

Editorial

It has been a busy month for elections in Asia. In Japan, incumbent prime minister Sanae Takaichi extended her four-month premiership with a resounding victory at the polls, a significant vote of confidence for the country's first female prime minister. In Bangladesh, a comfortable victory for the Bangladesh Nationalist Party led by Tarique Rahman brought to an end a year and a half of non-elected interim government provoked by what has been dubbed the "Monsoon Revolution" of August 2024 precipitated, it is said, by members of the Gen Z generation. Gen Z were also active in bringing about the resignation of the former prime minister in Nepal, which goes to the polls in early March after its own six-month period of non-elected interim rule.

“ From ballot boxes to prison cells, Asia's political landscape this month reveals both the resilience of democracy and the cost of its absence, as elections, transitions of power and struggles for accountability reshape the region in real time. ”

In Bangladesh it was Nobel Peace Prize laureate Muhammad Yunus who held power during the transition and paved the way for the implementation of new limits on the power and longevity of future governments, correcting what was perceived to have been a major democratic impediment during the long premiership of former prime minister Sheikh Hasina. Another Asian Nobel peace laureate features in our pages this month. José Ramos-Horta, a hero of Timor-Leste's war of independence in the 1990s, has given his support to a project to hold the military rulers of Myanmar accountable for their brutality while trying to extend their control of the troubled nation. A third Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Aung San Suu Kyi, has been languishing in a Myanmar jail since being deposed from power in a military coup in February 2021. Another Asian Nobel laureate, Narges Mohammadi, who is being held in an Iranian jail, could become a bargaining counter in talks between the Islamic regime of Ayatollah Khamenei and the US. She was awarded the peace prize in 2023 for campaigning against the oppression of women in Iran.

Away from politics, we take a look at the climate of acceptance or otherwise of homosexuality across Asia where LGBTQ+ individuals often face penalties for expressing their love and sexual orientation openly – though not everywhere. In our business focus, we hear from a former UK business minister Sir Vince Cable comparing economic developments in India and China. And we feature the work of the Chinese dissident writer Jung Chang to mark the publication of a sequel to her famous book *Wild Swans*.

We hope you are enjoying Democracy Asia and will write with your feedback to letters@democracyasia.com.

Nicholas Nugent