed as a consequence of the global economic crisis of 2007–2010, while thousands of bankers across the EU have become millionaires despite collapse or nationalization of institutions they worked for during the crisis. At the moment, it's not clear whether any of the curative measures in the works will allow Europe to avoid a major financial downturn. Some onlookers are skeptical that the euro zone nations can reach a workable deal, since the countries have a poor track record of working together on financial matters. Meanwhile, as all this is going on, troubled euro zone countries are pledging to cut back government spending to show they can be trusted - even though, this results in financial misery for the people in those countries, and will in all likelihood make it harder for Europe's economy to gain any momentum in the months to come.

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KIM JONG IL'S DEATH COULD UPSET REGIONAL ECONOMY

IN ASIA

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An impoverished nation of about 23 million people, North Korea has been among the most vexing and persistent problems in U.S. foreign policy in the post-Cold War period. The United States has never had formal diplomatic relations with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK, the official name for North Korea). Negotiations over North Korea's nuclear weapons program have consumed the past three administrations, even as some analyst anticipated a collapse of the isolated authoritarian regime in Pyongyang. North Korea has been both the recipient of billions of dollars of U.S. aid and the target of dozens of U.S. sanctions. Once considered a relic of the Cold War, the divided Korean peninsula has become an arena of more subtle strategic and economic competition among the region's powers.

U.S. interests in North Korea encompass crucial security, economic, and political concerns. Bilateral military alliances with South Korea and Japan obligate the United States to defend these allies from any attack from the North. Tens of thousands of U.S. troops occupying the largest U.S. military bases in the Pacific are stationed within proven striking range of North Korean missiles. An outbreak of conflict on the Korean peninsula or the collapse of the government in Pyongyang would have severe implications for the regional—if not global—economy. Negotiations and diplomacy surrounding North Korea's nuclear weapons program influence U.S. relations with all the major powers in the region and have become a particularly complicating factor for Sino-U.S. ties. At the center of this complicated intersection of geostrategic interests is the task of dealing with an isolated authoritarian regime, now under the additional pressure of executing a transfer of power following the death of leader Kim Jong Il. Unfettered by many of the norms that govern international diplomacy, the leadership in Pyongyang, now headed by its

dynastic “Great Successor” Kim Jong-un, is unpredictable and opaque. So little is known about the new leader that the uncertainty surrounding policymaking in Pyongyang may be more murky than it was under Kim Jong-Il. U.S. policymakers face a daunting challenge in navigating a course toward a peaceful resolution of the nuclear issue with a rogue actor. Rather than being a “traditional” communist state built on Marxist ideology and led by a vanguard party of the revolutionary elite, North Korea is a highly militarized society deeply rooted in its own traditions — which is the reason why it has not fallen, like the Soviet Union and its erstwhile satellite states, or reformed itself in a capitalist direction like China and Vietnam. The unexpected death of North Korea’s cult like leader added a layer of risk in Asia, a region that has generally been a bright spot in a slowing global economy. Underscoring that concern, stock markets in South Korea and elsewhere in Asia sank on the news that Kim Jong Il had died at age 69, ending two decades of rule marked by devastating famine at home and skirmishes with South Korea, the U.S. and other countries over North Korea’s nuclear weapons program.

With the abrupt death of the North Korean leader, Kim Jong Il, the fate of his isolated, nuclear-armed regime has dropped in the hands of his youngest son, Kim Jong-un. But the biggest enigma may be whether the younger son will be able to hold onto power in this last bastion of hard-line communism, much less prevent its impoverished economy from collapsing. Real power, therefore, will continue to rest with the 15-member National Defense Commission, of which Kim Jong Il was the chairman until his death. And the “military-first” songun policy, which was implemented by Kim Jong Il, will ensure that the country’s armed forces will remain in charge. This also makes North Korea different from other socialist states where the party controls the army. In North Korea, the military controls the party, the government, and everything else.

“I think we will be entering a period of heightened uncertainty, a possibility of more bad things happening, like another nuclear test, and those could disrupt regional markets,” said Marcus Noland, an economist and North Korea expert at the Peterson Institute for International Economics in Washington. By itself, North Korea’s closed and backward economy is too puny to matter. Based on official exchange rates, the country’s gross domestic product was estimated by

the CIA at \$28 billion in 2009, roughly the size of Bakerfield's and only about 3% of South Korea's GDP. But if North Korea's chronic food shortages and other entrenched economic problems worsen and there are signs that the country is straining under higher grain prices and the new leader has trouble consolidating power, it could touch off events creating more political and military instability. And that could upset the whole regional economy.

The increased risks in the Korean Peninsula come at a time when the global economy is relying more on Asia as the traditional powers of Europe and the U.S. struggling with high debts and unemployment. With China and India leading the way, the developing economies in Asia are projected to grow 8%, according to the latest forecast by the International Monetary Fund. That compares with 1.9% for the U.S., Europe and other advanced economies. Even that projection may be too optimistic, given the Eurozone's still-festering debt problems and a U.S. economic outlook clouded by political gridlock.

Adding to the concern, Japan's economy is still grappling with changes wrought by the March earthquake, tsunami and nuclear crisis. The country's economy grew slower than expected in the third quarter and faces a steep decline in exports to Europe.

China, the world's second-largest economy, is just as vulnerable in terms of export. Meanwhile, Beijing is struggling to deflate the nation's property bubble without derailing economic growth. The geopolitical question of stability in the Asia-Pacific region has long been a priority for the U.S., both economically and militarily. The Obama administration has made a concerted effort to solidify relations with allies such as South Korea and Japan, while sending a clear message that the U.S. intends to remain an influential party in the face of a rising China.

China has been North Korea's biggest benefactor and some analysts don't think Beijing will allow things to deteriorate so much in Pyongyang that China's self-interest in the region is threatened. Noland agrees that China has a vested interest in maintaining stability in the region.

At the same time, he said, Beijing has far less control over North Korea than many people might think. Chang Yong-Seok, senior researcher at the Institute for Peace and Unification studies at

Seoul National University, and other analyst said a change of generation might bring a re-evaluation of the north's isolation. They say that growing numbers of North Korean officials are visiting neighboring China to see the success of its three- decade embrace of market economics under an authoritarian regime.

“The new Leadership knows it will have to its mettle in the first few years,” said Mr Delvry , who visited Pyongyang in September, 2011. “Economic reform will be the single biggest challenge it faces.”

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The changing concept of secularism in India

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A significant aspect of the post-colonial structures of knowledge in the third world is a peculiar form of imperialism of categories. Under such imperialism, a conceptual domain is sometimes hegemonized by a concept produced and honed in the West, hegemonized so effectively that the original domain vanishes from our awareness. This language, whatever may have been its positive contributions to humane governance and to religious tolerance earlier, has increasingly become a cover for the complicity of the modern intellectual and the modernizing middle class of South Asia in the new form of religious violence that have entered the Asian scene. These are the forms in which the state, the media, and the ideologies of national security, development and modernity propagated by the modern intelligentsia and the middle classes play crucial roles.

By faith, we mean religion as a way of life, a tradition that is definitionally non-monolithic and operationally plural. We say, 'definitionally' because unless a religion is geographically and culturally confined to a small area, religion as a way of life has to in effect turn into a confederation of a number of ways of life, linked by a common faith having some theological space for heterogeneity. By ideology, we mean religion as a sub national, national or cross-national identifier of populations contesting for or protecting non-religious, usually political or socio-economic interests. Such religions- as-ideologies usually get identified with one or more texts which, rather than the ways of life of believers, then become the final identifiers of the pure forms of religions. The tests help anchor the ideologies in something seemingly concrete and delimited and in effect provide a set of manageable operational definitions.

The two categories are not mutually exclusive; they are like two axes on which could be plotted the state of contemporary religions. One way of explaining the difference between the two is to conceive of ideology as something that, for individuals and people who believe in it,

needs to be constantly protected and faith as something that the faithful usually expect to protect them. For a faith always includes a theory of transcendence and usually sanctions the experience of transcendence, whereas an ideology tends to bypass or fear theories and experience of transcendence, except when they could be used for secular purposes. It is religion-as-faith that prompted 200,000 Indians to declare themselves to be Mohammedan Hindus in the census of 1911. It is religion-as-ideology that prompted a significant proportion of Punjabi-speaking Hindus to declare Hindi as their mother tongue, thus underlining the differences between Sikhism and Hinduism and sowing the seeds for the creation of a new minority. Second, during the last two centuries or so, there has grown a tendency to view the older faiths of the region through the eyes of post-medieval European Christianity and its various offshoots. It is a part of the same story that in each of the dyads, the second category is set up to lose. It is also a part of the same story that, once the colonial concept of state was internalized by the societies of the region through the nationalist ideology, in turn heavily influenced by the Western theories of state and statecraft, the nascent nation-states of the region took upon themselves the same civilizing mission that the colonial states had once taken upon themselves vis-à-vis the ancient faiths of the subcontinent. Third, the idea of secularism, an import from nineteenth century Europe into South Asia, has acquired immense potency in the middle-class cultures and state sectors of South Asia, thanks to its connection with and response to religion-as-ideology. Secularism has little to say about cultures-it is definitionally ethnophobic and frequently ethnocidal, unless of course cultures and those living by cultures are willing to show total subservience to the modern nation-state and become ornaments or adjuncts to modern living-and the orthodox secularists have no clue to the way a religion can link up different faiths or ways of life according to its own configurative principles.

To such secularists, religion is an ideology in opposition to the ideology of modern statecraft and, therefore, needs to be contained. They feel even more uncomfortable with religion-as-faith claiming to have its own principles of tolerance and intolerance, for that claim denies the state and the middle-class ideologies of the state the right to be the ultimate reservoir of sanity and the ultimate arbiter among different religions and communities. The Westernized

middle classes and literati of South Asia love to see all such differences as liabilities and as resources of ethnic violence. Fourth, the imported idea of secularism has become increasingly incompatible and, as it were, uncomfortable with the somewhat fluid definitions of the self with which many South Asian cultures live.

The South Asians perceive as the more scientific Western meaning of secularism-is a hidden political hierarchy. We have spelt out this hierarchy previously elsewhere but we shall nevertheless have to restate it to make the rest of our argument. This hierarchy makes a fourfold classification of the political actors in the subcontinent.

At the top of the hierarchy are those who are believers neither in public nor in private. They are supposed to be scientific and rational, and they are expected to ultimately not only rule this society but also dominate its political culture. Jawaharlal Nehru rightfully belongs to this rung because he always made the modern Indian a little ashamed of their religious beliefs and ethnic origins, and convinced them that he himself had the courage and the rationality to neither believe in public nor in private.

On the second rung of the ladder are those who choose not to appear as believers in public despite being devout believers in private. We can think of no better example than Indira Gandhi. She was a genuine non-believer in her public life (she after all died in the hands of her own Sikh guards, rather than accept the advice of her security officers to change the guards) but in private, she was a devout Hindu who made about seventy pilgrimages.

On the third rung are those who are believers in public but do not believe in private. Some examples will explain why this category includes problematic men and women. The two illustrious examples of the genre from our part of the world are Mohammed Ali Jinnah who was an agnostic in private life but took up the cause of Islam successfully in public, and V.D. Savarkar who was an atheist in private life but declared Hinduism as his political ideology. More recently, when Bhimrao Ambedkar converted to Buddhism, he probably entered this category from the first. Such persons can sometimes be dangerous because to them religion is a political tool and a means of fighting one's own and one's community's sense of cultural inadequacy. Religion to them is not a matter of piety.

At the bottom of the hierarchy are those who are believers in both private and public. The best and the most notorious example is that of Mahatma Gandhi who openly believed both in public and private, and gave his belief spectacular play in politics. This category has its strengths and weaknesses. One may say that exactly as the category manifests its strength in someone like Gandhi, Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan, and Maulana Bhasani, it shows its weakness in others like Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran or Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale in the Punjab.

Thus, problems of ethnicity and secularization haunt today not merrily some of the capitals in the world, Washington, Bonn, Paris, and Moscow, they even haunt the country which the older South Asians have been trained to view as remarkably free from the divisiveness of ethnicity and religion. For instance, for some hundred and fifty years, Indians have been told that one of the reasons Britain dominated India and one of the reasons why Indians were colonized was that they were not secular, whereas Britain was. That was why the Indians did not know how to live together, whereas Britain was a world power, perfectly integrated and fired by the true spirit of secular nationalism. Now, we find that after three thousand years of secularism, Britain's secular nationalism is challenged by Irish, Scots and Welsh nationalism.

Some of the few reasons why secularism is considered something mythical in India are as listed: First, in the early years of Independence, when the national elite was small and a large section of it had face-to-face contacts, we could screen people entering public life, specially the upper levels of the public services and the high politics, for their commitment to secularism. Second, it has become more and more obvious to a large number of people that modernity is no longer the ideology of a small minority; it is now the organizing principle of the dominant culture of politics. Indians now sense the 'irreversibility' of secularization and they know that, even in this subcontinent, religion-as-faith is being pushed to a corner. Much of the fanaticism and violence associated with religion comes today from the sense of defeat of the believers, from their feelings of impotency, and from their free-floating anger and self-hatred while facing a world which is increasingly secular and desacralized. Third, while appealing to the believers to keep the public sphere free of religion, the modern nation-state has no means of ensuring that the ideologies of secularism, development, and nationalism themselves do not begin to act as faiths intolerant of others.

Certainly in India, the ideas of nation-building, scientific growth, security, modernization, and development have become parts of a left-handed, quasi-religious practice—a new demonology, a tantra with a built-in code of violence. In other words, to many Indians today, secularism comes as a part of a larger package consisting of a set of standardized ideological products and social processes—development, mega science, and national security being some of the most prominent among them. This package often plays the same role vis-à-vis the people of the society.

The proposition that the values derived from the secular ideology of the state would be a better guide to political action and to a less violent and richer political life (in comparison to the values derived from the religious faith) has become even more unconvincing to large parts of Indian society than it was a few decades ago. The first response—the spirit of which is difficult to capture—is to model oneself on the Western Man. The response consists of a desperate attempt to capture, within one's own self and culture, traits seen as the reasons for the West's success on the world stage. The second response to the Western Man is that of the zealot. The zealot's sole goal is to somehow defeat the Western Man at his own game, the way Japan, for instance, has done in economic affairs. This is a crude way of describing a complex response but it does convey that what passes as fundamentalism, fanaticism, or revivalism is often only another form of Westernization becoming popular among the psychologically uprooted middle classes in South Asia. Such responses of the zealot are the ultimate admission of defeat. There is however a third response that comes usually from the non-modern majority of a society, though to the globalized middle-class intellectuals, it may look like the response of a minority. This response does not keep religion separate from politics, but it does say that the traditional ways of life have, over the centuries, developed internal principles of tolerance, and these principles must have a play in contemporary politics. It is the awareness of this political process that has convinced a small but growing number of Indian political analysts that it is from non-modern India, from the traditions and principles of religious tolerance encoded in the everyday life associated with the different faiths of India, that one will have to seek clues to the renewal of Indian political culture.

The moral of the story is this: it is time to recognize that, instead of trying to build religious tolerance on the good faith of conscience of a small group of de-ethnicized, middle-

class politicians, bureaucrats, and intellectuals, a far more serious venture would be to explore the philosophy, the symbolism, and the theology of tolerance in the faiths of the citizens and hope that the state systems in South Asia may learn something about religious tolerance from everyday Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, or Sikhism rather than wish that ordinary Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists and Sikhs will learn tolerance from the various fashionable secular theories of statecraft.

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The Left Debacle

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Politics is cruel on people and parties who refuse to learn. Indeed, the CPI (M) led Left Government in West Bengal came to an end after 33 years of hegemonic rule.

Let me begin with a rear-view into the history of the CPI (M) rule in West Bengal. The CPI(M) led Left Government came into power in 1977 under the charismatic leadership of Jyoti Basu, who had been the Deputy Chief Minister under Ajoy Mukherjee's United Front Government in 1967. Consequently he handed over the reins to his protégé Buddhadeb Bhattacharya who was the party leader and the Chief Minister of West Bengal from 2000 to 2011.

It is difficult to point out what really went wrong and what led to the world's longest serving democratically elected communist government becoming so unpopular among the masses, that had been successfully reaching out to all these years. The dominant theory is, of course, that the industrialisation in Bengal backfired. People voted against the land acquisition in Singur, Nandigram and elsewhere. Not to forget Mamata Banerjee's alignment with the Congress, which was a potent force against the left coalition.

Elaborating on the change in the voting pattern of the people after 33 years, we can see that the vote in West Bengal is indeed in line with the rest of India, for progress and continuity. The people of West Bengal want to catch the bus and move forward and their voting behaviour reflected the same.

There was a swing of 8% from the Left which was enough for the Congress alliance to wrest away over half of the seats. The Left got 67 seats and 43.4% of the vote, its worst performance since 1977. Since, it is common to see the Left win this state in double digits, Trinamool

Congress and its allies beating the left by two percentage points was a remarkable victory. Trinamool Congress ended up winning 181 seats, beating the record of 16 seats won in 1984, which was a record number of seats won by a non-Left alliance in West Bengal until now. Compared to the 2004 election, Congress was able to retain 93% of the vote, Trinamool Congress was able to retain 85% of voters, while BJP lost 27% and the Left lost 12%. Overall the Trinamool-Congress alliance lost only 3% of its 2004 voters. The dissatisfaction of the state government is another reason why Trinamool Congress was able to wrest this state, since it went from 66% down to 58% in this election. Moreover, the reason for the decline of the left is mostly due to the Nandigram issue, where 48% of people from West Bengal disapproved the CPM's role.

Even though the Left managed to keep its urban vote base, it lost heavily in rural areas, which used to be its stronghold. The left also lost all social communities compared to 2004 election, except for the Adivasis, but compared to the 2006 election, it lost eight percentage points from that community. So, why vote against the Left when they were “industrialising” Bengal? Well, because they were not actually industrialising, they were posturing. TATA's left West Bengal not because Mamata was agitating, but because the Left Government did not do enough to resolve the issues. Nandigram erupted because of the arrogance that the government displayed in handling the issue. Thus, the industrialisation of West Bengal was show – time industrialisation, lot on paper but nothing on the ground. Industrialisation in West Bengal was more a Rip Van Winkle affair than an example of leadership and foresight.

The inability and refusal of the CPI(M) to read the writing on the wall and respect the voice of the people in the wake of Singur, Nandigram, Lalgarh and countless other expressions of popular protest only made it further isolated from the people and discredited in their eyes. Far from making any genuine attempt at seeking apology and rectification, the CPI(M) leadership resorted to arrogant browbeating and expressions of contempt for the people and even sexist slanders which only showed their disconnect with the glorious legacy of the Left Movement in the country.

The CPI (M) led government in West Bengal by no means amounts to a mass rejection of Left Politics and ideology, they had abandoned that years ago and begun to implement the same neo-liberal agenda it claimed to be opposing elsewhere, an agenda marked by a whole spectrum of pro-corporate policies and priorities, at the cost of people's basic rights and minimum benefits. Ironically, it was the growing rightward shift of the ruling Left in West Bengal which has brought the Right back in power. However, we must not lose sight of the fact that the phenomenal rise of the TMC in West Bengal over the last five years was propelled by the people's anger against the CPI (M) on the basic issues of land, livelihood and democracy.

By 2006 when Singur happened, we saw not only the Left Front government forcibly acquire land for the Tata's but also the CPI (M) central leadership accuse supporters of Singur agitation. When Nandigram happened and the entire democratic opinion in West Bengal and elsewhere condemned the series of massacres, the CPI (M) central leadership treated it as an anti-Left conspiracy hatched jointly by the far-right and the ultra-left. And when the Adivasis masses revolted in Lalgarh against police atrocities, the CPI (M) actively collaborated with the Centre to suppress the tribal agitation, unleashing a joint paramilitary campaign and working with Chidambaram to promote the theory and practice of Operation Green hunt.

Thus, in conclusion I think the voters in Bengal voted for hope and progress and voted against the duplicity of the CPI (M) leadership. CPI (M) unfortunately is not a party of accountability and transparency which is a requisite part of any government these days. In an age when the media is the voice of reason and the governing factor for people's thoughts, the CPI (M)'s analysis, collective decision and reflection are obsolete. It indeed becomes clear that they have run out of ideas and the West Bengal electorate has punished them for being ineffective. Thus, the people of West Bengal have voted for a change and they are experiencing it.

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COMMUNISM – Downfall or Death?

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The first Left Front government, led by Jyoti Basu, assumed office in 1977, with a resolve to provide immediate relief to the people, take the State forward on the path of development, decentralise the power structure, and thus involve people in the day-to-day work of the government. Of the 33 years it had been in power, the Left Front government was led by Jyoti Basu for over 23 years, until he stepped down in favour of Buddhadeb Bhattacharya in October 2000. That it has kept the promises and gained the people's trust is evident from the fact that the Left Front has been voted to power six successive times with massive mandates. This is a world record for an elected Left government. Effective and purposive governance, successful conduct of coalition politics, political stability that was achieved and firm adherence to secularism are widely seen as the reasons for its success. This was possible largely because of the CPI(M)'s ability to hold together the coalition which includes nine other parties. It has not been an easy task. But the CPI(M)'s experience with the United Front governments of 1967 and 1969 stood the party in good stead. This period was followed by a dark phase when the Left parties had to function in an atmosphere devoid of democratic rights, under the Congress (I) government. It was during this long period of struggle for democratic rights, civil liberty, social justice, agrarian reform and industrial resurgence that the Left Front took shape. For the past 35 years, the Left Front government has been pursuing an alternative approach to rural development planning. The approach is based on more equitable distribution of land and other productive assets in rural areas, within the limitations of the existing socio-economic structure. Although West Bengal has less than 4 per cent of the total agricultural land in the country, nearly 20 per cent of the land distributed through land reforms in India is in the State. About 60 per cent of the total land is owned by small and marginal farmers as against the national figure of 28.8 per cent. In other words, the government's efforts have created an objective situation in which agricultural

planning is done from the standpoint of the poorer working farmers.

The Causes of Debacle of the Communist Party In West Bengal:

After 35 years in power, the real problem which caused the debacle and the ouster of the Communist Party of India from West Bengal is because mostly of the following reasons

Land reform:

In the initial stage of their regime the left front paid utmost dedication to the land reform. But later on the acquiring of the land was done by the party cadres and leaders by bullying the people and by killing, kidnapping and raping the poor.

Human behaviour:

In the initial stages the left front provided the basic need for all the people. But slowly greed and power overtook their demands. They started to be arrogant towards the common man and served them only if they had parted away with some money for the local club houses.

Education system:

During their early days the Leftists established the education system and tried to educate the people about socialism, democracy, right to speech and many more things so that they can fight for their right. But later on the socialism and democracy paved way for corruption and the educators themselves started selling education for money.

Party policy:

Shifting of the policy of left front is another reason for their declination. They have shifted from socialism or class war to caste and religion war. They started showing sympathy toward the people who swayed to their tunes. In any government office including the police station one needs a letter of consent of the local left leader to get their work done.

Youth and changing society:

The left encouraged the youth to join the party with a false idea of giving them jobs. Initially they were given money to start local clubs, where they played carom, drank liquor, and played music at a very high decibel, but later on when they were not provided their jobs, these local boys became the antisocial elements of the locality.

The Degenerating Cities:

The Communist government even failed to see that the cities had already started looking haggard and dirty due to lack of development, garbage piling, unkempt roads and foot paths, water pipes burst and overflowing roads and over spilling of the refugees all over the city. The workers at the Kolkata Municipality became dysfunctional because they received salary without any work.

The Maoist factor:

The birth of the fragmented group of the CPI Maoist in the southern districts of both Midnapur, Purulia and Bankura, from the main Communist Party of India, acted like a nail in the coffin. The derailment of the Gitanjali Express, The Lalgargh massacre of the 24 policemen in west Midnapore, the killing of seven Forward Bloc supporters and such incidences was creating a terror and a fear among the local people.

Nandigram and Singur issue:

What happened in Nandigram and Singur is the last nail in the coffin of the left front. The killing of the innocent people and acquiring land by force also infuriated the local villagers. They were not compensated and were butchered by the CPI(M) cadres mercilessly.

Lack of Development in private sector:

Development is another issue which diminished the chance of left front to retain the power. Communist Party of West Bengal lacked introspection and insight to the problems which the

common people faced. The absence of private sector makes it impossible to increase the employment. Huge unemployment is a major factor for the declination of communism.

Lack of leadership:

The Left Front Government of the West Bengal failed to produce a new generation of leaders, who could carry out the agenda.

During the success of the 1977 elections, cheered by the crowd, Left Front leaders, including former Chief Minister late Jyoti Basu, his successor Buddhadeb Bhattacharya, CPI(M) State secretary Anil Biswas and Forward Bloc general secretary Ashok Ghosh, declared that West Bengal had created history in coalition politics. "It is the unity forged by a shared ideology that has been the strength of the Left Front. This unity is now unbreakable," said Biman Bose, Chairman of the Left Front and a Polit Bureau member of the CPI(M). But such was the irony of time, that this consolidation of "unbreakable" power, eventually dismantled in the May, 2011 elections when the Mamta Banerjee led Trinamool Congress came to power with a whopping 184 seats out of 294, leaving the Left Government with only 67 seats.

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Transition in West Bengal

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Political Science (Hons.), IInd year

Jyoti Basu's death after a 70 year long career in politics marks the end of a journey that spanned four different transitions. There was first, the great epochal change from the stifled and anaemic politics of the colonial period, with its competition based on a limited electorate to Independence and the early phase of political rule setting and institution building, to the crystallisation of vigorous political contestations based on ideological and identity polarisation and popular participation within a democratic framework. Joyti Basu was part of each of these phases.

A second transition involved the rise and expansion of the communist parties through the freedom struggle and peasant and working class movement and the lefts' embrace of parliamentary politics. This has created a distinct and important pole or space within the Indian political spectrum that cannot be ignored.

Equally important was the third transition. The Left won state level elections beginning with Kerala in 1957, and then in West Bengal and Tripura and acquired a significant legislative presence in some other states-although regrettably not in the Hindi belt (except, until recently in Bihar).By the late 1980s' the left had increased its national political weight to a point where it could influence government formation and policy making.

The success of the Indian Lefts' social coalition-building for parliamentary elections, coupled with its mass base allowed it to grow even while communism suffered a near collapse in much of the world after the end of the cold war and disintegration of Soviet Union. This was, of course a remarkable achievement. It became possible because the Left expanded its ambit of activity

outside the traditional domain, taking up issues such as secularism, foreign policy independence and peace and worked shoulder to shoulder with progressive social movements.

Jyoti Basu's departure marked a specific transition in West Bengal, where overwhelming dominance of the Left Front, in particular, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) stands threatened after 32 years in power. Although Jyoti Basu withdrew from active politics several years ago, he was witness to the major change that has occurred over the past decade in the relationship between the Left parties and the industrial working class, peasants and landless agricultural workers on the one hand, and the middle class on the other. The convulsions of Singur and Nandigram which showed Lefts' alienation from its original roots and core support base among the underprivileged poor, were expressions of this change.

There are other two areas where Jyoti Basu might have contributed. Substantially more to the Left than he did. If he had relinquished the chief membership of West Bengal earlier than he did and played a more active role in the Lefts' national leadership, the communist movement would have benefitted from his political insights and stature. Secondly had he adopted a proactive advisory role.

In recent years West Bengal has become one of India's laggards in the provision of primary health care, employment and education, and has a poor 4 to 5% representation of Muslims in government and police employment in relation to their 25% shares in population. Its momentum towards industrialization has not recovered after the Tata's pull out from the Singur project.

Many of the social and political agendas that Jyoti Basu would have liked to see advance remain unfulfilled. If the Left reinvigorates itself both in West Bengal and at the national level and energetically pursues these agendas, It could yet pay a handsome fitting tribute to this tall leader. These are the transitions in West Bengal.

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PARIBARTAN

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The Left Front in West Bengal was washed out in 2011. This was a historic day which came in the background of an equally historic election victory of TMC which marked an end to the Left Front in the state.

The three decades of the Left Front government is of enormous significance in the annals of the communist movement in the country. The 1950s and the 1960s witnessed the rising struggles of a working class, peasantry and other sections of the working people in west Bengal. It was not possible for the ruling classes to tolerate the existence of communist-led state governments. Given the all India political situation in the 1950s and 1960s, in view of the correlation of forces and the hostility to the Communists among the whole ruling class political spectrum, it was not possible to sustain these governments beyond short spells. It was only in 1977 after the end of internal emergency and the increased democratic consequences of the people after the anti-authoritarian struggle, that it became possible for the left-led governments to remain in office for a full term.

Looking back, we can see how the left front government led by Jyoti Basu worked with the constraints of the existing constitutional and socio-economic system, implemented land reforms, decentralised powers, instituted the democratic Panchayat Raj system, accomplished growth in agricultural production, protected democratic rights, insured communal harmony and nurtured secular values.

Brushing aside all controversies and blame, the fact remains that the left front in West Bengal, has been completely wiped out in the recent Parliamentary elections due to a general dissatisfaction among the people of the state, thus empowering the All India

Trinamul Congress which was founded on 1st January 1998. The party currently led by Mamata Banerjee is currently the second largest member of the ruling United Progressive Alliance coalition. During the 2011 state elections the TMC alone won 184 seats becoming a one-party majority in the Legislative Assembly, with the CPI-M garnering just 15% of the seats.

With regard to education, the Left Front government in West Bengal had undertaken several pro-people initiatives to ensure all-round development of the State. The Left Front government had ensured significant expansion in the spheres of public education and health. With a thrust on the expansion of school education, the number of schools in West Bengal has seen a substantial increase in the post-1977 period, with the number of secondary and higher secondary schools registering a four fold increase, from 4600 in 1977 to over 22,500 in 2006. Accordingly, the number of students appearing for the secondary board examination had increased from a little over 2 lakhs in 1977 to over 7.5 lakhs in 2006.

Positive results have also been seen in the implementation of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, with the net enrolment ratio of children of the relevant age group (5+ to 8+) exceeding 98% in 2006-07. The drop-out ratio has also fallen below 20% due to the effective implementation of the mid-day meals scheme, which now covers 94% of the primary schools in the State. This has been made possible through the involvement of Self-Help Groups in providing cooked meals in the schools.

Compared to this, more Madrasa, Urdu medium and Hindi medium schools have been set up and 10,000 Madarsas have been recognised by the TMC government. The issues which are yet to be touched upon are to identify locations to set up universities and 10 more medical colleges to be set up in the State. Universities and colleges for Muslims and Matuas are to set up and a special provision is to be made in the state budget for educational and economic uplift of Muslims. Thus Mamata Banerjee is trying to help minority groups especially the Muslims.

With regard to the land reforms initiated by the Left Front government in West Bengal, there

were three major components: (i) effective imposition of land ceiling and vesting of ceiling surplus land (ii) redistribution of vested land among the landless cultivators and (iii) securing of tenancy rights of sharecroppers (bargadars) through a system of universal registration of tenant cultivators (Operation Barga). As a result of this thoroughgoing land reform programme, West Bengal today has the most egalitarian land ownership pattern in the entire country. While West Bengal accounts for only around 3% of agricultural land in India, it accounted for over 21% of ceiling surplus land that has been redistributed in India till date. The total number of beneficiaries of land redistribution in West Bengal is over 28 lakhs, which is almost 50% of all beneficiaries of land redistribution in post-independence India. The security of tenancy rights provided to the sharecroppers under Operation Barga was also unprecedented in India. The total number of recorded sharecroppers has reached over 15 lakhs, which accounts for over 20% of the total agricultural households in the State. Over 11 lakh acres of land was permanently brought under the control of sharecroppers and their right to cultivate land was firmly established.

After 35 years of Left rule, 84% of land in West Bengal is owned by small (owning 2.5 acres to 5 acres of land) and marginal farmers (owning less than 2.5 acres) today, while the all-India figure is only 43%. Over 12 lakh acres of ceiling surplus vested land is lying with various State governments today but not being distributed among the landless. This shows the difference in the political will of the Left Front government in West Bengal and other State governments run by bourgeois parties. Moreover, around 56% of the total beneficiaries of land redistribution in West Bengal are dalits and adivasis. Dalits and adivasis also comprise over 41% of the registered sharecroppers. NSS data show that the proportion of agricultural land owned by dalits in comparison with their proportion in the rural population of West Bengal is the second highest in the country (after Tripura). Till date, over 5.35 lakh women have been given joint pattas and 1.57 lakh women given individual pattas (ownership rights over land) in West Bengal. Muslims have also benefited significantly from the land reforms programme. The share of land cultivated by Muslims in West Bengal in total cultivated land is 25.6%, which is the second highest in the country (second only to Jammu and Kashmir where the share is 30.3%).

Following the onset of the neoliberal policies in the decade of 1990s, whatever land reform measures were undertaken in most Indian States in the post-independence period were sought to be reversed. However, in West Bengal an additional 95,000 acres of land was acquired in the 1990s under the land reform legislation and 94,000 acres redistributed. These figures for the decade of the 1990s account for almost all the land acquired and over 40 per cent of the land redistributed in the entire country. The Left Front government continued with the land redistribution programme. 30,000 acres of land was distributed among landless families in 2006-07.

Over time, there has been an increase in the representation of the rural poor and of socially deprived groups like dalits and adivasis, as well as women, in the elected bodies.

All this has helped to change the power equations in rural society as well as encouraged the social and political empowerment of social groups that were earlier marginalized. The proportions of dalit and adivasi panchayat representatives in all the three tiers are over 37% and 7% respectively, well over their share in population. Since 1995, one third of the seats and positions of chairpersons in the panchayati raj institutions have been reserved for women. It is noteworthy that the actual representation of women exceeds one third as a number of women candidates also win in the general constituencies. Presently, over 36% of the gram panchayat members are women. Also, 7 out of 17 zilla parishads have a woman sabhadhipati and 155 out of 351 panchayat samities have a woman sabhapati. In the late 1990s, the panchayati raj system in West Bengal was further strengthened by introducing gram sansads. These are the general councils of voters in every ward, that are required to meet twice a year with a minimum quorum of 10 per cent of voters to discuss the work done by the panchayats and utilisation of funds.

As contrasted to this, the TMC government has started to resolve the Darjeeling crisis and chalk out development packages for the hills and Jungle Mahal; promote local languages in these areas: agreement signed with the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha to form the new administrative set-up for the hills. A joint forces operation against the Maoists has started. Efforts are being made to

appoint teachers for the promotion of local tribe languages like Alchiki.

Human indicators which focus on basic services like health, education, drinking water and sanitation are being developed especially in Jungle Mahal. Drinking water supply project is being taken up in Birbhum. The projects which are yet to be fulfilled are industrial and agricultural development based on availability of resources and agro-climatic conditions specific to the area. The TMC government has started markets for surplus crops; projects have been announced for Purulia, Howrah, Hooghly, Nadia, West Midnapore but work is yet to start. Projects which are yet to be done are to promote crop diversification, quality seeds to be made available and the promotion of the use of farm machinery.

With regard to infrastructure, new airports for Malda, Cooch Behar, Balurghat, Asansol-Durgapur, Midnapore, Birbhum and Sagar have been announced. Apart from this a comprehensive workplan to set up cold storage chains covering all major production centers of horticulture and marine food products is being drawn up. Cold storages are being stationed for Howrah, Hooghly, parts of Jungle Mahal and Nadia.

Also, a collaborative plan with the Airports Authority of India to develop Calcutta airport has been initiated. Bagdogra has got international status but deadlines have been missed for Calcutta.

A blueprint for the power sector with focus on hydel energy, coal-based thermal power, power based on natural gas and coal bed methane, wind energy, tidal energy and solar power has been set up. This plan is yet to be put into action.

Thus we see from a simple comparison as stated above, the actions of the Left Front government as well as the many plans which the TMC government will hopefully achieve. Mamata Banerjee is trying to reverse the policies of the Left Front. She is looking into the working of governmental institutions like hospitals, police stations and other governmental centres of employment. She is on a mission to beautify the state and apart from working from the top she is also a mass leader, mixing with the civilians in an effort to resolve their problems. The general

attitude of the civilians of West Bengal to the new government is that of high expectation and a hope that change will be brought about eventually, starting from now.

In Santanu Sinha Chaudhri's column, "Now and Again" which appears in the Statesman newspaper, he addresses the question of "change". As he has narrated his interaction with a government employed bus driver, we get to know the feel of the mass population particularly the low-end middle class. In his conversation with the driver, the driver, Tridib Dutta said, "You know, drivers and conductors would take buses on long routes. Instead of coming back the next day, they would take a day off and return the day after. No one would question them. Such things have stopped now... we get fat pay packets these days. We have no excuse not to do our work."

I conclude with the words of Santanu Sinha Chaudhuri, "The flavour of the season in West Bengal is 'paribartan', change. We have just shown the door to a supremely inefficient, corrupt and self-serving regime and brought in a brand-new yet- to- be tested government.

End notes and References

1. The Telegraph Newspaper, Monday 5th December 2011.
2. Historical Outline. 10th December 2011. www.pragoti.in/node/12
3. The Statesman Newspaper. 17th, 18th, 19th, 21st, August 2011.