

MUGABE: A BYWORD FOR MISRULE

After Zimbabwe Army ousted Robert Mugabe from power, the moot point is: will this be a permanent respite for the millions of poor Zimbabweans who have suffered for almost four decades? Surely not, as the successor, Mnangagwa, is a thug. He was very much part of the grubby system that Mugabe created. Though the army has trusted him for now to simply oust Mugabe, he may not be a permanent solution for Zimbabwe. He is a long time Mugabe loyalist and can play the same old tactics to retain power in the coming days. What Zimbabwe demands today is a free & fair election with a strong presence of the Opposition parties

Zimbabwe has finally seen a "new era" with the resignation of the country's longest serving ruler this week, Robert Mugabe. It was not an easy task for both his colleagues and the army to peacefully convince him to make way for the next ruler. Sordidly, it was even difficult for him to step down as he has never planned for his retirement. That is why he continued to rule this impoverished African nation for the last 37 years — setting a record as the oldest serving head of the world. Once he famously proclaimed, "Only God who appointed me will remove me."



Mugabe laid the foundation for poverty, misrule and cronyism in Zimbabwe. In this long saga of his misrule, his second and the current wife, Grace, has risen from nowhere. Indeed she was known for her spendthrift nature as "Gucci Grace" among the common people. Her highly ambitious nature has made many enemies for Mugabe within and outside the ruling party, called ZANU-PF. In the last few days, what happened in Harare is all about an open power struggle between Grace and Emmerson Mnangagwa, who is the current President of Zimbabwe. The crisis began when 93-year-old patriarch Mugabe wanted to install Grace as the next leader of Zimbabwe and sacked his deputy, Emmerson Mnangagwa, from the post of Vice-President.

Mugabe was the man who led the country to freedom. Thus many of the locals hail him as a revolutionary hero. Therefore, many of his countrymen want him to continue for his strong anti-imperialist rhetoric of the past, by overlooking his competence of a statesman. Also his long and arduous journey to spearhead the revolution and making the nation's transition possible from Rhodesia to Zimbabwe may deter the generals and the new Government to take any strong action against him. But, the ordinary Zimbabweans celebrated Mugabe's departure from power as the "beginning of new era" in their country.

When Mugabe came to power in 1980, he took part in a legitimate election. Instead of fighting out the powerful white minority of the country, he reconciled with them. This made him very popular figure

mon people in the name of socialism. He used the Government treasury to support all his activities, but somehow he was inclined to spend a good amount on the development of the education sector of Zimbabwe. His madness over money and muscle power drove the country into a complete financial mess. That is why whenever there was dearth of money, he started seizing white-owned huge firms and handing them over to his loyalists. This created a reign of terror and dissuaded many foreign investors, including the multi-national corporations, from staying put in the resource rich Zimbabwe. At times, when there was no money to pay to his army, policemen and the civil servants, he printed money on his own which eventually led to hyperinflation in the country. Top of all these, his wife, Grace, who started running a parallel Government made life difficult for all, including the senior party leaders.

Now, Mugabe has gone. Will this be a permanent respite for the millions of poor Zimbabweans who have suffered for almost four decades? Surely not, as Mnangagwa is no less than a thug. He was very much part of the grubby system that Mugabe created for long. Though the army has trusted him for now to simply oust Mugabe, he may not be a permanent solution for Zimbabwe. The 75-year old former Intelligence chief may take full advantage of the current disillusionment prevalent in Zimbabwe. He may soon face charges. When he was Security Minister, the mass killing of the Ndebele took right under his nose. He is a long time Mugabe loyalist and can play the same old tactics to retain power in the coming days. It is very natural that all the crew plotters may plan for a very stable administration so as to hoodwink the ordinary people about the real crisis. This will help them bring back normalcy to Zimbabwe for now. But Mnangagwa and his gang will undoubtedly lead the nation to a new crisis.

However, Mnangagwa seemed to be a pragmatic leader in comparison to Mugabe. At least, unlike Mugabe, he should not lose touch with the ordinary citi-



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zens of the country. He must improve his past image so as to instill faith in international organisations such as the International Monetary Fund to feed millions of his poor countrymen. He must bring immediate change to Mugabe's archaic and populist policies such as the law requiring all companies above a certain size to be majority owned by black Zimbabweans. This kind of policies may ruin the entire economy of the country. And this long process has already engulfed Zimbabwe and made the ruling party supporters, bosses and sympathisers uber rich in the past.

What Zimbabwe demands today is a free and fair election with a strong presence of the Opposition parties. As the country is heading for a general election in the middle of the next year, this must be a fresh beginning for ushering in a real democracy in Zimbabwe. Only when the global neutral watchdogs such as the UN and the European Union supervise this election, it may see an end to long held cronyism. The common people must get a chance to register their protest.

And they all should get a chance to choose their leaders. Will it happen? Or Zimbabwe will once again fall into the same ditch that Mugabe has long prepared just to plunder the nation. Above all, the ousted President and his First Lady must be punished for ruining the country. If it happens, the rest of Africa and its hated leaders will get a lesson for the first time. It is time now to send a warning signal to all the dictators in Africa. Simply put, Mugabe like figures must be served notice without any reason as they are the only reason for death, disaster and despair in the country. But that is not to happen as he and his wife has got immunity under a new deal.

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ASEAN takeaways

The summit has reflected weaknesses and achievements of ASEAN. The most apparent weakness is ASEAN's inability to address issues of severe national and regional cruciality in regard to territorial disputes in the SCS as well as the humanitarian crisis in Myanmar. However, ASEAN has not lost its relevance for an emerging regional power like India by replacing Asia-Pacific with Indo-Pacific

While it is definite that ASEAN has been evolved to play a central role in the regional affairs in Southeast Asia, the other side of the story implies that Southeast Asia has always been a hotspot for the global affairs and thus it is worthwhile to watch how the regional organisation is managing its relations with the existing greats as well as the emerging powers, especially when the new buzz word is Indo-Pacific and the centre of the world politics is gradually shifting to this part of the world from the US and Europe.

In fact, US President Donald Trump and White House officials have replaced the term Asia-Pacific with Indo-Pacific and it became clear in the ASEAN Summit that they will now use Indo-Pacific to describe the region.

The latest ASEAN Summit has been unique in many ways. In simpler words, the summit has highlighted the weaknesses as well as achievements of ASEAN as a regional organisation, especially with regard to its relations with the regional and extra-regional powers, who are eager to play substantial roles in the region so far.

First, China-ASEAN relations need to be factored in any analysis on ASEAN's evolution as a regional mechanism. Despite China's assertiveness on the South China Sea (SCS) in the recent past, just like its predecessors, the Philippines, in its capacity of ASEAN Chair, did not make any effort to mention China in the SCS disputes in the statement, released after the summit.

In fact, before the summit, President Rodrigo Duterte of the Philippines mentioned that the SCS should be "left untouched". Clearly this was a polite reminder to the US and other extra-regional powers that ASEAN has chosen the path of negotiation with China as far as disputes in the SCS are concerned. Duterte and most of his fellow ASEAN leaders seem to be right as they prefer to negotiate with China rather than confronting it vigorously for various reasons. One of the reasons is ASEAN's rigorous economic partnerships with China. In 2016, China-ASEAN trade stood at \$368 billion, thereby making China the largest trading partner of the ASEAN. China is also ASEAN's fourth largest FDI source. On the other hand, ASEAN is China's third largest trading partner as well as third largest source of FDI.

In Manila, China and ASEAN celebrated the 20th ASEAN-China Summit and 15 years of the signing of the Declaration of the Code of Conduct in the SCS. At the latest ASEAN-China summit

meeting, they signed three documents namely; Declaration for a Decade of Coastal and Maritime Environmental Protection (2017-2017), ASEAN-China Joint Statement on Comprehensively Strengthening Effective Anti-Corruption Cooperation and Joint Statement between ASEAN and China on Further Deepening the Cooperation on Infrastructure Connectivity.

While these documents portray the significant development in ASEAN-China relations, not mentioning China's stakes in the territorial disputes in the summit statement also demonstrates ASEAN's weakness. It actually reiterates the vulnerability of ASEAN as a regional institution and showcases the internal divisions prevalent within its members.

Second, apart from China, in any discussion on ASEAN's external relations, the US comes invariably. President Donald Trump had to leave for the US without attending the East Asia Summit, and definitely it has given rise to one question: Does this non-attendance show Trump's disinterest in the East Asian security architecture?

As far as Trump's Asia policy is concerned, despite his pro-protectionist view in economy, he emphasised on reciprocity and fairness of trade with the countries in Asia and at the same time, his speeches in the summit invariably show that the US wants the partners in the region to depend on their own resources and capabilities; rather than depending on the US and this change in the US's policy towards the region has happened following Trump's "America First" approach.

In addition, Trump focused on the concept of ASEAN centrality to uphold cooperation, which he finds necessary for advancing the security and prosperity of the Americans and the ASEAN countries. In this Asia trip, which ended in Manila on November 14, Trump has chosen to nurture bilateral trade with partner countries. Additionally, US' withdrawal from the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) had earlier put the reliability of Trump on question, especially with regard to his interest in the region.

Interestingly, the eleven members of the TPP have decided to move ahead with the mega-trade deal without the US. What is, therefore, interesting to note that ASEAN as a regional organisation has given platform to both the RCEP and the TPP and it is to be seen, how the common members of these two groupings deal with the emergence of the mega-trade blocs in the

future. Third, as far as India is concerned, the latest summit offered her a chance to demonstrate its positivity towards the Look/Act East Policy (LEP/AEP) and strengthened relations with ASEAN countries. For Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Manila was an excellent venue to speak about his Make in India, Digital India and other initiatives focusing on start-ups and entrepreneurship.

Connectivity remained an important focus of Prime Minister Narendra Modi as he addressed the business community and the Indian Diaspora during his Manila trip. In his speeches, Modi highlighted the issue of regional tourism and maritime transportation. India and ASEAN are, in fact, working towards the early conclusion of the Agreement on Maritime Transport. However, the focus of India-ASEAN relations as reflected through this summit was India's bilateral relations with the Southeast Asian countries as well as the Quad partners and ASEAN-India Summit level meeting.

Modi separately met the heads of the States from the US, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Vietnam, Philippines and Brunei and discussed in great detail issues of mutual concerns. With the host, India signed five MoUs in the areas of Defence industry and logistics cooperation, agriculture, MSMEs, cooperation between ICWA and FSI and establishment of ICAR Chair in the University of Philippines.

In his opening statement at the 15th ASEAN-India Summit, Modi assured ASEAN of India's "steady support towards achieving a rules-based regional security architecture that best attests to the region's interests and its peaceful development".

Clearly, India, which aspires to play a significant role in the Indo-Pacific — reflected through its participation in the Quadrilateral dialogue also involving US, Japan, Australia — has made it a point to express its willingness to keep ASEAN at its centre of its Act East Policy.

Fourth, as an institution of regional cooperation, ASEAN has also failed to address the violation of human rights in Myanmar's Rakhine. The principle of non-interference in the domestic affairs of other countries have forced ASEAN to take an ambiguous policy on the issue of illegal immigration and refugee influx from Myanmar to Bangladesh.

Within ASEAN, only Malaysia and, to an extent Indonesia had previously urged Nay Pyi Taw to stop the violence in Rakhine state. As a col-



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lective, the failure of ASEAN to address the Rohingya refugee issue has, however, not been a surprise. So far, the understanding is that law and security situation in Rakhine state is primarily an internal issue of Myanmar which has taken shape of a humanitarian crisis facing Bangladesh due to the refugee inflows. Hence, assistance to tackle the crisis related to the large-scale refugee inflows in Bangladesh has been offered by many countries; however, this approach leaves the root of the problem untouched in Rakhine, giving comfort to Myanmar.

In conclusion, it can be said the summit in Manila has reflected on a few of the weaknesses as well as achievements of ASEAN as a regional organisation. The most apparent weaknesses include ASEAN's inability to address issues of severe national as well as regional cruciality in regard to territorial disputes in the SCS as well as the humanitarian crisis in Myanmar. On the other hand, it can be argued that ASEAN has not lost its relevance; in fact, for an emerging regional power like India, ASEAN still plays an important role in shaping its own external policy in the region.

For countries like the US, ASEAN may cease to be a vital organisation with the changes in leadership's outlook; however, bilateral relations with select Southeast Asian countries are likely to be promoted based on the national interests of both the parties. Having said that, with a combination of opportunities and challenges, ASEAN stands as a symbol of status quo in the region and it will continue to remain so.

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Xi's 'new era' strategy: Eliminating questions on sovereignty



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Chinese views on sovereignty are shaped by Chinese identity and history. Since, separation of Taiwan and occupation of Hong Kong and Macau under foreign powers are considered tragedy, continued maintenance of sovereignty over concerned regions will be the highlight of PLA's activities

President Xi Jinping's 19th CPC speech surprisingly ignored to mention the single most important policy term in Chinese foreign policy — the "core national interests" — which refers to very specific issues that China considers non-negotiable when conducting relations with other nations.

The "interests" are contested as they impinge on other sovereign states' interests. The absence of the term may also indicate a position past terminology, which is "well understood" by the international community.

Even though the term "core interests" was not employed to explain China's position, the speech referred to China's major concerns with all the more assertion and resolve. Xi viewed Chinese national power as growing and gaining influence in the world. Such a perception of increased Chinese strength also flows into its understanding of the sovereignty and territorial disputes, obstacles in furthering Chinese power and national rejuvenation in the "New Era".

Xi referred to separation from Taiwan as a "historical tragedy" to be "met with resolute opposition". He goes further, saying, China has the confidence, resolve and "ability to defeat... attempts for Taiwan independence". And that "China will

never allow anyone, any organisation, or any political party, at any time or in any form, to separate any part of Chinese territory from China!". The statement is a clear indication of China's red line and its tenacity towards reunification. Xi warned Taiwan that recognition of the 1992 Consensus — both sides belong to one China — is a prerequisite for any dialogue to start.

In case of Hong Kong, Xi upheld "One country, two systems principle"; and at the same time demanded maintenance of the central authority in Hong Kong, while also guaranteeing Hong Kong's autonomy.

In Xi's China Dream of national rejuvenation, the year 2049 is goal marked as China entering the phase of fully developed socialist society, coinciding with the 100th anniversary of the People's Republic. Enshrined in the Basic Law of Hong Kong, the city is to be formally merged with China in 2047, in effect scrapping the autonomy provided under the Basic Law. This would mean the implementation of the Chinese economic and political model in Hong Kong.

Even though, Xi maintained that Hong Kong will continue to enjoy certain autonomy, it is speculated Xi or CCP would like to reunify Hong Kong with mainland without any conditions.

Though the Government did not clarify what degree of autonomy will be enjoyed by Hong Kong, past events suggest it is unlikely that the judicial and political structure will remain the same.

With the increase in awareness among the younger generation towards political freedom, and democracy, protests against Chinese Government for its restrictive activities in Hong Kong also increased. The pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong, following the 20th anniversary of the return of Hong Kong to Beijing, drew strong reactions from President Xi during his visit to the city. Referring to the return of the city, he said, "It is... important for us to firmly uphold China's sovereignty, security and development interests." Drawing the red line, Xi made it clear that any attempt to endanger China's sovereignty and security, activities against the mainland, challenge to the authority of the Government under the Basic Law is absolutely impermissible. If in the past Chinese policies towards these regions were seen as compromising, the paramount leader, Xi, defined his last five years through assertion of Chinese non-negotiable interests. In April 2017, then Chief Executive of Hong Kong Leung Chun-ying, while commenting on the debate over autonomy, said Hong Kong

enjoys autonomy as authorised by Beijing, not full autonomy.

Chinese views on sovereignty are shaped by Chinese identity and history. Since, separation of Taiwan and occupation of Hong Kong and Macau under foreign powers are considered tragedy, continued maintenance of sovereignty over concerned regions will be the highlight of PLA's activities. It is to be noted that the references made to PLA urged it to prepare to win the national security challenges. Xi said "(we must) build a powerful and modernised army, navy, air force, rocket force, and strategic support force" to confront the changes in national security environs. He also said that "a military is built to fight" and should "focus on how to win when it is called on". The speech suggested China's willingness to employ military measures in order to solve disputes, internal or external, and PLA's role in putting the issues of sovereignty and territorial disputes to rest.

Once the core issues are dealt with, China will automatically assume the status of a regional power. Though Xi said China is not hegemonic, he celebrated the modernisations achieved by the PLA and the plans of a fully modernised and capable military. Xi also mentioned progress made in the South China Sea, the construction of the artificial

islands, exhibiting Chinese power, and reaffirming Chinese claims on the South China Sea. From public point of view the construction on Spratly Islands is an achievement by the CCP, ensuring Chinese position of strength in regional affairs.

Since, China adheres to a single party system, the leaders might change but the party has to outlive personalities. To ensure eternal survival of the party, overcoming national security concerns will be paramount. The East Asia saw increase in China's military assertiveness, threats of use of force, coercive diplomacy, economic debt trap, and territorial claims. Given the case of Taiwan and Hong Kong, Chinese Government (with extension the party) cannot be seen as conceding its rightful claims.

President Xi's speech featured lessons for other nations with which China has territorial disputes as China clarifies that it will protect its interests with whatever means necessary. In an earlier speech, on Army Day, August 2017, Xi made it abundantly clear that China will not relinquish any piece of Chinese territory.

India, which has the longest disputed border with China, must observe caution as the same assertive behaviour, with the new perception of Chinese power, will translate into

tough, unilateral actions to consolidate boundary. Nations such as Japan, Vietnam, Philippines, India and Taiwan are more likely to face a belligerent and powerful China, with increased indications of militarisation in Indo-Pacific region.

In this context, the new thought "Socialism with Chinese Characteristics in New Era" can be understood as a strategy for the next three decades. According to Xi, in these years China will achieve national rejuvenation where it will have a world's best military, and a "military is built to fight". China certainly has made its departure from "keeping low profile to striving for achievement", but as Deng Xiaoping had mentioned, "We will only become a big political power if we keep a low profile (Tao Guan Hui) and work hard for some years; and we will then have more weight in international affairs". The "New Era" symbolises the next phase in China's rise, where China has more weight in international affairs, a power that it ought to use to achieve its core interests. Since these interests clash with other sovereign state, a conflict is due in the region.

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