

## 'Democracy' Derailed

At the time of writing UN security council is divided over the Suu Kyi verdict. Noble peace laureate Ms Suu Kyi was recently sentenced to 18 months of house arrest allegedly for violating the terms of her detention. But she has been under detention for most of the past two decades. That the ruling military junta of Myanmar won't allow her to participate in the general elections scheduled for next year is now as clear as anything else. Suu Kyi's party, National League for Democracy, won the national elections in 1990 only to lose power to the military. American efforts to have a harsh UN resolution seeking sanctions against the junta may not succeed despite overwhelming western backing. All were talking tough. Britain's prime minister Gordon Brown called for a global arms embargo while French President Nicholas Sarkozy went a step further by advocating severe economic attrition denying the Junta administration the major sources of profit—wood and ruby mining. But in any event China would veto against America-sponsored Western move against the Myanmar military. And in all probability business interests would tempt Russia to side with China on this issue. Both China and Russia do not bother about human rights. As for America their double standard on this score doesn't require much elaboration. For all practical purposes Myanmar is under China's sphere of influence and it is advantageous to the military junta as well.

Surprisingly the ruling elites in New Delhi have virtually legitimised China's complicity with the military regime of Myanmar for short-term economic gains. But should democratic movement gather momentum in Rangoon the Chinese will not lose time to recognise the civilian government, as they did in Kathmandu in 2007. As for Suu Kyi's manipulated trial and illegal detention they think it is unfair to challenge Myanmar's judicial sovereignty. When Bangladesh was East Pakistan China was very much with the Pakistani military junta and they refused to recognise Pakistan army's genocidal campaign against the people of Bangladesh. They found nothing wrong in the systematic elimination of Bangladeshi intellectuals. And today China, not Pakistan, is the largest supplier of arms and armaments to the Bangladeshi military. Incidentally China used its first veto in the UN security council in 1972 to block Bangladesh's membership. Communist hypocrisy at international level is nowhere so naked as it is in the case of China. Business matters, not principle.

China's presence in Southeast Asia is historical. Economic integration of Southeast Asia with China is deep rooted that all economics in the region suffer due to China's reduced imports designed for re-exports to the West and America. Because of the global meltdown China's exports to the US, Europe and Japan decline which in turn forces Beijing to buy less imports of parts that are used in making the exports from Southeast Asia. The Association of South East Asian Nations which includes Myanmar doesn't want to discuss the Suu Kyi issue. Nor will they support America scripted UN sanctions against Myanmar's junta. While reacting to the American move Thailand's prime minister Abhisit Vejjajiva, who is the current chair of the 10-member regional body, preferred dialogue to sanctions. Compared to a year ago industrial production in Thailand has fallen by

20 percent. And China matters a lot in Thailand's trade and commerce. So they could ignore the agony of Suu Kyi and democracy movement in Myanmar.

Whether the hawks in New Delhi like it or not, China's growing economic and military clout in South Asian strategic theatre is a fact of life. Pakistan has been a client state of America since its birth in 1947. But China's growing ability to influence Pakistan's polity in recent years is a matter of concern to Washington, not to speak of New Delhi. In Islamabad, every demagogue, dictator and democratic leader since Zulfikar Ali Bhutto has tried to balance American presence with the weight of the Chinese. The impact of the Karakoram Highway, Gwador Port and the Chasma II nuclear power plants on the Pakistani psyche is tremendous though Pakistan's military continues to be the part of American strategic design for west and central Asia. At one point Sri Lanka tried to cultivate China's favour when the western governments decided to leave the problems of the island republic at the doorsteps of New Delhi. Ironically, the strategy offered better business opportunities to Beijing without commensurate gains for Colombo.

China never considered India as equals in international affairs. Historically Beijing took it as an affront that New Delhi regarded China to be an absolute equal on the world stage. As per Chinese conviction, India had been an open field for invaders and marauders when the Han empire maintained its supremacy down the ages. The ground reality is that China is not going to loosen its grip over South Asia. Being a perpetual violator of human rights New Delhi can at best mock at itself by demanding Ms Suu Kyi's release. And they are not doing it.

The role of India's so-called progressives and democrats in highlighting the ordeal of Suu Kyi is pathetic. The left one day took to the streets to condemn South Africa's apartheid regime and demanded Nelson Mandela's unconditional release. They look too insensitive to Kyi's incarceration. Maybe two decades is a short period for them.

Diplomacy is a nice game and diplomats know how to play with the gallery. After some noises in the UN the Suu Kyi issue will lose momentum making room for some more pressing business deals. Only the people of Myanmar can hasten the process of Kyi's release by spreading movement for democracy while international outcry and that too occasionally can at best supplement domestic upsurge. □□□