

FOUNDER EDITOR
LATE S. M. ALI

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The new Election Commission

Keep it out of controversy

THE role of Election Commission (EC) is vital for strengthening democracy. And a free and fair election, which is its primary task, is the sine qua non for a functional democracy. And towards that end it should be transparent and free from political influence.

This EC, we are afraid, has not been able to live up to its task and generate the confidence and trust of all the major political parties. Thus, the need is for a commission which would be able to restore public confidence in it. It is not that the EC is not invested with enough powers, on the contrary, often times, it has failed to utilise the powers.

Now that the issue of the formation of the new EC has come to the fore, we believe, the focus should be to reclaim the moral ground it has lost over the last few years. That fundamentally calls for making concentrated efforts to nominate commissioners who will be able to work towards reasserting the commission's neutrality as an organisation. The new commission, after all, is going to be entrusted with the responsibilities of conducting the next general election. If dispute overshadows its formation, one wonders whether a credible election would be possible.

We also believe that a dialogue should be welcomed if it contributes to dispelling misapprehension and holding an inclusive election, although holding a dialogue with the political parties over the formation of EC is not constitutionally binding. There is a provision for a law in our constitution on the formation of the EC, which successive governments have failed to legislate. It is time to make such a law to keep the EC out of all controversies.

Schoolgirl commits suicide

Arrest instigators immediately

IT is appalling to learn that a young girl found no recourse but to commit suicide out of public shame steeped upon her and her family by the local Union Parishad (UP) member in Gopapur Upazila of Tangail. The incident centred on the girl who was allegedly having an affair with a batch mate. In such cases local arbitration or shalish is the most common means of resolving the situation. The UP member went beyond his mandate and verbally abused the young girl. The way the matter was handled shows the extent of chauvinism that is present at all levels including the administrative bodies. This has become all too common in our country where societal perceptions are almost always stacked against women and girls.

We understand that the principal accused in the case UP member Selim and five others who instigated the castigation of Sathi have gone into hiding. All too often, we see the same scenario in rural Bangladesh where overenthusiastic, root level public officials like UP members taking matters to a level where young girls like Sathi find it impossible to bear the shame and throw away their lives through suicide.

The law must step up to apprehend and punish these criminals who profess to be guardians of morality because no one gave them that right. It is not up to them to dehumanise people in this way and certainly not within their rights to instigate a situation which leads to a young woman taking her life.

The extra pair of eyes



RUBANA HUQ

KNOT SO TRUE
STRANGELY, we are not where we used to be anymore. Students who used to steer movements against tyranny have themselves become tyrants. Carrying a weapon is not an issue. Many of them use it to scare their mentors, many to kill, and many to also grab lands, footpath and plots. This has become routine. The last one happened a few days ago when two students were spotted holding guns and protesting an eviction carried out by Dhaka South City Corporation in Gulistan. It is common knowledge that those who have muscle power are the ones who suffer from the illusion of immunisation. We often forget that even the most powerful of them all fail at one point or the other. The students, who hardly looked like students, and had the classic look of classic goons also, were most fortunately expelled from the political party. Now, were they the only ones who had guns, or were there more with weapons stuffed in their pockets that day? The general public only saw what made headlines that day. We only saw what media shared.

There are two dailies which run full stories on the city everyday. They cover everything starting from land grabbing to waste. Anyone connected to city governance, including the mayors, are hopefully clued in to the reportage and also address issues raised in those pages. Therefore, when there's a picture of accumulated waste somewhere, the waste is removed following the newspaper coverage. Anything that gets reported in those pages, attract attention and hence, those who govern the city take the photos and the reports seriously and respond positively. That is, I guess, the beauty of the media. Through media, our vision is enhanced as it gives the readers an extra pair of eyes to look, sense and feel the

anomalies in order to react, digest or revolt. Similarly, when there are reports of fire, cracks or deviation on factories, we react and try and address the burning issues immediately. We do this to handle our reputational risk. We fear negative exposure, and therefore we react. If our actions are followed by fear, then do we really get to collectively remedy the whole

overviewing the overall remediation and relocation of the factories in readymade garments sector in 2018 has caused a lot of concern and curiosity. Some have said that we have limited resources, limited access to safety knowledge and that we may not be ready for Accord and Alliance to exit Bangladesh. Also, many within us believe that we are equipped to do what we have committed to achieve by 2018.

for Fire and Establishment (DIFE) as Convener, along with Accord, Alliance, BGMEA and BUET as members. Beyond 2018, if the platforms exited, will we be able to grow or sustain our new pair of eyes? Shall we be equipped to self-audit and monitor ourselves? Many sincerely believe that post-2013, while coping with the national and international pressures, most of us have become extra-aware of the safety requirements and are far more engaged with the labour working in our factories. In all fairness, we have gotten better and though we remain appearing as "work in progress", our paths have been set in stone.

I recollect the appeal of Milan Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* as a college student. In the novel that covers Prague Spring, there is a totalitarian power controlling the behaviour of Tereza and Tomas, both through the gaze that is directed at private life from the outside and through subsequent action. This gaze is ultimately internalised. Both protagonists begin to experience their fear of being seen and suspected. The anonymous "external power" (Foucault) permanently affects the two while the internalisation of totalitarian fictions leads to their unbearable lightness of being. Truth remains, we have to be able to see with our own eyes things that are to be remedied or resolved. Just a two-column news on the garbage that's piling up in Mirpur may help to get that pile removed but does not clean the whole city; just a front page of a few "student" leaders raising guns to protect their illegal occupation may get them expelled, but it does not correct or amend the whole system that suffers from political vulnerabilities. Similarly, just a report on rogue factories and a couple of monitoring platforms may prescribe correction, but the real change has to come from within. All of us need to grow our extra pair of eyes, and not just depend on media or monitors.

The writer is Managing Director, Mohammadi Group.



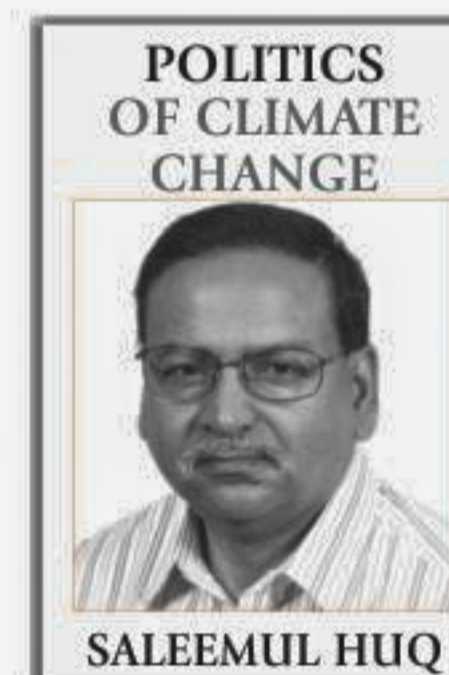
ILLUSTRATION: MANAN MORSHED

scenario? A waste dump somewhere, a political goon with a gun in his hand may be a part of a page of news, but that news also comes with a shelf life. What about our inner eyes that have gone blind over disuse? This does not apply to only us living within this land, this applies to those who interact, trade and engage with us.

Very recently, a fear of the news of departure of the two platforms

Realistically, there are 3,746 factories, out of which only 1,368 were inspected by Accord, 829 by Alliance and 1,549 by National Action Plan. Only 39 were found vulnerable. Rest all were accepted as remediable or were given suggestions to relocate. The ones which were announced to be unsafe and were closed down faced a Review Panel in consultation with the Inspector General of Department of Inspection

Role of Parliamentarians in tackling climate change



SALEEMUL HUQ

POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE
I have just been to Geneva, Switzerland where I was invited to speak at the General Assembly of the Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU) on the role of parliamentarians in tackling climate change. The IPU is the oldest and

biggest union of parliamentarians from all the world's parliaments and its current President is Bangladeshi parliamentarian Saber Hossain Choudhury.

There are four main ways in which parliamentarians have an important role to play in tackling climate change, specifically in implementing the Paris Agreement on climate change which was achieved last year.

Ratification of the Paris Agreement
The first role of parliamentarians is to ratify the Paris Agreement to enable it to come into force as international law. There are two thresholds that have to be reached for the Paris Agreement to come into force, namely, a minimum of 55 countries have to ratify it in their national Parliaments and they have to add up to at least 55 percent of global emissions. Both these thresholds have now been reached and hence the Paris Agreement will come into force as international law on November 4 in Marrakech, Morocco.

Approving national budgets
The second very important role that parliamentarians have to play is to scrutinise and then approve the national annual budgets presented to them by the finance minister each year. They need to query the budget to see if it is making adequate allocations towards tackling climate change and only approve the budget if it does.

Oversight of the executive

The third and perhaps most important role for parliamentarians is to provide oversight of the executive branch of the government. This is usually done by parliamentary committees on different subjects. Many parliaments now have parliamentary committees on climate change or environment whose role is to monitor the activities of the officials from the different ministries who are responsible to take actions to tackle climate change.

the IPU meeting and were quite vocal in raising their voices at the global level. They now have to be equally active at the national level through their actions in Parliament, and especially through the Parliamentary Committee on Climate Change and Environment to ensure that Bangladesh continues to play a pro-active role in tackling climate change.

The upcoming 22nd Conference of Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on

The members of Parliament from Bangladesh were well represented in Geneva at the IPU meeting and were quite vocal in raising their voices at the global level. They now have to be equally active at the national level through their actions in Parliament.



ILLUSTRATION: SÉBASTIEN THIBAUT

Being the voice of the people
The fourth role that each and every member of parliament has to take on is to be the voice of their constituents at both the national as well as international level. This is particularly important for countries like Bangladesh, which are especially vulnerable to the adverse impacts of climate change and whose poorest people are amongst the most vulnerable to those impacts.

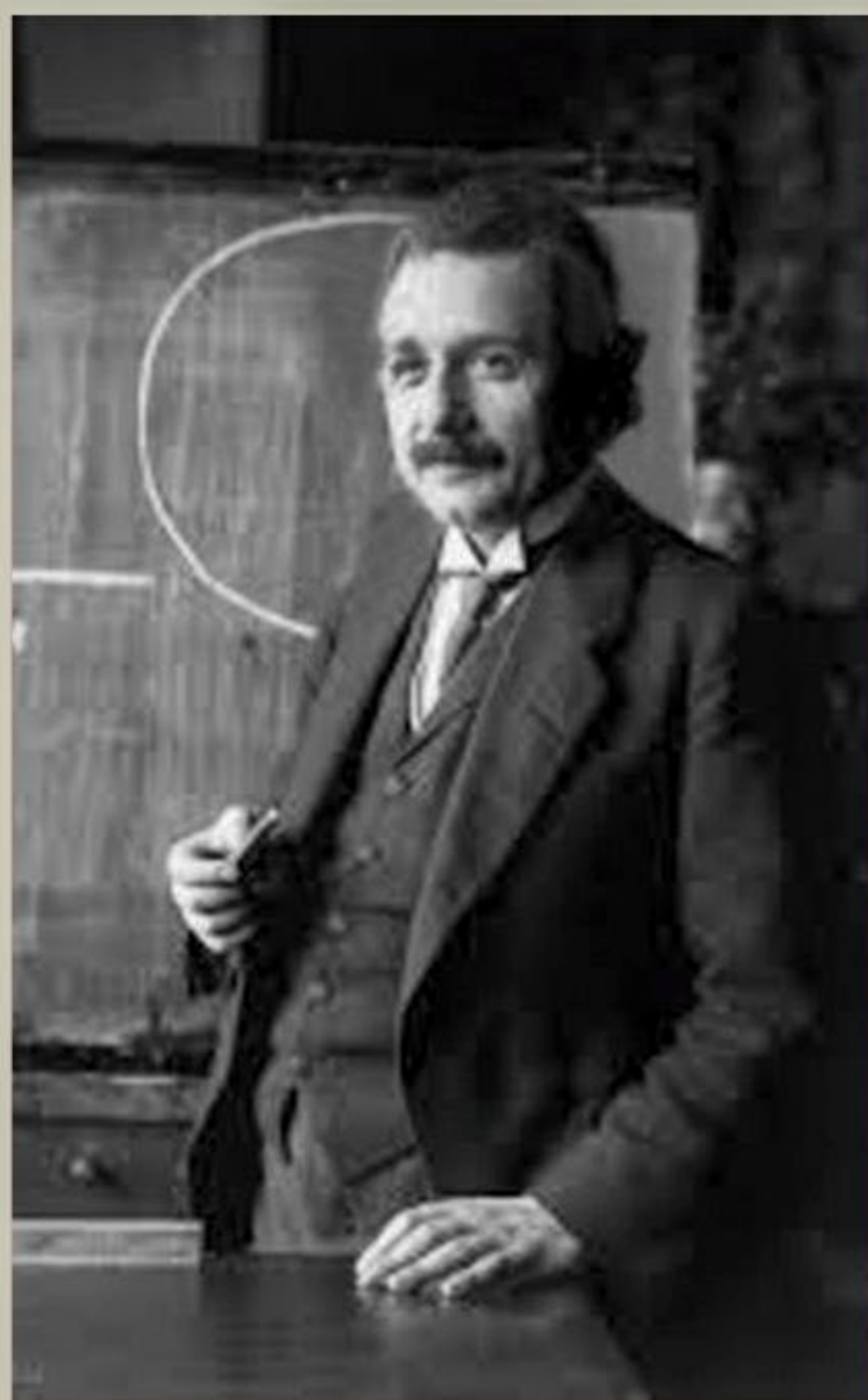
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Climate Change (UNFCCC), which will start in Marrakech next week, will be another opportunity for parliamentarians to raise their voices at the global level when the Moroccan Parliament hosts a meeting of parliamentarians in parallel to COP22.

I will also be in Marrakech for COP22 and will be reporting on it over the next few weeks.

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QUOTABLE Quote



ALBERT EINSTEIN

Condemnation before investigation is the highest form of ignorance.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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An example of true passion

I was travelling yesterday and the rickshaw-puller was a boy aged 20-21. When I got down from the rickshaw, he politely told me that he was a 2nd year honours' student at Nilphamari Government College pursuing Islamic studies. He added that he urgently needed some money for his registration fees and requested me to contribute some money for it. Touched and

impressed, I paid the fare along with the extra money.

He could have diverted his attention from studies and honest earning. Instead, he chose a hard job like rickshaw-pulling as a tool for the attainment of his goal. I salute the young boy for his courage and indomitable quest for higher study.
Md Zonaed Emran
A banker

The thrill of joy

On September 30, I was returning from office by taxi. Stuck in traffic in Tejgaon road, a little boy aged eight or nine - thin, bare-footed and wearing torn clothes, urged me to buy some flowers from him. He explained that he hadn't eaten anything since the previous night, and he had sold enough flowers to barely fill his stomach on that day. I was fumbling into my wallet to pay him when, to

my surprise, he started shouting along with everyone else on the streets. "Bangladesh jitchhe! Dehai diche Bangladesh ki chiz! Shabbash!" Maybe the boy cannot understand cricket as well as we do, but he forgot his hunger and started celebrating for his country. The boy has taught me what true happiness is.
Md. Mohin Uddin Mizan
University of Chittagong