



"....In the capital, protesters poured out of mosques after Friday prayers and ran rampant through the streets, throwing stones and torching police stations. Police chased them with batons, firing tear gas, water cannon and rubber bullets...."
"...Today is different: all Egyptians are together, the rich and the poor, to get Mubarak out," shouted one protester in downtown Cairo, his face covered with a scarf against the billowing tear gas.
"Where is the President!" screamed another man. "We need freedom and justice!"
That was a report from Egypt where street power ousted Mubarak from a 30-year long rule.

Similar were the reports from Tunisia where the Jasmine Revolution started it all a few months ago. Repeats are heard from Yemen, Libya, Bahrein and the Gulf State of Oman. Other states in the Arab world

ly and his henchmen. A powerful centre of gravity is created and greedy and unscrupulous men and women keep gathering around him and these accretions constitute new elites in a vicious system. Ordinary people are isolated, rendered powerless and are made into third class citizens. In fact there are no citizens; only the ruler and the ruled. Human dignity is lost. Rarely is this phenomenon only a mental disease. More typically it is born of the greed for wealth, wine and women. Why did Qadafi who was once regarded as an "international pariah" or a "mad dog" suddenly become beloved of the West? Because of the immense wealth he had amassed over his 42 years of rule. According to a 2006 Wiki leaks cable, "All of the Qadafi children and family are supposed to have income streams from the National Oil Company (State owned) and oil services subsidiaries." This, while 33 per

This cockiness is also characteristic of the dictator. "Muammar is the Leader of the Revolution until the end of time... when they (the protesters) are caught they will beg for mercy, but we will not be merciful," said the Libyan dictator in his address to the nation on the 22nd of February." This self-perception of invincibility plods them to make further plunder and further inroads into peoples' freedom. Opposition is physically vanquished by his men and its leaders are put in jail. Qadafi described the street protestors as "drug-infested mice." Hosni Mubarak had unopposed elections until in 2005 he was pressured by US to allow for rival candidates. He made sure he won that election, too, and jailed the rival. Ben Ali always claimed 99.9 per cent election victory in Tunisia.

These elections are another thing. They are



For this purpose appropriate constitutional changes are made. Since all is his private property the constitution also can be changed by at the autocrat's will. The constitution in Sri Lanka was recently changed just like an ordinary piece of law with no public or parliamentary consultation.

Free information is anathema for dictators. In Australia and the maligned West we have legislation guaranteeing freedom of information. Authoritarian regimes hate that. Journalists are early victims of their wrath. Hosni Mubarak and Qadafi strangled the internet when the revolution was gathering

TIDES OF MASSES TOPPLE DICTATORS

are rumbling.

There seems no doubt that this 21st century will be defined by the dumping of dictators all over the world. A demonstration of the human urge to be free of rulers who say they have all the answers and so claim a monopoly to rule forever.

In Western countries the fight for liberty officially commenced with the French Revolution of 1789. Even monarchies over there became transformed into constitutional monarchies where the King only reigns but does not rule. As the best form of gov-



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ernment devised by human civilization democracy has supplanted authoritarian rule throughout the West. The rest of the world moved slowly with pompous, corrupt, and abusive dictators ruling the roost over an apathetic population. Now the worm is turning.

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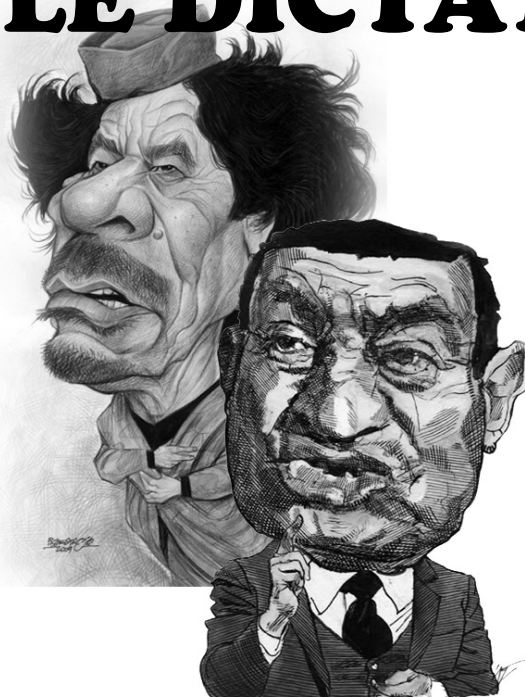
The history of human civilization may be retold as the struggle for freedom of the individual. "Freedom is the emancipation from arbitrary rule by other people," said Mortimer Adler. Why should an individual or a people be trampled and made to supplicate before another human and his family and cohorts? Isn't the very idea smelly? Isn't a dictator an ugly being? Don't the latter also breathe eat, defecate, urinate, and fornicate like the rest of us? What is special that a dictatorial regime can do that representatives of the people cannot do? Democracy gives accountability of rulers to the ruled; democracy gives responsible government. Dictatorial regimes, on the other hand, gives "no care rule" or "my car my petrol rule."

Look at the falling Libyan dictator, Muammar Qadafi. I heard him the other day over my car radio say, "Libya belongs to me." This is the mental disease of the typical dictator. The idea that the country and its resources and its people are his private property. Little is public and everything is privately owned by the Fuehrer, his fami-

cent of Libyans live below the poverty line. Qadafi has all these money invested in the West and the West believed that his downfall may cause a significant tremor in their economies. Hosni Mubarak, the deposed Egyptian dictator has earned over 50 billion US dollars worth of assets. For a long time he was also the favourite of the US. The situation had been similar with the Tunisian deposed strongman Ben Ali. Suharto of Indonesia owned half of Jakarta's assets by the time that country was relieved of him.

A common factor about these tyrants is that they initially come to power through the peoples' consent on the basis of nationalist sentiments. Qadafi rode to power on an anti-western platform deposing King Idris. Hosni Mubarak and the Tunisian Ben Ali had similar slogans. To the Muslims around the world who felt downtrodden or ignored by the West Qadafi became an instant hero and he kept building his halo into a cult. His anti-Western stance made him also the heroic symbol of the non-aligned movement of the sixties and seventies. Qadafi got so cocky with his anti-West slogans that he had a bomb planted in the Panam flight 103 and was detected by US technology.

held by many tyrants but they make sure there are no opposition parties. Dictators amass so much wealth and indulge in so much power abuse that they must ensure that they leave a dynasty to succeed them. Dynasty building is thus a commonly known strategy. Mubarak built up his son, Gamal, to succeed him. Muammar wanted his son, Saif al-Islam, to take over after him.



pace but the damage had already been done. However, it is not entirely easy to lock up cyber space. Information went to the outside world through Face book, Twitter and mobile telephones and cameras. One of the benefits of IT is that it acts as a dampener on bad governance and human rights violations. A small mobile camera can send pictures of HR violations all around the world. These are indeed hard times for dictators. The information revolution will eventually help to undermine autocratic regimes. Those in possession of the technology are young people. Younger people are not only IT savvy but their aspirations and values are different from the older grumpy generations. This is why the youth have spearheaded the recent uprisings.

The pace and occurrence times of liberation struggles will, however, depend on the way these autocrats handle the festering discontent. Up to a point dictators can buy time by adopting an intelligent and subtle mix between co-opting or placating its people and repressing the latter. When regimes become too brutal or when they are perceived as not been considerate to the welfare of the people they get into quick trouble. Despite huge reserves of oil wealth in Libya Qadafi ignored the poverty of his people and acted like a madman on the rampage when protestors came out. The Bahrein royal family, on the other hand, tries to placate protestors after an initial phase of repression. Much depends, therefore, on the astuteness of regime leaders in handling the right mix of these strategies.

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