

Pressure Groups and Democratic Governance – An Indian Perspective

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Interests groups pursuing the causes they believe in and persuading the political parties, governments and legislatures during and between elections is an integral part of vibrant democratic process. The author draws and evaluates a sharp contrast between two fundamental approaches of pressure groups persuading larger causes of public interest. One being the usage of hartals, bandhs, rasta rokos, obstructionism and indefinite fasts as coercive weapons in pressurizing governments or legislatures to concede their demands and the second is quiet, systematic and consistent persuasion of elected governments and legislatures and non-obstructive forms of dissent to bring institutional reforms. While establishing that the increasing erosion of legitimacy of the political process has propelled the adoption of the first approach, which made India ungovernable and chaotic, the author sets out nine vital conditions to be fulfilled in order for a democracy to mature and various interest groups to play a constructive, positive role in deepening democracy and enhancing our liberties.

Competition between alternative policies and contestation of ideas are the stuff of electoral politics. Pressure groups need to be particularly conscious of the legitimate role of legislatures and elected governments to make decisions on contentious issues. Citizens have a right to dissent, but ultimately majority view must prevail. But on substantive issues of democracy, liberty, citizen empowerment, rule of law and accountability, there can only be a single, acceptable approach in keeping with the letter and spirit of the constitution. In these areas, the legislatures and governments must respond positively to public opinion and pressure groups and strengthen democratic institutions. Failure on either side to recognize and respect these rules of the game will lead to dysfunctional institutions and ungovernable anarchy.

It is axiomatic that nations which have in their official titles the words 'democratic', or 'people's' are almost always autocratic and undemocratic. In order to understand the role of pressure groups and its limitations in a democracy, it will be useful to review the criteria for describing a nation-state as a modern political democracy.

Myron Weiner¹ listed four criteria for classifying a state as a functioning democracy. They may be paraphrased as:

- 1) Competitive elections
- 2) Political freedoms
- 3) Winners do not punish losers merely because they lost an election.
- 4) The elected government exercises real power; not a coterie or junta.

This list focuses almost entirely on politics and government, and does not adequately highlight citizens' right to organize, persuade and pressurize governments.

Robert Dahl² gave a broader list of "procedurally minimal" conditions for a modern political democracy or 'polyarchy'.

- 1) Control over government decisions about policy is constitutionally vested in elected officials.
- 2) Elected officials are chosen in frequent and fairly conducted elections in which coercion is comparatively uncommon.
- 3) Practically all adults have the right to vote in the election of officials.
- 4) Practically all adults have the right to run for elective offices in the government...
- 5) Citizens have a right to express themselves without the danger of severe punishment on political matters broadly defined...
- 6) Citizens have a right to seek out alternative sources of information. Moreover, alternative sources of information exists and are protected by law.
- 7) Citizens also have the right to form relatively independent associations or organizations, including independent political parties and interest groups.

The seventh condition of Dahl directly focuses on citizens' right to form interest groups, and the fifth and sixth conditions focus on the democratic freedoms necessary for

¹ Myron Weiner, "Empirical Democratic Theory," in *Competitive Elections in Developing Countries*, ed. Myron Weiner and Ergun Ozbudun(Durham, N.C: Duke University Press 1987),p 4-10

² Philippe C. Schmitter and Terry Lynn Karl, 'What Democracy is . . . and is Not', in Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner (eds), *The Global Resurgence of Democracy* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1993), 45

citizens to effectively organize and advocate the causes and interests they wish to pursue.

Clearly a democracy is incomplete if citizens have no right or capacity to articulate their views and persuade governments to pursue a course according to their beliefs. Article 19(1)(C) of the Indian Constitution explicitly recognizes this right to form associations, and the other fundamental rights ensure freedom of action for any group of citizens in expressing their views, mobilizing public opinion and persuading any branch of government – executive, legislature or judiciary – to take into account their concerns.

For the purpose of our discussion, we must distinguish between pressure groups representing the economic interests of discrete clienteles, and those that seek to represent no specific client, but pursue larger causes they believe in. The lobbies of various corporate groups seeking economic gain through favourable tax structures, allocation of natural resources, licensing, administered pricing, and subsidies fall in the former category of pressure groups serving the economic interests of discrete clienteles. Many organizations working to improve governance, protect or expand constitutional rights, reform political process, or are engaged in policy advocacy unrelated to economic gain to any discrete group fall in the latter category;

This second category of pressure groups working for the general public good as opposed to specific economic interests of a corporate group or clientele enjoys higher acceptance and legitimacy in our society. Such acceptance of non-profit activism is common in all democracies. Lobbying by corporate in the United States and many other western democracies is viewed with increasing suspicion. Given the inevitable link between such lobbying and campaign finance, there is a growing concern about legislative and policy-making process being subverted by, and mortgaged to, corporate interests. Several laws have been enacted for registration, monitoring and regulation of lobbying, and for limiting the campaign contributions of individuals, corporates and lobbying firms in order to curb their undue influence in legislative process. However,

these regulations, while they enhanced transparency, have not diminished the influence of lobbying and campaign finance in legislative process. Given this history, and the general suspicion of undue influence of corporate vested interests in policy making, non-profit groups pursuing non-economic interests of general population have always enjoyed higher public acceptance and legitimacy. The following discussion is largely centered around such groups exerting influence in the sphere of democratic governance, but not in the service of economic interest of discrete clienteles.

Even this distinction between corporate lobbies and non-profit 'do-gooders' is erased by disingenuous methods. The National Rifles Association (NRA) in the US is a classic example of erosion of boundaries between massive membership and powerful activist base fiercely committed to what they perceive as their constitutional right to bear arms, and the huge funding and support of the gun manufacturers who act as its corporate sponsors. The vast corporate funding and the resources raised from fiercely committed gun-owning members give NRA unique ability to finance the campaigns of many legislators. Equally, the well-organised, committed membership has disproportionate voting power affecting the outcomes in most marginal constituencies. The net result is, while a significant majority of citizens consistently favours effective gun control, a majority of legislators consistently oppose it. NRA illustrate the potential power of a pressure group masquerading as a rights-based organization, but backed by effective organization, vote mobilization, and sponsorship of profit-seeking corporate.

The NRA and its unique power are probably specific to American context, and are unlikely to be replicated in other functioning democracies. The vast campaign finance requirements in the US, the habitual gerrymandering of electoral constituencies, the primary elections which give disproportionate power to the extreme wings of parties, the enormous advantages incumbents have in American legislative elections, the strict separation of powers giving the Supreme Court the last word on the Constitution, and the rigid, literal interpretation of the Constitution by the Court disregarding changed context and emerging challenges – all these conditions have created a perfect storm in

the US, making effective gun control astonishingly difficult despite frequent episodes of gun violence and resultant deaths of innocent, unarmed persons.

While NRA type of activism is unlikely to be replicated in the Indian context, there is an inherent danger of agitation and mass protest derailing our democracy and undermining institutions. This is true in all democracies wedded to liberty. But this danger is compounded by circumstances specific to India. Our freedom struggle was based on protest, civil disobedience and resistance to authority. Though most of our national struggle was peaceful, violent resistance was not an insignificant part of it. In fact, it can be argued that but for Mahatma Gandhi's moral authority and sway over the masses, our anti-colonial struggle could easily have become violent and revolutionary. The revolt of 1857 itself was a very violent armed insurrection against an oppressive, colonial regime. The violence and arson of Chauri Chaura compelled Mahatma Gandhi to suspend the national movement, to the chagrin of many of his own followers. The violent upsurge symbolized by Chapekar brothers, movement against partition of Bengal, the various conspiracy cases, the Ghadar Party, the martyrdom of Bhagat Singh, Rajguru, Sukhdev, Chandrasekhar Azad and other patriots, the Indian National Army led by Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, the violent Quit India Movement, the mutiny of Naval Ratings – all these illustrate the potentially violent rebellion against alien control of our destiny. Gandhiji's unique genius to give a peaceful and creative expression to Indian anger largely contained forces of overt violence, and made Indian struggle for freedom unique in the annals of world history, making the miracle of peaceful, seamless transfer of power possible.

Gandhiji had to fashion new instruments of struggle against colonial rule in order to contain forces of overt violence, and yet put pressure on a powerful, well-organised alien government. Passive resistance, civil disobedience, boycott, Satyagraha, hartal, bandh, and finally his own indefinite fasts became powerful tools in the hands of an incomparable moral leader. Because of Gandhiji's influence on the national psyche and the fond memories of the heroic freedom struggle, the methods employed against an

alien, unelected, undemocratic, colonial ruler have been sanctified in our national consciousness. Our people, political parties, media and even legislatures instinctively believe that these forms of protest and applying pressure that were fashioned against a colonial, illegitimate government are perfectly valid even in a Constitutional democracy. Dr Ambedkar realized the dangers of obstructionism and unrestrained protest in a democratic society and urged restraint. But that admonition is largely ignored. Even in legislatures elected to participate in reasoned public debate, and to reconcile peacefully conflicting interests in a complex society, abuse, occasional violence, obstruction and paralysis are deemed to be legitimate weapons. Given this backdrop, civil society organizations acting as pressure groups to improve democratic governance have largely adopted hartal, bandh, rasta roko, obstruction and occasionally indefinite fast as legitimate weapons in pressurizing governments or legislatures to concede their demands.

This propensity to resort to extra-constitutional methods of protest in a constitutional democracy has made India increasingly ungovernable and chaotic. It is in some ways a tribute to our democracy that voices of dissent and dissonance have unrestrained freedom of expression. But if certain rules of protest are not observed, our democracy becomes dysfunctional and paralysed. Long years ago, Galbraith, the then US Ambassador to India characterised our democracy as a 'functioning anarchy'. While this chaotic, noisy, perpetual protest adds charm to our democratic credentials, it also makes us increasingly dysfunctional and becomes a part of the problem. This challenge is complicated by two special problems that stem from the enormous, grinding poverty affecting hundreds of millions of lives, and the erosion of legitimacy of political process.

Democracy is an incredibly complicated system to operate in any society in any age. It is especially difficult in a society with mass poverty and illiteracy, where the basic needs are not met and millions lead lives of deprivation and desperation. In a fundamental sense the challenge of governance and policy making in any society is reconciliation between the short term pain a society has to endure and the long term public good that

a government is expected to promote with public money. Shorn of shibboleths, all governmental power is about how resources are deployed. The most tempting recipe for politicians is to pay high wages to government employees without demanding public services and outcomes, give short-term subsidies to ease the pain of poverty temporarily, reward favoured corporates and other special interests with licenses, irreplaceable natural resources or subsidies, and perpetuate their hold over power. This is true with democracies even in affluent societies, unless there is high quality public discourse and enlightened public opinion that can take a long-term view of things. Added to these, in a globalised economy, the erosion of productivity and competitiveness that results from short-term policies leads to economic decline and popular unrest threatening the government's hold over power. It is this see-saw of populism and long-term productivity that are the staple of policy choices and electoral politics. In a society with mass poverty and a tradition of public discourse shaped by notions of state as mai-bap, it is particularly difficult for governments to pursue policies aimed at enhancing competitiveness and earning capacity of the poor and elimination of poverty, as opposed to short term benefits to ease the pain of poverty without improving the lot of the poor and enhancing their incomes on an enduring basis. The fact that India has one of the lowest qualities of education and healthcare is an ample testimony to this tendency to ignore real empowerment of the poor at the altar of short term populism and votes.

Pressure groups advocating short-term populism have great popular appeal and are lionised and romanticized at our current stage of evolution as a polity and economy. It is easy to demonise politics and governments, and portray them as enemies once a pressure group has no obligation of balancing budgets, reconciling conflicting interests or promoting long-term competitiveness and incomes of poor.

This difficulty is further compounded by increasing failure of political process in fulfilling its basic functions. The parties and political process have to fulfil at least four basic functions in a democracy. First, they must be effective vehicles for political participation

of citizens, capable of attracting, promoting and preparing the finest talent in society to perform public duties. In general, Indian political parties have failed in this function. Parties have either been reduced to being family fiefdoms or feudal estates of oligarchies and plutocrats. Only those with enormous, unaccounted money power are generally welcomed and promoted for political leadership and electoral competition. Second, the political process must be conducive to electing the talented, public-spirited citizens to office through fair and ethical means. However, in our electoral system as it evolved over the past few decades, even if public-spirited, talented citizens are serious contenders for elective office, they are in general unlikely to be elected by fair and ethical means. Vote buying, short-term populism, political polarization based on visceral, primordial loyalties and abnormal, unaccounted, illegitimate expenditure have become essential requirements for electoral success in most cases. Third, parties must offer alternative policies and clear agendas for tangible action to facilitate informed voter choice. In general, with a few significant exceptions, our elections do not offer to voters clear policy choices and alternative agendas, it is largely about electoral tactics, caste combinations, competitive populism, and projection and deification of personalities. Finally, the political process must enable a government in office to deliver on the promises made and mandate obtained. Our legislatures are stymied by obstruction and paralysis inside and protest and cacophony outside. Anti-defection provisions and dominance of a few parties in the first-past-the-post system made elected representatives largely slaves of party bosses, stifling reasoned debate and decision making. In many ways elections are now about who is in power, and not about what will be done while in power.

These factors significantly eroded the legitimacy of the political process. This further encouraged well-meaning pressure groups to resort to obstructive, and extreme forms of protest. We have a polarised political culture in which the parties out of power are forever ready to embarrass and oppose a government in office irrespective of the merits of an issue or their own beliefs and judgment, or their own actions while in office. In this

pervasive culture of perpetual protest, pressure groups sometimes have exaggerated influence without accountability, posing a danger to democracy and governance.

Many pressure groups played, and are playing a very robust, creative and balanced role in improving governance. Unrelenting efforts of Lok Satta and Janaagraha led to significant improvements in voter registration over the past two decades. Lok Satta, Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) and People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL) have been in the forefront of disclosure of details of candidates for elective office. In the wake of Tehelka scam, Lok Satta successfully persuaded the leading parties to utilize the opportunity constructively to create an avenue for legitimate funding of parties with tax incentives to donors and disclosure. The then ruling combine National Democratic Alliance (NDA), and the main opposition Congress came together to enact unanimously a remarkably progressive political funding law in 2003³. If Indian political crisis is solely a problem of campaign finance, our law addresses it adequately. However, our political crisis is one of distorted incentives where vote buying, unquestioned loyalty to party bosses, and abnormal, illegitimate deployment of money power often ensure election. Therefore, far-reaching systemic changes to alter the incentives are necessary for real change. Cooperative Development Foundation (CDF) is a classic example of small, but dedicated, professional organization relentlessly, and single-mindedly pursuing an agenda with great success. Its efforts led to a very liberal, progressive law on cooperatives in Andhra Pradesh first (MACS Act, 1995)⁴, followed by seven other States which enacted similar laws over the next decade. Finally, CDF and Lok Satta persuaded the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government through the National Advisory Council (NAC) and built a consensus among all parties to create a framework for cooperatives on par with all associations. The result is the 97th Amendment to the Constitution which gave cooperatives the explicit protection of Article 19(1)(c) on par with associations and unions. That our legislative process is at times inelegant, and a needless, unwieldy, at times self-contradictory Chapter IX B is added to

³ The Election and Other Related Laws (Amendment) Act, 2003

⁴ Andhra Pradesh Mutually Aided Cooperative Societies Act 1995

the Constitution against better advice is a different matter. The Constitutional validity of Chapter IX B is now before the Supreme Court.

The remarkable work of Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS), National Campaign for Peoples' Right to Information (NCPRI), Lok Satta and many other organizations in enacting Right to Information Act has been perhaps the best documented civil society success for governance reform. Much more contentious has been the enactment of the Lokpal Act after decades of advocacy, and the memorable campaign of India Against Corruption (IAC) led by Anna Hazare, the advocacy and efforts of NCPRI and Lok Satta. There were two distinct, separate approaches evident in the advocacy for high ombudsmen of Lokpal, Lokayuktas and local ombudsmen. While one view (represented by IAC) was that Lokpal must be omni-potent with complete jurisdiction over all public servants from subordinate staff to the Prime Minister, the other view (advocated by Lok Satta, NCPRI, Transparency International (TI), Centre for Media Studies (CMS) and Foundation for Democratic Reforms (FDR)) was that the high ombudsman must have specific jurisdiction over high functionaries, and not all public servants, there must be institutional checks, and there must be several levels of ombudsmen and other institutions with clear roles and effective integration. The Lokpal law is now in place, but it has not yet been constituted. Lokayuktas in many states are powerless and ineffective. As the controversy surrounding Karnataka Lokayukta in recent weeks demonstrates, a powerful ombudsman can itself be a source of corruption, intimidation and extortion unless there are institutional checks and balances and accountability.

Far more successful was the struggle of FDR, Lok Satta and Centre for Public Interest Litigation (CPIL) in the 2-G Spectrum case. Thanks to collective efforts and advocacy of all these organizations and eminent Indians, the Supreme Court cancelled 122 tainted licenses of 2-G spectrum, ordered transparent bidding; and directed that all natural resources in future should be allocated by a competitive, transparent bidding process. Subsequent successful 2-G auctions, cancellation of coal mining licenses and subsequent auctions, the amendment to mining law in the pipeline – all these indicate

that a vital avenue of grand, collusive corruption has now been closed, and public interest has been protected.

However, not every legislative outcome of a pressure group will have such huge, positive impact. Often, the change remains confined to the statute books with little impact on governance or lives of people. For about a decade, FDR and Lok Satta have advocated a local courts law in India to facilitate easy, inexpensive, accessible, speedy justice in simple civil disputes and criminal cases. A series of draft Bills were prepared by judges, jurists and experts with great care and professionalism. Finally, the NAC was persuaded by the logic of local courts for speedy justice as an integral part of independent justice system under complete control of High Courts and with provision for appeal. In 2009, a truncated law applicable only to villages, Gram Nyayalayas Act was enacted. However, lack of political will and judicial neglect ensured that very few local courts have been notified or functioning. The need of the hour is to expand them to urban areas where there is greater need for speedier justice and rule of law, and ensure that at least 10,000 courts are created on par with the small claims courts in the United Kingdom to promote a culture of rule of law.

Perhaps the most challenging intervention of a civil society organization in our governance process is in relation to judicial appointments in higher courts. Traditionally, the Courts have been powerful allies of reform oriented pressure groups and civil society movements. American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) in the US has expanded liberties of people primarily by resorting to litigation and pushing the boundaries. Common Cause, PUCL, CPIL, FDR, Lok Satta, CDF, ADR and other organizations and movements have sought the intervention of Supreme Court to further the reform agenda. Supreme Court's landmark rulings have been instrumental in putting right to information, improved voter registration, candidate disclosures, independent crime investigation, anti-corruption institutions, cooperative autonomy, transparent allocation of natural resources, and disqualification of convicted incumbents on the national agenda, among others. Erosion of faith in political institutions and electoral process has

further enhanced the Court's role. In a highly complex, polarized society, the Court's intervention on volatile issues is the only stabilizing factor. For instance, in the Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhoomi dispute, caste reservations, river water disputes or other such contentious issues, the political process has neither the capacity nor credibility to find acceptable and just solutions. In this backdrop, protecting the credibility and independence of the Supreme Court and High Courts assumes enormous significance for the future of our democracy.

The Supreme Court's verdicts in 1993 and 1998 in relation to appointment of judges in effect amended the Constitution through judicial diktat, and gave the incumbent judges the power of appointing their successors. Merits of specific appointments by the Collegium system apart, any organ of state or institution appointing its successors is antithetical to notions of democracy and accountability. There has been no precedent or practice of judiciary nominating its own successors in any functioning democracy. FDR and Lok Satta firmly believed that there is much that is wrong with our political institutions; but the only way to improve our system is by transforming our system to ensure better politics, people's participation and accountability, and not by undermining elected legislatures or government, through unelected, unaccountable institutions and mechanisms. If the Court's moral authority and credibility are dented by its assumption of roles clearly assigned by the Constitution to the other organs of State, then ultimately the national interests and democracy suffer grievously. With this logic, FDR / Lok Satta have for a decade been pursuing the National Judicial Commission for judicial appointments. The major leaders and parties in governments and opposition have been consulted regularly. A team of three eminent jurists of unimpeachable integrity and reputation for fierce independence and judicial leadership – Justice MN Venkatachaliah, Justice JS Verma and Justice VR Krishna Iyer – was brought together to evolve a model for an appointments commission. These eminent jurists – two of them were directly or indirectly involved in the creation of Collegium system – recommended a National Judicial Commission with the Government, Parliament and Court being involved. All these details along with the background documents were shared with the

government and opposition. Finally, the 99th Amendment to the Constitution was unanimously approved by Parliament and became the law with the ratification of half the State legislatures. The constitutionality of this Amendment is challenged before the Supreme Court, and the verdict of the Court and the capacity of our institutions to uphold the letter and spirit of the Constitution will probably shape the future of our constitutional order. The Court, the Parliament and the civil society have a vital role in protecting the constitutional scheme and ensuring that elected legislature, popular government and the court – all play their rightful role in upholding democracy.

Given this overview of pressure groups in our democratic governance, a few important lessons can be drawn from our past experience and global practices. In order for democracy to mature and various interest groups to play a constructive, positive role in deepening democracy and enhancing our liberties, the following nine conditions need to be fulfilled.

- 1) If a pressure group is specifically catering to the economic interests of discrete clienteles or corporate or other vested interests, then strict regulation, norms of registration, monitoring and transparency are vital to protect democratic institutions and larger public interest.
- 2) Non-profit interest groups which are dedicated to specific policies on contentious and polarizing issues should recognize their limits in dictating policy to an elected government, and should exercise great restraint in advocacy. Policy choices are legitimate areas of political contention, and they should be decided in the electoral arena through people's mandate, as far as practicable. The elected legislature and government have the obligation to reconcile short-term compulsions with the long-term public good, and populist pressures in support vocal minorities will ultimately undermine public interest and make the nation ungovernable.
- 3) The political parties, media and civil society should evolve a broad consensus on the non-negotiable role of State. National security; public order, justice and rule of law; universal access to quality education irrespective of birth; accessible, affordable,

quality healthcare irrespective of means; basic infrastructure and access to amenities to all including electricity, transport, water, sewerage, drainage, sanitation etc, must be the minimum acceptable responsibilities of a modern, civilized, democratic state. There should be a clear recognition that the Indian state significantly falls short in rule of law, infrastructure, education and healthcare. Such a consensus will make rational allocation of resources and effective state action easy irrespective of electoral vagaries and pressure groups.

- 4) Pressure groups must recognize that they are no substitute to electoral democracy and institutions of State. Respect for political process, constant and constructive engagement and persuasion through evidence and logic must be hallmarks of pressure groups, not denigration of political process or undermining the democratic legitimacy of elected institutions.
- 5) Parties, citizens and interest groups – all should be willing to play by certain acceptable rules of engagement in a constitutional democracy. Once citizens have constitutional liberties including freedoms of expression and association, and once people have universal franchise to elect their representatives, obstructive methods of civic engagement and paralysis have no place in a democracy.
- 6) At all times institutional checks and balances should be preserved. Authority and accountability have to go together in every organ of state and institution. No institution should be allowed to grow unchecked and unaccountable, however worthy or exalted it may appear. In particular, all players should recognize that the legitimacy of a governing system depends on the willing consent of the people, as expressed through free vote.
- 7) The parties, floor leaders and legislators should recognize that Parliament and State legislatures are the legitimate fora for democratic engagement and decision making. Unreasonable use of whip to stifle debate or free expression, obstruction of legislature and paralysis have no place in a civilized democracy. Failure of legislatures undermines all other institutions too, and leads to a downward spiral threatening our democracy.

- 8) Political parties and electoral process need to be reformed to restore public faith in political institutions. Reforms allowing entry and rise of talented, public-spirited citizens in politics, facilitating election of such people by ethical means, offering clear policy alternatives to the voters to enable them to make informed choices, enabling elected governments to deliver on the mandate obtained, and empowering citizens and local governments as far as practicable to promote participation and efficacy are of critical importance to promote health of our democracy and fulfil our potential.
- 9) Media should promote reasoned public debate and help improve the quality of discourse. Visceral, polarizing, loud, invective-based, zero-sum approach to public discourse is detrimental to democratic spirit and rational decision making.

Our democracy is a work in progress. That such a poor, complex, diverse society could endure as a nation-state and as a stable democracy is a tribute to our founding fathers. We have a robust, noble and yet pragmatic Constitution which helped us build institutions and ensured stability with liberty. The vast range of civil society organizations and pressure groups that thrive in India, the perpetual, unending argumentation and the relatively peaceful reconciliation of conflicting interests are signs of a successful democracy. Interest groups pursuing the causes they believe in and persuading the parties, governments and legislatures during and between elections is an integral part of this vibrant process. But we have a long way to go. Government cannot be allowed to stifle freedom of association, advocacy or dissent. Nor should pressure groups be allowed to subvert democratic institutions or undermine the larger public interest or long-term interests of society. A fine balance needs to be struck.

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