

## Blood-letting in Iraq

Primacy of UN role is the answer

NO fewer than 54 Iraqis were killed in clashes with American troops in the Iraqi town of Samara last Monday. That was an indication of the popular resistance against the occupation of Iraq by the coalition troops escalating into a wider conflict.

The coalition military strategists must be taking stock of the latest situation, which is certainly not of the kind they had envisaged when Baghdad fell to the US troops in May. The Samara bloodbath is not to be mistaken as an incident having little to do with the overall run of things in Iraq. President Bush wanted to win the hearts and minds of Iraqis, but when people die in droves, the goal looks like a distant one.

The coalition strategists should ask themselves what they could achieve if the troops come under attack and kill civilians in retaliation. This is the kind of senseless killing that puts a big question mark on the mission. Moreover, it is going to be attritional.

President Bush has reason to be worried, but he still has the time to acknowledge that the only way to get out of the morass is to give the UN its due role in the war-ravaged country, whose people seem desperate to regain their sovereignty. The primacy of the UN role in the resolution of the crisis is something that cannot be sidetracked any more. All the more so, because nothing has happened so far that could substantiate President Bush's claim that the situation is improving. Rather, the recent attacks on nationals from some other countries only gave a grim picture of Iraq under occupation.

## CHT accord

Its implementation needs prioritising

ANOTHER anniversary of signing the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord has just gone by, but instead of celebrating the day, the tribal community let it pass amid protestations. Even after six long years of its advent, the accord is yet to be fully implemented. It marked an end to the two-decade-long insurgency, but the uncertainty about its implementation does cast a shadow over the region's future.

The implementation process has hit a few snags. First of all, one of the vital imperatives of the treaty viz. resolution of land disputes hangs fire. Though a land commission was formed, later than expected, it is yet to show any tangible result. It's learnt that the issue is lying with Attorney General's office for legal opinion. Important matters like these better not get put through any bureaucratic rigmarole. For, settlement of land disputes is pivotal to peace in the region.

The controversy over the voters' list needs to be addressed in earnest. It is of fundamental importance to the holding of district council elections in order to ensure proper representation of both the communities -- tribal and non-tribal in the region. It would bring accountability and efficiency in the local bodies which are currently lacking. The district council elections are vital from another standpoint. They will be the electoral college for the formation of the regional council at the top. Elected bodies can only be instrumental in bringing about stability and progress in the region. Discovery of caches of arms from the secret dens of criminals in the hills portending ill for the region, the role of elected local bodies assumes a critical importance.

There is one positive thing: the BNP government is not unwilling to take the peace accord forward. But their intent to implement it still seems confined to rhetoric. We understand that the complex issues can't be resolved overnight, but they must be given utmost priority. There has to be a consensus cutting across all the communities that dillydallying with the accord's implementation will only foster instability and uncertainty in the region.

# Dr. B. Chowdhury and the role of civil society



HARON UR RASHID

ON 20th November last, former Bangladesh President Dr. A.Q.M. Baddruddoza Chowdhury held an Iftar Party that included diplomats and representatives of civil society. He addressed them highlighting national situation marked by "insecurity of life", arising out of the "worsening" law and order and an environment of "corruption assuming new dimension" at present.

He told the audience that before he became a candidate for the position of President, he "resigned from all political positions and so, since then and even at this moment", he did not hold any "political position and platform". However, being a senior citizen and a member of the "civil society" with a background in politics and in medical profession, he was "in a natural position to respond to the situations prevailing in the country." In particular he hoped that "a united platform of the civil society could start with members organising and functioning themselves. They could sit in roundtable conferences and discuss ways and means to come out" of the

serious problems the nation faced at this juncture.

I assume from his address that the former President considered an appropriate role for the civil society to organise itself to get rid of what he described problems besieging a nation. It appears that his main focus was to urge the civil society not to sit on as "onlookers".

This raises questions such as: What is "civil society"? What is its role?

The term "civil society" has been

defined as scrupulous compliance of the provisions of the Constitution, both in letter and spirit, by the ruling power.

Civil society constitutes collective conscience that acts against injustice and unfairness against individuals in a nation-state. Many social thinkers believe that civil society exhibits three essential characteristics: (a) passion for individual liberty, (b) desire for good governance and (c) democratic pluralism. Civil society, being a

owes its origin to French philosopher Rousseau's "Social Contract" (1762). Rousseau (1712-78) believed in the "natural goodness of human being" which he felt was warped by social environment. His famous quote was "Man is born free but everywhere he is in chains."

If individuals in a society have civic and political rights under the Constitution, there is an assumption that a civil society exists. A civil society is dedicated to ensure the existence of rule of law, the existence

of protests from civil society. In this connection the media plays a pivotal role in appraising the civil society with exposure of misuse or abuse of power.

Civil society is generally resurrected in national crisis. In some countries civil society expresses itself through what is vaguely called "people's power". In the 70s, the Polish Worker's Movement (Solidarity), although a Union movement from Gdansk dockyard under the leadership of Lech Walsza, was

power organised by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. In 1990 two major political parties got united and with the active support of the civil society removed the government of President Ershad.

Social thinkers do not consider civil society to include political parties. Political parties are separate with their ideologies and may influence civil society to take action against the authority or vice versa. That means when civil society organises itself to protest the style of governance, political parties may join civil society to make a combined show of civil power against the authority.

Civil society is a potent force, like "a sleeping lion". When it rises, it can transform the whole society. The underpinnings of civil society are based on equality, fairness, justice, rule of law and liberal democratic society. Some social thinkers consider that a narrow selfish coterie, beneficiary from authority, often attempts to substitute civil society. As Eric Bentley said: "Our society is an age of substitutes; instead of language, we have jargon; instead of principles, slogans; and instead of genuine ideas, Bright Ideas." The bottom line of good governance, what Wendell Phillips stated, is that "Governments exist to protect the rights of poor. The rich needs no protection -- they have many friends and few enemies."

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## BOTTOM LINE

**When civil society organises itself to protest the style of governance, political parties may join civil society to make a combined show of civil power against the authority... Civil society is a potent force, like "a sleeping lion". When it rises, it can transform the whole society. The underpinnings of civil society are based on equality, fairness, justice, rule of law and liberal democratic society. The bottom line of good governance, what Wendell Phillips stated, is that "Governments exist to protect the rights of poor. The rich needs no protection -- they have many friends and few enemies."**

loosely applied to moral force of the community. Each individual is a part of universal natural order that is endowed with discipline, control and reason. The conscience of community is therefore based on natural order and fairness.

The moral force is the bedrock of establishing a peaceful, secure, just and progressive society and the collective force in the society/community is often called the "civil society." Civil society has an ethical edifice. It aims at establishing decency, fairness and democratic rights in the society. Its activities are directed towards the estab-

lishment of moral force of the state and the community and thereby protects the community from bad governance of country. It brings to mind what Lord Moulton (1844-1921) said about governance: "Tyranny is yielding to the lust of governing."

The origin of civil society appears to be rooted in altruistic sources of action of human beings. Altruistic attitude means spirit of compassion, benevolence, and empathy. Empathy connotes feeling consistent with perceived welfare of another person. The idea of civil society according to many thinkers

of organised non-state interest groups and the existence of a balanced pluralism in a country to achieve the optimum good for the community.

Civil society has deep interest in the state of economic and social development of a country. There comes a point where civil society may rise against the authority if ordinary people are being denied good governance. Furthermore personal insecurity, corruption, nepotism, poverty, illiteracy and growing inequality between rich and poor within the country are the primary elements that give rise to

essentially a movement by civil society against communist dictatorship. In 1986 the Marcos government had to resign under pressure from "people's power" that included civil society and the Catholic Church. On last 23 November, Georgia's President Eduard Shevardnadze was compelled to resign because of organised peaceful protests that included civil society and opposition political parties.

In Bangladesh in 1971 March, we witnessed the collapse of authority of Pakistan military government at the hands of the combined civil

# A girl with flowers



M.J. AKBAR

MOSHE Dayan was a genius! Not just a military genius, but a political genius."

Bill Clinton was telling a story, something he does almost as well as he runs a government. We were at Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's table. The former American President had paused in Delhi during a world tour on work related to his personal foundation, and Mr Vajpayee had invited him to lunch as his personal guest. Clinton looked like a man in a virtuous cycle. He was trim and fit, but perhaps retirement begins to age a politician before his time. His appetite however had not aged, and he expressed his doubts about his ability to protect his new weight with so much Indian food around. Bukhara at the Maurya remains his preferred means of waist-expansion. Talk drifted between Indian food (excellent) and American jazz (even better). Then the conversation turned to war and peace.

Clinton the Politte was instantly transformed into Clinton the President. He was reluctant to criticise his country on as sensitive a matter as Iraq, but his analysis was cool without sounding partisan. He thought that George Bush had made a mistake by not giving Hans Blix and his UN inspection team more

time. He appreciated Bush's difficulty, once American forces had been mobilised on the borders of Iraq. You could not keep an Army ready for war and then walk away from war: America's reputation would have been denied beyond repair.

Iraq led to Palestine; and we inevitably reached the genesis of the present phase of conflict -- when Clinton's dream of peace between Yasser Arafat and Ehud Barak collapsed in the twilight of his resplen-

ably, describing them as "sell-out". Sharon wanted to provoke the Arabs and mobilise Israeli hardliners behind him. Clinton advised Barak to stop Sharon's visit to the Temple Mount. Barak replied that he could not legally do so, and persuasion was beyond his capabilities.

A mixture of regret and excitement filled Clinton's voice as he recalled his next suggestion to Barak. First, ensure that there are enough policemen to prevent any violence. Then ask a young

ful image. It was an idea of pure genius, typical of a man who had sought the impossible in his own life -- and found it.

Yasser Arafat phoned Clinton when he was leaving office to congratulate him on having been such a successful President. "I told him (Arafat)," said Clinton, "that I had become a failure -- and that he had had turned me into a failure." That failure saddens Clinton, of course, but it also puzzles him: It was a done deal, bar some shouting about the

tions began to relax and joke during the negotiations.

So when, and why, did Yasser Arafat become No-Sir (Clinton's term) Arafat?

Clinton was thoughtful. The talks failed, he said, because Arafat could not change from the radical that he had been all his life. Maybe Arafat had some serious political problems as well. Perhaps he felt that Israel could not have delivered on the deal (it still had to be ratified) without the support of a Clinton in

Was Atal Behari Vajpayee, all through the lunch a perfect host, permitting his guest to sparkle while he held to the shadows, being excessively optimistic when he placed his faith in peace in another difficult neighbourhood? For five years now Vajpayee has been Prime Minister. He has seen more roller-coaster drama in this time than Prime Ministers with twice that time in office. There was the hope of Lahore, the betrayal of Kargil, the defeat in Parliament, the victory in general elections, and always the unceasing haemorrhage of cross-border terrorism. But he never lost his faith in peace. Slowly, the momentum was established for Agra; and failure at Agra produced a devastating backlash of terrorism that nearly wrecked our Parliament in session and took the subcontinent to the brink of a nuclear war. That was perhaps the toughest moment to sustain hope, but Vajpayee did so. Clinton's remark was simple: no matter what the odds, it never hurts to believe in peace. There is always a peace dividend.

Is that what we are seeing now, as India and Pakistan cap their heavy guns, stretch a ceasefire into the Siachen and talk of land, sea and air routes opening up? So much blood has dripped across the last two decades that peace seems an unreal possibility. But perhaps it truly does lurk around that elusive corner.

When Atal Behari Vajpayee goes to Islamabad in January, perhaps the little baby girl called Noor should welcome him with a flower. Maybe she will not yet understand what she is doing, but the rest of us will.

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## BYLINE

**Clinton's remark was simple: no matter what the odds, it never hurts to believe in peace. There is always a peace dividend... Is that what we are seeing now, as India and Pakistan cap their heavy guns, stretch a ceasefire into the Siachen and talk of land, sea and air routes opening up?... When Atal Behari Vajpayee goes to Islamabad in January, perhaps the little baby girl called Noor should welcome him with a flower. Maybe she will not yet understand what she is doing, but the rest of us will.**

dent presidency. The battles, of terror and politics, resumed with unprecedented ferocity.

Dayan, Clinton said, was a genius because of 1967. Not because he won that war, although that was brilliant enough, but because he had the courage to think about the peace. Moshe Dayan stopped his triumphant troops from raising their flag of victory on the Temple Mount. You have defeated the enemy, Dayan told his soldiers, but you have no right to humiliate them. Clinton's face, urgent and animated in admiration for Dayan, turned sombre as he recalled another Israeli general, Ariel Sharon, who, three decades later, deliberately crossed this line of wisdom in search of right-wing votes. Barak was Prime Minister then, and under political pressure from a surging Sharon who attacked the peace efforts predict-

Palestinian girl, alone, to wait for Sharon with a bouquet of flowers in her hand. She should give him the flowers, and add one sentence: "You are most welcome to come here every day when there is peace."

That single image, Clinton believes, would have etched a place in the heart of the region and the mind of the world; it would have defined the future.

Was America's extraordinary President being naive? Had his deep conviction in peace blurred harsher truths?

No. Clinton understood what mapmakers and wall-builders do not; that peace, like love, first begins in the heart. Only then does it start to search for statistics, arguments and a saleable rationale. As I heard him describe what might have been I could feel my own emotions stir at such a simple, beautiful and power-

ful image. It was an idea of pure genius, typical of a man who had sought the impossible in his own life -- and found it. Yasser Arafat phoned Clinton when he was leaving office to congratulate him on having been such a successful President. "I told him (Arafat)," said Clinton, "that I had become a failure -- and that he had had turned me into a failure." That failure saddens Clinton, of course, but it also puzzles him: It was a done deal, bar some shouting about the

White House. Perhaps there were other reasons. Clinton said he could appreciate how the mind of a man who had survived fifty assassination attempts, who had been uprooted many times, might work. But there was no escape from the core conclusion. The peace deal failed because Arafat could not change from the radical he had been all his life. He could not shed his past. Arafat was not prepared within for that moment of history.

The peace that failed, and the Sharon visit to Temple Mount, provoked the passions that set off an intifada that has wreaked havoc upon yet another generation of Palestinians and Israelis. Their fate remains divided by a line of folly. That Palestinian girl with flowers in her hand is still waiting for Arafat and Sharon to return to the right side of wisdom.

# The different faces of democracy

AMM SHAHABUDDIN

DEMOCRACY is considered the best mechanism to run a popular government. With the passage of time, it has gone through many turns and twists, taking on different shapes or forms in different countries around the world. It may sound strange to many plain thinkers, but it is a hard reality that can't be denied. To truly look at democracy, we have to look not at the ideal but at the reality as it is practiced around the world.

Let us begin at the beginning. The classic text-book definition of democracy is government for the people, by the people, and of the people. But what do we actually find when we look in the political mirror both in the first world as well as in the third world? To call a spade a spade, the definition has become a mere mantra. Democracy has shed its original skin with the passage of time and taken on a new shape. Just as the shape of water depends on the shape of its container, democracy also differs from country to country, depending on various factors in the

country.

In fact, in the third world democracy has given birth to a new political caste system. Thus in most of the third world countries, the pyramid of a democratic government consists of three distinct layers -- the top, the middle and the base, in which the top group exploit the bottom group with the support and collaboration of the middle group, which make the rich richer and the poor poorer. It is not necessary to point your finger at any particular country. Just look in the mirror.

## One side of the coin

The meaning and use of democracy varies from people to people and country to country. There is no such thing as absolute democracy, like absolute monarchy. What is sauce for the goose may not be the same for the gander, as they say, or one man's meat may be poison for the other. Just look at some of the developing or least developed countries where the majority of the people live below the poverty-line and go to bed half-fed or hungry. What do we find? Our so-called charismatic leaders,

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whether in government or in opposition, are constantly squabbling for power, finding fault with each other, spreading hatred and nothing else, sending the country to the dogs.

They are digging each other's graves. In such a deplorable situation, whatever efforts they make in the name of nation-building go down the drain. What the leaders exploit is the catch-word of democracy. They know how to fool the people in the sacred name of democracy. Like magicians, they create illusions to make waves and then impose themselves as the only saviours of the sinking ship! Thus the poor will remain at the bottom of the democratic pyramid to be exploited by the political upper class. But nature has its own way of filling the vacuum. The leaders can

fool all the people some of the time but not all the time. There is always a curtain-fall, ending the show.

This is one side of the coin, rather dark and pessimistic, with, of course, some bright spots here and there.

The other side of the coin -- the way democracy works in the rich and economically advanced countries in the west -- is rather bright and captivating at first sight. It must be admitted that whatever may be the pit-falls and hidden blocks in the western system, it is free from the nasty and nauseating bickering and ludicrous and shameless name-calling, that makes our democracy a laughing stock before the world.

**Built-in constitutional flaws**  
Let us take a look at the functioning

of democracy in the world's richest country, America. Two powerful political parties, the Republicans and the Democrats, traditionally rule the country almost by rotation. But remarkably, they don't fight for a change of government through unconstitutional means such as hartals, street agitations, rowdy demonstrations, burning of public and private transports, looting of shops, etc.

In contrast to the ghastly political scenes in the third world, in America the party winning the majority of votes rules the country without any disturbance from the opposition. A regime change comes only after the party in power runs its full course, and steps down if defeated in the election held at the end of its tenure.

But there are flaws and pitfalls in

the system that play havoc from behind the scenes. You needn't go far to find such flaws in the American system. The very election of the incumbent president George Bush is questionable because he was not elected by the direct vote of the people but through a built-in constitutional flaw. It was the two-tier election system known as the electoral college that was introduced some 200 years ago that decided the fate of George Bush.

## Fund-raising campaigns: Corporate trade shows

There are many other flaws besides the electoral college in the presidential elections in the world's richest country. The most glaring flaw is the role that money plays in electing

politicians. Democrat Senator Russ Feingold has dubbed the fund-raising campaigns that all American politicians must undertake corporate trade shows. Mr. Feingold calls the US democracy a corporate democracy, not a representative democracy, adding, that it is no longer one person, one vote. According to the senator, the fund-raising system is legalised bribery and extortion and fund-raising campaigns serve as symbols of the system's corruption. These allegations come not from the mouth of Bin Laden or Saddam but direct from the horse's mouth, a US senator! So, the picture is too vulgar to swallow in the name of democracy. Perhaps it suits a rich country like America, America, being the richest country, can boast of its brave corporate democracy, instead of a representative democracy.

## Embrace democracy, Bush urges Arab leaders

Perhaps the Middle East countries, which are no less rich than America because of their oil wealth, would

welcome such US-style democracy. President Bush recently urged the Middle Eastern leaders to embrace democracy, as, according to him, lack of democracy in the Middle East was turning it into a breeding ground for terrorism. The bottom-line for Bush is that democracy is a panacea against terrorism, as if there is no trace of terrorism under democracy. America has launched a multi-million dollar programme to strengthen democracy in the Middle East. Secretary of State Collin Powell recently announced \$20 million funding for this purpose. A good amount of money for a good cause, no doubt, as the programme would also include a frame-work for the US to work together with governments and the people of the Arab world. Some cynics consider the programme Washington's latest strategy to tighten its grip over the Middle East's oil resources and also to protect Israel's influence and dominance in the region. Only time will show which way the wind blows.

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