



## Inculcating political tolerance

The culture of political tolerance involves debate and dynamic exchanges of opinions and arguments, whereby politicians can get closer to the truth and benefit from a vital public life. Developing a culture of political tolerance is a long-term undertaking that removes the roots of intolerance and is necessary for the democratic process.

A.N.M. NURUL HAQUE

It would not be an exaggeration if one says that the repressive government actions against the leaders and activists of the main opposition during observance of hartal and human chain recently have displayed all the ugly signs of political intolerance. A new dimension has been added to the customary and callous actions of successive regimes in treating political opponents.

There is a singular lack of tolerance in our political system, where the ruling quarters and the major oppositions are often at violent loggerheads with each other. While political parties are one of the most crucial factors for the sustenance of a viable democratic system, they must have tolerance. Sadly, one has seen that every ruling party suppresses the opposition. This is a common practice in the country, irrespective of which party is in power.

The party in power usually takes advantage of state resources to suppress opposition activities. Opposition to ruling government policies are often portrayed as anti-state treasonable activities, and the state's law enforcing agencies are used to make politically-motivated arrests and repress opposition members.

The recent BNP enforced hartal to protest what they called the multiple misdeeds and questionable actions of the government. The ruling party reacted to the situation by taking a hard-line strategy to nip in the bud the opposition's capacity to organise an uprising that was expressly the goal as pronounced by some leaders of the mainstream opposition. It can be said with a degree of certainty that the ruling alliance lacks tolerance and democratic norms,

along with a dearth of the spirit in governance.

BNP's vice-chairman and a valiant freedom fighter, and also a former diplomat, Shamsher Mobin Chowdhury, was taken on remand after his arrest while observing hartal. The arrest of BNP lawmaker, Shahiduddin Chowdhury Annee, during an ongoing parliamentary session, when he had sought refuge in a hospital after a pincer attack by the police and Chattrra League goons, is really condemnable.

The beating of occupants in the house of Mirza Abbas by the Rapid Action Battalion men, injuring his family members, was unprecedented. The politically conscious and democratically-oriented sections of people have expressed their fury and frustration over the intensification of confrontation and escalation of the coercive and repressive measures against the opposition.

The attack on the BNP's human chains, a peaceful political program, suggests that the government was in no mood for any public display of dissent and displeasure against them and thus unleashed the police and the goons of its associate organisations.

The human chain is essentially a peaceful program, and different organisations form human chains at different places in the capital and elsewhere in the country almost every day. The government cannot resist people's right to register their protests peacefully.

The attack on a rally of the National Committee to Protect Oil, Gas, Mineral Resources, tends to indicate that the ruling quarter is not really ready to tolerate any dissenting voice in the society. The popularity rating of the ruling party certainly goes down following such intolerance to dissent and

divergent opinions. So, the government needs to effect a course correction and be tolerant to accommodate the divergent views and dissenting voices.

Some senior leaders of the ruling party have seen signs of possible extra-constitutional intervention, blaming the opposition leaders for precipitating a crisis. The opposition has also thrown back the blame on the ruling party for its failures in governance, repression of opposition party leaders, plundering of public funds and tyrannical rule. These are not good signs for sustenance of a viable democratic system in the country.

A report in the London-based *Economist* (dated June 10, Dhaka) says: "The chances of another coup in Bangladesh are close to zero," says a former general in Bangladesh's army. That sounds excellent. But the country's 'rival queens' -- Sheikh Hasina, the prime minister, and Khaleda Zia, (former prime minister) -- who were both jailed during an anti-corruption drive by an army-backed caretaker government in 2007-08 -- seem to see the soldiers' docility as an opportunity. The result is that, 18 months after Sheikh Hasina's Awami League won a parliamentary election in a landslide, Bangladesh's politics is back to normal; personal, vindictive and confrontational."

Lack of political tolerance is a problem not only with Bangladesh but also with many other countries. It manifests itself when political leaders refuse to give space to opposition parties and politics, when political parties do not tolerate dissent from their membership and, more generally, through a rejection of different views.

The IPU had chosen the theme of "Democracy and Political Tolerance" for the International Day of Democracy 2009 in order to highlight the importance of creating a culture of tolerance in society, and in political life in particular.

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public life. Developing a culture of political tolerance is a long-term undertaking that removes the roots of intolerance and is necessary for the democratic process.

Political intolerance creates a conformist culture and represents a threat to democracy. It also narrows people's perceptions of politics and shapes their subsequent behaviour. So, the political leaders have a responsibility to practice tolerance in their words and actions.

Overall democratic learning can cultivate political tolerance among the politicians and uphold the core principles of democracy. But the common complaint against the leadership of both the major political parties in Bangladesh is that they have failed to develop a culture of tolerance in their political lives.

A society in which freedom of expression is not guaranteed hinders political tolerance. Open dialogue and a diversity of political opinions are made possible by, and reinforce, a culture of tolerance.

The freedom of expression of the parliamentarians, almost exclusively those from the opposition, frequently comes under attack. This is a particular concern because the opposition in parliament is an indispensable component of democracy. Political tolerance is, therefore essential to the functioning of parliaments and should be actively pursued in practice.

Bangladesh is a country, globally known for its poverty, corruption, violence and natural calamities. But these are not all about the country. There are some positives that discerning eyes cannot fail to see. Bangladesh has made positive strides in education, life expectancy and rural development. Literacy rates have increased remarkably though the quality of education is yet to be improved.

To achieve the full potential of these positive indicators, the leadership of both the major political parties must develop a culture of political tolerance and be aware of the real mood of the people.

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## Accountants don't write novels

YOUR humble narrator, a novelist who also writes columns, has fled from the newspapers temporarily to write some books. Back in the book world, I was reminded of the time earlier this year when I was featured at a literary festival in Shanghai the same weekend as Scott Turow, the lawyer who wrote *Presumed Innocent*, a wonderful thriller. It got me thinking. Books from lawyers like him, John Grisham and David Baldacci fill the bestseller lists. Other professionals, like doctors, write too: *The Kite Runner* for example, by that unforgettable writer, wotsname.

But where are the accountants? I put this question to a group of friends who developed a theory to explain the discrepancy.

A lawyer's job is to delete distracting facts until one is left with an emotionally affecting narrative. In other words, lawyers are identical to novelists, except for the fact that they earn money, drive big cars, live in huge houses with blonde trophy wives called Meghan and deserve to DIE DIE DIE DIEEEEE.

Not that I'm jealous. No serious novelist would lower himself to "sell out" by doing anything as artistically questionable as "earning money." Pah!

Accountants do the opposite to lawyers and novelists. Instead of selecting facts, they're trained to gather ALL related facts to create a comprehensive record which is entirely free of emotion and as dry as possible.

"The better the accountant, the worse the novel," said one of the professional people present, made philosophical by my presence, or, more likely, the six empty bottles of Corona in front of him.

That got me thinking again. What sort of adventure stories would serious accountants write? I decided to write one on their behalf. I call this:

### Harry Potter and the Balance Sheet

Once upon a time there was a boy called Harry Potter, whose uncle told him he was a liability. But the boy felt unwilling to accept this designation without qualification, since his parents were off-balance sheet, ie, missing.

One day, a strange visitor named Hagrid gave the boy professional advice. "This advice is provided to you without prejudice," he said. "Your fortunes may go up or they may go down. But due diligence requires me to inform you that you are not a liability of the muggle class, but an asset of the wizard class."

The young asset travelled to Hogwarts School for a set of "add value" courses expected by analysts to cause a significant appreciation in his book value. In class, Harry met a female asset called Hermione and thought about having a merger with her.

But he was distracted because an outside party called Voldemort earmarked him for 100 per cent depreciation, ie, death. A huge takeover battle followed, with Voldemort attempting a hostile acquisition followed by a total liquidation of Harry and associated assets.

Harry won by using an unlisted extraordinary item called heroism. In a huge EGM of interested parties at Hogwarts Hall, Harry found that his book value had increased considerably. However, there was no merger with Hermione.

"Also, I haven't found my parents, who are still listed as receivables," Harry said.

As a result, analysts suggested that there may be room for subsidiary or spin-off adventures.

The following day I emailed the story above to some of the gang at my local noodle shop.

They said that it was not as child-friendly as the original, but it DID have a refreshingly different feel about it.

Will it be appearing on bestseller lists soon?

Probably not. JK Rowling's famously large crew of copyright lawyers will make sure of that.

Unless, of course, they are all too busy writing novels. Heh-heh-heh-heh.

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## Today's victor may be tomorrow's vanquished

People tend to forget that in sport there is neither a permanent victor nor a permanent vanquished. This makes sport interesting. Today's victor is tomorrow's vanquished, and the vice versa is equally true. People watch games with so much attention only because the result is unknown.

ABDUL MATIN

SPAIN'S victorious World Cup squad received a tumultuous welcome on their return to Madrid. About one million people were reported to have lined a five-mile route in the Spanish capital to welcome and applaud the victors. The team met the Spanish royal family and the prime minister.

They paraded through the streets in the heart of Madrid as air force fighters flew overhead, trailing red and yellow colours symbolising their national flag. They got a reception they deserved. The reigning European champion has been elevated to the position of the world champion. It is time for the Spaniards to celebrate. Why shouldn't they?

The runners-up, the Netherlands, were also given a heroes' welcome by the Dutch on their arrival in Amsterdam. Their plane was escorted into Dutch airspace by an air force plane painted orange, their national colour. They

were taken on an open-top boat tour of Amsterdam canals and were received by the queen and the prime minister. They lost 1-0 to Spain in the final match. So what? In games only one team wins. They played well and deserved this honour.

An estimated crowd of 150,000 people cheered Uruguay's World Cup squad in Montevideo to celebrate their fourth position in the World Cup. "This is incredible," coach Oscar Tabarez said during a reception in the Uruguayan capital.

The Argentines went even further and surprised many by giving a very warm welcome to Diego Maradona's team as they returned to Buenos Aires. Even though the administration took precaution to seclude the squad from the crowd, an estimated 15,000 fans, dressed in their national colours, greeted them at Ezeiza Airport despite the bitter disappointment at their 4-0 defeat in the quarter final against Germany.

Argentina played well in all the previous matches. Argentine President Cristina Kirchner invited the team to the Presidential Palace but they declined the invitation because they deemed themselves unworthy of the honour. The president did not give up. She said: "I will wait for them." The Argentines, however, showed the world that they are indeed a sporting nation and know how to honour their heroes, in good times as well as in bad times.

Germany's World Cup team, on the contrary, returned home relatively quietly, even though they finished in the third position. They too had reasons to celebrate. They reached a position surpassing other former world champions, Brazil, Argentina, Italy, France, England and Uruguay.

Thomas Mueller won the Golden Boot as the top scorer, with five goals. He was also voted the best young player. The team, which had won the World Cup three times before certainly deserved a much warmer welcome from the Germans. They should have been more generous and compassionate.

Unfortunately, the situation is even worse in our part of the world. Usually, we only welcome the victor and ignore the vanquished. After India failed to qualify to play in the Super 8 of the ICC World Cup in 2007, Indian cricket fans attacked the house of wicket-keeper Mahendra Singh Dhoni in Ranchi. "Dhoni, die, die," the protestors chanted, burning

effigies of the wicket-keeper.

What happened next? India won the ICC World Twenty20 cup during the same year. Cheerful Indians accorded Dhoni and his team a grand reception at a packed Wankhede Stadium in Bombay. The ceremony came to an end after a five-hour-long journey in an open double-decker bus from Sahar International Airport. Traffic was brought to a standstill on the route, approximately 20 kilometres long, with crowds lining the roadsides and waving to the heroes!

What a contrast! People tend to forget that in sport there is neither a permanent victor nor a permanent vanquished. This makes sport interesting. Today's victor is tomorrow's vanquished, and the vice versa is equally true. People watch games with so much attention only because the result is unknown. Any of the contending teams may win a game.

In a war, only the victor survives and the vanquished disappears. This does not happen in sport. In sport, the vanquished may rebound, anytime. One should never condemn a losing team. They need more care, more understanding and more encouragement to boost their morale and to build confidence. This will help them to rebound sooner. So, hail the victor and the vanquished; this is sport.

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## HARRY POTTER AND THE BALANCE SHEET

