

US Presidential Election

What are the Possible Reasons for the Mess?

It does not matter who wins the election, Bush or Al Gore, the administration is likely to suffer from inherent weakness because of the lack of mandate from the people. Al Gore has the slim majority of popular vote but may not win the majority of electoral votes (271). The American people are divided in the middle. It appears that the US Congress needs to look hard on the system of election and come out with a better standard and procedure for future elections.

by Harun ur Rashid

THE outcome of the US Presidential election is indeed in a mess. The comedians have a field day and a few comedians say that this messy election will continue to be their subject matter for at least eight years. A few American people have started saying that if the two men cannot settle themselves, let President Clinton run the country for another four years.

It appears to many that the term 'chad' or 'hanging chad' or 'dimpled chad' on the card has become a joke in all over the world. Very few knew a country in Africa, called Chad (southern neighbour of Libya) but now the term 'chad' is known in different context to the TV viewers and readers of the newspapers all over the world.

The Republican Party (Bush) has moved a petition to the highest court in the land US Supreme Court of nine Judges with the request not to allow the hand-counting of votes to be added in the final result of Florida. The request of the Democratic Party (Al Gore) to hand count the votes was allowed by the Florida Supreme Court. The Republican Party thinks that the court has overstepped its jurisdiction in changing the laws and rules of the election in Florida. This decision of the Florida state court will be reviewed by the US Supreme Court on Friday, 1 December. Both parties seem to be nervous and are keeping their fingers crossed.

This intervention by the US Supreme Court appears to be unprecedented with respect to the Presidential election. Generally speaking, the Court does not intervene in a matter which is essentially political in nature. By moving the election issue to the Court, it appears that the judiciary will decide the outcome of the highest office in the land.

The tone of the protest and slogans by the party supporters of both parties in the streets appears to be unseemly in a mature democratic country. Known to be the leader of the free democratic world, it was expected that the supporters would have patience and tolerance to see the court proceedings run its course. But the shouting

matches between the party supporters appear to have damaged the image of the US in other countries. The developing countries in future will not take the US seriously to monitor their elections. If the Americans cannot look after themselves, how can they look after others?

A fall-out from this chaotic situation seems to be that the one party-rules countries will now have the opportunity to point out to their people that the multi-party system does not work even in the US. Some say that this pandemonium in the US Presidential election has done a great disservice to the movement of democratic pluralism. In the authoritarian states, the autocratic rulers would argue that if US cannot hold peacefully and smoothly the election to the highest office, why should they follow this faulty system?

One good question remains: Why is the mess?

First, it appears that there is no nation-wide standard voting system in the US. Each state decides its own electoral laws with regard to the procedure of elections and as a result, the procedure and rules of the election vary from state to state. Had there been a uniform system one could argue that this confusion over hand-counting of votes to ensure the intention of the voters by looking at the card whether the voter has punched the hole or not would not have arisen.

Second, neutral public servants do not run and declare the elections in the US. There is no neutral Returning Officer to declare the result as we have in Bangladesh and in other countries. There is no national Election Commission to decide the disputed result of the election.

Each and every mid and high level official in the US gets elected, say, the Judges the District Attorneys, the chief election officer and the members of the election canvassing board of each county (who certify the result) in the state are elected on party basis.

Once elected they are alleged to have a bias for their party. At the centre of attention is Ms. Kathleen Harris (43), Florida's elected Secretary of State responsible for declaration of the result.

It is reported that she is a Bush fan and a year ago a news release was put out by her saying: "I am thrilled and honoured to announce my support for George W. Bush for the Presidency." That is the reason why the declaration of the result of the election in Florida state by Ms. Harris has been challenged on the ground of being motivated by her partisan attitude.

Finally, the American people do not vote directly for their President. It is the faceless 538 members of the Electoral College which elect the President. Each state is allotted electors to its number of the Congress determined by population. Big states have large numbers while the small states have less.

Winning a state even by a small margin entitles a candidate to all that state college votes except in one or two states which allot electors on proportion of votes garnered by the candidates. Again there is no uniform system in the country. If Florida had the proportional system of electing members of the electoral college, this confusion might not have arisen.

There is a view that President Clinton's administration, despite its hiccup with Monica Lewinsky affair, turns out to be the orderly and credible one. History will judge him better than he has been. It does not matter who wins the election, Bush or Al Gore, the administration is likely to suffer from inherent weakness because of the lack of mandate from the people. Al Gore has the slim majority of popular vote but may not win the majority of electoral votes (271). The American people are divided in the middle.

Americans love to point out that theirs is a nation founded on laws. There seems to be an amazing number of lawyers per head of population in the US. The American people have voted but few could anticipate that the lawyers and the courts are to decide who wins the US Presidential election.

It appears that the US Congress needs to look hard on the system of election and come out with a better standard and procedure for future elections.

The writer, a barrister, is former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

THE five pillars of Islam are: Declaration of Faith, Salat, Zakat, Saum and Hajj.

In the declaration of Faith, viz. La ilaha illallah, Muhammadur Rasoolullah (i.e. nothing worthy of worship except Allah, and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah), we become conscious of the individual positions of Allah, the Holy Messenger Muhammad (S) and the rest of the Creation. It signifies that every soul has come from Allah, and every soul goes back to Allah. A successful return back to Allah is only possible through the Message and Guidance given by Allah Himself. As a matter of fact, Allah has appointed the Holy Messenger Muhammad (S) to convey His message to every soul in order to guide them towards the destination earmarked for them. Therefore, when we say Muhammad (S) is the Messenger of Allah, it is not only an assertion of the high status of the Holy Messenger Muhammad (S), it is at the same time a reminder of the functional relationship of the Holy Messenger Muhammad (S) with Allah on the one hand and the rest of the Creation on the other.

Salat (devotional Prayer), Zakat (minimum Charity), Saum (Fasting) and Hajj (Pilgrimage) are the mechanics applied for that journey back to Allah. The prerequisites in these mechanics are the high moral standards of good conduct exemplified by the Holy Messenger Muhammad (S); and the efficiency of these mechanics is a reflection of the spiritual relationship one establishes with Allah.

Briefly, Salat is a vehicle which continually brings the soul in the Presence of Allah. One may say, it is the rehearsal for the soul, before it stands in the Grand Presence at the end of its journey. A training in the protocol, before visiting the King!

Zakat is a vehicle which reminds the soul that it is not alone in the journey. The soul has to share the given resources with other souls, so that everyone can have an easy passage towards the destination.

Hajj is a vehicle which brings home the message of the Grand Gathering that will take place at the end of the journey.

Last but not the least, Fasting is a vehicle which brings the soul closer to Allah by virtue of practising *Samadiyyat*, i.e. by emulating the divine attribute *As-Samad*. One who is not dependent on anything.

What is said above about Salat, Zakat, Hajj and Fasting does not do any justice to the extent and depth one can go in describing these mechanics. The idea here is to put Fasting in the picture as a whole, and then look at it in a bit more detail, especially in the spiritual context.

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The Spiritual Context of Fasting

by Muhammad Alamgir

The Unique Role of Fasting

The central theme of all divine worship is to perfect the ability of recognising the greatness of Allah; to glorify Him as He must truly be glorified; and to surrender to Him in the absolute terms. One who has done that to the maximum limits of one's potential is said to have acquired divine qualities. That is exactly what the Holy Messenger Muhammad (S) required of us when he said, *takhal্লাqu be-akhlaqillah* i.e. inculcate in you the qualities of Allah.

Now, in all the other forms of worship, viz. Salat, Zakat and Hajj, the soul achieves a certain measure of purification which determines the measure of its divine qualities. In these forms of worship, attention may not be directly focussed on acquiring divine qualities, although the end result is just the same.

In contrast, the primary

reward for all good deeds has been mentioned in the Holy Quran and the Sacred Hadis. But the reward for Fasting is the vision of Allah Himself. That is why, the above Hadis-e-Qudsi is also read as, "as-Saumu Lee wa Ana Ujiyba Behi", i.e. Fasting is for My sake, and I will be the reward for it.

A Training in Self-restraint

Let us look back at what is really denoted by Fasting. It would seem that the reward mentioned is too great. If abstinence from food and biological functions is the only requirement in Fasting, Had it been so, Fasting would be no different from starving, which people undertake to reshape their body; or from hunger-strike, which is used as a weapon in a non-violent agitation; or from the starving of a poor man, who is compelled to do so because of lack of provisions. As a matter of fact biological abstinence is mainly physical

lies the special significance of Fasting. No wonder, it becomes much more productive when undertaken as a month-long programme, as in Ramadan.

This is the time during the year, when such a concerted effort is devoted to repairing all the damage done to our body, mind and soul.

To repeat, Fasting is the totality of control imposed on all aspects of self, so that all our overt and covert actions are in complete accord with the commands of Allah.

Restraint of the Mind

In elaborating what has been termed as restraint of the mind, Imam Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (may Allah be merciful with him) has said the following:

1. Restrain your eyes from looking at what may give you evil ideas, or what will divert your attention from the remembrance of Allah. The Holy Messenger Muhammad (S) has said: Five things destroy Fasting false-

hood, backbiting, slander, perjury and to see with lust or animal passion.

2. Restrain your tongue from useless and vain talks. Stop false-speaking, back-biting, slander, abusive speech, obscenity, hypocrisy and enmity. Adopt silence. Busy your tongue with the mention of Allah and the recitation of the Holy Quran.

The Holy Messenger Muhammad (S) has said: Fasting is like a shield; if a man is fasting, let him not rebuke and dispute. If a man wants to assault or start a quarrel, say to him, 'I am fasting.' Two women were fasting at the time of the Holy Messenger Muhammad (S). They became so much over-stricken with hunger, that order was sought from the Holy Messenger Muhammad (S) for them to break their fast. He asked for a cup and told them to vomit what they had eaten. Both of them vomited fresh blood and flesh. The Holy Messenger Muhammad (S) said, 'The two women fasted with lawful food, but broke their fast with unlawful food. The two women back-bited people and ate their flesh.'

3. Restrain your ears from hearing evil talks. What is unlawful to utter, is unlawful to hear. To remain silent at the time of back-biting is unlawful.

The Holy Messenger Muhammad (S) has said, 'The back-biter and the hearer of back-biting are equal co-sharers in the sin.'

4. Restrain your hands, feet

Allah, in giving the reasons for Fasting, has summed up the whole issue in one short, albeit comprehensive, phrase: "La'allakum Tattaqoon", that you may learn self-restraint. When we talk of self, we do not mean body alone; we mean body, mind and soul.... Fasting is the totality of control imposed on all aspects of self, so that all our overt and covert actions are in complete accord with the commands of Allah.

attempt in Fasting is to emulate Allah in His attribute of *As-Samad*. Allah does not depend on anything for sustenance. He does not need any food or drink. In short, He is free from any biological needs. He is above biology and bio-chemistry. However, our souls are entrenched in our bodies, which are purely organic, i.e. they undergo growth and decay, and therefore, for their biological function they need sustenance: food, drink, sleep and a few other things.

Allah has decreed that the rank or position of *khalifa*, i.e. His deputy or vicegerent, in short, the position nearest to Him, be given to human beings. The various forms of worship are nothing but the secrets revealed by Allah to man, to help him achieve that rank.

Fasting, in which we abstain from supplying the body its biological needs, goes a long way in achieving that nearness. What we actually do in Fasting is copy Allah, as it were, and live outside the bounds of biology.

That is why Allah has said in a Hadis-e-Qudsi, "as-Saumu Lee wa Ana Ujiyba Behi", i.e. Fasting is for My sake, and it is I who will give the rewards for it. There are two things in this statement. One, the rewards for all other good deeds will be distributed, as it were, by the Angels; of course, as per the command of Allah. But the reward for Fasting will be given by Allah Himself. Second,

and very little spiritual, if at all. Whereas what we are looking for is the spiritual connection, or the spiritual context, in Fasting.

Allah therefore, in giving the reasons for Fasting, has summed up the whole issue in one short, albeit comprehensive, phrase: "La'allakum Tattaqoon", that you may learn self-restraint. When we talk of self, we do not mean body alone; we mean body, mind and soul.

Needless to say, in Fasting, restraint for the body is 'abstinence' from food, drink and carnal desires. If one has to do it voluntarily, it does require some level of spiritual strength. Even so, this is the lowest kind of Fasting.

Restraint of the mind would require control over all the limbs of the body, in order to stop them from committing the sins they usually commit. This is the Fasting of the selected Muslims.

Restraint of the soul means to remain 'vigilant', so that the soul does not stray away from the Presence of Allah, i.e. the remembrance of Allah. This is the Fasting of the very elect.

One may point out that, restraint of the mind and the soul are not specific to Fasting. They should be practised all the time, fasting or not fasting. The truth of the matter is, when the body is subjected to the rigours of Fasting, it becomes easier for the spirit to take hold of the activities of the mind and the soul. Herein

became unbeatable after he joined up with Montesinos. In the years after Fujimori's long-shot victory they dissolved Congress, suspended the Constitution and trampled other democratic institutions in Peru, with barely a whimper of protest from the international community.

The president had to figure out his next political move without his former adviser. In the backdrop of Peru's current political scenario, it seemed that Fujimori faced a future of uncertainty. He was expected to attend the Ibero-American summit in Panama city when he made what began as a brief stopover in Tokyo. News that

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to lead Peru into elections four years early on April 8.

The vote to reject Fujimori's resignation sent from Tokyo where the former strongman was apparently sheltering from the political storm was the first time. In Peru's history a president had been declared morally unfit for office. It is a shameful exit for a man who rose from obscurity to serve a decade as president, priding himself on trouncing leftist rebels, licking hyperinflation and securing peace with neighbour Ecuador.

Unwanted, "unfit" in the end, Fujimori's swift fall from power was as dramatic as his rise to the presidency in 1990.

Dramatic End of Fujimori Era in Peru

by A S M Nurunnabi

Peruvians called Alberto Fujimori plenty of unflattering things during his 10 years in power: a cheat, a human-rights abuser, even a tyrant. But the ways he fell from power were quite dramatic. His nemesis was his intelligence chief Vladimir Montesinos who became a close adviser to President Fujimori. As unofficial head of the National Intelligence Service (SIN), Montesinos helped run the war against left-wing terrorist, he also placed his military buddies in top commands and allegedly presided over high-level corruption.

At the beginning of October last, Montesinos, 54, came crashing down, threatening to take Fujimori's presidency with him. In the end, Montesinos was done in by a small political party called the Independent Moralizing Front. Montesinos's mistake was that he bugged his own office. A hidden camera caught him giving \$15,000 to an opposition lawmaker as an apparent bribe. The Moralizing Front, one of whose leaders was Fujimori's embittered ex-wife got hold of the

videotape and released soon afterwards. Already under fire for apparently rigging last presidential election, Fujimori had abruptly announced he would dismanle the SIN, resign his own office and call elections as soon as possible. Then the transition came to a jarring halt. Fujimori said he would stay in power until his successor is inaugurated.

For days, Fujimori had failed to formally fire Montesinos. Instead, the intelligence chief dropped out of sight. The ousted spymaster fled the country and hid out briefly in Panama. Early this month, Montesinos deepened the crisis by flying home. Many Peruvians blamed Fujimori for failing to keep him out. As if he hadn't caused enough trouble, Montesinos gave a rare interview to a Lima radio station, claiming Fujimori had given him permission to return.

The first vice-president promptly quit in protest, and two congressmen bolted Fujimori's party, which soon split into rival factions. Coup rumours flew widely.

With Montesinos's friends and former classmates still dominating the military's top ranks, some Peruvians worried that he continued to control key parts of the armed forces. Fujimori tried to ally such fears. Demonstrating his powers over the troops, he confined all military personnel to their barracks until further notice and removed Montesinos's brother-in-law, an army general, as commander of the armoured division headquarters in Lima. He also arrested a few officers close to Montesinos but he let them go just as quickly.

Military experts insisted that the generals had chosen to back the president. Still observers speculated that Fujimori was afraid to act aggressively for fear that Montesinos might spill state secrets or embarrassing personal details he knew from his 10 years as the de facto head of intelligence-nuggets like whether Fujimori was born in Japan, as some opponents claimed and he denied, disqualifying him from the presidency. Meanwhile, the president had

gambled to cut his losses. For weeks, his representatives had been haggling with opposition leaders over the precise terms for a new election. Fujimori was trying to delay it as long as possible. And in exchange for his stepping down he wanted a sweeping new amnesty law, granting immunity from prosecution to both military and civilian officials for a wide variety of crimes, including drug trafficking. Suddenly the president caved in, dumping the amnesty demand and agreeing to hold the vote no later than April 8.

The amnesty issue didn't go so easily. Political analysts said the generals were sure to push Fujimori for broad legal protection, as payment for staying out of the Montesinos standoff. They had reasons to worry. Human rights activists were demanding the creation of an independent truth commission to investigate atrocities committed since 1980 in the two-pronged civil war against the leftist Tupac Amaru rebels in the slums and the

vicious Shining Path in the countryside. No matter what the army wanted, though, Fujimori couldn't deliver an amnesty law without opposition support. And that was something he could not expect much of.

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Peruvian President Fujimori intended to resign prompted his entire 14-member Cabinet to resign, rocketing up levels of political uncertainty in the Andean nation.

Peru's Congress was set to name a moderate opposition leader as interim president after it declared Fujimori "morally unfit" to be president and removed him from office in disgrace after allegations of corruption.

The head of Congress, Valentín Paniagua, a 64-year-old moderate constitutional lawyer, seen as having broad appeal, was expected to be anointed president

to lead Peru into elections four years early on April 8.

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Art of Protest that Dumps Politicians with the Garbage

For centuries the arts have served as a vehicle of social and political comment. Community groups in Peru demanding a change in the political culture, are using a mix of art and artistry to whip up enthusiasm in a people generally cautious of public criticism, reports Gemini News Service.

Stephanie Boyd writes from Lima

"Put the garbage in the garbage" reads the simple slogan on Peru's hippest new rubbish bags, framing black and white photos of President Alberto Fujimori and his former personal adviser Vladimir Montesinos, the spy chief accused of a slew of crimes including corruption, torture and civilian massacres.

The loosely organised Civil Society Collective (CSC), which includes women's organisations, students and artist groups, distribute the bags at street protests and organise 'dumping activities' piling up bags outside government buildings and public squares in Lima, the nation's capital.

As Peru sinks further into political crisis, civilian demonstrators have embraced pop art to coax the country's masses away of violence and fed-up with weak and divided opposition parties, to take to the streets. The first concerted artistic actions came in the aftermath of Fujimori's third-consecutive electoral win in 1995, which was marred by accusations of fraud.

Every Friday afternoon during the past five months demonstrators have faithfully brought soap and wash-basins to Lima's central square, where they wash the Peruvian flag and hang it to dry in front of the government palace.

Less than two months into Fujimori's controversial third term his power began to crumble after a video showing Montesinos allegedly bribing an opposition politician was leaked on 14 September.

Two days later, Fujimori announced he would call new elections without him in the running. Thousands of Peruvians



we must establish who is responsible for the crimes before we can build true national reconciliation."

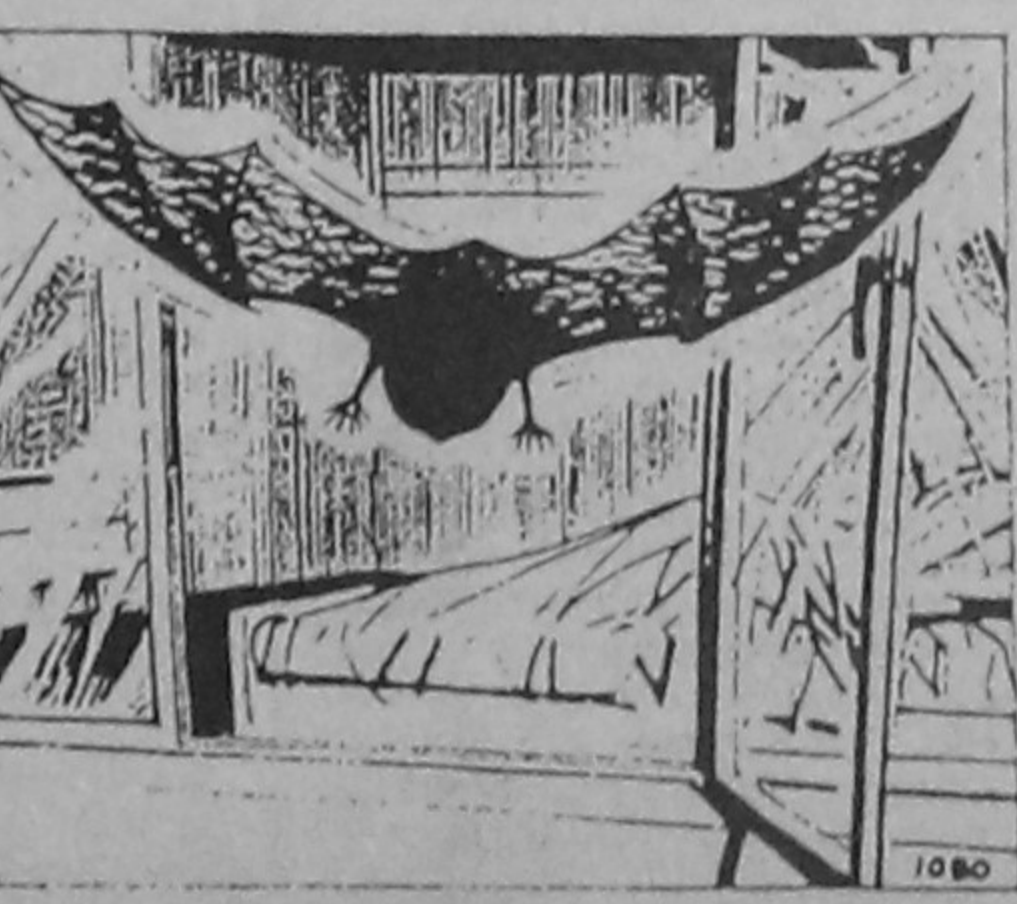
A recent poll by the independent firm Apoyo found that 71 per cent of Peruvians disagreed with the government's amnesty proposal, but citizens have not taken to the streets en masse.

Opposition congress member Rafael Rey Reyes blames Peru's 49 per cent poverty rate and the government's control of media outlets. But Peru's popular opposition newspaper *La Protesta* has actively campaigned for civil uprising, drawing parallels between Fujimori and Yugoslavia's Slobodan Milosevic, who was evicted through civilian protest.

"I believe it's incorrect to say the population is only concerned about having enough food or getting our breakfast," Machier responds. "But we need leadership someone to say, okay, where are we going to meet? Let's go to the Palace, let's go to the Plaza de Armas, to the little Pentagon... The conditions of indignation exist, we're just lacking a leader."

Five years ago people were afraid of demonstrating or even talking critically about the government in public, says Guerrero, a post-graduate student. "Now that has changed and citizens feel they have the right to speak and give their opinions." Lima's historic San Martin square has been virtually taken over in recent months by the CSC. Luis Garcia, organiser of the artists' collective "Resistencia", which supplies CSC with protest pop art, surveys a lunch-time crowd milling around the latest contribution to the "Wall of Shame."

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by Jim Davis