

Egypt strives for democracy

ZAHURUL ALAM

THE fall of Hosni Mubarak was inevitable, although even hours before his departure, Mubarak declared that he was going to remain in power till the presidential election of September 2011. His vice-president asked the people to go home and to work. The people did not leave Tahrir Square. They were adamant to get rid of the autocrat who ruled the country for 30 years.

The state of emergency imposed by Mubarak at the inception of his presidency destroyed democratic norms, violated human rights, prevented normal growth of the democratic institutions, and instigated corruption by a small quarter favoured by the regime.

The 18 day protest that sacrificed 300 lives was the reflection of the people's anger and dissatisfaction over decades of misrule and autocracy, and scored a resounding triumph in less than 24 hours following Mubarak's refusal to resign. Hosni Mubarak in his last speech attempted to brand himself as a patriot. However, his handing over power to the military raises vital questions regarding his willingness to see a democratic and prosperous Egypt.

The "patriot's" duty was to hand over power in a manner whereby the danger of emergence of another authoritarian regime could be avoided. That could be done by handing over power either to a national government comprising political and social forces, or by following the constitutional provisions that do not allow for a defense council to rule the country. The Egyptian constitution allows the president to hand over power either to the vice-president (for temporary departure) or to the speaker (for permanent departure).

None of the above was followed. Rather, the power handover to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces keeps alive the possibility of emergence of another autocratic regime. The head of the defense council, Defense Minister Mohammed Hussein Tantawi (75), is famous for his anti-reform approach. Both his age and political philosophy are not in conformity with the objective of the Egyptian people's struggle.

The danger is that he may be removed, he may be unable to lead the nation to the right direction, or he may simply install another autocracy. All will ultimately make the sacrifices of the people null and void. The protest days clearly demonstrated that Egypt lacks organised political forces to lead the nation with clear mission and vision.

In Egyptian politics the army has so far played a vital role, with three presidents coming from the armed forces -- Tantawi being the latest. The great influence of the army in politics impacted adversely on the growth of political parties and political leadership, and in strengthening the democratic process as a whole.

This lack of political leadership became more evident during the 18-day protests, and especially after the refusal of Mubarak to resign.

None of the politicians were seen at the square, which, till morning was jammed with general people.

Certainly it is not the army that will materialise the people's aspirations. History of military capture of power in different countries does not have any evidence that after their power capture democracy was strengthened, human rights situation improved or corruption reduced. The reverse has always been true. It would not be wise to expect that another president from the army would strengthen democratic institutions in Egypt.

Overhaul of the political system towards the right direction is not possible without judicious political leadership, and that leadership needs to come from amongst the people, not otherwise.



Despite this, even some prominent political leaders, prior to Mubarak's departure, expressed the expectation that the army should capture power. The Nobel Peace laureate and prominent reform

advocate Mohammed ElBaradei, apprehending that "Egypt will explode," said that the "army must save the country now. I call on the Egyptian army to immediately interfere to rescue Egypt. The credi-

bility of the army is on the line."

Instead of coming forward to rescue the country, the politicians were advocating for the military to "save the nation." They hardly understood that the country had virtually been under military rule and the state of emergency for more than 60 years, which only increased the people's political, social and economic hardship.

Despite gaining independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1922, and ending of protectorate with the United Kingdom in 1952, Egyptian politics did not experience much of democracy. Gamal Abdel Nasser, the founder of modern Egypt, was an army officer who overthrew King Farouk in 1952 and replaced General Neguib -- the first Egyptian president -- and was president during 1956-1970.

Although Nasser attempted to establish a secular Arab state at the juncture of three continents, his rule is branded as the most authoritarian, with complete concentration of powers in the hands of the president. This is evidenced by the fact that the current constitution of Egypt was promulgated on September 11, 1971, after Nasser's death. Nasser's economic policy aimed at strengthening state monopoly.

Sadat, who succeeded Nasser, made some economic and political reforms, including (re)introduction of multi-party system and "open door" policy (Infitah). However, those did not change the fundamental economic and political structure of the country, neither did the reforms of Mubarak, who had been in power for 30 years without any credible elections taking place.

The provision for presidential election was introduced in the constitution only in May 2005. The September 2005 presidential election, in which Mubarak got more than 86% votes, was the first-ever

multi-party election during his 30-year rule. That election was severely criticised by the contesting candidates, parties and the media for widespread irregularities and fraud. Some parties boycotted the election apprehending electoral fraud, while some, including the Muslim Brotherhood, were not allowed to contest. Mubarak was elected for the fifth time as the president.

Mubarak's regime, similar to his predecessors', most of who were from the military, yielded little for the Egyptian economy. The average annual growth rate in Egypt during 1980-2007 was 1.3%, even lower than that of Bangladesh. The country's HDI ranking as per 2010 UNHDR is 101 compared to 15, 82, 55 and 47, respectively for neighbouring Israel, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Almost all Arab-speaking African countries (Algeria, Morocco, Libya, Tunisia, etc.) have better HDI ranking compared to Egypt. The per capita Gross National Income of Egypt is lower than all above countries, except Morocco.

This is evidence of the irrelevance of the myth that the army can bring positive changes in socio-economic sphere of Egyptian life. The objective of the recent uprising lies in the aspiration of the people to establish a democratic Egypt that will ensure their economic, social and political rights and freedom, ensure democracy and good governance, and ensure human rights. The protesting people demanded "an overhaul of the political system," not only the resignation of President Hosni Mubarak. Overhaul of the political system towards the right direction is not possible without judicious political leadership, and that leadership needs to come from amongst the people, not otherwise.

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Why I support Mohammed Yunus

NICK STACE

A year ago, I along with other social enterprise leaders from around the world visited Nobel laureate Professor Yunus at his Grameen headquarters in Dhaka, Bangladesh. I'm lucky that through my work I get to meet some interesting people in life, but I have met few people who can match the Yunus magic -- his charisma and vision has transformed the lives of some of the world's poorest and most vulnerable people.

Yunus set up the Grameen Bank, which today is giving opportunities through small loans to 10 million of the world's poorest families in 73,000 villages, in 1983. But it didn't stop there. Through social business partnerships with global brands such as Adidas and Danone, Yunus is tackling underlying causes of poverty. These sustainable social businesses now employ over 30,000 people and deliver benefits to many millions of people.

At our first meeting in Dhaka, Professor Yunus used a vivid analogy to explain the problem that the poor face: "To me poor people are like Bonsai trees. When you plant the best seed of the tallest tree in a flower pot you get a replica of the tallest tree only inches tall. There is nothing wrong with the seed you planted -- only the soil base is too inadequate. Poor people are Bonsai people. There is nothing wrong with their seeds, only society didn't give them the base to grow on."

"Real" banks have never wanted to loan to the poor, only loan sharks do with business models that extract bone-crushing interest rates attached to violence and intimidation. Grameen in contrast provides loans at reasonable rates, in a supportive environment. It's inspiring stuff because it puts people at the heart of busi-

ness solutions, and without political interference it will continue for the benefit of generations to come.

There is no question that Professor Yunus is challenging to the world as we see it; he turns on its head conventional thinking, which of itself can allow the seeds of doubt and suspicion to fester in an insecure regime.

It is of course a familiar story that people who suffer the most often live in parts of the world that experience higher than average levels of corruption. Transparency International con-

million in aid money from one Grameen entity to another was a violation of a clause in its aid contract. Grameen agreed to move the funds back and the matter was settled amicably. The Norwegian Finance Minister Erik Solheim declared that "according to the report, there is no indication that Norwegian funds have been used for unintended purposes, or that Grameen Bank has engaged in corrupt practices or embezzled funds."

It is understandable why Yunus supporters see the attacks on him as politically motivated and fear

the world. It would be a tragedy of epic proportions affecting millions of the most vulnerable people globally.

That's why I feel so passionate about standing up for Professor Yunus and why I've joined Liam Black, co-founder of Wavelength (a partner of Grameen) and Danone in supporting the birth of a new organisation called Friends of Grameen. Friends of Grameen has already attracted a unique coalition of social enterprise leaders, big corporations and political leaders from around the world. It will be chaired by Mary Robinson, the former president of Ireland and I believe it can help build an unstoppable momentum in support of the global icon of the poor.

Through Friends of Grameen we are putting pressure on every political leader from around the world who has basked in the Yunus glory, to now defend him in his hour of need. David Cameron met the Bangladeshi prime minister two weeks ago and through his advisors we encouraged him to raise widespread concerns about the way Yunus is being treated. In Australia the support of Kevin Rudd, the foreign affairs minister, is being sought. And Hilary Clinton, US secretary of state, has already declared her support.

There are few people in the history of the world that can have done more than Mohammed Yunus to alleviate poverty and to bring about lasting change to the world's poorest. It's taken a lifetime to create such a legacy and it could take just a few months to destroy it. That's why I and others who have met Yunus feel we have a duty to do all we can, or witness a beacon of hope in a country where people yearn to get on, snuffed out by cynical political interference.

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firmed in a recent report that Bangladesh is still extremely high on the world corruption league table. And as The Economist noted in 2007: "The problem is that the mafia in Bangladesh are the political parties."

For that reason Professor Yunus embarked on a mission to clean up politics, a move The Economist says earned him "powerful enemies among Bangladesh's politicians."

The recent attacks on Yunus are over corruption allegations that were proven unfounded some years ago. In 1996 the Norwegian Development Agency thought the movement of \$100

that the government will not give up trying to ruin his reputation. According to Nicholas Kristof of The New York Times: "It may be that the government worries that Yunus will enter politics, or criticise politicians -- and they may also be salivating at the prospect of gaining control over Grameen, which touches one person in three in Bangladesh."

Whatever the reasons for the attack on Yunus -- jealousy, personal gain, or fear -- if hne goes under and the bank comes under government control, the big losers will be the poor of Bangladesh, as well as the microcredit movement around

A new form of therapy



AT A LUNCH with friends, a psychiatrist stood up and said she had to leave early to see a patient. Her husband said: "Why don't you stay and I'll do your patient?" We all laughed. He's a businessman! He might be able to fix up companies but would be a mega-disaster trying to fix up someone's life. Or would he? As she left, I couldn't help daydreaming about what would happen if one day the "corporate doctor" did end up seeing a patient at his wife's office.

DR BIZ: Why don't you make yourself comfortable on this couch and start telling me about your assets?

PATIENT: Don't you mean my life? Well, my father beat me and my mother stole my boyfriends ...

DR BIZ: Ewwwww! Too much information. No wonder you're crazy and messed up. You should keep that icky stuff to yourself. No one wants to hear about your loopy family!

PATIENT: But I thought psychiatrists always made you talk about your parents?

DR BIZ: Not if they are sordid losers best swept under the carpet! Let's get back to the important stuff, ie, your assets.

PATIENT: Well, I have a husband, two kids and a dog. But I don't know if I would describe the husband as an asset. That's my main worry.

DR BIZ: Easily fixed. We simply list his negative qualities in the "liabilities" section and you can work out with a calculator whether he is worth keeping or not.

PATIENT:

Really? That's great. Can you do that with my kids too?

DR BIZ: Sure. We'll also need list your cash and cash equivalents. Does anyone owe you anything?

PATIENT: My best friend owes me a big favour. She told her husband she was staying with me, but she was hanging with her gorgeous boss who is this hunky....

DR BIZ: Whoah. Too much information again! You are quite the little gossip, aren't you?

PATIENT: But you're my psychiatrist.

DR BIZ: That's not the point. You shouldn't say these things in public -- what if I put them on my Facebook page?

"Status Line: Met this cute woman but her parents were loony perverts, her best friend cheats and she wants to ditch her husband, etc." You have to be discreet, like, say priests or businessmen. Anyway, let's move on. We need to do an inventory, listing everything you own with value.

PATIENT: Okay. I'll start with my shoes.

DR BIZ: No. I'd start with the highest value items, such as the apartment.

PATIENT: The highest value items are my shoes. You don't know much about women like me, do you?

DR BIZ: No, I guess not. Let's cut to the chase. What's your exit strategy? I'm guessing you want to outplace yourself with a decent golden parachute?

PATIENT: That could be good.

DR BIZ: I can organise that for you. But first I have to confess something. I am not a psychologist. I am a businessman.

PATIENT: Who cares? Tell me more about this golden parachute. (Fade to black as happy music plays.)

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