

2011 THE YEAR OF UPRISINGS

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YEAREND SPECIAL



IN EGYPT POPULAR REVOLT OUSTED HOSNI MUBARAK



IN LIBYA MUHAMMAD GADDAFI WAS HUNTED AND SHOT



IN INDIA CIVIL SOCIETY TOOK ON CORRUPTION



IN THE US PEOPLE ROSE AGAINST WALL STREET

2011 saw populace across the world, including India, rise in protest against misgovernance and corruption, shaking governments and toppling regimes. A perspective of personalities and events that shaped the year

THE FOG OF CHANGE

By Raj Chengappa
Editor-in-Chief

In all chaos there is a cosmos, in all disorder a secret order, Carl Jung observed. There wasn't much of a cosmos when 2011 dawned. There was a certain order in the universe but it was neither harmonious nor whole. There was the hangover of a debilitating worldwide economic recession, unfinished wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, an unstable North Korea flexing its nuclear muscle, a wobbling Pakistan and in India, the ruling United Progressive Alliance (UPA) had begun fraying at the edges.

It was an incendiary mix alright but few would have predicted that it would explode in 2011 and result in the tumult that came in its wake. The tyrants that ruled much of the Middle East certainly did not as they began the year secure in the belief that God was in heaven and all was well in their little worlds they had brutally shaped around them.

It required only a tiny spark in Tunisia caused by a vegetable seller, Mohamed Bouazizi immolating himself in protest in the dying days of 2010, to ignite an unprecedented democratic rebellion that spread with astonishing rapidity across much of the Middle East. By the spring of 2011, uprisings had begun to topple many despots that bestrode the Arab stage for decades.

While the year saw scientists come close to overthrowing Einstein's theory of relativity by demonstrating that neutrinos travel faster than the speed of light, it was the Arab square that proved that there were no constants. The fire in Tunisia spread to Yemen where riots broke out over unemployment and food shortages. By then the Tunisian President, the smooth-talking Zine el Abidine Ben Ali had fled his country



in disgrace. Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh agreed to step down, ending 33 years of his despotic rule.

Technology did help fan the flames in Egypt resulting in Cairo's Tahrir Square becoming the symbol of the 'Facebook' revolution that deposed Hosni Mubarak. Muammar Gaddafi, who had ruled Libya with an iron fist for over 40 years, was hunted by his countrymen and shot dead in a sewer like a desert rat, an ignominious end to the region's longest serving ruler.

As the contagion spread, the royal rulers of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar and Jordan felt the searing heat as did Syria. Many of them were forced to make concessions that they had denied their people for decades. Saudi Arabia gave women the right to vote and to hold public office but stopped short of allowing them licences to drive cars. By year-end, the 2011 uprisings had changed the face of Middle East for good. A new order was emerging but the

fog of change cast a shroud over what final shape it would take.

That fog had descended on the rest of the world too in 2011. In the US, President Barack Obama reached the nadir of his popularity after failing to lift his nation out of a recession that even saw an 'Occupy Wall Street' movement break out. In Russia, Vladimir Putin was warned that he couldn't take his people for granted. Europe struggled to control financial chaos triggered by the Greek default crisis that threatened to unravel the European Union.

Back home, India was also in the throes of a major upheaval. Edmund Burke wrote that "a populace never rebels from passion for attack, but for impatience of suffering." That impatience was most evident when Anna Hazare, a septuagenarian social activist, recreating the imagery of a Gandhian uprising, occupied Delhi's Ram Lila grounds to wage an epic battle against venality in governance.

Public anger in India fortunately did not exhibit what the surprise Tamil hit song called *kolaveri* (murderous rage) as in the Middle East. But caught with its hand in the '2G' gill, the mighty UPA government underestimated the angst over corruption and went down on its knees to placate 'civil society'.

Asked to define a rebel, Albert Camus cryptically said: "It's a person who says no." In 2011, populace across the world, including India, came out in vast numbers to emphatically say not just "no" but "no more" — that enough was enough. They were not satisfied by creating little rebellions that Thomas Jefferson believed were a 'good thing now and then' for the 'sound health of government.' In an instant world, the public wanted instant change — here and now — however chaotic the result. There was no normal. Change then was the constant. It is for these reasons that the editors of *The Tribune* decided to term 2011 as the year of uprisings.

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