

## What a waste of public money!

### OSD culture should be shunned

OFFICER on Special Duty' is what the government does to punish someone in bureaucracy by taking away his desk. The individual in question remains free to draw the benefits associated with his / her position while having no duty to perform. We are appalled to see the punishment meted out to an individual for the last 16 years who has received benefits to the tune of Tk6.5million over the period as payment for his tenure of 'no service' to successive governments.

Regardless of whatever the individual in question was supposed to have done, or in many cases, not done, since OSD is often used to settle political or personal scores, the fact remains that Mr. Kader's sorry state has come to light due to the inordinately long period he has remained OSD. His situation may be unusual in terms of the period, but it is by no means unique. This paper has highlighted the culture of OSD in the civil service. Indeed, public money to the tune of Tk151crores for the upkeep of more than 3,500 public servants sidelined as OSDs over the last decade.

Things have gotten to the stage where the High Court has sought an explanation from the government. Whether or not a rational explanation will be forthcoming, one will have to wait and watch out for. But as we have reiterated in the past, it is imperative to drastically reduce this phenomenon that is to a great degree based on partisan considerations.

## Wal-Mart's welcome move

### Factory improvements must be tangible

THE move by Wal-Mart Stores Inc to provide up to \$50 million in low-interest loans and other kinds of payment to garment factory owners in Bangladesh to help them improve factory conditions is surely welcome. One of course wishes that conditions had not come to such a pass and that RMG owners in Bangladesh had on their own taken precautions about workers' safety before tragedy, of the kind that took more than a thousand lives in the Rana Plaza collapse, struck the industry.

We cannot deny that the opprobrium we have earned abroad because of our treatment of garment workers and because of the many and varied incidents in garment factories over the years has certainly been a blow to our self-esteem. Such incidents have of course led to criticism in the West of those firms which have for long patronized our garment industry because of their failure to hold the RMG sector in Bangladesh to account.

Now that Wal-Mart as also Gap have pledged to come forth with financial assistance to RMG owners, we trust all efforts will be expended towards a tangible improvement in working conditions in our factories. That we have consistently failed to ensure workers' safety comes through the creation of the Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety in North America. Let the alliance as well as Bangladesh's people now see the results of such outside concern as well as assistance.



## Diplomacy best option in Syria

EDITORIAL

AS the UN arms experts investigate the alleged chemical weapon strike in Damascus, the US and its Western allies are seriously considering military intervention against the Syrian regime.

Though the UN experts are yet to conclusively establish who used the chemical weapons, war drums in Washington are getting louder. One must remember that the US case of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) against Iraq fell flat on its face. The regime change there, instead of bringing peace, has thrown the country in a vicious cycle of violence and turmoil that shows no signs of abating. Same is the case in Afghanistan, where the US, after years of conflict, is finding it hard to get a face-saving exit.

On the question of military intervention, it is not clear what sort of action would be taken. Many analysts say that it will be a limited operation aimed at some Syrian regime facility. But the real question is, will a limited strike serve the purpose or exacerbate the already volatile situation?

The Bashar al-Assad regime cannot be dislodged by the limited military strike. The regime has been fighting the rebels for the past two years and is yet to show signs of any weakening. Moreover, given the precarious Middle East situation, one wrong step on the part of the US can disturb the delicately placed regional balance.

The region is already in a mess and it would not be prudent to further aggravate the situation which can spin out of control.

Russia had already warned that "attempts to bypass the Security Council, once again to create artificial groundless excuses for a military intervention in the region are fraught with new suffering in Syria and catastrophic consequences for other countries of the Middle East and North Africa."

Diplomacy is still the best option and efforts should be made to pursue this path.

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# Time for introspection!

SUNDAY  
POUCHASHFAQUR  
RAHMAN

THE next and the penultimate session of this parliament will begin on September 12. This could turn out to be an extraordinary session if the main opposition BNP participates. Pressing political issues relating to the next national elections could be sorted out, including the nature of the interim or caretaker government that would ensure peaceful polls.

We know that the world is watching us closely. United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki Moon has personally taken interest in the lead up to our national elections so that free, fair and credible elections are held. He has been sending envoys to Dhaka over the last eight months with the hope that our two big political parties can arrive at a consensus as regards the modus operandi of holding such an election. The US and the European Union have also been making similar efforts towards making such an eventuality a reality.

Our two main leaders of the two main political parties, the BNP and the Awami League, bring tremendous experience in resolving intractable political problems. They have successfully done so several times in the past. It is only when they become bankrupt of new ideas and innovative thinking that they leave the country to its fate. Such was the situation before the temporary take over of the reins of government by a military-backed unconstitutional regime. Why are we thinking that the country is again headed towards such a precarious future? It is these two leaders with their collected wisdom who will be able to settle matters again. Both of them need to think out of the box.

The present political crisis in Bangladesh is born out of the fear that once the tenure of this government is over, there will be a scramble to return to power by the ruling Awami League (AL) by whatever means. The practice of a smooth transition through democratic norms is seen as an impossibility by the mainstream opposition parties. The only way out is to have a neutral, non-political body temporarily take charge of things and to oversee the holding of a free, fair elections. This caretaker government would then hand over power to the winners.

The opposition is confident that only under such a caretaker government, 'a level playing field' can be ensured. The Supreme Court in a recent judgment also suggested that two more elections could be held under a caretaker system if all the parties participating in the elections agree.

The government however disagrees. The Constitution has been amended to do away with the caretaker system. National elections will be held under an interim administration run by the departing government, just like the way all democratic governments do. Why should Bangladesh elections be different?

As things stand, there is a clear difference between perceptions and reality as seen by the two main political parties. The opposition BNP thinks there would be widespread vote rigging, ballot fixing, etc by the AL if it is allowed to supervise the elections. There is a huge 'anti

incumbency' vote which the BNP can easily pick up as the AL has failed in many areas during its tenure. But the BNP knows that the AL will see to it that such votes are not cast in favour of BNP if AL is allowed to supervise the holding of the elections.

In fact, the perceptions could be wrong. First, elections are very difficult to rig nowadays. The people are aware about who are the genuine voters in an area. The national identity card has made this more verifiable. During election time, there is an overwhelming presence of the print and electronic media. Any violation or breach of rules is easily detected and stopped. In this matter, the UN and the European Union are ready to supply more sophisticated equipment in order to see that the voting is fair. The opposition BNP's fears on this count could be minimal.

Next, voters' perception about a political party or a particular candidate is not formed in a day or in few days. Just look at the recently held five mayoral elections. The AL lost handsomely to BNP supported candidates. This is in spite of the fact that all the AL-supported candidates during their mayoral tenure did so much for the welfare of the people. The AL lost because people's perception about the party had changed for the worse in the last few years. The people discovered that since AL came with an overwhelming majority in parliament it has become 'hugely arrogant.' Also, the AL leadership lost touch with the grassroots and cared little about the problems that were faced by the people. So the people cast their vote for the BNP supported candidates. It was simply a negative vote.

The AL has deep roots in Bangladesh. It has resources and manpower to go along with this advantage. There is still time for the AL to change and to bring wise counsel to its deliberations and actions on the ground. It has to return to its roots without further delay. Holding of meetings and statements from leaders are not going to go far. They, like the BNP, also have to mend the divisions within. There are too many groups within groups working. Then there are rogue elements that are eating away into AL vitals. They need to be done away with. If the AL can do these things urgently it stands a good chance of winning again even if a caretaker government is in place. A caring, sharing party which it was in the past can again revive its dwindling fortunes, and not caretaker government or otherwise.

Both the leaders of the two main parties have reached a stage in their lives which calls for them to be more than a politician. Time has come for them to leave behind legacies. What would these two leaders be remembered for when they are gone? Those foundation stones which they have randomly placed all over the country are not a reflection of their wise leadership. The people must remember them as great and benign leaders. They have risen from humble political beginnings to such great heights. They must indeed have great qualities that have engineered them on. This is the time that they must leave something for posterity to remember.

We ask both the leaders to now introspect in these coming two weeks or less. Then let them enter the parliament and leave after proving that in their time good sense and common sense prevailed. They were not pawns to politics. They were craftsmen in their own right who brought back sanity to politics.

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## Western intervention in Syria will be unjustifiable

SUPAD KUMAR GHOSE

IT is very likely that the US, along with UK, France and Australia, will intervene in Syria on the pretext that the Assad regime has used chemical gas against its own people. It is very tough to assess the ground level realities in this strife torn country, and it is not yet clear that the Assad regime has used chemical gas. Moreover, the Assad government has no rational motivation to use chemical weapons when it has the upper hand against the rebels.

Amidst this, the UN team in Syria has been investigating the chemical attack in Ghouta, a suburb of Damascus. It is expected that it will complete the investigation by the end of the month. It is hoped that it will be able to find out who used chemical gas.

But the West is being impatient. Several Western governments have already jumped to a conclusion and accused the Assad regime of using chemical weapons. Former British prime minister Tony Blair has turned out to be the chief apologist for intervention in Syria. He has invoked moral claim in favour of Western intervention in Syria in a column published in The Times of London. It should bear mentioning here that the same Tony Blair, who was the prime minister at that time, was the chief apologist for the US attack on Saddam Hossain's Iraq in 2003 on the false accusation that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction.

Some quarters in the US are also exhorting the Obama administration to intervene in Syria. It seems that military preparation is afoot to attack Syria. The West is claiming that it is not ready for regime change in Syria, rather, what is sought is the decimation of the ability of the Assad regime to use such weapons against its own people.

Whatever may be the nature of possible intervention in Syria, it will be totally unjustified for a variety of reasons. First, it is not clear what purpose it will serve. The Assad regime has shown remarkable tenacity to cling to power in the face of adverse circumstances. It is still popular among a section of the people who are in the minority. It is possible that it will fight back as lethally as possible as long as it enjoys the support of the other minorities, Alawites, Kurds, Christians and Armenians.

Second, the West should ponder hard before intervening against a member of the Muslim World which has been at the receiving end of Western aggression for much of the twentieth and twenty first centuries. One should add that the bitter memories of Western intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan are still fresh in Muslim psyche.

Iraq is a fractured society as a result of US intervention against Saddam Hossain in 2003, and its democracy may not prove itself capable enough to prevent its future dissolution.

The case of Afghanistan is no better either. The Taliban are regrouping and may come back to power following US withdrawal. The ragtag Afghan army may not be a match for the tenacious Taliban.

Third, the Syrian scenario is more fraught with dangers because the Syrian rebels have been fighting interne-cine civil war among themselves. Sometimes, they are more divided among themselves than they are united against the Assad regime. In this backdrop, it is very unlikely that the rebels can ever be united enough to form any national government and represent all factions of the Syrian people once the Assad regime is defeated in the battle field. The presence of the al-Qaeda elements on the side of the rebels makes it more complicated to envisage any post-Assad solution in Syria.

Fourth, Western intervention may produce regional repercussions that may embroil several countries, such as Iran, Israel, Lebanon, etc. Iran has already declared that it will not sit idle if Syria, its only ally state, is attacked by the West. Hezbollah in Lebanon, who are already involved in Syria to prop up the Assad regime, may become bolder and attack Israel, which will, in turn, react more violently if it comes under attack.

Fifth, how can the West justify its intervention in Syria for the death of 330 people, allegedly in a chemical attack, when it is conniving at the death of four times more civilians at the hands of the Egyptian army, which is nurtured by Western countries?

Whatever might be the shortcomings of Egyptian President Muhammad Morsi, he is the first democratically elected leader in the five thousand years history of Egypt. The only fault of Muhammad Morsi's supporters is that they are calling for the reinstatement of their democratically elected leader. Nevertheless, the US and its allies are playing a variety of diplomatic games to overlook the crime of the Egyptian usurpers.

On the other hand, the mighty West is edging closer to attack the Assad regime in Syria, whose role in this chemical attack is still subject to investigation. From this viewpoint, one can easily infer that the logic of Western intervention is selective and biased.

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## LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR

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### Miranda's arrest

This refers to the report, "Miranda's detention is a threat to press freedom" (Aug. 26). His detention is very chilling. Even though he was released later, his mobile phones, laptop, DVDs and other items were seized. The free press is in grave danger in a supposedly free nation—the UK. Had it happened in any other developing country, it would not have attracted much attention as there are media curbs in these nations. The UK seems to be acting at the behest of the USA in NSA surveillance controversy. The journalists who exposed Watergate scandal became heroes and not the harassed ones. The US has lost the right to call itself a protector of human rights and free media. It is heartening to note that the Guardian is fighting back, teamed with US papers like New York Times and the First Amendment protects US journalists, and the government there cannot seek pre-publication restraint by resorting to the tactics like the UK.

Deendayal M. Lulla  
Mumbai, India

### Land of "Heerok Raja!"

The government is trying to bluff the innocent public by putting up colorful hoardings with exaggeration or half-truths. I am giving just one example about power generation. I work at Siddheshwari and I experience power failure at least four times a day. And incidentally I have read in a newspaper that "unprecedented shortages of electricity have crippled 21 districts of the western zone for 3 consecutive days" where less than 600MW was supplied against the requirement of 1000MW during the evening hours. Truly, we are living in the kingdom of "Heerok Raja!"

A F Rahman  
One-mail

### Hi-zinc rice

Congratulations to BRRI and Dr. Md Alamgir Hossain, the breeder behind the hi-zinc rice. Bangladesh is all set to release the world's first zinc-enriched rice variety capable of fighting diarrhoea and pneumonia-induced childhood deaths and stunting. Zinc, iron and vitamin A are the three most vital micronutrients, deficiency of which hamper children's natural growth and decrease their disease prevention capacity. The whole nation is proud of the success of our scientists.

Hasna Begum  
Advocate, Supreme Court of Bangladesh

### Comments on news report, "Talks? Huh!" published on August 29, 2013

#### deep purple blue

Our leaders are very firm in what they say against each other but they do not have the ability to talk among themselves to resolve national problems. They are indeed very principled!

#### Nasirullah Mridha, USA

To respect the HC order is the business of ordinary people. It is not for the leaders.

#### Vikram Khan

They just act like rotten spoiled children. However, they gamble with the lives and future of millions of Bangladeshi people.

#### S. M. Iftekhar Ahmed

The so-called leading ladies have little respect for the people of this country, let alone the courts. Yet ironically or perhaps due to a lack of choices, people still vote for them.

#### Abul Kashem

None, who has minimum common sense, will believe that leaders of these two political parties will sit together to solve any problem whatsoever.

#### Nds

Nothing tangible will come out of their meeting each other. Rather it is far better that they are kept apart from each other as is normally done when two individuals are in fighting mood.

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### "Dhaka rated 2nd least liveable city" (August 29, 2013)

#### Vikram Khan

Interesting... Most of the 'least liveable' cities are situated in Muslim countries. Many people living in these countries move to the 'most liveable' cities situated in non-Muslim countries. Should it not be better to stay and improve the quality at home?

#### Nds

This is the most objective and credible rating ever made relating to this country.

#### Tahsina Taimur

Decentralisation can be an effective way to make the city liveable.

#### Fahad

The survey seems a bit exaggerated.

#### Max

Corruption, lack of patriotism, absence of civic sense, no planning etc. etc. So the result is predictable.

#### Aziz Shariff

So, are we going to do something about it? Our politicians probably have the thickest skin of all.



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