

Ego is just like dust in the Eyes.. Without clearing the dust, we can't see anything clearly, so clear the ego and see the World.

THE RIGHT TO LIFE AND NON-VIOLENT PROTEST

DISHAN JOSEPH

During a time of global crisis, from the impact of the COVID pandemic to Climate Change, the freedom to protest has become a litmus test for the health of democratic values. Globally, how far States will continue to restrict that right in the face of popular momentum for change on multiple issues will be key to the people's ability to campaign, hold authority to account and get their voices heard to create meaningful change. Two of the globally respected and inspiring leaders of non-violent protest were the great Indian Leader Mahatma Gandhi and American civil rights champion Martin Luther King, known as MLK.

Mohandas Gandhi is the innovative leader who introduced the concept of Ahimsa, in non-violent protests. His famous Satyagraha campaigns impacted the British to leave India. A very important point to remember is that Mahatma Gandhi always led his protest marches from the front. He didn't use any 'agents' to represent him. This is the hallmark of true leadership and boldness. The most memorable and successful was his 'Salt March'. The Satyagraha campaigns attended by thousands were often silent protests. It was a show of force, but a force of disciplined and united people. These Indian protesters did not breach the law in any way. This is why decades after his death he remains the Father of India.

PROTECTING PROTESTORS

Martin Luther King fearlessly championed the rights of the segregated and marginalized African-American community. His famous speech "I have a dream" is relevant today across the world. Unlike the Indian atmosphere during the time of Gandhi, the civil rights cause of MLK was met with fierce police brutality and vengeance. The 'majority all white police' abused their authority and supported white extremists to intimidate and harass black Americans. Martin Luther King was shot dead when preparing to address a protest rally. During most of their protests the African-Americans sang Christian hymns of hope and prayed on the roads. However there were recorded incidents of some retaliating with force, which was against the concept of MLK's ideology. During the inauguration of President Barack Obama, on worldwide media channels one of the political commentators duly reminded the world that it was Martin Luther King who paved the way for a coloured American to ascend the White House.

Internationally, the core principle of Public Order Management is that the vast majority of crowds that gather are law abiding citizens who are legally exercising their rights to



An injured person being taken for treatment by two policemen during the attack on protesters opposite the Presidential Secretariat.

This is an age of protest: from direct action in Europe against Climate Change and demonstrations against COVID restrictions to protests against the re-election of President Lukashenko in Belarus and the pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong. But it's also an age of retreat from the duty to facilitate our right to protest. In authoritarian regimes, the crackdown on popular dissent has been brutal and sometimes lawless.

protest and voice their concerns and beliefs. This understanding should be the basis of any lawful protest and the Police Forces, worldwide must remember they took an oath to "Serve and Protect" and that oath includes protecting protesters and their right to lawfully protest-free from acts of violence. May 9, 2022 in Sri Lanka will be remembered as a day that democracy was buried. Well organized rowdy elements, influenced by liquor descended like a demonic legion from the Temple Trees, armed with iron rods and swords and brutally attacked unarmed protesters. It was sad to see clergy being attacked by thugs. These uneducated thugs had no respect for priests, women and youth. They even burned and vandalized the medical tent of the St. John Ambulance brigade, which is an international level first aid organisation. The Sri Lanka Police failed miserably in their duty to serve and protect the peaceful protests. The world saw these events and now excuses and lies are flowing like a river from those who are guilty of these crimes.

This is an age of protest: from direct action in Europe against Climate Change and demonstrations

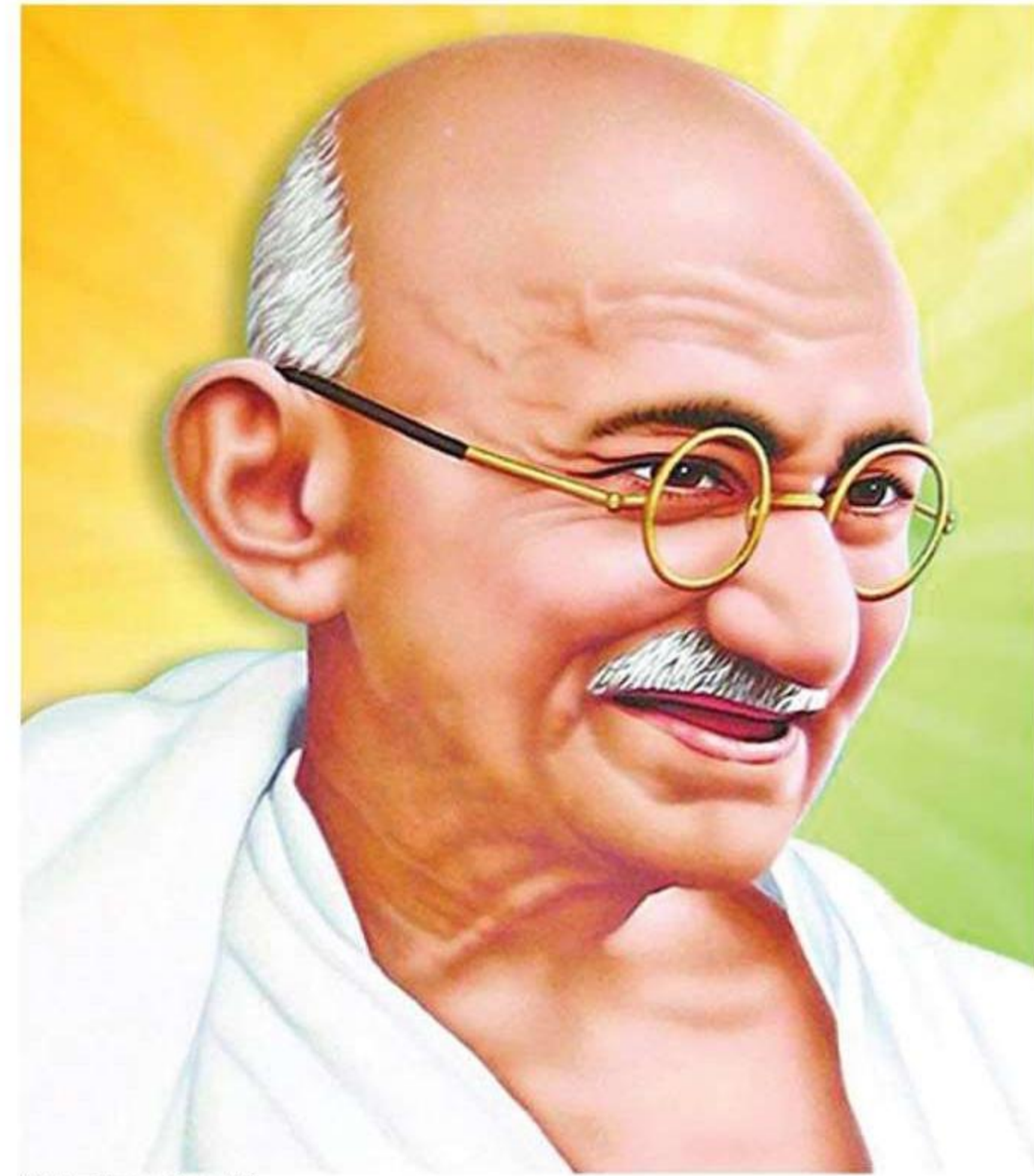
against COVID restrictions to protests against the re-election of President Lukashenko in Belarus and the pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong. But it's also an age of retreat from the duty to facilitate our right to protest. In authoritarian regimes, the crackdown on popular dissent has been brutal and sometimes lawless. Even in liberal democracies, where civil liberties have been won through protest movements, there is a backlash. In the United Kingdom, unprecedented new legislation will reduce people's ability to mobilize and voice their views. The departure of democracies from safeguarding protest not only erodes the rights of its citizens – protected by the Human Rights Act – it weakens the state's role as an advocate for international human rights.

The right to freedom of assembly and association is closely linked to the right to freedom of expression. Neither are absolute rights and can be limited in certain circumstances. Yet both are recognized as central to an open society, enabling each of us to participate in public life and express political opinions. That tension, between grassroots movements that are growing ever more creative in their tactics and states

that are pushing back, has reached a peak over the past two years, exacerbated by the pandemic.

Prudent readers will know that in 2020, the UN Human Rights Committee adopted a General Comment on the right to protest, which provided an authoritative interpretation of its protection in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). It stated 'failure to respect and ensure the right of peaceful assembly is typically a marker of repression'.

Worldwide, today the new generation of activists who face arrest, prosecution and possibly prison for civil disobedience simply feel they have no choice. In his new book, Hong Kong activist Nathan Law writes: 'It was hard to process the idea that I was now a criminal. To have broken the law felt so alien to me. While I was prepared to face my sentence, as all activists who confront unjust laws must be, I was nevertheless irritated by the irony of such acts of civil disobedience – that in order to advocate for democracy and justice and safeguard the rule of law, sometimes laws had to be broken.' Understanding that a group has a certain behavior is one thing, but knowing "Why" it behaves the way it does is



Mahatma Gandhi

the key to understanding "How" to deal with these people not only as a group but as individuals. A group of any sort is made up of individuals; individuals with certain behaviors and characteristics.

UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

UN Article 2- Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.

Further Article 3 says- Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person. Article 6- Everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law.

Article 19- Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers. Article 20- (1) Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association. (2) No one may be compelled to belong to an association.

Article 25- (1) Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being

of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

Article 26- (1) Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary and professional education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.

It has been observed by sociologists that when Article 25 and 26 are not met to the people's desired expectation, it is then that the people feel a sense of injustice, resentment and also being deceived. People naturally start comparing their countries to other nations, which are perceived to have a better standard. This is also why people desire to take risks and migrate, seeking greener pastures.

Today the world is a global village. People are effectively connected by vibrant social media. The quest for change in many spheres will continue, globally. When we uphold the rights of others we can all live in peace and cherish the dividends of prosperity. This must become a universal mandate. During this week of Vesak, all Sri Lankans must remember the prudent warning of the noble Buddha "Three things cannot be hidden- the sun, moon and the truth". The truth will always triumph. (The writer is the author of the book Target Secured- Police Special Task Force)



A 'Black Lives Matter' protest



The separate area that has been allocated outside the Presidential Secretariat close to the Galle Face Green for protesters to carry out protests and demonstrations.