

chiffon or silk-bordered head-of-the-state. I don't want to see an Asif Zardari in the hot seat either. And Allah forbid, I don't want to have some hirsute chin and a 'kisti' cap staring at me every day from newspapers and televisions screens either.

Yes, the prospect before us is dire and dismal, indeed.

But how did we come to this dead end street? Who was in the driver's seat, who was navigating, who had the map? Why didn't someone stop and ask directions, turn back, make a sharp u-turn? Ah! The pointlessness of the past! Faced with the foggy future, the predicament of the present seems to be a situation we allowed to happen to ourselves.

I am talking about us, the educated, self- respecting civil society who never raise our voices loud enough to make our needs and desires heard, and who never lift our hands to dig a path out of the morass.

So while disgrace if not disaster clouds the nation's circus, bring in the clowns. Let us listen to their cacophony and prattle, the jokes and lies, the sales pitch and the auctioneer's voice. Let us watch the old wine being dribbled back into new bottles. Perhaps we deserve no better.

Remember the saying 'Beggars can't be choosers'? I don't want to have this applied to us even as a metaphor. At a literal level, I normally swallow the fact that we Bangladeshis come from a 'poor' country but I would never allow anyone to think of us as a nation of beggars. After all, poverty is not a matter of choice, but begging is. But now, faced with the one opportunity to actively choose a hopeful future, we have again landed ourselves into a scenario where we are about to prove not how poor we are economically but that politically, we are a pitiable collection of mendicants who have no choice in creating our destiny but must accept whatever is dropped into our alms bowl.

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But is this true? Did we really have no choice at all, no vision, no plans, no demands, no leaders, no heroes? Did we not have at least one hero who made us feel good and clean and rich and proud? Did we not have a chance to have someone who could have been the leader we deserved?

I speak for myself, but I know one person, who I would have voted and campaigned for had he entered the fray on behalf of all of us self-respecting, hard working citizens who believe they deserve a true leader. But this man of vision and honour, with the common touch and an international reputation, was too good for us. But just for a moment, close your eyes and imagine having a visionary, a Nobel Laureate and a hero for a national leader.

Oh! Yes, we could have!

Not today, since we have already agreed to put ourselves back into the clutches of those we rejected. But one day, when we have the courage to gather and wield size 10 shoes and have the conviction, passion and vision to believe in a respectable destiny for ourselves, we too, can deserve heroes for leaders. Yes, we can. Can't we? ■