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Drift into Democratic Deviance

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Drift into "Democratic Deviance" **by** **Shahid Najam***

Democracy, peace and security play a pivotal role in combating poverty and advancing sustainable human development thereby ensuring well being for all. Terrorism, civil unrest, conflicts and instability, in all their forms and manifestation, are anathema to human development and pose immense challenge to the democratic order. They unleash death, destruction, disintegration and disabilities and in their wake bring human suffering, misery and affliction. Corruption, abuse of political or bureaucratic power for personal gains, bribery and money laundering add to the enormity of problem and have a massive repercussions for the economic and financial sustainability of a country, its polity and governance. Poor and the marginalized are the worst affected who are denied the opportunity to earn their livelihood; the resources and funds for social sector and safety net programs; the voice to articulate their priorities; and the security to pursue and realize even their coarse necessities of life.

The rule of law together with transparency, accountability, and responsive governance are essential if development efforts and social justice are to be ensured and secured. A robust national integrity and oversight system; a vibrant civil society yearning for responsive, responsible and inclusive development; free access and exchange of information and ideas; and, respect and protection of the fundamental human rights are sine qua non for the success of democracy and its institutions. Democratic advancement, however, is not a linear process nor is irreversible. The democratic gains achieved through historic struggle and sacrifices of the civil society, the pluralist institutions and the citizens may relapse and drift into "democratic deviance" and "majoritarianism" if the state institutions especially the Parliament fails to perform its constitutional role and becomes the tool for advancement of the narrow interests of the handful of political elite.

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The confrontational politics, harassment, intimidation, abuse of power and infringement of the right of expression and speech in the name of the regulatory function of the government foments subversion, suspension or violation of the constitutional order. The probability of conflict, violence and civil unrest with severe damage to public property and loss of innocent lives becomes imminent.

The leaders have to play their role to ward off the possibility of such backsliding and instability and eventual setbacks to democratic development. They need to:

- espouse good governance and lead by front in terms of their own integrity, rectitude and commitment and to the national interests;
- encourage and respond to the needs of the civil society through embarking on need based development with major emphasis on equity and social justice;
- promote respect and protection of human rights especially the rights of the minorities; and,
- strengthen the state institutions to bring them to a sustainable paradigm; and
- create the environment for participation of all groups in the democratic processes.