

## **'Great hope' for success of democracy in Mideast**

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**By Ramesh Mathew**

THE path being adopted to implement democracy may vary from country to country but the goal is the same everywhere, the seventh Doha Forum on Democracy, Development and Free Trade was told yesterday.

Scott Bates, a top official of the US-based National Democratic Institute, a non-profit group working to strengthen and expand democracy worldwide, was addressing the concluding session of the forum at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel.

The session's theme was: "Is the West really supportive of democracy in the Arab Region?" Bates said that all Western societies were democratic in character, principle and approach. "From Lisbon to Los Angeles, we have many things in common and a common belief that is deep-rooted in the ideologies of democracy."

He said democracy was more than just elections. "It involves the rule of law, protection of minority rights, protection of human rights, freedom of press and government's accountability to people." Bates said democracy was in consonance with the general values of the West and was probably the only tool to ensure long-term security of any region.

Acknowledging that the people of the Western world were by and large ignorant of the culture of the Middle East, Bates however said that they had some understanding of the region's polity. Asserting that the Western world, notably the US, was working to promote democracy in the region, he recalled some of the initiatives that Qatar had made in the last few years, terming them as decisive steps on the road to democracy. Bates also lauded HH the Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani's inaugural speech at the forum, which he said had clearly mentioned where the country was heading.

Expressing confidence that democracy would ultimately succeed in the Middle East, Bates said he had great hope in the region's young generation. "It's major strength is that nearly 70% of the region's population is less than 30 years of age. That itself gives me enormous confidence about the future of democracy in the region," he said.

Speaking earlier, member of parliament from Bosnia and Herzegovina Haris Silajdzic said state-sponsored violence was working against the interests of those aspiring for democracy in his country. Lashing out at the UN and International Court of Justice for "remaining mute spectators" to the cruelties in his country, Silajdzic said the whole purpose of democracy stood defeated in such circumstances.

Former Algerian premier Maloud Hamrouch said the absence of proper platforms and credible political forces had led to the failure of democracy in his country. "The absence of a free press has contributed to the failure of democracy in not only our country but in the entire region," he said.

"A number of regimes in the region have scant respect for their constitution and power abuse is rampant," Hamrouch said. It had resulted in the denial of economic, political and social rights to a large number of people.

Zsolt Nemeth, chairman of the foreign affairs parliamentary committee of Hungary, former British foreign secretary Lord Howe, and Kristi Westphalen, counsellor of the ministry of foreign affairs of Finland, also spoke at the session.

Baroness Symons of Verham was the moderator.