

Unite to protect democracy

Extremism must be defeated by all means

WE most heartily rejoice at the news that we have successfully foiled an attempt to topple the democratically elected government.

From the Army Headquarters' press briefing on Thursday, it has become clear that extremist forces at home and abroad are active and are trying to use some misguided army personnel, both in service and retired, to fulfil their extremist agenda.

We are happy that members of the armed forces have been able to frustrate this effort to destabilise the government and protect the democratic process that was re-initiated in 1991 through the ouster of dictatorship in a mass upsurge.

We congratulate the army, especially, its intelligence services, for the efficiency they have demonstrated in early detection of the sinister coup plot and taking timely action to destroy it.

It pains us to recall that it was due mainly to intelligence failures that in the past the army could not prevent a number of coup d' état from taking place in one of which we lost the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman along with most of his family members. There were several other coups and counter-coups which decimated a large number of army officers and soldiers including Liberation War Heroes and sector commanders like General Ziaur Rahman, Khaled Musharraf and Abul Manzur. Those incidents were instrumental in the destruction of democratic institutions and inflicting irreparable damage to the country, civil society and the military establishment.

It is a matter of concern that religious extremism has made inroads into the armed forces. It proves that some ill-motivated quarters are misinterpreting the message of peace in Islam and using their misguided followers to spread religious extremism in the army.

We must realise that the ideological inroads that extremism has made into various segments of our society including the armed forces, has to be countered by a very forceful, coordinated and effective campaign to explain how extremism distorts true Islam.

The government's publicity wings and the media need to launch a massive campaign against these extremist tendencies.

The elements of hidden extremism have to be ferreted out from the army and other sensitive organs of the government and society. However, care should be taken that it does not turn into a tool for witch-hunt.

Finally, we call upon all political parties to refrain from using this incident for partisan ends, but extend their cooperation in fighting the danger of extremism in society.

Easing traffic gridlock

Focus on parking welcome

WE have been consistently saying that parking is key to tackling traffic congestion. Our counsel falling on deaf ears, unsurprisingly vehicular logjams have assumed a horrendous proportion. It is so difficult to endure that most people reach workplace or return home in completely fatigued and disoriented state.

Against this backdrop, we thank the Communications Minister Obaidur Quader for his prompt initiative to address the nagging problem. His focus on parking surely strikes a responsive chord in us. But we cannot say the same about some of the short-term measures that the national committee on reduction of traffic congestion has decided on.

True, lot of the earmarked parking spaces are under illegal occupation. The committee wants these to be recovered. After several half-hearted attempts by law enforcers in conjunction with Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (Rajuk), the encroachments have resumed with a vengeance. When the minister directs Rajuk to free the parking spaces fronting out different buildings of obstacles he is actually asking the authorities to take the trodden path. Clearly, much more determined efforts backed by adequate political will and law enforcement capacity would be needed to make a dent in the situation.

Another recipe that is proposed had also been tried out earlier on, with little or no success. The committee wants a large number of BRTC buses to be pressed into service for school children. Parents would be persuaded to switch from use of private transport to carry their school children to that of the new fleet of transports. The idea is good but to be practicable this has to be organised with adequate security arrangement for the wards.

A part of the solution lies in ensuring that the buses pull up at designated stoppages, especially avoiding stopovers in and around busy traffic intersections. Free-for-all off-loading and up-loading are a major cause for traffic jams, next to arbitrary road side parking. With a stringent, more precisely, corruption-free enforcement of traffic rules,

Economy and climate need concurrent solutions

VINOD THOMAS

AT the start of the New Year, the world continues to be gripped by a two-fold crisis: an economic downturn with wide-spread job losses, and accelerating global warming with extreme weather events. Asia has been relatively less affected by the global economic slump, but the most hit by natural calamities -- whose frequency and damages make Bangladesh one of the most disaster prone countries.

While both crises demand urgent attention, political leaders fear that dealing with climate change in the midst of an economic slowdown will hurt recovery efforts. In reality, mitigating and adapting to climate change can also offer opportunities for economic growth. Yet attempts to deal simultaneously with both crises have run into a seemingly intractable stalemate, as seen at the year-end climate summit in Durban, South Africa. So here we propose actions in three areas that can promote growth while dealing with the ravages of climate change.

First, energy has a substantial influence on both the global economy and climate. Energy expenditure represents about 8% of GDP worldwide. It accounts for about 40% of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions through its use in electricity, heating and industry, which has been rising steadily, especially in relatively fast growing Asia. No solution to the climate crisis is possible without a shift to

low-carbon energy.

Fortunately, governments can make huge gains through energy efficiency, which can both drive growth and make a significant dent in emissions, given the right drivers and incentives. China, the world's second largest economy, has employed investments, penalties, rewards and awareness-raising activities to slash energy use among its largest 1,000 companies. These

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actions prevented the release of 265 million metric tons of carbon dioxide between 2006 and 2009.

Phasing out fossil fuel subsidies, meanwhile, although politically challenging, would spur global clean energy development and generate growth. Countries spent a staggering \$409 billion in fossil fuel subsidies in 2010.

Second, forestry represents around 12% of global greenhouse gas emissions, while presenting a major economy-boosting opportunity. From Brazil to Indonesia, ranchers and loggers routinely fell a hectare of forest to create a pasture worth a few hundred dollars while releasing hundreds of tons of car-

bon dioxide into the atmosphere. One win-win solution is to prevent deforestation where the land is worth more with trees than without. At prices of \$10 for every ton of unreleased emissions, those groves could potentially generate several times more from carbon markets than from pasture or deforestation. Another solution is to restore already degraded lands. In Niger, one of the poorest nations, land

ing severe urban gridlock and deteriorating air quality, as well as increasing emissions. While an expanding auto industry can be part of economic recovery, investments in cleaner public transport have been found to generate even greater economic returns.

In the United States, stimulus dollars spent on public transport yielded 70% more job hours than those spent on highways, according to Smart Growth America. Meanwhile in Mexico, the government is pursuing an innovative transportation approach with policies and investments to scale up bus rapid-transit networks across the country.

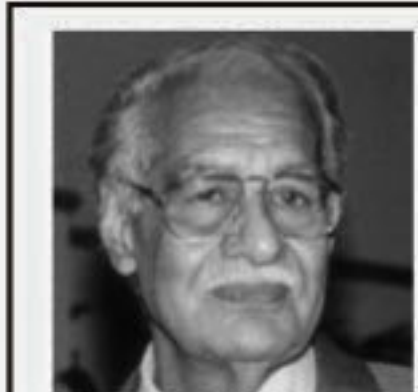
Moving away from old approaches of economic growth will not be easy. Even where energy reform, sustainable forestry, and investments in public transit can be shown to be beneficial, powerful special interests are blocking progress in many countries. To overcome these entrenched interests, countries -- and especially the top GHG emitters in Asia and the West -- need to help mitigate climate change is in their own national interest. Equally, nations need to take urgent steps to adapt to a changing climate if growth is to be sustained.

Willingly or not, Asia and the world will, of necessity, eventually move to a low-carbon future. But it is the countries with the political courage to act boldly and urgently today that will be best positioned to reap the rewards.

The writer is Director General for independent evaluation at the Asian Development Bank.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Ego or polity



KULDIP NAYAR

Chief of Army Staff V.K. Singh has done the most unprecedented thing by going to the Supreme Court on his birth year which he claims is 1951 while the government says repeatedly that it is 1950, meaning thereby he retires this May.

I wish the matter had been handled with care and caution. Preferably some amicable settlement should have been found and things not allowed come to such a pass. Defence Minister A.K. Antony is known to be balanced and experienced. Why did he let the issue reach the point of no return?

Yet, that does not justify a bit General Singh's knock at the Supreme Court's door. This is the worst choice he has opted for, to encourage talk that the civil has humiliated the armed forces. What BJP leader Jaswant Singh, a parliament member, has said tantamounts to Bonapartism. He says the sword of the armed forces has been blunted. Thank god, he is not in the government. Otherwise, the retired army officer that he is, he would have done unimaginable harm to democracy. It is a pity that even the 15 years he has spent in parliament has not yet worn out the dictatorial tendencies in him. In democracy, people's sovereignty, the civil side, is supreme and not the military or any other institution.

Woefully, the views aired by the sacked Navy chief Vishnu Bhagwat are no different. Understandably, he is bitter because he was a victim of communalism -- the BJP was in power. But at least he maintained the balance of not going to the Supreme Court. He did not convert the issue into civil versus military, which General Singh has tried to do and which Jaswant Singh had the temerity to support. I was shocked

to hear General Katoch saying that political leaders are on twitter. I do not know how he came to occupy a top position with such views?

When I rang up former Air Chief Idris Latif at Hyderabad, he was horrified over General Singh's appeal to the Supreme Court. He is probably of the old school that service comes before self and that the military does not challenge the order of a government, whatever one's feelings.

After General Singh had accepted the year 1950 for promotions, particularly at the time of his elevation as army chief, he should not have gone back on his commitment. This is what he and his supporters should ponder over.

Their behaviour smacks of dangerous ambitions and when some former top brass interpret the age issue as the confrontation between civil and military, they mock at India's democratic state.

People are proud of the armed forces but they do not want them to be anything except apolitical. Once the government, elected by the people, decides anything there is no question of disobeying it. General Singh should have resigned and then gone to the court if he was so incensed.

I wish the BJP had rapped General Singh on the knuckles. Or, does Jaswant Singh represent their viewpoint? No doubt, the government has handled the case insensitively. But the question has become bigger. The Chief of the Army Staff has challenged the Union of India. There is no dilly-dallying when the question of the country comes. General Singh has been wrongly advised and he has compromised the position he holds.

The government has filed a caveat

in the Supreme Court so that the case is not decided without hearing the other side. It is a case of indiscipline and should have been dealt that way, not through the court. I am shocked to hear that some compromise has been tried through back channels. This should have been done before the army chief went to the court. Now it looks like a compromise at the expense of people's sovereignty which the government represents.

General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani's case has been taken over by some other developments in Pakistan. Prime Minister Yousuf Reza Gilani put the army chief on the spot by

saying that he should have sent his reply to the Supreme Court inquiry into the memo for US help through a businessman, Mansoor Izaz, not directly. Not only that, Gilani dismissed his defence secretary who had said that "the country is under the control of the military" and went on to say that he would not tolerate a "state within state."

While the army posted at Islamabad the infamous brigade which has helped stage coups in the past, Gilani has convened a meeting of parliament to declare that the confrontation was between democracy and dictatorship. He wanted a vote of confidence for him but the consensus was on the support of democracy.

I know Gilani went out of the way to defend General Kayani and ISI chief Shuja Pasha in parliament when America killed Osama bin-Laden at Abbotabad without letting Islamabad know. But everyone

learns from mistakes and Gilani is no exception. In fact, he has brought the nation together behind the demand of democracy after realising that whatever the outcome of the crisis, Pakistan's problems essentially flow from the control of the army over administrative matters.

Another development in Pakistan is that the Supreme Court has issued a contempt notice to Gilani. He has been taken to task for not obeying the court's order for reopening the cases of corruption against President Asif Ali Zardari and the late Benazir Bhutto. The government's defence has been that both of them and some others were exonerated by former President General Pervez Musharraf through the National Reconciliation Ordinance he issued.

While writing this column, the fate of Gilani was not known. But whatever the outcome, he is the first prime minister who has withstood the pressure of the army. People may blame him for not standing up in the four years of his regime. Probably, the army did not throw its weight about as it did during the regimes of General Ayub Khan and Zia-ul Haq. Probably, Gilani was waiting for an opportunity and hit back when it arose.

True, all eyes are on the Supreme Court -- the Supreme Court which gave legal sanctity to the first coup by General Ayub through inventing "a doctrine of necessity." Chief Justice Iftikhar Choudhary has given independence to the institution, something which Pakistan needs.

Indeed, Pakistan has changed. But India is yet to understand how. The people and political parties are unanimous in opposing the return of the military. Democracy has come to stay, however belatedly. This prepares the ground for both countries to be friendly neighbours. There is no option to peace. Even if they consider it a punishment, they are sentenced to perpetual normalisation.

The writer is an eminent Indian Columnist.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

January 21

1793

After being found guilty of treason by the French Convention, Louis XVI of France is executed by guillotine.

1968

Vietnam War: Battle of Khe Sanh One of the most publicized and controversial battles of the war begins.

1919

Meeting of the First Dáil Éireann in the Mansion House Dublin. Sinn Féin adopts Ireland's first constitution. The first engagement of Irish War of Independence, Sologhead Beg, County Tipperary.