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Political game-play: Need for rules

There have been disturbing examples of indifference to this element of dissent in the exercise of the rule of law, in street demonstrations or even discussions in the Parliament. A former president, Professor Bodruddoza Chowdhury being dragged on the street just because he opted to differ is a regrettable incident. Spectacle of law abiding women dissenters being subjugated to indecent manhandling by law enforcers is too shameful to be recalled.



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POLITICS and a political system as its most significant by-product, have been the recognised tool of social management in civilized societies. Centuries of experiments by human beings, influenced by thoughts of celebrated political gurus -- Aristotle, Plato, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau -- theorising endlessly in volumes, came to the inevitable conclusion that statecraft needs to be managed as an organised endeavor where the rulers and the ruled interact through a complex process which is inherently political.

The authoritarian phase of this evolution was relatively simpler in the sense that the ruler did not rule through a consensus -- his personal or dynastic interest having been identified as the interest of the society or the state. Things changed and ideas kept on evolving. From Renaissance to French Revolution, to birth of nationalism during nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the process gave birth to a new level of consciousness about the character of state, which will be structured around a system where the majority will rule to protect and advance certain values. Such values include protection of the right of the individual and human dignity, their justifiability, the right to differ, respect for the sovereign right of the people, elimination of discrimination between people of differing faiths, the use of the factors of production and its management to ensure distributive justice of shared economic benefits. Most nations opted for what came to be known as a democratic system. The system evolves around a complex exercise participated by or-

ganised groups -- called political parties -- theoretically and morally committed to sustain the values of that system. While it is easier to focus on their responsibilities to the institutional aspect of a democratic order, for example, the Constitution, written an article, or a structured judicial system written in codes, adherence to its unwritten components has often placed challenges before nascent democracies inhibiting the growth of a robust culture. The process is admittedly difficult requiring a deep insight into the inherent character of the process and its challenging dynamics. Here commitment to the best practice becomes a function of a deep realisation and an endearing interest on the part of the political establishment of the country -- zealous, resolute and determined.

As has been indicated, Democracy is a form of social experiment, a methodology, in continuous endeavour to deal with the most complex of social and human issues. For example, it aims to neutralise the innate tendency of the majority to be arbitrary by a system of institutional accountability; the subjugation of the crude pursuit of class interest to the loftier ideal of the Common Good; the element of human greed to be responsive to the sensitivity of social accountability; the imperceptible absolutism of the state to violate individual rights to be responsive to the dictates of justifiability etc. The list is expandable to demonstrate the complexity of the challenge before a Democracy.

Can a system with such a daunting challenge before itself achieve a degree of absolute success without the system conforming to certain norms? To put it simply, can it be "Productive" in the pursuit of its objective without being "Principled"? In nascent democracies, the experience has not always been very encouraging and practitioners all over the world have erred and there have been countless explanations from these erring practitioners. Even then the pursuit for excellence continues. In the case of Bangladesh, derelictions have been pronounced and disturbingly with no sign of imminent relief. A reflect-

ed ability to choose the government he likes, are the most fundamental element of any democratic adherence. This right of the sovereign is sacred and inviolable. Any attempt to intimidate the sovereign in the free exercise of its right to choose -- through an abuse of state authority or muscle power is immoral and must be abhorred. In that scenario the shameless parade of fake referendums by military adventurists, the regrettable indulgence by even elected governments to repeat this fake practice are discomfiting records. The nation has to continue with the experiment of the concept of a "Caretaker Government", ironically because the existing institutions were found inadequate to ensure the right of free franchise. The controversy generated recently about the effectiveness of the system even after conducting three elections, only points to the fragile adherence by the political establishment to a core element of a democratic culture. Rules of the game in this regard are simple -- sovereign's right to free vote is inviolable and sacred. This concern must be a shared one and not selective and expedient.

Democracy has a universal message of equality latent in its contents, rejecting any form of discrimination in the name of religion, caste or sex. In other words, it is fundamentally non-discriminatory. This non-discriminatory universalism of a democratic culture is intended to inspire the entire population of a nation with the common goals of Nationhood, each playing its role in an unhindered way. The existence or even resurgence of a communal culture are disturbing aberrations in our onward march to a democratic evolution. The tendency to play to the voters' gallery or to the irrationality of a fanatic call, however tempting, can be indulged at the cost of the Nationhood which has been indelibly defined in blood as democratic and secular.

Democracy is a culture of practicing dissent, dissenting views ultimately congealing in the form of a rich democratic consensus. Trading dissent with the sovereign -- each party presenting its product to the sovereign is an exciting component of a democratic culture. Intolerance of dissent, any attempt to suppress it through use of instruments of oppression or any other manipulative device is

simply "Implied Fascism". There have been disturbing examples of indifference to this element of dissent in the exercise of the rule of law, in street demonstrations or even discussions in the Parliament. A former president, Professor Bodruddoza Chowdhury being dragged on the street just because he opted to differ is a regrettable incident. Spectacle of

nately left with some of its corrosive legacies. This has led to a pervasive absence of accountability, arbitrariness in the management of public resources and the growth of a plundering culture with impunity. Absence of a system of accountability is a sure invitation to the growth of a corrupt culture. Essentially it is the realisation of the political establish-

ment about their responsibilities as Trustees of National Resources and its management through an accountable system that will inspire the establishment and sustenance of that system. Failure in this area has been devastating with the country being internationally perceived as the most cor-

rupt. While the only visible corrective measure has been the establishment of an Anti Corruption Commission, unfortunately, with an avoidable partisan image.

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the democracy are practicing arts and one of the intriguing part of the exercise is its participatory character -- participants being political friends and foes alike. It is not a loner's game; and trying to play it in an exclusionary way makes it stale, unproductive; it loses in grace and innate majesty. Curiously, the political intoxication of a majority -- simple or absolute -- makes this truth less discernible -- only to be visible when the counter-productivity of this lonely exercise becomes obvious, and at an enormous cost to a nation.

We are admittedly in the midst of that costly phase; when the parliamentary political culture is not enriched by the curious absence of any dialogue between the leader of the house and leader of the opposition for almost one and a half decades; when parliament becomes dysfunctional by the absence of the opposition induced by inconsideration of an intoxicated majority and the ill-founded intransigence of the minority; when policy considerations on vital national issues is not enriched by the grace of a democratic consensus; when politicisation of supporting institutions -- the bureaucracy, the judiciary, the law enforcement becomes the tool of obsessive partisanship; when trusteeship of National Resources becomes prey to an unaccountable plundering culture; and, above all, when right to dissent is either disrespected or invites the wrath of instruments of operation.

Items on the debit side of the balance sheet appear numerous and there is an urgent need to balance it with a massive demonstration of a bold political will translated into concrete actions and these include, among others, inculcation of a culture of accommodation of views on both sides and reform measures. And this must be the reflection of a shared realisation of a democracy.

It certainly appears doable. Respectfully, does the political establishment agree?

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law abiding women dissenters being subjugated to indecent manhandling by law enforcers is too shameful to be recalled. The assassination attempt on a former prime minister and the leader of the opposition in a parliamentary democracy is indicative of the existence of a fascist culture. Even more disturbing is the fascist culture acquiring a religious militant character. The attempt on the life of late Prof. Humayun Azad and death of Prof. Eunus at Rajshahi University occurred with fascist indication of an ominous proportion. Bangla Bhai thrives, hides, emerges and dances, curiously with no RAB or COBRA looking for him, under the hilarious music of state patronage. Bangla Bhai seems cross-fire immune!

The twin monster of Terror and Black money coexist -- each complementing the other as threat to a true democratic order. Both these monsters emerged and thrived under state patronage -- thanks to the short-sighted political strategies for a shortcut to manipulative politics. They are vicious tools of a manipulative culture disrespectful to the core values of democracy. The existence of this danger, with alleged patronage being enjoyed from the political establishment, are issues with no visible sign of correction. One find it hard to recollect Terror and its management forming a top agenda of any meeting of Working Committee, Presidium or Standing Committees clearly indicating a deliberate indifference to a burning issue. Terror has never been on a regular agenda for discussion in a special session of the National Assembly.

In a democracy management of the national resources becomes a collective endeavour with sense of accountability to the Republic's Owner-The People. In that sense the national budget is supposed to be a consensus document, its implementation respectful to a system of public accountability. Management of public expenditure must be a combined product of both political efficiency and public accountability -- transparent and institutionalised. Endeavour to build traditional accountability was seriously compromised by the emergence of majoritarian rule. Such a dispensation tends to destroy or inhibit growth of institutions that were to ensure accountability and we are unfortu-

ment about their responsibilities as Trustees of National Resources and its management through an accountable system that will inspire the establishment and sustenance of that system. Failure in this area has been devastating with the country being internationally perceived as the most corrupt. While the only visible corrective measure has been the establishment of an Anti Corruption Commission, unfortunately, with an avoidable partisan image.

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A corrupt culture destabilises democracy because it breeds inequality, it creates vested interests, it inhibits sound economic management. Issues demanding the shared attention in the political establishment are numerous.

Politics and the exercise of



টোটালাস ফ্রাগের।

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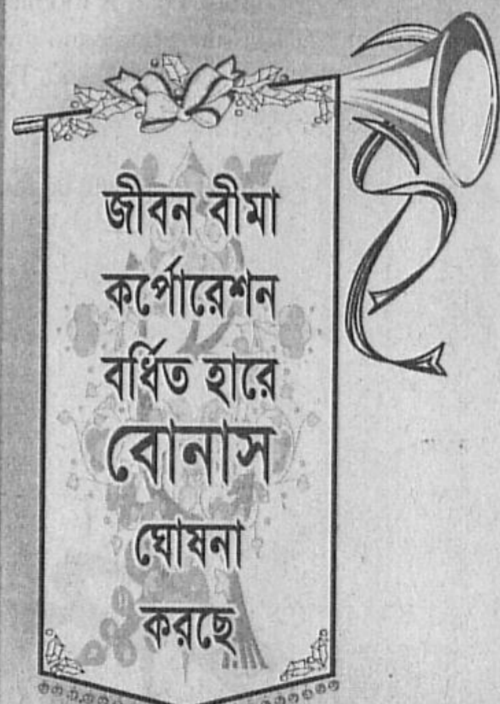
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