Now the question is whether the

US is ready to accept the democratic

choices made by the developing

world. It is no more the question

whether developing world is ready for

demonstrated its military supremacy

and its diplomatic weakness is Iraq.

This misadventure has not only

alienated most of the world from the

Bush administration, but increas-

ingly alienated the two constituen-

cies it does need to win over: the

One of the key demands of the

United Iraqi Alliance, the broad

based Shia coalition that won the

election in December, was the

removal of the American military

And simultaneously, the support

for the war in the US is haemorrhag-

ing. Sixty per cent of the Americans

believe that it was a mistake to send

troops to Iraq and disapprove of the

way Bush is handling the war. More

than half of the US population want

to see the troops withdrawn within

no small part be due to the fact that in

invading Iraq. Bush fulfilled only half

of Crowe's criteria for a great presi-

Bush's looming problems may in

Iragis and Americans.

The principal area where the US

democracy



LATE S. M. ALI DHAKA MONDAY MAY 1, 2006

Electoral roll concerns

Let no genuine voter be left out

NE gleans two impressions from the recent newspaper reports on preparation of a draft voter list set to be announced soon. One, there is likely to be 1.4 crore new entries to the 2000 electoral roll of 7.48 crore voters. Two, a large number of genuine voters may have been left out of the list.

The anticipated addition of 1.4 crore to the old list is considered quite on the higher side because 8.9 crore voters would mean 63.57 percent of the current population of 14 crore. By all calculations, the voter-population ratio thus appears to be record high and this is borne out by the historical trends. Statistics show that 55 percent of the Bangladeshis are aged over 15 years and this points to the fact that the figure of 7.4 crore voters was too high in the last voter list itself, let alone the current draft being talked about.

According to standard practices, the draft list that is expected to be made public soon will be circulated among the electorate for further review and correction. We hope eventually the speculations about 'ghost' voters and exclusion of genuine ones will be set at rest to pave the way for the preparation of an authentic voter list.

However, we have some suggestions to offer in this regard. Representatives from all political parties and civil societies along with EC officials should constitute committees to ascertain at local levels whether genuine voters have been left out or there has been any wrongful insertion. The people should be given all opportunity to furnish their particulars for inclusion if their names have been left out. We have to keep in mind that there have been allegations about interference by the supporters of the ruling coalition at the local levels during preparation of this year's draft voter list.

It goes without saying that voter list is the primary instrumentality whereby free and fair elections are ensured by the state. Therefore, it has to be as genuine as humanly possible ruling out any attempt whatsoever to tamper with it for partisan gains.

Labour rights day

So much more to be done

AY Day bears special significance in the context of Bangladesh since much remains to be done in improving the lot of our working people, especially the industrial and service sector labour, compared to their counterparts' status in the relatively more advanced economies. We routinely witness the rituals of holding or staging discussion meetings, seminars and rallies in support of the rights of the workers, but at the implementation level, serious questions remain unanswered.

As early as 1965, the Factory Act came into being in order to ensure a working environment for the labour force, yet even by the none too high standards of that law, the state of workers remains dismal. High-tech automation in a globalising world coupled with the increase in privatisation of industries, has exerted new pressures on the traditional job market place. Labour is being retrenched calling for retraining and social safety net covers. Besides, they have to work with each individual entrepreneur applying his/her own standard.

Most employers, of smaller units in particular, continue to ignore the existing provisions for labour security, payment of prescribed wages, including compensation on account of extra hours of duties. In the case of female workers, the situation is even gloomier. They continue to work under conditions that are degrading, often with remunerations that are lower than those of their male colleagues



Bush's travails

M ABDUL HAFIZ

HORTLY before the first Gulf war, recently retired chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral William Crowe, warned his successor, General Colin Powell in words that resonate even today. He said that a war in the Middle East. killing thousands of Arabs for whatever noble cause, would set back the United States in the region for long time. (A discernible observer would admit that Crowe's prediction has since come true).

But despite his warning, the Admiral knew that US military intervention was imminent, because it involved presidential prestige. To be a great president, he told Powell, the presidents must have their wars. One has to find a war even if there isn't one. President Bush is credited with both.

Six years into his presidency it is difficult to think of a single, substan-

A bridge too near

M J AKBAR

HOSE who play bridge know that there are two routes to success. Either the combination of 26 cards on your side (13 each with you and partner) matches so well that even a two or a three bring in a trick; or the honours are so dominant that they make the opposition irrelevant. If you have both, of course, then you bid Grand Slam with a smile.

Elections used to be an honours game. The aces -- from Jawaharlal Nehru to Indira Gandhi to Jyoti Basu used to dominate the electoral game. Their charisma was the deciand honours was unbeatable. So they ance: there are leaders in Delhi who retained the United Front even when could learn a lesson or two from her. they had the numbers to rule Bengal She knew the statistics

Government of India is a pack of cards without an ace.

In 2001 she won 132 of the 234 seats with 31.44% of the vote, and DMK got 31 seats with 30.92% of the vote. A difference of half a per cent in vote share meant a gap of 101 seats in the Assembly. Such are the tyrannies of first-past-the-post system.

the difference, and even the smallest The DMK is more dependent on allies than Jayalalithaa. It has 42% card, with one per cent of the vote, support, but is kept in the race by 3% from the Congress and 2% from the Few elections have been as fasci-PMK. The Left is statistically invisible nating, even breathtaking, as the one being fought currently in Tamil but has its role in key constituencies. If the cards on both sides are Nadu, because, unusually, everyevenly matched, then it is the aces thing matters. Our opinion poll, done by AC Nielsen, believes that 48% of that will make the difference. the vote will go to alliance led by Karunanidhi might have made a fatal Javalalithaa and 47% to her foes, led mistake when he projected his son by M. Karunanidhi. That is a dead-MK Stalin as the face of the future. heat, given that the standard margin There was a visible sag in the DMK momentum at the start of the cam-Jayalalithaa personally compaign, during the Stalin phase, and it is only when Davanidhi Maran came into the spotlight did his alliance emerge from the shadows. Irrespective of the results in May, this Assembly election will have marked Maran's evolution as a leader of his state. If his party does not recognize

this, the smile on Jayalalithaa's face could become even larger.

For she has the clear edge when it comes to personality. All the pointers in the opinion polls confirm this. Her party is four points ahead of the DMK only because of her (since it is a personality-driven business, if her party were to lag, it would also be because of her). She has only two allies; the DMK has half a dozen were anyone to count, and yet she is ahead. It may be a marginal lead, but Tamil Nadu is all about margins that transmigrate into broad sweeps. Two years ago to the month she suffered what was widely advertised as a death blow, losing every single seat in the elections to the Lok Sabha. To revive from that gravevard needed miraculous levels of self-belief and a head as cool as the South Pole.

ratify the UN convention on the rights of children.

For long, the US clung to the notion that military strength would always have the last say and none of these syndromes mattered. It could well strut the world stage chanting: Indeed, in the wake of 9/11, it wore its unpopularity as a badge of honour.

have lately been emboldened by the

US failures in the Gulf who campaigned against the neo-

by Washington

Brig (retd) Hafiz is former DG of BIISS.

minister, while the DMK joined the Union government with key portfolios. Jayalalithaa used power to better public effect than her opponents. 52% of the people think that she has been either a "very good" or "good" chief minister; between 60 and 70 per

cent believe that the three basics,

drinking water, electricity and road

conditions, have improved under her

watch, and a clear majority thinks she

did good work during the tsunami

and the floods. These are the pillars

of good governance. Unsurprisingly

then, she has the lead among the

young. The young poll more heavily

So what happens if AC Nielsen is

than the middle-aged.

wobble in the Manmohan Singh government, it has nothing to do with the states. The Prime Minister's credibility has been dribbling away ever since he decided to make the nuclear deal with the United States the central achievement of his government without thinking through the consequences of unsustainable triumphalism, or indeed the nuances of policy-making in Washington.

If there is the faint sound of a

His worst mistake was to hint that opposition to this deal was "communal," since some Muslim organizations had protested against George Bush. Credibility is all he had. If that goes he has little else.

right and Jayalalithaa forms the government in Chennai again? A It was always a comforting myth that leadership is possible without whole lot of nothing, actually. A few understanding politics; that this, in hours of genuflection, and life goes fact, might be a virtue. He must be back to normal. There is no logical reason for turmoil. The Congress, the first Prime Minister of India who after two years in power and daily would cancel a series of election megaphone publicity, will not have meetings in a vital state like Bengal increased its vote share anywhere, in order to attend an economic meeting in Hyderabad. Others and slumped in Kerala and Assam. would have done both, not one at Despite a fractured and unimpresthe expense of the other. A government is as strong or weak as its focal point. That focal point is blurred. Foreign policy is in shambles. Domestic policy is shooting off in different directions, depending on the predilections of Cabinet ministers

PERSPECTIVES

One of the key demands of the United Iraqi Alliance, the broad based Shia coalition that won the election in December, was the removal of the American military. And simultaneously, the support for the war in the US is haemorrhaging. Sixty per cent of the Americans believe that it was a mistake to send troops to Iraq and disapprove of the way Bush is handling the war. More than half of the US population want to see the troops withdrawn within a year.

tial foreign policy initiative that the US President George Bush pursued but that did not involve war or its threat. This is not without a reason. It is one area in which America indisputably reigns supreme, accounting alone for 40% of the global military expenditure and spending; almost seven times the amount spent by its nearest rival, China,

Bush. For if the last six years have proved anything it is the limits of military might as the central plank of foreign policy. Indeed, shorn of any meaningful diplomacy or rational approach even to military problems, Bush has clearly failed both on making America any safer and securing its global hegemony. In displaying his hubris and machismo in a brash, brutal, and ruthless manner, Bush could have asserted power, but certainly lost authority and influence both at home and abroad

alone, and would not let Jyoti Basu

retire even when he wanted to. (Not

every politician thinks power is

But the aces have gone, or left the

table; electoral bridge is now a largely

distribution game. The allies make

synonymous with life.)

matters.

With his approval ratings dwindling to a Nixonian low and the midterm elections approaching, many of his fellow Republicans regard him to be a liability. Stumbling across the political landscape and rallying support for a lost case, he resembles more one of those mediocrities who have no enemies but are thoroughly disliked by their friends. The recent release of the National Security strategy did not belie that perception of him, but confirmed it. Although the strategy insisted on diplomacy remaining America's "strong preference," it went on to reaffirm the US commitment to the virtue of pre-emptive strikes. "It

necessary under long-standing principles of self defence that we do not rule out the use of force before attacks occur," it went on to assert. Iran received "special mention" with a warning that talks must succeed if

confrontation is to be avoided.

BYLINE

The Prime Minister's credibility has been dribbling away ever since he decided to

make the nuclear deal with the United States the central achievement of his govern-

ment without thinking through the consequences of unsustainable triumphalism, or

indeed the nuances of policy-making in Washington. Manmohan Singh might be a

good man, but that, alas, is not good enough reason to be Prime Minister of India. The

In practice, such paranoia translates into a perverse version of carrot and stick diplomacy. It means that you offer your adversary a carrot and then threaten to whack him with the stick while he is eating it.

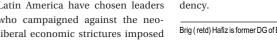
That America's standing in global politics has plummeted with such an approach is without question. Of the ten countries polled in 2004 and again in 2005 by the Pew research group, the US has fallen in public estimation in eight of them. In only three -- Britain, Canada, and Russia -did a majority still look upon the US charitably

The reasons are not hard to find. Only weeks back the country that aspires to lead the free world stood alongside only Israel, Palau and the Marshal Islands in rejecting the creation of a new UN council to protect human rights. Only the US and Somalia (which has no recognized government) have failed to

"no one likes us, we don't care."

But as events in Iraq have soured, the ability of the Bush administration to deliver on these threats has diminished considerably. With its military over-stretched and its diplomatic resources exhausted it has apparently been forced back to a position of relative weakness because nobody trust it or particularly fears it. If anything, both Iran and North Korea

In the meantime, the elections are producing the wrong results. Much to US distress, Hamas are in power in Palestine. Rene Preval, a protege of Aristide, whom the US helped remove in a coup two years back won the presidency in Haiti. Iraq's Ahmad Chalabi, the favourite of Pentagon whom the US wanted to impose on the Iraqis at the outset of war could not win a single seat. The voters in Latin America have chosen leaders



lives

a year

Yet, greatness eludes George

Special attention needs to be paid to the conditions of the largest population of female workers employed by the country's RMG sector. It is here that they have to work in an extremely insecure and unhealthy environment having no proper protection against accidental fires to top it all. Many factory buildings also stand on unsafe foundations. The deaths of hundred of workers in accidental fires and building collapses are all too known to bear any repetition. Pitiable also are the conditions under which the most of the household labour has to work.

It is for the public and private sector leaders to enforce and ensure the basic rights for our deprived labour force in the interest of higher productivity and rapid economic growth, let alone for our better image across the world. The labour, for their part, should be obliged to abide by work ethics.

sive factor. I was going to use "decisive edge" but it was always far more than an edge. It is true that Nehru and Indira Gandhi might have won nothing without the broad base of the Congress they inherited from Mahatma Gandhi, and Jyoti Basu would have been merely a brilliant barrister without the party structure created by Promode Dasgupta and

mands 46% of the vote, but if Vaiko with 1%, had not switched sides and his selfless contemporaries, but joined her, the script might have equally, the Congress and the CPI(M) were sustained by the magnetic become lop-sided. It is a tribute to Javalalithaa's sagacity and character leadership of such aces. The Marxists that she never permitted her ego to were sensible enough to appreciate come in the way of a political allithat a combination of distribution

of error is plus-minus 2.07%.

The key statistic is surely that 90% of those who voted for her in that failed election are still with her, and only 4% have switched to the DMK. In comparison, there has been a switch of 8% from the DMK to her, and the DMK's retention rate is 86%

Unusually, both sides have been in power during the last two years. Javalalithaa of course remained chief

sive Opposition, the Congress will probably need a coalition in Assam, turning one more one-party state into coalition country.

In Bengal and Kerala, the party remains a lower single-digit fact. So why should parties which have nothing to gain from uncertainty, risk the comfort of power in Delhi? The only partners of the ruling coalition in Delhi to gain will be the Left, which will add a Kerala wing to its Bengal fortress. The Left has no history of deliberately destabilizing any of its comfort zones. A cat that gets cream

Manmohan Singh might be a good man, but that, alas, is not good enough reason to be Prime Minister of India.

The Government of India is a pack of cards without an ace.

MJ Akbar is Chief Editor of the Asian Age late in life doesn't believe in nine

Twin-faced crisis in Middle East



M B NAQVI

writes from Karachi

EOPLE talk of two crises in the Middle East: they take the Iranian crisis to be most ominous and tend to regard it as self-contained and independent. Others recognize Israel-Palestine relations as a different crisis that, well, just goes on and on. This column does not regard these two as separate or to think they solely concern major powers; they also interact and indeed are intertwined. They concern us all.

The Iranian crisis is closely linked with Israel's security. People were talking till the other day of America having become tired after its rather fruitless wars in Afghanistan and

Iraq. Both states have been virtually

destroyed; what obtains in both places is an anarchy that refuses to be controlled or contained. Ameriprojecting itself as a regional precan troops looked like having eminent power by taking a strong bogged down in both countries. All anti-US stance; whether it is bluffing said and done about oil, the reason about its military strength or not, why US went to war over Iraq has no the fact of the matter is that its acceptable rationale except Israel's stance vis-a-vis Hamas (and its aid to Hamas) are projecting Iran on the Destruction of the Iraqi state Arab horizon as a benign and Arab-

would work wonders for Israeli friendly power. The point to emerge is that neosecurity, it was assumed by the neocon led America is seriously conconservative thinkers in the US (who have not been ousted from all positemplating war with Iran, or maybe some restricted military action. tions of influence). Israel would be Probably it is thinking of using well on its way to dominate the region after the strongest Arab state tactical atomic weapons. The Ameris removed from the map. They icans refuse to withdraw the option seemed to forget about Iran but of war the way they are seen to have actually hadn't; it was only a question of sequencing. Iran's turn was

security

nuclear weapons power. As of now there is doubt whether Iran would actually become a nuclear weapons power in the near future.

Should it become so, the Americans would then tend to cease having any incentive to go to war. Why? because the Iranian power already includes the power to retaliate both on the American fleet in the Gulf, a possible closing of the Straits of Hormuz or to strike at Israel. Should

Iran become a nuclear power, its pre-eminent status in the Middle East would be firmly established and Americans would then be able to do little about it. The only window of opportunity that seems to be open to America is to attack Iran now.

Not that it would be easy going for done it in the case of North Korea the US to attack an even nonafter the latter declared itself to be a nuclear Iran. Nuking Iran may not be politically feasible. All American noises about non-proliferation would go up in smoke internationally if it were to use nuclear weapons once again. Even tactical nuclear weapons are, well, nuclear weapons and possess much destructive power. As it is, few assign any moral

authority to the US. After a nuclear strike it will be ridiculous to talk of morality and US in the same breath.

There is another aspect. It would finally kill the nuclear nonproliferation regime altogether. The shock of America using nuclear weapons on non-nuclear countries it does not like would make the world far more dangerous than it already is. The American star will not rise to farther skies or create shock and awe. American prestige would plummet insofar as its standing in the world and global public opinion are concerned. The Americans have not yet lived down their brutal acts of August 6 and 9 in 1945. Can America actually do it again? No matter what its rhetoric would be. nothing will ever wash the blood of countless Iranians off their hands and even the party that does it would not be able to return to power for

God knows how long

Insofar as Israel's security is concerned, it is already radically threatened by the rise of Iran. For all its brave war-like stances, the Israelis may not be in a position to repeat what they did with Osirak in Iraq in 1980

Apart from the fact that Iran is a larger country with a large population, such an attack can badly hurt the world economy. Iran can also attack Israel directly. Whether or not it acquires nukes soon, all the current talk of nuking its nuclear installations serves to induce Iran to become a nuclear power. After the contemplated strike, Iran's political behaviour would become overtly hostile in Iraq and beyond. That will be dangerous for both US and Israel. As North Korea has pertinently reminded, pre-emptive strike is not the prerogative of only the US; others can act similarly. Anyway, Iran would surely like to retaliate in some way. Its restraint on the Iraqi question would vanish if Israel or the US makes any strike on its nuclear installations, irrespective of its results.

To begin with, unless the CIA and its brother agencies have already penetrated into those installations,

their total destruction may not be achievable except through a proper nuclear bombing of a much higher magnitude and on a much larger scale than what the initial Nagasaki and Hiroshima bombing was.

Apart from the political cost, an abortive attack would make America a laughing stock. It would be a dangerous political folly from a longerrange viewpoint. Iran's star can rise, instead. The remaining American influence with the autocratic rulers of the Gulf would be severely threatened

The forces that Iran can release by its friendly stance toward the Arab states are now unimaginable. There is no anti-Iranian sentiment in the Arab street today. America's non-proliferation talk has no moral force behind it. It has already been countered by the demand that Americans must do their part of the bargain if the rest of the world is to remain without nuclear weapons, as NPT stipulated. It is required to begin disarming itself of the atomic weapons. In any case, the Non-Proliferation Treaty is on its deathbed.

As the moral force behind NPT is slipping out at a growing pace,

America's policy hitherto has not made any impact on Iranian rulers, except in one respect. The clerics rule in Iran has become more popular due to the nationalistic sentiment. The old trend that saw Khatemi elected twice was a growing protest against the clerical rule. Now that sentiment has been smothered by America's gung-ho policies. Instead America may have put Iran on to a course of playing a role in the Arab world itself that used to be an American preserve

The net impact of recent American actions has been that the Afghanistan state has been followed by uncontrollable anarchy that is drawing Pakistan into its coils. Many law and order problems in Pakistan have their origins in Afghanistan. Those who act as guerillas in Afghanistan are also doing the same work insofar as they can in Pakistan. As for Iraq, one has already noted that the civil war has broken out just as in Afghanistan. Iraq's future is bleak. Maybe Iran's star will rise further. Who has actually benefited from the American policies is a question that has to be pondered.

MB Naqvi is a leading columist in Pakistan

to remain without nuclear weapons, as NPT stipulated. to come later. Today Iran, on the other hand, is playing a deft political hand. It is

PLAIN WORDS

The forces that Iran can release by its friendly stance toward the Arab states are now

unimaginable. There is no anti-Iranian sentiment in the Arab street today. America's

non-proliferation talk has no moral force behind it. It has already been countered by

the demand that Americans must do their part of the bargain if the rest of the world is