

Look to India not west for lessons in democracy, says analyst

by **MOBIN PANDIT**

DOHA: If the Gulf and other Arab states have a genuine desire to embrace democracy, they should look for assistance from India, which is the world's largest functioning democracy in their neighbourhood, said a visiting Indian strategic studies expert yesterday.

Going to the West is not the right thing to do as it is culturally apart with the pace of democratisation also being different, he added.

Sandeep Waslekar, presi-

dent of the Mumbai-based Strategic Foresight Group (SFG), was here to attend the 4th Qatar Conference on Democracy and Free Trade. SFG is one of India's leading independent think tanks on national, regional and global security issues.

Waslekar sees a mix of factors driving the West to promote democracy in this region and one of them, he claims, is a strong missionary zeal. In the past, there were Christian missionaries coming in from the West and now you have democ-

racy as the new religion there, he says.

"This is, however, not to suggest that the West does not have a genuine concern to see democracy taking roots in this region. The problem is, their objective is so multi-pronged that it gets confused. A good example is Iraq," argued Waslekar.

Politics is like an industry and if you have to install democracy, you have to get appropriate technological knowhow from outside. "So, why go to the West. There is

India in the immediate neighbourhood and despite all its social and economic woes, it is the world's largest functioning and successful democracy with 600 million enrolled voters and matured democratic institutions."

The Indian election commission is known for monitoring one of the most comprehensive electoral exercises in the world. It is a country with different religions and has historical links with this region, said Waslekar. There is democracy at the grassroots panchay-

at (village) level in India, which is comparable to the Shura (advisory) system here. "There is so much that India can share with these states in the realm of democracy and its implementation."

The smaller GCC states suffer from the problem of plenty just as bigger Islamic nations like Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan and even Saudi Arabia have unemployment as their major woe.

There are an estimated 10 million people in the age group of 15 to 35 years in these coun-

tries alone, most of whom are unemployed and there are fears they may be recruited by radical Islamic groups, said Waslekar.

Saudi Arabia is facing a unique predicament which is a fallout of the problem of plenty it had in the early seventies. The state being cash-rich provided patronage to young citizens by offering them government jobs without considering their productive capacity.

Three decades down the line today, the country is battling a huge social problem. "Qatar



Sandeep Waslekar

must be cautious and avoid such a situation," he suggested.

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