

GLOBAL UP-TO-DATE

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The world around us is changing rapidly. Wars, new turn in global politics, human rights issues are occurring every day, posing new challenges and concerns. Global Up-to-Date is an initiative by Centre for Governance Studies (CGS) which will work as a hub for explaining the contemporary global issues.

The regular briefs will focus and explain the issues related to International Politics, Economy, Security, Human Rights, and Development. There will be a monthly printed version newsletter containing briefs of all the contemporary global important issues. The online version contains regular updates of the pressing issues along with the PDF version of the newsletter.



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Sanctions and Political Dynamics: Exploring Cambodia's Election Fallout

Roman Uddin

The recent imposition of visa sanctions and suspension of foreign assistance programs by the United States following the Cambodian People's Party's (CPP) victory in the July 2023 elections underscores the geopolitical complexities of Cambodia's political landscape. This move not only highlights the consolidation of power by Prime Minister Hun Sen and the CPP but also raises broader questions about the impact of such sanctions on global power dynamics and the lessons they offer for countries grappling with questionable elections.

Hun Sen's ascension to power and his party's dominance has been marked by a tumultuous history rooted in Cambodia's traumatic past. Rising from a peasant background, Hun Sen's involvement with the Khmer Rouge regime and subsequent defection to Vietnam laid the foundation for his political trajectory. By leveraging strategic alliances and political maneuvering, he gradually solidified his rule, culminating in his appointment as Prime Minister in 1985.



Source-AFP

A pivotal juncture in Cambodia's political landscape occurred during the 1993 United Nations-sponsored elections, which saw the CPP's defeat to the royalist FUNCINPEC party. Hun Sen's refusal to accept the results and subsequent power-sharing arrangement underscored his determination to maintain control. The ousting of Prince Norodom Ranariddh in a 1997 coup further solidified Hun Sen's grip on power, setting the stage for his consolidation of authority and systematic suppression of opposition.

Hun Sen's rule has been characterized by a crackdown on dissent, the dissolution of the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP), and the arrest of its leader, Kem Sokha, in 2017. These actions have drawn international condemnation, prompting the United States to respond with sanctions as a means of expressing disapproval and exerting pressure on the Cambodian regime.

The imposition of visa sanctions and foreign assistance program suspensions constitutes a demonstration of the United States' geopolitical power and its attempt to influence Cambodia's internal affairs. These measures seek to hold accountable individuals involved in undermining democratic processes. However, they also have broader implications for Cambodia's relations with the West and underscore the tension between democratic principles and the expansion of China's influence.

China's support for Hun Sen and the CPP has played a pivotal role in shaping Cambodia's political landscape. By reducing reliance on Western aid, China has allowed Hun Sen to resist external pressure to implement democratic reforms. This dynamic exemplifies the broader geopolitical struggle between the United States and China for influence in Southeast Asia.

The sanctions on Cambodia provide a valuable lesson for countries worldwide grappling with questionable elections and democratic backsliding. The suppression of opposition, manipulation of election laws, and erosion of democratic institutions, as seen in Cambodia, can have far-reaching consequences for a nation's political stability and international standing.

Bangladesh, which also experienced US warnings and visa restrictions in response to concerns over democratic processes, serves as a pertinent example. The US policy shift to support free, fair, and peaceful national elections in Bangladesh mirrors the approach taken with Cambodia. The threat of sanctions is a clear message that the international community values democratic norms and principles, and it underscores the global repercussions of neglecting them.

In the contemporary geopolitical arena, the imposition of sanctions by a major power like the United States serves as a reminder of the far-reaching influence such actions can exert. They prompt a reassessment of the balance between internal governance and international relations while also challenging the narratives of governments that seek to consolidate power at the expense of democratic norms.

However, the recent visa sanctions and suspension of foreign assistance programs by the United States in response to Cambodia's questionable elections underline the intricate interplay between domestic politics, geopolitical maneuvering, and international norms. The case of Cambodia and its lessons resonate not only within Southeast Asia but also serve as a broader cautionary tale for nations worldwide. As the world watches Cambodia's political landscape unfold, it remains to be seen how these sanctions will impact the nation's future trajectory and whether they will serve as a catalyst for change in other countries facing similar challenges.

Unrest and Strife: The Manipur Ethnic Conflict of 2023

Shrabony Akter

In May 2023, a highly charged ethnic conflict ignited between two distinct groups in Manipur, India – the prominent Meitei faction and the lesser-known Kuki community. Manipur, nestled in the country's northeastern region, accommodates a populace exceeding three million. This Indian state is demarcated into two distinct domains, with approximately 90% of its expanse covered by hills and the remaining 10% comprising valley plains. As per the 2011 census, the valley zones, predominantly inhabited by the Meitei, account for 57% of the population, while the hilly tracts, primarily occupied by the Kuki and Naga groups, are home to the remaining 43%.



Source-PTI

Manipur's historical narrative is exceptionally intricate. Historical precedent reveals that the British colonial authorities invoked the "Divide and Rule" strategy, earmarking specific hill regions for the Kuki tribe. Paradoxically, the nomadic inclinations of the Kuki people needed to align with this legislative framework, giving rise to a cultural mismatch between their customary lifestyle and the newly enforced law. Conversely, the Meitei were allocated valley territories, conferring upon them a strategic advantage. Consequently, a sense of discontentment persisted between these factions, persisting beyond India's independence in 1947.

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While previous instances of strife between the Meitei and Kuki groups have transpired, the current wave of violence in Manipur is underpinned by two pivotal catalysts. N Biren Singh, the Chief Minister of Manipur and a member of the BJP, adopted a policy aimed at safeguarding the state's forested regions from illegal migrants. In pursuit of this objective, the

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While previous instances of strife between the Meitei and Kuki groups have transpired, the current wave of violence in Manipur is underpinned by two pivotal catalysts. N Biren Singh, the Chief Minister of Manipur and a member of the BJP, adopted a policy aimed at safeguarding the state's forested regions from illegal migrants. In pursuit of this objective, the government initiated the abrupt evacuation of Manipur's villages, devoid of prior notice or justifiable cause. This decision fomented peaceful protests amongst the hill-based tribal groups, a stance the government swiftly labeled illegal. Tensions escalated with a clash between N Biren Singh's supporters and locals in the Churachandpur district, coinciding with one of Singh's rallies. Subsequently, the Indian government invoked Article 355 to assume control over Manipur's security, authorizing a shoot-on-sight directive.

Meanwhile, on April 20, 2023, the High Court issued a decree granting the Meitei community Scheduled Tribe status. This verdict, however, generated dissatisfaction among the Kuki and Naga segments, driven by concerns over the potential erosion of their political and economic influence within Manipur. The legislative assembly of Manipur is disproportionately weighted in favor of the Meitei, with around two-thirds of its seats occupied by them. Among the 60 Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs), a mere 20 represent the hill communities. Given Meitei's elevated educational status and existing privileges in employment and other sectors, a palpable sense of apprehension and discontent has taken root within the Kuki community.

Though historical conflicts were part and parcel of the interaction between these two ethnic factions, the recent escalation was triggered by a court ruling in March, bestowing "Scheduled Tribe status" upon the Meitei majority. This elevation entails commensurate economic benefits and quotas in government jobs and education, paralleling those accorded to the minority Kuki community. In response to this verdict, on May 3, the All Tribal Student Union in Manipur

instigated a Tribal Solidarity March, joined by local inhabitants. Regrettably, this peaceful mobilization was met with aggression from the Meitei contingent, culminating in mutual house burnings and the perpetration of diverse forms of violence.

Despite these events unfolding in early May, global attention and political scrutiny only crystallized on July 19, 2023. A viral video depicted the harrowing spectacle of two women being stripped and paraded by a mob of Meitei men, with one of the women reportedly subjected to gang rape. This disturbing footage stunned the world and compelled India's Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, to finally break his silence. However, his intervention has yet to quell the escalating tensions. The atmosphere in Manipur remains fraught with restlessness and uncertainty.

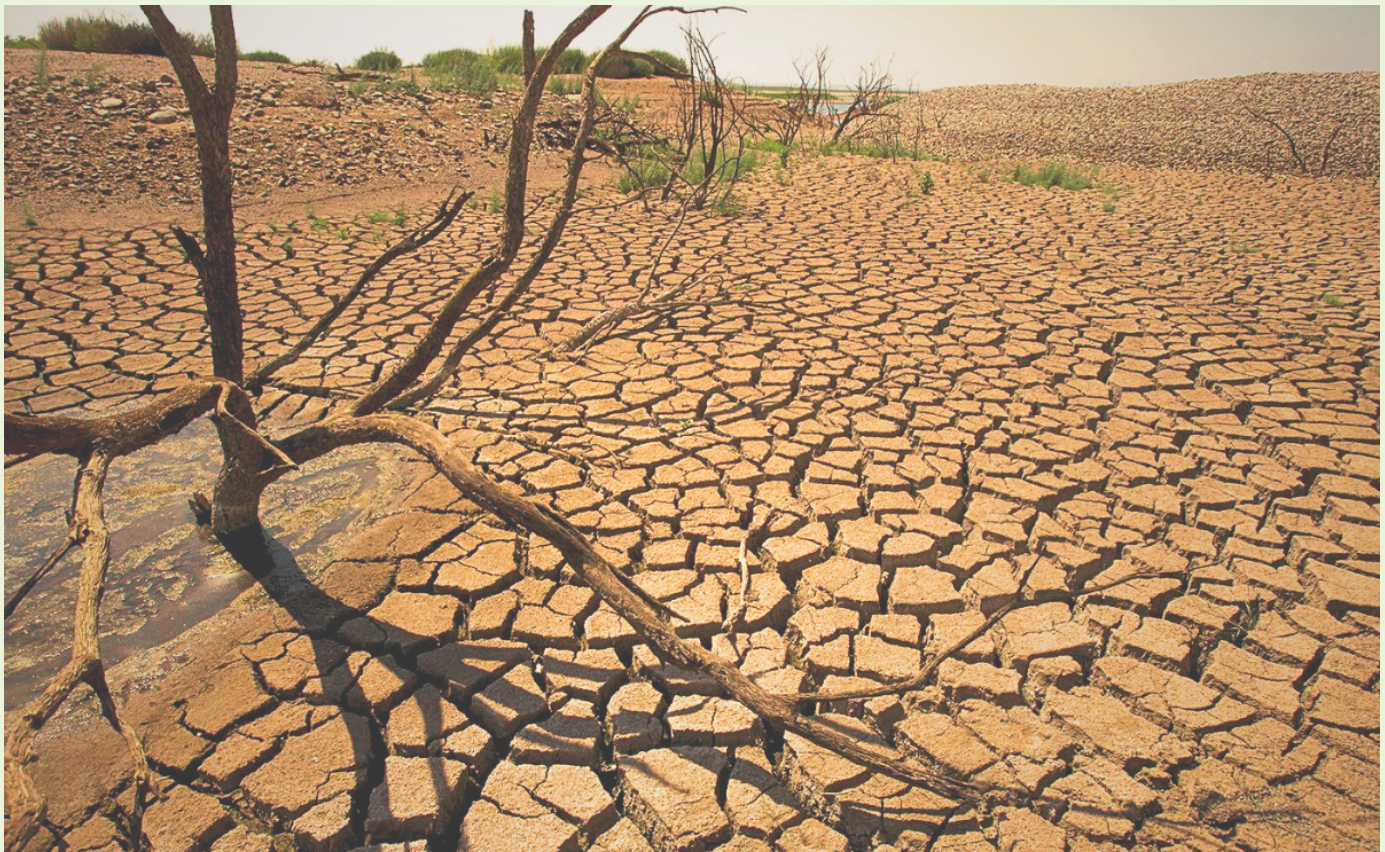
The Hottest Summer in History; Maybe the Coldest for The Rest of Your Life

Kazi Rhid

Global warming has been a pressing issue in the past few decades, the scientists have been crystal clear on where we are heading from the very beginning. They've warned us about the catastrophic consequences that are going to take place if world leaders don't take appropriate action. But the world has been so blinded by the illusion of development and power that they didn't care as much as they should have. The initial target was to keep the climate within 1.5° C increase to the preindustrial levels, but as time went on, that goal became unrealistic.

At the start of June this year, the Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S) of the European Union predicted that by the next five years, the temperatures would go to a record-breaking level, but even they didn't think that this would be so soon, as it was this year. Dr. Samantha Burgess, deputy director at C3S, said, "These are the hottest temperatures in human history" when talking about the recent temperatures. This past July was the hottest month ever recorded on Earth since the actual temperature data goes back to 1940 when the data had been on record. But from the prehistoric archeological and paleontological records, a lot of scientists are saying it is likely the hottest in about 120,000 years. So, in human history, the temperature has never been higher.

The scary part is that the trend so far has no indication of going downwards; WMO predicts that there is a 98% likelihood that at least one of the next five years will be the warmest on record. "It is scary to remember that in another decade, this will be viewed as a relatively cool year, most likely," said Kim Cobb, a climate scientist at Brown University. As much alarming as it is that this is the warmest year, we should be prepared for even hotter temperatures, which would result in more illness, hospitalization, and deaths related to higher temperatures. The healthcare infrastructure should be prepared for things like this; both urban and rural areas need proper shading for the people who live their day-to-day lives on the street, be it a hawker or rickshaw puller. These people often times don't have any other option but to work under the scorching sun and at most times unaware of these climate related issues, as much as they are being discussed on the big stages.



Source-AP

What does it mean for the future of energy and infrastructure? Ever since the late 80's scientists have been very vocal about what the implications of dependency on fossil fuels would be; those predictions are now coming into reality as the record-breaking levels of temperature are seen all over the globe. The wildlife in certain areas has had a significant impact on their ecosystem because of the heat; the world has already gone to a point of no return in terms of warming, and now is the time for damage control. The dependency on a certain lifestyle because of the use of energy is not reversible, but we need to make sure that the energy that is being produced is clean and sustainable in the long term. As important as it is to build infrastructure all across the lesser developed parts of the world, the focus needs to be on the harmony within the ecosystem that already exists. Sustainability, as much as it has become a buzzword for international bodies, is not being practiced in reality.

The problem can no longer be just confined to the planting of trees, carbon taxes, and uses of less polluting methods of transportation and production need to be implemented as soon as possible. The outcomes of the climate crisis are now at our doorsteps, frequent climate related disasters are everyday news now. The need for collaboration to fight this crisis is more important now than ever, the climate crisis needs to be on the forefront of all the discussions globally. Every profession from all the specialty and discipline need to come together to fight the issues relating to every aspect of climate change. It has never been just a climatology problem that a few scientists need to figure out, it is an overall crisis for the entire world and everyone needs to put their heads together to come to aid, for the sake of humanity.

Thailand Elections: The Old Guard Makes A Comeback

Mohammad Nihad Nowsher



Source-Getty

During the recently concluded general elections in Thailand, Pita Limjaroenrat's Move Forward Party (MFP) garnered 151 out of the 500 available seats in the House of Representatives, basing its election manifesto on progressive politics. The political turmoil which has followed has pivoted, to a certain extent, on the activities of the Pheu Thai Party, a political party backed by the Shinawatra family which came in second place with 141 seats. The results brought to light the nation's tussle between progressive and conservative politics, where the former, presently finds itself in danger of being shunned.

Following the announcement of the election results in May, Pheu Thai had announced that it was prepared to enter into a coalition with MFP. Fast forward to the end of July and one finds that MFP's leader, Pita Limjaroenrat, has had much to deal with in terms of political pressures. Some of them include two rejections from Parliament (with regards to the post of Prime Minister), a publicized fight versus conservative defamation laws, doubtful coalitions and an elusive, but crucial, 375 votes in Parliament. Events since the elections in May have seen rumors being circulated that the MFP may well, eventually, find itself in the opposition camp. Added to the equation is Pheu Thai's reluctance to openly oppose the ideals of the unelected Senate, wherein a majority has been unsympathetic towards MFP opposing Section 112 of the Criminal Code (also known as the lese majeste law), the title of the aforementioned defamation laws.

Despite the average age of Thailand's current voters being relatively old, MFP's win confirmed that the nation's public are prepared for a new-age, where political entities are no longer greatly influenced by the military and monarchy. It is questionable whether the prevailing political structure within Thailand will be able to accommodate, at the center, MFP, the party which won the most seats in Bangkok (a former stronghold of Pheu Thai). The 250 influential individuals who occupy the nation's Senate are, according to the Constitution, allowed to partake in the vote to choose the Prime Minister and, apparently, most members of the association would like to see MFP in the opposition. The odds are firmly stacked against MFP when also considering that since 2006, elite groups, the Constitutional Court and the military have persistently backed the establishment.

What is commendable is MFP's commitment to its well-publicized populist movement and attempts in engendering sweeping changes in the country. This dedication, being spearheaded by the promise to refine the lese majeste law, has also seen MFP strive to guide demilitarization and demonopolization and effect changes in areas such as the minimum wage, bureaucracy, human rights, environment and culture. In the words of MFP leader Parit Wacharasindhu, the party is making the necessary efforts to reassure the general public that a 'better Thailand' may be achieved in the future. In spite of MFP's initiatives, it has seemingly miscalculated the priorities of Pheu Thai, the party which, since elections, has become central to proceedings. A recent announcement that former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra is set to make a comeback in Thailand's political arena has led some to believe that while Pheu Thai will be part of an upcoming coalition, MFP may not. Political analysts reckon that Thaksin's reintroduction will inevitably align conservative parties, which are particularly anti-MFP, with Pheu Thai.

MFP's political ambitions stand at a crossroads, where the party's encouraging ideas have, as it seems, met with the entrenched ideals of an establishment. While MFP's seat share in the House of Representatives will continue to inspire many in Thailand, it remains to be seen how Thailand's political landscape engages with Pita Limjaroenrat's party.