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theSTAR

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Wisdom dawns on EC, at last

Decides not to curtail its authority

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In the face of widespread criticism, the Election Commission has finally backtracked on its move to scrap its sweeping authority to cancel one's candidacy in the parliamentary polls for serious electoral offences.

The commission yesterday decided not to propose any amendment to Article 91E of the Representation of the People Order (RPO) that empowers the EC to revoke a candidature.

The EC said it had made the decision following protests and opposition from political parties and concerns voiced by people and the media.

"Earlier, we decided to scrap it because of some inconsistencies in Article 91E of the RPO. But there had been a wave of protests from different quarters soon after the decision was made public," said Election Commissioner Shah Nawaz at his office in the EC Secretariat.

The latest decision comes two days after the EC sent an explanation to the media, showing its logic to scrap Article 91E of the RPO.

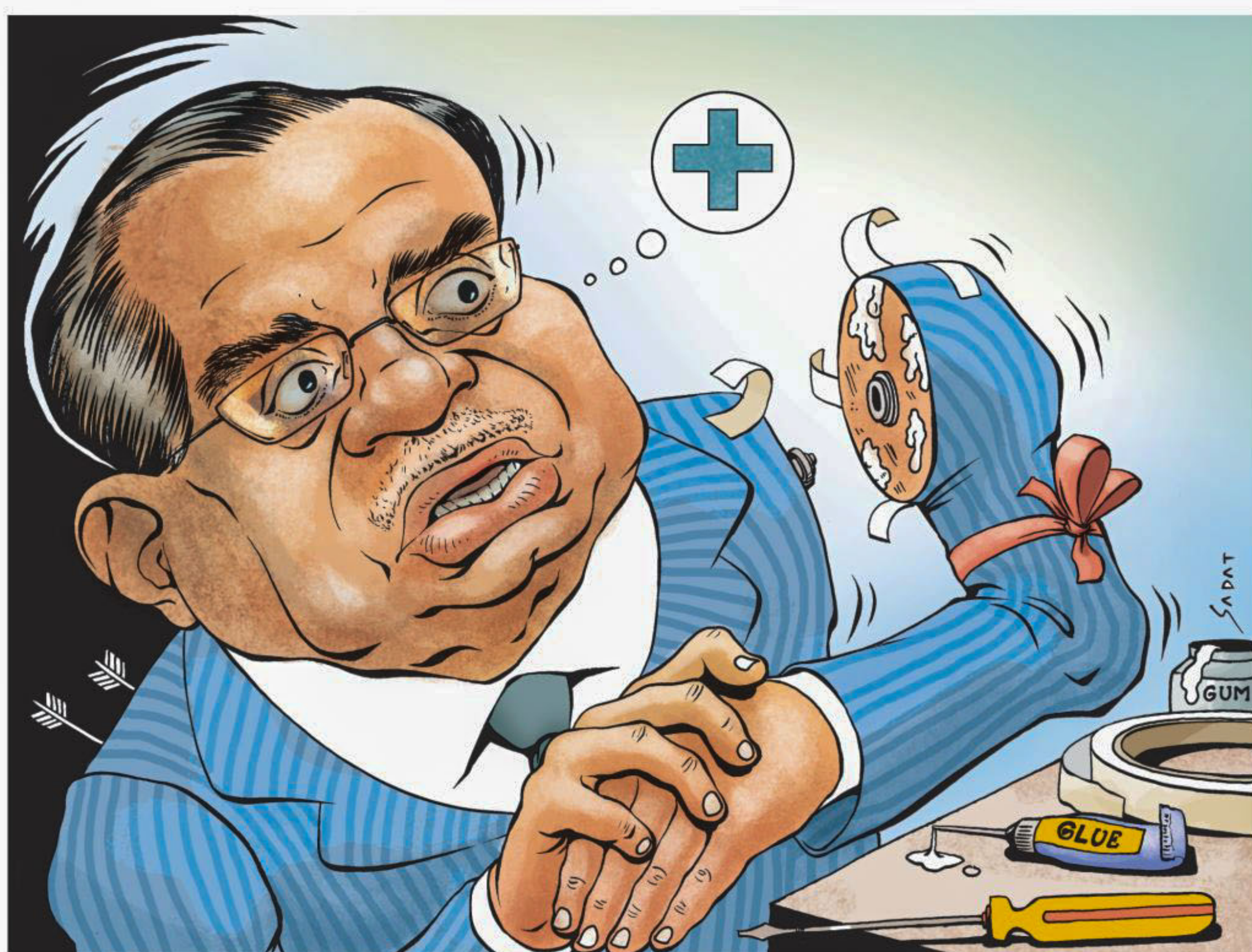
Experts hailed the EC's decision to retain its authority, saying the article will help prevent violations of electoral laws at the upcoming national election.

The EC's authority to cancel candidacies was restored in 2008, and it effectively worked in preventing the candidates from violating electoral laws in the polls.

The EC had been given the authority before the 2001 parliamentary polls, but it was scrapped after a brief period in the face of opposition from political parties.

The restoration of the provision in 2008 helped the EC prevent violations of electoral laws, such as blocking roads for rallies or processions, pasting posters and daubing walls with graffiti.

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8TH WAGE BOARD Noab for talks before govt decides

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Newspapers Owners Association of Bangladesh (Noab) yesterday urged the government to consult with its members before making any decision on the newspaper industry, especially on the wage board.

In a statement, the members of Noab said the chairman of the eighth wage board had announced a 50 percent dearness allowance without the consent of the Noab representatives on the wage board.

The chairman also submitted the wage structure of the eighth wage board to the information minister and later to the cabinet to have it approved in principle, said the statement.

The statement said Noab members did not know what the board chairman had submitted to the minister.

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West holds back on Syria strike

Attack unlikely before UN report; Obama yet to decide

AFP, Damascus

UN chief Ban Ki-moon yesterday said his investigating team would report back this week on suspected chemical weapons attacks in Syria as the US and its allies held back from immediate military action.

US President Barack Obama said he has yet to sign off on a plan to strike Syria over the horrific attacks last week that activists say killed hundreds of people and threatened to draw the West into the brutal 29-month conflict.

A Western bombing blitz had appeared imminent earlier this week, but US allies were increasingly reluctant to act before hearing the results of a UN probe into the alleged poisonous gas attacks.

Ban said the UN chemical weapons experts -- who headed out to one of the attack sites near Damascus for the third day of inspections -- would leave Syria by Saturday and report to him immediately.

He appealed to divided international powers to work together to head off military action in Syria, where the UN says 100,000 people have been killed and several million made homeless since the conflict erupted in March 2011.

"Diplomacy should be given a chance ... peace (should)

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Polls-time govt with MPs of dissolved JS

Govt weighs unused constitutional scope

SHAKHAWAT LITON and ASHUTOSH SARKAR

The government is toying with the idea of forming an election-time cabinet with MPs drawn from the current parliament after dissolving it.

The idea comes from a never-used provision of the constitution. The provision says if the situation demands, the president can pick MPs from the dissolved parliament and form the cabinet to fill the void before a new government comes to power through elections.

Government policymakers are now analysing this provision, article 56 (4), which allows formation of such a government, highly placed sources have said.

The move indicates that the government is considering holding the polls after the dissolution of the House, although the Awami League-led administration reintroduced a provision in the constitution for holding the polls within the last 90 days of the parliament's tenure.

The law minister, two influential advisers to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, the newly appointed law commission chairman who is also a former chief justice and the attorney general have recently met to examine the provision.

The meeting took place at the law minister's office early this month, said meeting sources, who would speak only on condition of anonymity.

The meeting resolved that there was no need to amend the constitution to form an election-time government.

The government is yet to make any formal announcement about the meeting or its purpose.

If article 56 (4) is applied, the current cabinet will have to resign before the formation of a polls-time administration, and the new administration will exercise executive powers and extend all necessary support to the Election Commission for holding the election.

However, the 15th amendment to the constitution, which scrapped the caretaker government system, paved the way for the entire cabinet led by Sheikh Haina to remain in office during the polls.

"We have just analysed article 56 (4) and

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OSD for 16 years!

M ABUL KALAM AZAD

The government has spent around Tk 65 lakh on an officer, who has not given any service to the nation for the last 16 years.

Strange as it may seem, the person has been an officer on special duty (OSD) all these years.

Mohammad Abdul Kadar had been made an OSD while he was serving as assistant commissioner with the status of senior assistant secretary at Shariatpur Deputy Commissioner's Office in 1997. He still holds the same status.

A government official with the status of senior assistant secretary is paid around Tk 4.80 lakh in salary and benefits a year.

In practice, an OSD has no other duty except for attending office and signing the attendance register. He gets salary and other benefits excluding transport

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