

## **Editorial**

Democratic days of Bhutan heralded with the transfer of power from fourth to fifth kings with new king accepting the fact that governance should be through the peoples' elected representatives. In the past the monarchy used to face pressure to relinquish power; the transition to democracy witnessed appreciation and approval.

The maturing of democracy did not go well in terms of practice, functioning and delivery. The monarchy remained the central force influencing decision-making and intervening the projects of the elected government. Though the constitution includes enormous royal prerogatives, it was positively hoped that path to democracy will widen as time goes. Many steps taken by the palace are proving to be otherwise.

In 2013, the palace interfered the election with the objectives to stop Druk Phuensum Tshogpa (DPT) regaining power. Only days before election, a calculated step was taken through India to stop supplying petroleum products to Bhutan, which was repealed following the election results in its favour, resulting in pro-palace People's Democratic Party (PDP) winning the vote.

The PDP government formed on the bases of Thimphu palace and New Delhi has left behind no remarkable achievement during its five years' rule. The government remained under the shadow of the palace's hyperactivities.

Palace wanted to wipe out DPT in 2018 but failed to do so – pointing out the fact that monarchy is still not trusted in the east. The new party Druk Nyamrup Tshogpa (DNT) offered several ministers to win votes in the east – maintaining some success. The primary target of the palace was to snatch away the legacy of DPT

from Nanong-Shumar constituency in Pema Gatshel district from where Jigmi Y Thinley had won the election twice.

Pema Gyamtsho who took over the reins of the party from Thinley was forced to exit from politics. Other DPT MP Kuenga Loday was entangled into criminal case and made to resign. The new DPT leader has chosen silence ever since taking over the role – the opposition is thus neutralised. Entire media agencies and houses in the country are subjugated by the Royal Media Foundation that evaluates their contents and asserts rewards and punishments.

While still being chief commander of the Royal Bhutan Army, Royal Bhutan Police and Royal Bodyguards, the King constituted a new force called De-Suung. This paramilitary force has been active in development activities, rescue operation and other important task which should have been the responsibilities of an elected government. This Orange Army is outside the constitutional mandate.

A new project, announced in 2019, is in full swing. Gyalsung – literally mean Crown Prince – is a project aimed at providing training for police, army, de-suung along with other trainings for those coming out of the university and ready for employment. The project is directly supervised by the royal palace, though by norm such projects must be administered by an elected government. No one has the authority to questions the intention of the palace-led project, its funding mechanism and auditing the irregularities.

The 2021 National Day was celebrated in closed doors citing COVID 19 pandemic. The strangest thing of the event was a dance performance by 10 government ministers and prime minister – the height of hypocrisy to appease the palace.

Further, the king has been active travelling across the length and breadth of the country to monitor the COVID situation and providing instructions to the field staffs.

All these instances are testimony of the king's interest in being pro-active politician and weaken the mandate of elected government. Weakening of an elected government results in death of democracy and returning to the order of absolute monarchy. That's has been the repeat history of Bhutan under Wangchuk dynasty.

There has been no exercise on the part of the government to address the issue of Bhutanese in exile and diaspora abroad. The citizenship issues of citizens inside Bhutan are not solved yet. Several Bhutanese people resettled in European and other countries are unable to access to citizenships of those countries. Bhutanese community in America is plagued with domestic and gender-based violence.