

## Where has patience gone?

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BAKING is suffering from the poverty of patience today. Generally speaking, when it is said that Bangladesh is poverty ridden country it is supposed to be indicating the material aspect of it. But today, reaching to a cross-road of our nation's history we, the people of Bangladesh, particularly our nation's leaders, are poised to prove that they are the poorest of the poor, having no patience whatsoever. It's a shame that our political leaders have no patience which is essential for democracy, are extra determined to get to the power of state machinery by hook or crook and they don't care at all the sufferings of 'the people', a catch-word they often use in their political verbosity. Do they at all think about the economic loss of the country? Or do they weigh their political agenda on 'loss and benefit' basis as against the total burden that it places on the economy, democracy and human lives? Some would say: No! They are too busy with their political 'businesses'.

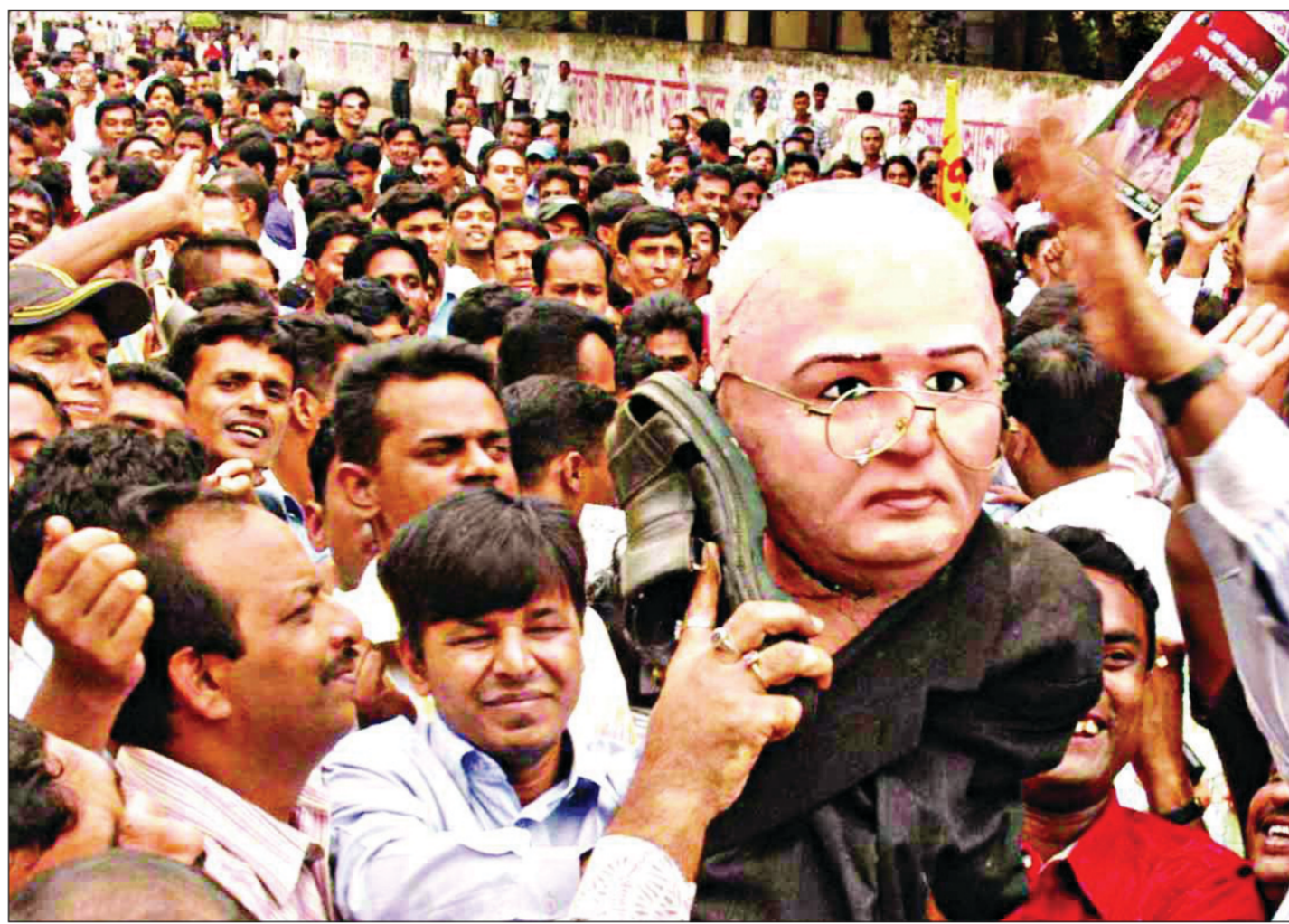
Modern people founded democracy as a system of offering maximum opportunity to one's life, the benefits of liberty and freedom. No man-made system is ever perfect and it is certain to have some kind of deficiency. Even democracy, so many years in practice, is no full-proof system. That's why, though in spirit it is the same, democracy varies in methodology and application from country to country. Yet, that has been found to be the most suitable system of governance in these modern days to help enjoy a meaningful

human life for every individual. However, once democracy is accepted as the system of governance it becomes mandatory for all to cooperate so that the system can develop and, in the process, take charge of the state affair. Thereafter, the need is to have confidence and trust in the system itself so that it yields good results. Here is the need for patience. People have to wait for the system to deliver justice. In democracy people are indeed free to express their opposition, voice criticism and even can express their agitation through meetings, rallies, slogans and other peaceful means. In fact, the liberty to protest is the beauty of democracy. But more importantly, when we agree to follow a system we voluntarily 'give up some of the citizens' liberty and even constitutional rights', whichever stands against the system in a way of interfering and/or obstructing its working. The reality is, when we agree to abide by some rules we also at the same time agree to sacrifice some of our 'inherent-freedom'. So even if a free citizen is agitated, has some say against anything in the democratic process or feels that something grossly wrong is going on, he or she is free to voice his or her suggestions and even indignation but in the process opposition cannot violate the system and the constitution. In democracy, complete surrender to the constitution is a must. If the majority thinks that the constitution needs a change, that too can be done through a democratic process. This is equally true for political parties also. Here is the question of patience and restraint from any

destructive activity.

But what is happening in our country now? Where are the political parties pushing our democracy towards? The two largest political parties have failed in a number of cases to respond to the needs of democracy. They don't practice democracy within their own party and they are often found violating the democratic norms in the state and political system too. They want to follow democracy under the conditions set by their own political agenda. Even when they talk about honouring the constitution they prefer doing it under some preconditions. There they are going wrong by not allowing the young democracy of our country to grow stronger and establish its root deeper. For their own political gain, they are setting preconditions that challenge the constitution and threaten democracy.

Today the nation is faced with a very critical problem. The Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) is a constitutional post. Once a popularly elected government appoints a citizen as CEC, he or she will be guided/governed by the constitution only. The constitution gives the CEC so much of power and respect that even the president of the country can't remove him. Only through the Supreme Judiciary Council may the CEC be removed which is a lengthy procedure and takes much longer than three months, the period within which the Caretaker Government must finish its job. Now the question arises whether we should honour the country's constitution or do we want to violate it. Some of the political parties want the CEC to resign. But when the CEC didn't



volunteer to resign under popular demand, as claimed, none could suggest an easy solution. They may be angry but they cannot forcefully remove him. The constitution has given him this power, nay, the honour. There came the real test of patience and we have seen that most of our nation's leaders failed miserably. It included senior lawyers,

renowned political leaders, civil society members and cultural activists. Failing to suggest a solution, most of them uttered foul and disgracing words, brought aspersion about the mental health of a constitutional figure. Is that the patience we have? Have we not ceded some liberty and constitutional right in the name of constituting an

independent election commission? If that is so then becoming impatient means we are not yet ready to surrender to our constitution itself. Then how can one think that democracy is safe in our hands?

It's only 15 years that Bangladesh is enjoying true democracy. We still have a long way to go. Our politicians have to

have tolerance and patience to allow the young democracy to take deeper roots so that any unfortunate situation cannot take us back to square one: the undemocratic and dictatorial rule that the country experienced since independence. If the political parties create a no-go situation for the Caretaker Government then where are we likely to land? The

President, though he is also the Chief Adviser of the Caretaker Government, is still there as the guardian of the country's constitution. If any severe blockade were created in the process of transition to democracy or, in a worst case, in the functioning of the government, would the president not take severe measures? In any case if it turns out to be 'the emergency' as the only choice then wouldn't that be the most unfortunate case for our people: going back to square one again? Who then would be blamed by the future generations: the politicians, the national leaders? It's their turn now to seriously think about it.

There are other aspects of this crisis also. The huge damage that the politicians are doing to this poor country's economy is insurmountable. The price hike in the local market, fall of the value of Taka in the international market are few indications only; just tip of the iceberg. While encouraging street agitation and political violence, enforcing all-out blockade to public life through few political activists, it has become a fashion for the politicians to claim that 'the people are with us'. On the contrary, in a country like Bangladesh everyone now wants to secure one's life economically: in the office, in the business or workplace. Who doesn't? Race for the chair by the politicians must not undermine the peoples' desire to prosper economically. After all, in today's international politics also the most popular phrase is: It's economy stupid!

The author is freelancer.

## Veto by US is a licence to kill

M SHAMSUR RABB KHAN

THE US has vetoed a United Nations Security Council resolution urging an immediate withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza. The resolution would have also condemned an Israeli attack in Gaza that killed 18 Palestinian civilians last week. Nine of the council's 15 members voted for the measure, while four nations e.g. Britain, Denmark, Japan, and Slovakia abstained. But the "no" vote cast by US ambassador John Bolton was enough to kill the resolution.

The voting pattern clearly indicates that majority was in favour of such a resolution that would have reigned in Israel from brutal aggression against innocent civilians. This is not the first time that US have done that. Last year, it was the same John Bolton who vetoed a similar UN resolution. In the wake of growing Israeli attacks on Palestinians, the veto added fuel to the fire. And it came at a time when Iraq is boiling with occasional bomb blasts and explosions ripping through the streets of the already ruined country. Neither the recent defeat of the Republican in congressional elections could deter the US from going in for such an illogical and immoral step that disregards human value.

What would the US say to all those grief-stricken families of Beit Hanoun? And how would the US react had a few innocent Americans been killed in a similar fashion? Without doubt, all hell would break loose when an American citizen is killed anywhere in the world. TV channels, newspapers and leaders from around the globe would have condemned the dastardly act. Security agencies all over the world might have sounded high alert. In the world's perception, especially in that of America, there is no equality in death, leave alone the living tragedy.

Killing of children and women does not move a nation that leaves no stone unturned in giving lecture on freedom, democracy, and human rights.

There is an element of deep-rooted prejudice for the suffering people of Palestine that the US vetoed a UN Security Council resolution denouncing Israeli crimes against the Palestinians. Much to the anguish of people across the Middle East, the stance taken by the US would only help encourage the Jewish state to continue its aggression. Every veto in the UN on this issue only emboldens the aggressor. Ignoring the unfettered atrocities on hapless Palestinians last week, the US has one again sided with the aggressor. All the lofty talks of restoring peace and stability in the region falls flat once the US stamps the seal of approval to the brutal killings of Israel. On any ground -- legal or moral -- vetoing the UN resolution does mean legitimising the Israeli atrocities and giving it a licence to kill.

In principle, the world, especially leaders in the Middle East may denounce the use of veto by the US against the Security Council resolution that condemned Israeli crimes against the Palestinian people; the blatant disregard to the popular sentiment would just help aggravate the situation. In practice, the US would continue to exploit the veto power giving a whip to the dreaded dictator, who spits on democracy and human rights.

The veto came on the close heels of the latest Israeli massacre of 18 Palestinian men, women and children in Gaza. What about the role of international community? Almost from lacklustre neutrality to enigmatic silence, the world leaders have moved their backs to the non-stop genocide of innocent people. After all, why poke nose in others affairs? The UN is helpless. The other Muslim nations are

weaker, they can pledge only to work out a viable and long lasting solution. Above all, some of the close allies of the US speak out a language that is more plausibly diplomatic, signifying nothing more than what is happening in Palestine.

So all the plans, strategies, and policy agendas of the states in the Middle East and those outside remain on the paper once the US steps out to veto the resolution, while in case of Iraq it did not even bother to take the UN resolution. During the last war between Israel and Hezbollah, the role of the US was partial; it only woke up when enough damage was done.

In truth, the US has not been serious in realising peace, security, stability or permanent solution to the Israel-Palestine problem, but to help Israel at all cost and in all circumstances like a blind lover, who loves to favour everything about his beloved. Rather than working out a real-time solution to ease the tension between Israel and Palestine, the US has made a mess of peace in the region by one-sided and undue favouritism towards the former.

Much of the credit for the present predicament in the Middle East, particularly in Iraq and Palestine goes to the US. This is one truth that Washington should not fail to realize, sooner or later. In such an unjust environment, any retaliation from the victim's side is bound to come. The people of Palestine, like the US, is at war with terrorism; the only difference is that the tiny Arab state has no means and materials to fight the mighty military power of its opponent backed up by a superpower.

The author has contributed this article to The Daily Star.

## A New Deal in Washington

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THE mid-term election that has given majority to the Democrats in both the Houses of Representatives and Senate is not a bombshell really. The undercurrent of change has been flowing for quite some time. Corruption in the high offices was the top election issue followed by economic mismanagement. Iraq, working as a catalyst, triggered the election from a third position as rejection of Bush policies. It was not so much brilliance of the Democrats but the inert policies of the Bush administration that drove the voters crazy. A wind of change is blowing over Washington.

Why was disaster in Iraq not the main election issue? The electorate did not mind so much the occupation of Iraq but the failure to consolidate the gains following victory. They were so much excited about the bloodless victory over the exhausted Saddam regime that President Bush had the highest approval ratings following the occupation. A simple victory lost in hardheaded arrogance after the occupation. Cleansing the Bathist out of the administration and disbanding of the armed forces in post Saddam Iraq boomeranged and played havoc. The response should have been general amnesty except for the top leaders and criminals that could have reconciled many with the occupation forces and encouraged to collaborate with the new reality. Generosity is part military victory over civil population for consolidation. There was need to settle down on a workable model before tearing down Saddam's regime. Rumsfeld was the prime culprit of post war mismanagement.

As an interim arrangement, the Americans should have worked with the Bath party less the leaders and gradually seed democracy on a loosely framed constitution. The newly acquired individual rights could have mellowed the guilt of occupation. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld in collaboration with VP Dick Cheney behaved like a bull in a china shop with the unnerved Iraqis. The enemies of America could not have played it worse. He has been a political liability ever since. The President should have fired him long ago. What he could not do the American electorate has finally done, at tremendous political costs to the Republicans.

Oil cartel and their representative Rumsfeld and many in the administration are responsible for the corporate corruption at the highest level. The way Halliburton was favoured nakedly with contracts worth billions of dollars in Iraq and elsewhere; it was scandalous even by American standards and obviously drew flares from other frustrating competitors. Corporate bosses and political beneficiaries worked hand in glove to bankrupt oil giant Enron, the seventy billion dollar behemoth, which hurt millions of Americans. Public anger was rising over the years and it is time to pay the price by the

**Iraq as a nation, all but ceases to exist. It will need a new direction, more reconciliation and less direct intervention. Reconciliation will be difficult in the face of sectarian violence that has already reached the level of civil war. The centuries old sectarian grudge has exploded into murderous violence in pulverized Iraq. Civilian dead is officially 1,5,000 and unofficial guess 6,50,000. How are the occupation forces going to restrain sectarian violence without participating in maintenance of law and order? Street patrol and search and destroy operation means more danger to American lives.**



Republicans. With V P Dick Cheney not in the presidential race, Republicans will have a hard time getting a suitable candidate for the White House next. It is not that Republicans do not have attractive candidates but the backfire of Bush administration will be too heavy to ignore.

Besides Iraqi quagmire, democrats will have opportunity to hold the tail of the Bush administration on corruption and the free run of lobbyists. The President will have to absorb washing a lot of dirty linen in the Capitol Hill to work out a deal with the democratic majority for next two years. With presidential race warming up for 2008, democrats are expected to be hardly forgiving.

A wind of change is obvious but that does not guarantee democratic ascendancy in the Whitehouse in 2008. Nomination for the presidency will be fiercely contested among the hopefuls that might exhaust democrats and eventually divide them. Al Gore remains a formidable candidate, like a shrewd politician, carefully maintaining reluctance but keeping the option open. Fans of re-elected Senator Hillary Clinton and her tentacles are visible all over her noncommittal attitude. She is presenting herself presidential in everyway these days. With Nancy Pelosi as Speaker of the House of

Representatives, Senator Hillary Clinton gets a shot in the arm to bid seriously. If Pelosi can be the first woman Speaker in American history, why can Hillary not be the first woman President of United States? Powerful governors have made it a tradition to bid and reach the Whitehouse. The worst may come for democrats if the hopefuls fight until last bullet. Democratic presidential primaries are likely to be gruelling, nasty and self-defeating as well. Many good opportunities are lost in party bickering. Republicans may have become minority in the legislative bodies and lost many gubernatorial races but President Bush is very much there in the Whitehouse for two more years. If he plays his executive power astutely, he can still take a lot of wind out of the democratic sail. American presidential race is more a matter of personal charisma and voter appeal than party affair. A candidate may not be party insider for nomination. It will be political naïveté to rule out a serious Republican challenge for the presidency.

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murderous violence in pulverized Iraq. Civilian dead is officially 1,5,000 and unofficial guess 6,50,000. How are the occupation forces going to restrain sectarian violence without participating in maintenance of law and order? Street patrol and search and destroy operation means more danger to American lives. With three thousand Americans dead, the electorate are in no mood to suffer more casualties.

Oil rich hilly north is the home of Kurds, who has the chance of the century to assert their right as a nation. If they are not politically satisfied they will certainly renew their armed struggle. The majority Shiites down south are ready for their cause too. Sunnis around Bagdad, sandwiched between Kurds in the north and Shiites in the south, are on survival course. In the Arab tribal culture, there are no opponents, only enemies, blood of the opponent are celebration, sanity nearly always whimpers. Iraq as a nation ceases to exist except in loose federating units, shockwave of which may turn into 'tsunami' for other improvised states. Before recognising the three-dimensional solution of Iraq, Americans will have to do lot of homework to find workable models for friends. They cannot afford another hard landing in the Middle East.

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