

Election Commission's concerns

These merit consideration

THE Election Commission (EC) has voiced its concern that unless the culture of political confrontation is stemmed before it gets any worse, we may well be headed for a major political turmoil like the one that visited us before the last general election.

We believe this is a timely warning expressed by the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC), and merits utmost consideration of all the major political parties. The realisation should dawn on them to heed the appeal, otherwise, confrontational politics cannot be defused.

Along with the expression of a concern, the EC has also given its suggestions and set goals for their realisation in a concerted manner. Those include, *inter alia*, building on the trust in the independence of the Election Commission, maintaining an authentic electoral roll and conducting free and fair elections.

Coming as they do in the backdrop of the EC having held the 2008 general election, by-elections and local government elections successfully and credibly, the Chief Election Commissioner's (CEC) recommendations merit serious consideration.

We fully endorse his view that a strong and independent EC is necessary to rid our electoral process of the evils of political vendetta, money and muscle power.

The next general elections are due in 2014. Between now and then, not only the good precedents set by the current EC would have to be followed, the political parties will need to fill in the gaps in the electoral reform processes.

Also importantly, the integrity that was reflected in the preparation of the electoral roll should also apply in updating the same for the 2014 General Election.

Of fundamental importance is the need for appointment of non-controversial persons of high probity and respectable track record to the posts of Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and his team of Commissioners. A provision exists in the constitution, which lays the criterion for appointment, but this has hardly been followed in the last 40 years. The CEC's pointer calls for attention.

The dwindling forests

Social forestation is welcome

WE learn it from no less a person than the finance minister that forest coverage has come down to only nine percent. He emphasized on social afforestation and massive tree plantation in each village to face the climate change impacts. His observations came at the inaugural session of the first Bangladesh Forestry Congress 2011 held in Dhaka.

However going by the official estimate the forest coverage is seventeen percent in the country, which of course belies reality. The information is indeed very discouraging in that the fast diminishing forests is pushing us into a catastrophic situation. The negative effect is already being felt. The heating of the climate and desertification are causing harmful effects on habitation and cultivation.

The indiscriminate felling of trees for housing and industrialization, increasing population and lack of proper land use plan are to be blamed for the dwindling forests. Adequate plantation has not been done to make up for the lost trees. In addition to providing ecological balance the forests meet demand for timber, firewood, fibre and myriads of other forest produces. The sector also contributes to income generation and poverty reduction.

The initiative of the forest directorate for social afforestation program is a welcome step towards saving this shrinking natural resource. Foremost will be protection and conservation of forest lands. The logical move would be to delegate some of the responsibilities of protecting the forest lands to the local communities who are naturally motivated for the job with their inherent knowledge of woods and the geography of the region.

We sincerely hope that the authorities concerned and their development partners would work together to raise awareness among policy makers, the general public and the private sector of the importance of biodiversity in general and ecosystems in particular to development and the consequences of its loss. Above all, stringent measures must be

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

April 21

753 BC

Romulus and Remus founded Rome (traditional date).

1526

The Mughal emperor Babur establishes an Islamic dynasty in India with victory at the Battle of Panipat.

1863

Bahá'u'lláh, considered the founder of the Bahá'í Faith, declares his mission as "He whom God shall make manifest".

1945

World War II: Soviet Union forces south of Berlin at Zossen attack the German High Command headquarters.

1960

Founding of the Orthodox Bahá'í Faith in Washington, D.C.

1967

Greek military junta of 1967-1974: A few days before the general election in Greece, Colonel George Papadopoulos leads a coup d'état, establishing a military regime that lasts for seven years.

1971

Justice Abu Sayeed Chowdhury is appointed special representative of Bangladesh at the United Nations.

1975

Vietnam War: President of South Vietnam Nguyen Van Thieu flees Saigon, as Xuan Loc, the last South Vietnamese outpost blocking a direct North Vietnamese assault on Saigon, falls.

1989

Tiananmen Square Protests of 1989: In Beijing, around 100,000 students gather in Tiananmen Square to commemorate Chinese reform leader Hu Yaobang.

2004

Five suicide car bombers target police stations in and around Basra, killing 74 people and wounding 160.

Japan: Recovery and rebirth

NAOTO KAN

AT 14.46 on March 11, Japan was hit by one of the most powerful earthquakes in recorded history. We are now making all-out efforts to restore livelihoods and recover from the series of tragedies that followed the Great East Japan Earthquake. The disaster left more than 28,000 people dead or missing, including foreign citizens.

Since March 11, Japan has been strongly supported by the international community and our friends around the world. On behalf of the Japanese people, I would like to express my sincerest gratitude for the outpouring of support and solidarity we have received from over 130 countries, nearly 40 international organisations, numerous NGOs, and countless individuals from all parts of the world.

The Japanese people deeply appreciate the *Kizuna* (a Japanese word for "bonds of friendship") that has been shown to us by friends around the world. Through this hardship, we have also come to truly understand the meaning of "a friend in need is a friend indeed."

From Bangladesh, we have received a number of messages expressing condolence, sympathy and encouragement immediately after the earthquake struck, including that from H.E. Sheikh Hasina, Prime Minister of Bangladesh, and donations from people and various organisations of Bangladesh.

The government of Bangladesh kindly provided us with relief supplies of blankets, rubber boots and rubber gloves. The Parliament of Bangladesh unanimously adopted a condolence resolution for the victims of the disaster.

Furthermore, the Embassy of Bangladesh in Japan and Bangladeshi nationals living in Japan have voluntarily extended their help through providing donations and temporary shelter in hotels, serving hot meals to those affected by the disaster, and so on. I wish to express our sincere

thanks for all the sympathy and support the Bangladeshi people have extended to us.

That Japan has experienced nuclear accidents at the Fukushima Dai-ichi plant, whose severity was assessed as most serious based on an international scale, is extremely regrettable and something I take it very seriously. Bringing the situation at the plant under control at the earliest possible date is currently my top priority.

I have been working at the forefront of efforts to tackle this troubling situation, leading a unified effort by the government. I have mobilised all available resources to combat the

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risks posed by the plant, based on three principles: first, give the highest priority to the safety and health of all citizens, in particular those residents living close to the plant; second, conduct thorough risk management; and, third, plan for all possible scenarios so that we are fully prepared to respond to any future situation. For example, we continue to make the utmost efforts to address the issue of outflow of radioactive water into the ocean from the plant.

In addition, the government has taken every possible measure to ensure the safety of all food and other products, based on strict scientific criteria. We have taken highly precau-

tory measures so that the safety of all Japanese food and products that reach the market has been and will continue to be ensured.

In order to assure domestic and foreign consumer confidence in the safety of Japanese food and products, my administration will redouble its efforts to maintain transparency and keep everyone informed of our progress in the complex and evolving circumstances at the Fukushima Dai-ichi plant.

I pledge that the Japanese government will promptly and thoroughly verify the cause of this incident, as well as share information and the lessons learned with the rest of the



Prime Minister Naoto Kan

world in order to prevent such accidents from occurring in the future. Through such a process, we will proactively contribute to global debate to enhance the safety of nuclear power generation.

Meanwhile, from a comprehensive energy policy perspective, we must squarely tackle a two-pronged challenge: responding to rising global energy demand and striving to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to combat global warming.

Through the "Rebirth of Japan" I would like to present a clear vision to the entire world -- that includes the aggressive promotion of clean energy -- that may contribute to solving

global energy issues.

The Great East Japan Earthquake and the resulting tsunami are the worst natural disasters that Japan has faced since the end of the Second World War. Reconstruction of the devastated Tohoku region will not be easy. However, I believe that this difficult period will provide us with a precious window of opportunity to secure the "Rebirth of Japan."

The government will dedicate itself to demonstrating to the world its ability to establish the most sophisticated reconstruction plans for East Japan, based on three principles: first, create a regional society that is highly resistant to natural disasters; second, establish a social system that allows people to live in harmony with the global environment; and third, build a compassionate society that cares about people, in particular, the vulnerable.

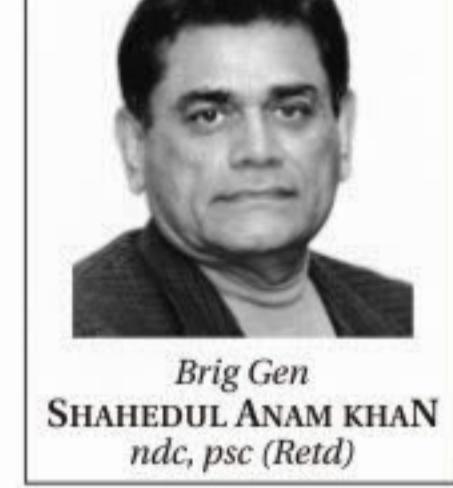
We, the Japanese people, rose from the ashes of the Second World War, using our fundamental strength to secure a remarkable recovery and the country's present prosperity. I have not a single doubt that we will overcome this crisis, recover from the aftermath of the disaster, emerge stronger than ever, and establish a more vibrant and better Japan for future generations.

I believe that the best way for Japan to reciprocate the strong *Kizuna* and cordial friendship extended to us by the international community is to continue our contribution to the development of the international community. To that end, I will work to the best of my ability to realise a "forward-looking" reconstruction that gives people bright hopes for the future. I would wholeheartedly appreciate your continued support and cooperation. Arigatou.

The writer is Prime Minister of Japan. This article is exclusive to The Daily Star.

STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING

Damned if you do and damned if you don't



A good job cuts both ways. After having done a good job of the task entrusted upon him that is perhaps the thought that is going through the minds of Mr. Ibrahim Khaled. He is a banker of eminence who had the misfortune of being nominated the chairman of the share market scam probe committee. He must be ruing the fact that he ever took up the responsibility.

And as head of the committee he is "guilty" of a few things. Firstly, the committee, unlike many such in the past, completed the task within the stipulated time. We do not know of any other that can take similar credit. Mr. Khaled must bear the unpleasant consequence of being an exception, something that would be credited in any other country that prides itself on good governance, probity and transparency, but not here.

Secondly, the probe committee has identified the manipulators of the stock market who were complicit in the cheating of a large number of unsuspecting small investors of their savings. And going by the reports which have appeared in bits and pieces in some, and in some details in other newspapers, he has dug up enough evidence to establish prima facie case against these people. It is

his fault that he has identified the shady face of the powerful of the society, who not only control money but control politics too.

Going by the way a section of the media and some important and well known personalities have moved against him it seems that after Yunus it is now Mr. Khaled's head that is on the block. One can hardly miss the well coordinated move to denigrate the man. Not only is there an attempt to kill the message there is move afoot to destroy the messenger too.

All sorts of statements are being attributed to him; he is being quoted out of context and he is being made

the villain of the piece, as if he is responsible for all that has happened in the stock market. Mr. Khaled's situation only demonstrates how fickle minded we are and how quickly we shift positions when our individual or partisan interests face a setback.

When Mr. Khaled's name was announced as head of the probe committee a section of the media as well as the opposition BNP expressed their reservation about the outcome

of the enquiry on the grounds that he was an "Awami League man" who was put there to see that the truth did not come out. Now they are going gaga over the report which they want published immediately.

Conversely, he was defended as being a man of impeccable integrity and strong moral fiber by the "other camp." What is surprising now is that, going by the comments of some influential persons, it is the AL that now finds the report motivated. The long and short of the accusation against Mr. Khaled is that the report has been prepared deliberately in this manner only to embarrass the government.

The purpose of an initial enquiry, as one understands it, is threefold. To find out why an incident occurred, apportion blame for it, and suggest remedy. Surely, no enquiry report is entirely complete. It only establishes a prima-facie case and allows for further investigation basing on the findings that might even absolve some from the list of "accused" in the initial enquiry or identify others not in the report.

There is lot of speculation about the report. And the government must share much of the responsibility for it. In spite of the well meaning finance minister's commitment to transparency in governance, and of unimpeachable character, his statements have confounded the confusions.

We are only too well aware of the consequences of not acting on the 1996 scam report. That scam, reportedly, was manipulated by some that are also involved in the recent manipulations. The more the delay the more will there be scope for the scamsters to influence the policymakers as we are told being done at present, by bringing to bear all the political and monetary clout, so that the process is derailed and the course of legal remedy and structural alterations are subverted.

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