[**Time to fix errant democracies**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1605023/time-to-fix-errant-democracies)

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THEY can chop journalists into pieces in Saudi Arabia and pour acid on the remains to wipe out all traces of the crime. Should that prompt our struggling democracies to pat themselves on the back? Aren’t Pakistanis perpetually looking over their shoulders for a lurking coup? Are Tamil minorities seeing democratic salvation in Sri Lanka?

Almost on cue, Indian leaders never fail to flaunt themselves as representatives of the world’s largest democracy. The US doesn’t see anyone other than Israel as democratic in the Middle East. And, not to forget, the world crowned Aung San Suu Kyi with the Nobel Prize as a virtuous democrat. The military coup in Myanmar has upset many as any military coup against an elected government should. But neither democracy nor military rule would make a difference to Myanmar’s raped and murdered minorities, primarily the Rohingya.

In India, as ethnic abuses continue to be heaped by pro-government TV channels on agitating Sikh farmers the hatred borders on bloodthirst revealed by state-backed majoritarian mobs that lynched thousands of Sikhs in 1984. That’s hardly different from state-supported mobs that have gone on killing sprees against other Indian minorities — Muslims, Dalits and Christians — in different parts of the country, on different occasions. Israel of course takes the cake in institutionalising racial abuse inflicted by alleged democracies on their helpless minorities.

India yet seems best positioned to fix the communal and racial virus without the need for foreign tears for its threatened democracy. The home-grown farmer’s agitation has put a spanner in the Hindutva dream of turning India into an anti-intellectual, hateful and uncaring theocratic state at the behest of high-caste Hindus. The evidence of the happy turnaround is readily palpable. The man credited with single-handedly setting up the Modi victory in 2014 has become the prime minister’s bitterly alienated foe.

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Contrary to middle-class India’s fears/ jubilation over an apparent anti-Muslim sentiment prevailing across the country, Mr Modi has had to struggle for every MLA. His success story began not in the communal frenzy of Gujarat, but in his seizure of the Indian media with the help of business lackeys who own handy newspapers and TV channels.

The media was used to peddle fake news about a communal incident in Muzaffarnagar, in western Uttar Pradesh, which turned the course of the 2014 elections. Rakesh Tikait the Hindu Jat farmer from Muzaffarnagar was instrumental in changing the mood of the powerful farmers’ lobby in Western UP in Mr Modi’s favour. Helped by the media campaign, the communal narrative hit the bullseye for Hindutva.

Tikait today stands deserted by Modi over the farmers’ issue, and was also abused and physically assaulted by Hindutva mobs. The attack has resurrected the farmers’ movement and is set to find an echo in West Bengal, Assam and other states where elections are due this year.

Also the image of Sikh men courageously escorting stranded Kashmiri Muslim women to their homes in Srinagar during the military crackdown in the valley has merged with memories of every community in India showing up in support for the agitation by Muslim women against Modi’s discriminatory citizenship laws. As it takes off, the farmers’ agitation could be shaping up to become a bigger mass movement in India than the one the RSS had built against Indira Gandhi’s emergency regime.

Add to this Mr Modi’s huge loss of powerful Sikh and Maratha allies in Punjab and Maharashtra who have ditched him. He could be facing a disastrous denouement. If the Biden-Harris team, therefore, take respite from settling old scores with China over Hong King and Uighur rights, the Kashmiris could do with some of their attention as often their pain is overlooked in a major Indian campaign for equality.

But the root cause of the world’s inability to fix seriously compromised democracies is the immunity that Israel enjoys with Western capitals. This is really where the source lies for the world’s failure to save democracies from ruin. There too, however, voices of sanity are breaking through the military barricades.

On Jan 12, 2021, for the first time an Israeli organisation had called the Israeli state for what it is — an apartheid regime. Though many Palestinians, supporters of the Palestinian cause and non-Israeli human rights organisations have been terming the Israeli regime as an apartheid regime, the significance of a reputed human rights organisation from Israel — B’Tselem — publishing a detailed report reasoning its arguments cannot be lost.

The Israeli regime, committed to the ideas of racism and pursuing its expansionist policies, is driving out Palestinians from their homeland and also annexing the nearby lands. This is widely seen as the model that India under Mr. Modi’s watch is trying to emulate in Kashmir and Assam. Today, Palestinians reside in less than 12 per cent of the historical Palestine that existed before 1948.

Despite the world public opinion being overwhelmingly against it, Israel continues with its aggression. The reason for this is the unwavering support it receives from the US as its trusted ally in the resource-rich Middle East. Buoyed by this support, in 2018 it had enacted a contentious law that defines Israel as the ‘nation-state of the Jewish people’. In 2019, it had announced its intention to annex up to a third of the occupied West Bank, including all of its Jewish settlements, which are home to nearly 500,000 Israelis. It is these two developments that led B’Tselem to categorise Israel as an apartheid state.

The eight-page report brought out by B’Tselem states that the entire “area between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River is organised under a single principle: advancing and cementing the supremacy of one group — Jews — over another — Palestinians… . There is one regime governing the entire area and the people living in it, based on a single organising principle”.

How different is that from the struggle for democracy elsewhere?

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