The Statesman
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Back to work

With the United States House of Representatives having elected its new Speaker, Mike Johnson, an atmosphere of urgency now pervades Capitol Hill. With just over three weeks left until the expiration of a stopgap funding measure on November 17, the government is at risk of shutting down. Simultaneously, President Joe Biden is advocating substantial new spending to support allies Israel and Ukraine as well as enhance security along the US-Mexico border. This confluence of events underscores the complex challenges facing the nation and the imperative of bipartisanship. Government funding battles have dominated the US Congress over the past year, with recent partisan disputes coming dangerously close to pushing the country to the brink of defaulting on its substantial debt. A diverse set of opinions, priorities, and divisions among lawmakers have made reaching a consensus an arduous task. This past month, intra-party fighting among Republicans almost resulted in a partial government shutdown, as hard-line members rejected an agreed-upon discretionary spending limit, calling for additional cuts instead. The ramifications of such divisions are not limited to political spectacle. High-interest rates have driven up the government's borrowing costs and created a record $1.7 trillion deficit.

Speaker Johnson faces the immediate challenge of averting another government shutdown and his inexperience in the role adds complexity to the process. His call for an aggressive schedule and a desire to advance spending legislation are commendable, but these initiatives will require astute negotiation within the narrowly Republican-controlled House and across the aisle in the Senate, which has a two-vote Democratic majority. The urgency surrounding government funding intersects with President Biden's request for $106 billion in new spending to aid Israel, Ukraine and fortify the U.S.-Mexico border. This request hinges on bipartisan support. Its outcome remains uncertain, given the array of ideological positions and partisan priorities. The Senate, despite previous delays, is making progress on bipartisan funding bills. Its hope to pass appropriations for various programmes is promising, but the continued fiscal warfare between the Senate and House Republicans remains an obstacle. The division over spending priorities, as well as differences over issues like border security and aid to Ukraine are points of contention that require resolution. In these challenging times, the role of bipartisanship cannot be understated. The fate of government funding and America's fiscal health hinge on collaboration between lawmakers with diverse perspectives. It is crucial that lawmakers set aside partisan priorities and find common ground. While each side may have deeply held convictions, the urgency of the moment demands cooperation. The functioning of government agencies is at stake, making it imperative to put the interests of the American people first. Whether Mr Johnson, described once as a "despicable bigot of the highest order", is the man to steer the House in these fractious times is another matter.

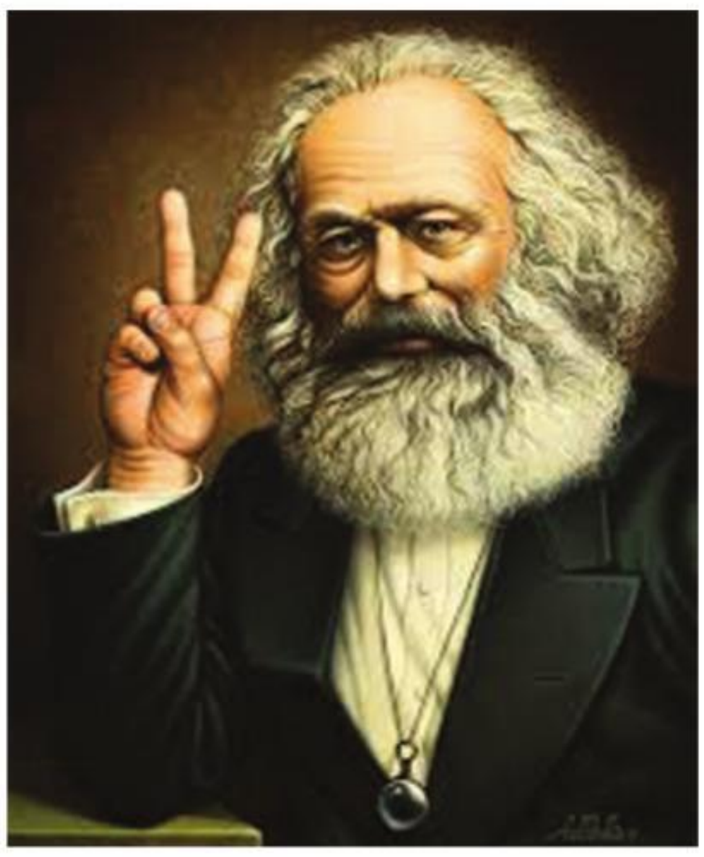
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The global electric vehicle (EV) revolution has been charging ahead, driven by a shared vision of reducing carbon emissions and transitioning to a sustainable energy future. Central to this shift are the lithium-ion batteries that power EVs. China, the undisputed powerhouse of the EV battery supply chain, is flexing its muscle with restrictions on the export of graphite, a seemingly unglamorous yet essential component in lithium-ion batteries. While Beijing claims these restrictions do not target a specific industry, they have sent ripples through the global market. The backdrop is crucial. It comes in response to the US curbing exports of key technologies, particularly semiconductors, to China. The US restrictions have made a significant impact, with China struggling to keep pace in the development of artificial intelligence and semiconductor technology. As a countermeasure, China has retaliated with restrictions of its own, including those on exports of key materials like graphite. Graphite is vital in the production of anodes for lithium-ion batteries, which are at the heart of EVs. These restrictions will impact foreign manufacturers of EV battery components who have been slower to shift to synthetic graphite compared to their Chinese counterparts. It's essential to recognise that China dominates not only the global production of graphite but also its processing. Thus, the restrictions have the potential to affect supply chains that extend far beyond China's borders. Natural and synthetic graphite are both used in battery anodes. The new rules mandate export permits for high-end synthetic graphite, affecting foreign buyers in Japan, South Korea, and the United States. This restriction comes at a time when foreign companies are grappling with the shift from natural to synthetic graphite ~ an endeavour that has been sluggish due to production concerns and cost considerations.

While some Chinese companies with overseas operations expect limited impact, they utilise lower-density synthetic graphite, which falls outside the new restrictions. This leaves other manufacturers, reliant on Chinese graphite, potentially facing disruptions in their supply chains. The broader implications of these restrictions are two-fold. First, they highlight China's ambition to maintain its dominant position in the global EV battery supply chain. By limiting the export of a critical resource like graphite, China gains leverage and control. This manoeuvring could have consequences on EV battery manufacturers outside China. Secondly, it underscores the urgency for foreign manufacturers to expedite their shift to synthetic graphite. Although the move to synthetic materials is seen as more environmentally friendly and enables faster battery charging, it requires investment and adaptation. As the restrictions put pressure on the supply of natural graphite, the impetus to expedite this shift becomes clearer. As the world seeks to curb carbon emissions and transition to cleaner transportation options, the integrity and resilience of the EV battery supply chain is critical. In navigating the road ahead, global manufacturers must not only adapt but also collaborate.

The Anti-Colonialist

During his life, Marx closely observed the main events in international politics and, as we can see from his writings and letters, in the 1880s he expressed firm opposition to British colonial oppression in India and Egypt, as well as to French colonialism in Algeria. He was anything but Eurocentric and fixated only on class conflict. Marx thought the study of new political conflicts and peripheral geographical areas to be fundamental for his ongoing critique of the capitalist system



When he lived in Algiers, Karl Marx attacked ~ with outrage ~ the violent abuse of the French, their repeated provocative acts, their shameless arrogance, presumption, and obsession to take revenge like Moloch in the face of every act of rebellion by the local Arab population. "A kind of torture is applied here by the police, to force the Arabs to 'confess', just as the British do in India", he wrote. "The aim of the colonialists is ever the same: destruction of the indigenous collective property and its transformation into an object of free purchase and sale".

What was Marx doing in the Maghreb? In the winter of 1882, during the last year of his life, Karl Marx had severe bronchitis and his doctor recommended a period of rest in a warm place. Gibraltar was ruled out because Marx would have needed a passport to enter the territory, and as a stateless person he was not in possession of one.

The Bismarckian empire was covered in snow and anyway still forbidden to him, while Italy was out of the question, since, as Friedrich Engels put it, 'the first proviso where convalescents are concerned is that there should be no harassment by the police'.

Paul Lafargue, Marx's son-in-law, and Engels convinced the patient to head for Algiers, which at the time enjoyed a good reputation among English people to escape the rigours of winter. As Marx's daughter Eleanor later recalled, what pushed Marx into making this unusual trip was his number one priority: to complete Capital.

He crossed England and France by train and then the Mediterranean by boat. He lived in Algiers for 72 days and this was the only time in his life that he spent outside Europe.

As the days passed, Marx's health did not improve. His suffering was not only bodily. He was very lonely after the death of his wife and wrote to Engels that he was feeling "deep attacks of profound melancholy, like the great Don Quixote". Marx also missed ~ because of his health condition ~ serious intellectual activity, always essential for him.

The progression of numerous unfavourable events did not allow Marx to get to the bottom of Algerian reality, nor was it really possible for him to study the characteristics of common ownership among the Arabs ~ a topic that had interested him greatly a few years earlier.

In 1879, Marx had copied, in one of his study notebooks, portions of Russian sociologist Maksim Kovalevsky's book, Communal Landownership: Causes, Course and Consequences of its Decline. They were dedicated to the importance of common ownership in Algeria before the arrival of the French colonizers, as well as to the changes that they introduced.

From Kovalevsky, Marx copied down: "The formation of private landownership ~ in the eyes of French bourgeois ~ is a necessary condition for all progress in the political and social sphere'. Further maintenance of communal property, "as a form which supports communist tendencies in the minds, is dangerous both for the colony and for the homeland".

He was also drawn to the following remarks: "the transfer of land ownership from the hands of the natives into those of the colonists has been pursued by the French under all regimes. (….) The aim is ever the same: destruction of the indigenous collective property and its transformation into an object of free purchase and sale, and by this means the final passage made easier into the hands of the French colonists".



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As for the legislation on Algeria proposed by the Left Republican Jules Warnier and passed in 1873, Marx endorsed Kovalevsky's claim that its only purpose was "expropriation of the soil of the native population by the European colonists and speculators". The effrontery of the French went as far as "direct robbery", or conversion into "government property" of all uncultivated land remaining in common for native use.

This process was designed to produce another important result: the elimination of the danger of resistance by the local population.

Again, through Kovalevsky's words, Marx noted: "the foundation of private property and the settlement of European colonists among the Arab clans would become the most powerful means to accelerate the process of dissolution of the clan unions. (…) The expropriation of the Arabs intended by the law had two purposes: 1) to provide the French as much land as possible; and 2) to tear away the Arabs from their natural bonds to the soil to break the last strength of the clan unions thus being dissolved, and thereby any danger of rebellion".

Marx commented that this type of individualization of land ownership had not only secured huge economic benefits for the invaders but also achieved a "political aim: to destroy the foundation of this society".

In February 1882, when Marx was in Algiers, an article in the local daily The News documented the injustices of the newly crafted system.

Theoretically, any French citizen at that time could acquire a concession of more than 100 hectares of Algerian land, without even leaving his country, and he could then resell it to a native for 40,000 francs. On average, the colons sold every parcel of land they had bought for 20-30 francs at the price of 300 francs.

Owing to his ill health, Marx was unable to study this matter. However, in the sixteen letters written by Marx that have survived (he wrote more, but they have been lost), he made a number of interesting observations from the southern rim of the Mediterranean. The ones that really stand out are those dealing with social relations among Muslims.

Marx was profoundly struck by some characteristics of Arab society. For a "true Muslim'", he commented: "such accidents, good or bad luck, do not distinguish Mahomet's children. Absolute equality in their social intercourse is not affected.

On the contrary, only when corrupted, they become aware of it. Their politicians justly consider this same feeling and practice of absolute equality as important. Nevertheless, they will go to rack and ruin without a revolutionary movement".

In his letters, Marx scornfully attacked the Europeans' violent abuses and constant provocations, and, not least, their "bare-faced arrogance and presumptuousness vis-à-vis the 'lesser breeds', [and] grisly, Moloch-like obsession with atonement" with regard to any act of rebellion.

He also emphasized that, in the comparative history of colonial occupation, "the British and Dutch outdo the French".

In Algiers itself, he reported to Engels that a progressive judge Fermé he met regularly had seen, in the course of his career, "a form of torture (…) to extract 'confessions' from Arabs, naturally done (like the English in India) by the police".

He had reported to Marx that "when, for example, a murder is committed by an Arab gang, usually with robbery in view, and the actual miscreants are in the course of time duly apprehended, tried and executed, this is not regarded as sufficient atonement by the injured colonist family. They demand into the bargain the 'pulling in' of at least half a dozen innocent Arabs. (…) When a European colonist dwells among those who are considered the 'lesser breeds', either as a settler or simply on business, he generally regards himself as even more inviolable than the king".

Similarly, a few months later, Marx did not spare to harshly criticize the British presence in Egypt. The war of 1882 made by the troops from the United Kingdom ended the so-called Urabi revolt that had begun in 1879 and enabled the British to establish a protectorate over Egypt.

Marx was mad at progressive people who proved incapable of maintaining an autonomous class position, and he warned that it was absolutely necessary for the workers to oppose the institutions and rhetoric of the state.

When Joseph Cowen, an MP and president of the Cooperative Congress ~ considered by Marx "the best of the English parliamentarians" ~ justified the British invasion of Egypt, Marx expressed his total disapproval.

Above all, he railed at the British government: "Very nice! In fact, there could be no more blatant example of Christian hypocrisy than the 'conquest' of Egypt ~ conquest in the midst of peace!"

But Cowen, in a speech on 8 January 1883 in Newcastle, expressed his admiration for the "heroic exploit" of the British' and the "dazzle of our military parade"; nor could he "help smirking over the entrancing little prospect of all those fortified offensive positions between the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean and, into the bargain, an 'African-British Empire' from the Delta to the Cape".

It was the "English style", characterized by "responsibility" for the "home interest". In foreign policy, Marx concluded; Cowen was a typical example of "those poor British bourgeois, who groan as they assume more and more 'responsibilities' in the service of their historic mission, while vainly protesting against it".

Marx undertook thorough investigations of societies outside Europe and expressed himself unambiguously against the ravages of colonialism. It is a mistake to suggest otherwise, despite the instrumental scepticism so fashionable nowadays in certain liberal academic quarters.

During his life, Marx closely observed the main events in international politics and, as we can see from his writings and letters, in the 1880s he expressed firm opposition to British colonial oppression in India and Egypt, as well as to French colonialism in Algeria.

He was anything but Eurocentric and fixated only on class conflict. Marx thought the study of new political conflicts and peripheral geographical areas to be fundamental for his ongoing critique of the capitalist system. Most importantly, he always took the side of the oppressed against the oppressors.

A MEMBER OF THE ANN ASIA NEWS NETWORK

ASIAN VOICES

A call to end conflict

While the war between Israel and the Palestinian militant group Hamas seems to be a world away, Filipinos cannot afford to ignore it as many overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) in the battle-scarred land have been caught up in the escalating violence. To date, four Filipinos ~ all caregivers working in Israel ~ are among the dead in the Oct. 7 attack by Hamas that spurred Israel's retaliation with bombardments and a siege on the Israeli-occupied Gaza Strip.

Thousands have died on both sides of the conflict, with trapped Palestinians reeling from Israel's cut-off of food, water, and medical supplies, and humanitarian aid just trickling in two weeks into the crisis.

Amid the din of war, the heroism of a Filipino caregiver shines through, underscoring the tragic fate of OFWs forced to leave the relative safety of the homeland in search of a better life in foreign shores. Angelyn Peralta Aguirre, 33, from Pangasinan, died with her elderly ward when Hamas militants fired through the door of the bomb shelter where they had sought refuge. In a frantic message she had sent to her family, Aguirre said: "They are already here. I am afraid."

In a post, Jerusalem's deputy mayor, Fleur Hassan-Nahoum noted: "Despite having a chance to flee the Hamas terror attacks, Angelyn showed unbelievable humanity and loyalty by remaining by Nira's side during the violence, resulting in both

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

of them being brutally murdered by Hamas. Unimaginable honor in the face of evil." Another caregiver, Paul Vincent Castelvi, 42, from Pampanga, was among those abducted and killed during the Hamas assault, while Loreta Villarin Alacre, 49, was killed along with several others after being reportedly waylaid by the militants. The Department of Foreign Affairs confirmed that a fourth OFW, a female caregiver whose identity had not been disclosed, also died in the initial assault. Government reports said two Filipinos remain unaccounted for in Israel, where some 30,000 OFWs are working, mostly as caregivers. As Israel prepares to launch a ground invasion of the Gaza strip ~ the densely populated area under occupation by Israel but ruled by the Islamist Hamas ~ the Philippine government has ordered the mandatory evacuation of the 131 Filipinos living there. But dozens, most of them married to Palestinians, have reportedly opted to stay. At least 78 Filipinos in Gaza are among those massed up in the southern Rafah crossing near the Egyptian border, waiting to be allowed to leave the war zone.

In an interview with this paper, Egyptian Ambassador to Manila Ahmed Shehabeldin said he had asked his government to "prioritize Filipinos" in the border crossing.

At the same time, he has echoed the dilemma the Philippine government is grappling with: "But Israel is bombing the crossing from the Palestinian part inside Gaza, and so how can you evacuate people?"

This predicament should prompt the Philippine government to vigorously exert all its diplomatic resources to bring the Filipinos out of harm's way, including thousands of OFWs who had also been asked to leave neighboring Lebanon.

With two American hostages released by Hamas following United States President Joe Biden's trip to Israel last Wednesday, President Marcos should similarly invoke the country's long-standing alliance with both Israel and the US to immediately secure the safety of Filipinos trapped in the conflict zone. In a meeting with Israeli Ambassador Ilan Fluss in Malacañang shortly after the Hamas assault, Mr. Marcos has "assured Ambassador Fluss that the Philippines will always stand with Israel in this war against the inhuman terrorist attacks by Hamas."

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR editor@thestatesman.com

Disappointing

SIR, This refers 'After calling Hamas a terrorist outfit, Tharoor says he is with Palestine' (Oct, 28). Politicians in general and Congress leaders in particular, are known for their duplicity and doublespeak. However, for Tharoor, who is known to call a spade a spade, to backtrack and dilute his earlier statement made during an IUML rally at Kozhikode is disappointing.

Hamas is an Islamist militant movement that governs more than two million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and indulges in armed struggle against Israel. Earlier this month, Hamas launched a massive attack on southern Israel, killing hundreds of civilians, soldiers and taking dozens of civilians as hostages. In retaliation, Israel declared war on Hamas. It is wrong to justify any form of terrorism.

Terrorists have no religion. Their only objective is to create polarisation in the society. A terrorist does not become an angel by calling himself a freedom fighter. During the predominantly non-violent Indian freedom struggle, though there were stray acts of violence against the Englishmen, no innocent was ever targeted.

Under no circumstances can Hamas justify its act of killing innocent Israelis. Their inhuman actions set in force a furious reaction from the Israeli forces, resulting in the bloodbath at Gaza. This is not in any way to justify the death of innocent civilians in the conflict on either side. However, terrorist organisations need to pause and consider the consequences of their senseless actions. It is naive of Hamas to expect intervention from world nations, or the UN to restrain Israel, after the diabolism unleashed by them.

Yours, etc., V Jayaraman,
Chennai, 28 October.

