

Democracy on life support



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FIFTY years ago, in June 1972, the Watergate scandal broke out. Former CIA personnel had broken into the Democratic Party National Committee Office in the middle of the night at the Watergate Hotel in Washington. A Senate investigation ensued, and President Richard J Nixon resigned two years later on August 8, 1974 from US presidency.

In June 2022, the US Congress is holding hearings to ferret out the facts about the insurrection on January 6, 2020 when a rowdy crowd invaded the US Capitol building, shouting death to Vice-President Mike Pence and Speaker Nancy Pelosi. The demonstrators were trying to prevent Congress from the required certifying of the presidential election results, in which Joe Biden had defeated Donald Trump by a difference of seven million popular votes.

In the Watergate case, an incumbent president, who had been re-elected for a second term, was obliged to take responsibility and pay the price of resigning in disgrace for what was regarded as gross malfeasance. Fifty years later, a former president is accused of conspiring a far more serious offence: overturning the presidential election results and supporting a violent assault on the Capitol building, the seat of the US Congress. But this time, the political establishment is so divided by party line



An explosion caused by a police munition is seen while supporters of President Donald Trump gather at the US Capitol Building in Washington, DC on January 6, 2021.

FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

coup engineered by Trump may not be enough to defeat Trump supporters in the midterm election in November.

Two-thirds of US residents (64 percent) think that democracy is in crisis and at risk of failing, according to a National Public Radio (NPR) and the global market research company IPSOS survey in January 2022. Only seven percent of young Americans thought the US was a "healthy" democracy, according to the Harvard Institute of Politics youth polling in December 2021.

Political observers believe that the midterm election remains a toss-up, and will be decided by the voters' views on the Biden administration's handling of the economy and the danger of a stagflation that looms large after the pandemic and the Ukraine war. Donald Trump is even seen by many as a viable candidate for presidency in 2024, unless he is indicted and sent to jail. The attorney general of the Biden administration, Merrick Garland, who has to make the decision about pursuing indictment, is concerned about the political repercussions of such a move rather than the merit of the case. He is watching what the Congressional hearing brings out, and how the public reacts to the hearing. This does not augur well for democracy in the US. What does this tell us about the fate of democracy in the world?

A group of American scholars have written about a clear and consistent pattern they see, which they call the Authoritarian Playbook (Protect Democracy, June 2022). Aspiring autocrats follow this playbook with minor variations to achieve their goal. The playbook lists seven basic tactics that the authoritarian leaders employ in pursuit of their aim. These are:

- 1. They attempt to politicise independent institutions, such as undermining the independence of the election process.
2. They spread disinformation - controlling media platforms to spread disinformation and undermine confidence in democratic institutions.
3. They aggrandise executive power at the expense of checks and balances - influencing legislature and judiciary not to restrain the executive branch from exercising power in corrupt ways.
4. They quash criticism and dissent - the authoritarian leaders and autocratic-minded state functionaries use the power of government to limit dissent.
5. They specifically target vulnerable and marginalised communities - rallying populist support by attacking vulnerable communities and defining them as outsiders.

The next parliamentary election in Bangladesh in 18 months would come at the end of the third consecutive term of the Awami League-led government. It has been a period of economic growth and mega infrastructure projects, but also a period of democratic erosion marked by two rounds of seriously flawed national elections in 2014 and 2018, and growing economic inequality.

that the large majority of Republican Congress and Senate members oppose even the investigation, which they consider a political witch hunt.

Meanwhile, Donald Trump's support base among the public holds, and he wields great influence in nominating Republican candidates for the midterm election in November 2022 for the Congress and state-level offices. Political pundits believe that there are very low public expectations about morality and trustworthiness of politicians. Even the facts about the threat of a veritable

society vision that inspired its charter as an independent country?

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Reversing the authoritarian trends and mindset that have sunk roots in the political culture cannot happen overnight. But a beginning in this direction can be the legacy that Sheikh Hasina, the daughter of Bangabandhu, can leave for the next generation. Keeping the 12th parliamentary elections in mind, four actions can be taken: a) Ensuring that candidates are nominated because of their honesty, competence, popularity and record of public service, rather than the money and muscle power they can muster; b) Pledging to shun the use of mastans, muscle power, intimidation and violence by the ruling party and its candidates, and reining in the affiliated bodies such as the Chhatra League, Jubo League and Sramik League, observing strictly the rules for public representation; c) Pledging total support for the Election Commission to conduct a free and fair election, placing the government machinery at the hand of the commission for this purpose, and encouraging it to exercise its authority fully, including postponement of polling as needed; and d) Pledging to forego stoking factional, communal, sectarian, and religious divisions for political gains and reclaim the liberation ideals of justice, inclusion and human dignity for all - thus aspiring to be a model of liberal democracy in the region.

Convincing the citizens of the sincerity of these intentions will be the surest way to seize victory for the ruling party at the polls, and at the same time of injecting vital life-blood into the democratic process. Only words will not convince the public. Actions will have to follow in the form of creating a level playing field for all political parties - not pushing for repressive laws, and not using government power to punish dissent and protests.

গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার
আঞ্চলিক খাদ্য নিয়ন্ত্রকের দপ্তর
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তালিকাতুক্তি বিজ্ঞপ্তি
চট্টগ্রাম বিভাগীয় সড়ক পরিবহন ঠিকাদার (ডিআরটিসি)
আঞ্চলিক খাদ্য নিয়ন্ত্রক, চট্টগ্রাম এর অধীন ২০২২-২৩ ও ২০২৩-২৪ অর্থ বছরে এক এলএসডি/সিএসডি/স্থাপনা/গুদাম হতে অন্য এলএসডি/সিএসডি/স্থাপনা/গুদামে পাশ্চাত্য/পশ্চিমবঙ্গ সড়কপথে খাদ্যশস্য/খাদ্যদ্রব্য/অন্যান্য প্রব্যাদি/মালামাল পরিবহনের নিমিত্ত চট্টগ্রাম বিভাগীয় সড়ক পরিবহন ঠিকাদার (ডিআরটিসি) নিয়োগের লক্ষ্যে আগ্রহী ব্যক্তি/ঠিকাদারী প্রতিষ্ঠানের নিকট হতে তালিকাতুক্তি (enlistment) আবেদন আহ্বান করা যাচ্ছে।

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH
ACROSS
1 Flower part
6 Fake
10 Likely
11 Comet's place
12 Pillages
13 Afghan capital
14 Land in the sea
15 Limited
16 Peculiarity
17 British rule in India
18 Casual top
19 Like a hot rod
22 Brooklyn team
23 Castle
24 Surround
26 Absorbed
29 Bowler, for one
32 Battleship letters
33 Soccer's Hamm
34 Home-coming group
36 Drill parts
37 Well-founded
38 "Under-stand?"
39 Leaves out
40 Famed fur tycoon
41 Make do
42 Unemotional
DOWN
1 Breaks apart
2 Beach problem
3 Stick at a table
4 Poker payment
5 "Miserables"
6 Bridge
7 Custom
8 Less than right
9 Scuffle
11 Winter
12 Olympics feats
15 Craze
17 Echoes
20 Score amts.
21 "Tamerlane" author
24 Acknowledge
25 College cost
27 Letter before omega
28 Danish, e.g.
29 Great confusion
30 Crockett's last stand
31 Colorful flower
35 Spider's kin
36 Optimum
38 Neon, e.g.

SATURDAY'S ANSWERS
B A B A S R A D I O
A L A M O A G O N Y
R I S I N G C O S T S
E V E A L E S E T
S E D A T E D I R E
R A N H E I R
L A S T S H A R M S
I T T Y P E R
S P A S E X T A N T
T E N P E A M O E
F A L L I N G O U T S
O C E A N O N S E T
R E E D S N E E D Y

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