EDITORIAL The Daily Star



FOUNDER EDITOR LATE S. M. ALI

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Growing concern over election

Pressing need to reconcile political differences

S Secretary of State John Kerry has in a letter requested Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and opposition leader Khaleda Zia to resolve the issue of election-time government through a dialogue.

This letter following UN secretary General Ban Kimoon's phonwne call as well as EU delegation's conveying similar messages only point to a growing concern in the international community about the prevailing political standoff casting a shadow on the upcoming general election. It cannot be gainsaid that the anxiety is growing as the next general election is drawing ever closer.

While this is a reflection of our political parties' incapacity to come to terms with each other on matters of national interest, we would like to emphasize that they should have been able to reach an understanding of their own without being pursued by the international community.

In fact, our civil society members including the media have long been urging them to find a common ground on the polls-time government. It is worthwhile to note that the renewed urgency of the matter stems from the brinkmanship of both the parties while the people bear the brunt and the country faces instability.

We hope the two major political camps will respond positively to the concerns expressed in a chorus and arrive at a common ground to forge ahead. Loss of time is no option.

Glimmer of hope for Syrian conflict

Negotiations, not war, is the answer

N a surprise move, President Obama has indicated that a US military strike can be put on hold against the Assad regime should it decide to place its arsenal of chemical weapons under international supervision. This comes in the backdrop of a Russian proposal to put Damascus' toxic stockpile under "international control". While Syria has welcomed the move, it has yet to accept the offer.

Though there are sceptics about its workability, they have however regarded this as stepping back from direct confrontation. This is a much welcome first step in the right direction but it is subject to proof. It is interesting to note that Senator Kennedy was quoted as saying that Assad must hand over his entire stockpile within the next week to avert a US strike. That statement has somewhat been watered down by US officials as a "rhetorical argument".

The Kremlin has been working behind the scenes to defuse a potential for at least a limited war between Syria and the US. We believe that negotiations and not conflict is the answer to this prolonged civil war that has claimed so many lives. Diplomacy must be allowed a chance to work. With a hostile Congress wary of any further military involvement abroad, President Obama's cautious optimism and the first tentative positive vibes coming out of Damascus should help lay the foundations for a peace plan that will be overseen by the United Nations.



The Syrian snarl

EDITORIAL

S expected, the G20 Summit in St Petersburg concluded recently on a discordant note with L the main adversaries -- the US and Russia -clashing on the issue of intervention in Syria in the wake of the sarin gas attack which, according to reports, killed 1,400 Syrians on August 21. Amid strong denials by President Bashar al-Assad that his regime has nothing to do with the chemical attack, the US and some of its allies, convinced of the Syrian government's complicity, are going ahead with their strike plan.

Despite reservations from the UN and the American public's aversion to yet another war, President Barack Obama, back from the Russian conclave, has doubled his efforts in impressing upon the US Congress of the need for a "limited" strike against Syria, promising that things will not be akin to Iraq. US Secretary of State, John Kerry, too, is leaving no stone unturned in drumming up support of the Arab League and the European Union.

After his talks with the Arab League in Paris recently, Kerry said that the League members agreed that the Assad regime had crossed the "global red line" by launching the gas attack.

It's an irony that all this rhetoric is floating around, especially when the UN inspectors are yet to release their report on the gas attack. And it's also strange that the UN sleuths have also limited themselves to studying the chemical strike but not as to who has been behind the gruesome act. With Russia and Iran opposing the US strike moves tooth and nail, things may go worse in the already disturbed and volatile region. There's a possibility that Syria may strike in retaliation against some of the US allies, vitiating the atmosphere further. Hence, the US intervention may not provide any succour to the suffering Syrians, but would further add to their woes. Over 100,000 people have died since the uprising began in Syria, March 2011, according to the UN. A pragmatic and prudent approach of reconciliation and dialogue could pave way for a negotiated political settlement of the issue.

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Forty years ago, in Chile

GROUND REALITIES



SYED BADRUL AHSAN

ing darkness. In the early hours of September 11, 1973, the country's armed forces, led by General Augusto Pinochet Ugarte, went into action to overthrow the democratically elected government of President Salvador Allende Gossens. Three years previously, in 1970, as an Allende triumph looked like a possibility, Chile's rightwing elements, in good company with the American

administration of President

→ ORTY years ago today,

Chile passed into terrify-

Richard Nixon, went to work to undermine the election or, if that was not possible, to steal the election. In the event, Allende was elected to office with just 36.2% of the vote. The day was September 4, 1970.

Allende told his ecstatic supporters: "Entrare a la Moneda y conmigo entrara el pueblo. Sere el Companero Presidente" -- he would enter La Moneda, the presidential palace, in the company of the people, for he was going to be their president. It was, as Ariel Dorfman was to note later, the moment of baptism for Allende as Chile's leader. And yet for all the enthusiasm that greeted the socialist politician's electoral victory, things of a portentous nature were already beginning to be felt. The Nixon administration, through Henry Kissinger, had not given up its goal of creating problems for the new Chilean government. The Central Intelligence Agency went into the job of organising people against Allende, through recruiting agents in Santiago, and pumping in money to elements ready and willing to destabilise the administration. Alongside that went propaganda against the Allende government's 'attempts' to turn democratic Chile into a fortress of Marxism.

President Allende warded off all such attempts bravely, through drawing attention to the US-led campaign against the people of Chile and through employing all diplomatic means to explain to the outside world that democracy under the Marxists was safe in his country. He sent the young and articulate Orlando Letelier to Washington as ambassador in the hope that Letelier would be able to explain to Americans the causes behind the nationalisation programme underway in Santiago. To Paris, as ambassador, went the acclaimed poet Pablo Neruda.

Yet Chile was in danger. Increased funding by the CIA strengthened Allende's enemies. Steps were also taken to influence the Chilean military into moving against the government. Economic destabilisation was encouraged by the US government and its agents in Santiago. Trade unions were drawn into the anti-Allende camp and truck drivers put a brake on all their activities and brought transport movement to a halt all across the country. The wives of Chile's military officers took the unprecedented step of confronting the army chief, General Carlos Prats, and berating him over his 'failure' to take action to 'save' the nation. Their target was of course President Allende. It was an incident that left Prats deeply disturbed. As paralysis took hold of the country, Prats resigned on August 22, 1973. He was replaced the next day by General Augusto Pinochet, considered an Allende loyalist. That appointment would be the biggest irony for Chileans, for no sooner had Pinochet taken control of the army than he went into the business of planning the coup against Allende. Over the next eighteen days, Pinochet and his fellow officers in the air force and police swiftly went into working out the details of the plan to overthrow the president. Secrecy was maintained in the absolute sense of the meaning. As the military and the CIA finalised their plans to depose the government, President Allende waged a desperate struggle to keep his government together.

The first moves toward the coup were taken at 4 a.m. on September 11, when various military units in the capital and other cities in Chile gathered to voice their support for the leaders of the coup. As Chile slept, soldiers went into

action in the cities of Concepcion and Valparaiso. Before daybreak, the two cities went under the absolute control of the military. In Santiago, at 6.20, President Allende was awakened with news that a coup led by his new army chief was in progress. Within the following hour, the military, by now rapidly moving to gain control of the city and planning to seize the Moneda presidential palace, sent a message to Allende offering to let him leave the country. The president spurned the offer. The air force systematically strafed the palace and hit its targets with precision. By 9 a.m. Santiago passed into the hands of the army, units of which fanned out to various parts of the city. A half hour later, President Allende made what would be his final broadcast to the nation. He promised defiance and pledged to fight on to uphold constitutional government in Chile. Sometime later, he appeared on the balcony of La Moneda, an AK-47 in his hands and a helmet on his head. Moments later, he went back in. It was the last the world would see of Salvador Allende. By early afternoon, he was dead. One of his aides, who had managed to escape from the presidential palace, would later tell the world that he had seen Allende place his gun between his feet and, as he ran from the place, had looked back to see the president's skull fly off from his head. The more accepted version of how Allende met his end came from other sources, who pointed out that soldiers had stormed into La Moneda and stabbed and shot the president to death. After an autopsy that really was not, Allende's body was buried in his ancestral village. No stone or any other sign marked his grave. The coup leaders wanted no trace to be left of the dead president. Allende was sixty five when his life came to an In the days following the coup, terror took over Chile.

Thousands of people were rounded up by the soldiers and detained in the local stadium. Many of them were murdered. Officially, the number for those who died from the excesses of the military regime was 3,192. Many more simply disappeared. Hundreds of Chileans, many of them prominent citizens, went into exile in neighbouring countries and in Europe. Carlos Prats left the country and moved to Argentina. Orlando Letelier, the former envoy who was Allende's last defence minister, was seized on the morning of the coup and tortured over the next twelve months before being freed and allowed to leave Chile. He would eventually make his way to the United States. The poet Pablo Neruda, ailing at the time of the coup, would be humiliated by soldiers ransacking his home. Within days of the coup, he would die. The popular singer Victor Jara, a vocal supporter of the Allende government, was picked up by the army and murdered in the very Santiago stadium where he had once roused his fans to ecstasy with his music.

Salvador Allende's widow would make her way out of Chile. The dead president's cousin, the writer Isabel Allende, too would leave the country and settle abroad. The Pinochet regime, having put a brutal system in place, would not, however, rest until it had dealt with its enemies, real or assumed. Agents of the Chilean intelligence organisation DINA murdered General Carlos Prats and his wife through blowing up their car in Buenos Aires, Argentina, on September 30, 1974. Two years later, on September 21, 1976, Orlando Letelier, busy marshalling support for Chilean democrats in the United States, was blown up in Washington by DINA agents acting with assistance from their American friends.

The Pinochet dictatorship kept tight control over Chile till 1990, when General Pinochet left office, albeit after ensuring immunity for himself and his men over the 1973 coup and subsequent measures taken by his regime. In his later years, Pinochet became a target of human rights groups around the world and at one point was arrested in London upon a warrant issued by a Spanish court. Eventually allowed to go back home by the British government, he saw a resurgent Chilean democracy strip him of his immunity and charge him with human rights violations during his years as dictator. He died, aged 91, in December 2006.

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If 'red line' is international, US should respect it as such

Without making military strikes

the last resort and deployed

through proper authority, the US

would also be crossing some red

lines written by the world.

EDITORIAL DESK: THE CHINA POST

S President Barack Obama has pressed hard for military intervention on Syria to punish Bashar al-Assad's government for allegedly using chemical weapons. The UN report on the alleged chemical attacks is yet to be completed but the US said it is certain the regime's forces deployed the weapons.

A key part of Obama's argument is that he did not pluck the now famous "red line" he mentioned a year ago "out of thin air." "We have been very clear to the Assad regime ... that a red line for us is we start seeing a whole bunch of chemical weapons moving around or being utilised," the president said as he answered a

reporter's question in August 2012. On September 4, Obama elaborated on these comments, suggesting the "red line" was not his invention, but the world's. "I didn't set a red line, the world set a red line. My credibility is not on the line. The international community's credibility is on the line. And America's and Congress'

credibility is on the line because we give lip service to the notion that these international norms are important," Obama said in Stockholm, the home of the Nobel Foundation that gave him the Peace Prize in 2009.

It is telling that in making the case for military engagement to a reluctant American public, the president is spending considerable efforts on drawing a line between him and the "red line." Is the "red line" an arbitrary criterion set by Obama or is it indeed an international norm? In other words, are there universal rules in war?

Human beings have been trying to shove the cruelty and chaos of war into a moral framework since ancient times. In Rome, a just war had to have the right cause (national defence or retaliation for pillaging or breach of agreement) and the formal blessing of priests. The idea of just war was taken up by early Christian philosophers such as Saint Augustine and Thomas Aquinas.

The "just war" principle, derived from these forbears and developed further over time, states that a war can only be waged as the last resort by the legitimate author-

ity for the right intention (such as self-defence). A just war must be with a fair chance of success and aimed to ultimately restore peace. It must also be fought with just means: that the weapons used discriminate combatants and non-combatants. These ideas are the basis of the Geneva Conventions and Geneva Protocol, which are probably what Obama meant by "international norms."

The use of chemical weapons on civilians crosses the red line as it violates the section of the Geneva Conventions that outlaws "indiscriminate attacks on civilian populations," and more specifically the Geneva Protocol that outlaws the use of "asphyxiating, poisonous or other gases, and of all analogous liquids, materials or devices" and "bacteriological methods."

As Sun Tzu said in The Art of War, military action is an action against the normal order of things. It is hard to set the rules for a competition in which the termination of human lives is a key feature, but that does not mean these rules should not exist. But in order for such rules to work, they should not be used as justification for

national interests.

When Obama sets international norms such as modern protocols and the historical ideas of just war, as the "red line," he also bounds the US under the same standards. Without making military strikes the last resort and deployed through proper authority, the US would also be crossing some red lines written by the world. That means the US should exhaust all diplomatic avenues before striking, as well as confirm beyond reasonable doubt that Assad is in fact behind the attacks. And even after that, the US should ensure the strike has a reasonable chance of success. That means the military options the Obama administration takes should be aimed not only to "make a stand" but to achieve what it claims to be doing, which is either destroying Syria's chemical weapons or making a big enough deterrence that Assad never again uses chemical weapons.

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TO THE EDITOR letters@thedailystar.net

PM should listen to the people

Recently Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina categorically announced that the incumbent government would retain power and the present parliament would not be dissolved during the next parliamentary election. She has been saying that the next parliamentary election will be held as per the constitution. But most of the people want the next general election to be held under a non-partisan caretaker government. PM should pay heed to people.

Samiul Raijul Bangladesh University of Textiles, Dhaka

Peace offensive to end Syrian crisis

On many occasions I disagree with what the Pope says in terms of world politics, but today I totally agree with him when he speaks in favour of a peaceful approach to resolve Syrian crisis.

Military action can never put an end to the crisis. The way things are moving, military action would result in massacres of innocent civilians. Military intervention never brings good solution to any conflict.

The global family of the civil society cannot sit idle as mere observers of the events in Syria. Its indifference to such a crisis makes it directly or indirectly responsible for the killings in Syria.

As the United Nations are failing to bring any solution, the representatives of the people from all over the world, religious leaders of all beliefs, should organise a peace mission and meet the conflicting parties in Syria and sincerely resolve the crisis. I propose that we altogether organise a march / delegation to go and meet the different parties of the conflict in order to bring them to the negotiation table.

Let us organise a non-violent campaign/crusade. It might be dangerous, but we should be as audacious as the suicide bombers who are offering their life for killing. Let us dare our life for peace! Yves Marre

On e-mail

Cops or extortionists?

Perhaps Bangladesh is the only country in the world where cops are allegedly and reportedly involved in extortions. According to some national newspapers, cops often extort from truck and bus drivers on highways. Some cops forcibly extort in broad daylight from traders of Aminbazar in Savar near Dhaka. Surprisingly, no action is being taken against these alleged cases of extortion by cops.

It seems that extortion by cops is not considered a crime here in Bangladesh. If the law protectors turn into law breakers, a day will come when no one will abide by law.

Md Sairul Islam Lecturer in English Jahangirpur Girls' School and College Mohadevpur, Naogaon

Unconcern for negotiated settlement The U.S. government is such a bunch of liars,

deceivers and betrayers of their people! The people get so used to hearing them lie; they don't believe anything they say any more.

The same thing happened in Lebanon years ago. When they elected a pro-communist president, Eisenhower sent in the Marines! And Lebanon's had nothing but grief ever since. And the same thing happened in Vietnam. When they looked like they were about to have a procommunist government, the US stepped in to make sure they didn't! It has no intention of settling by negotiation whatsoever. Ted Rudow III, MA

Encina Ave Palo Alto, CA

Comments on news report, "Travesty of justice," published on September 8, 2013

Nds

Expecting justice from a neighbour like India is unreasonable.

Shahin Huq

We the Bangladeshis are having the full brunt of Indian oppression, which makes us think if this was the reason why the then Indian government helped us become 'independent' in 1971.

Abul Kashem

India never invests a single rupee anywhere unless it fetches 1000 million back.

Abbasuddin

Why is the US government silent on the issue being the 'police' of the world? The UN, HRW and Mr. Mozena have become blind and deaf suddenly.

Ahmed Zakaria

The present government is reluctant to say anything negative about India. It simply does not have the courage to do so. We should protest vehemently regarding this atrocious verdict.

"4 bloggers indicted" (September 9, 2013)

Vikram Khan

Actually government should make public what exactly these bloggers have written; that would help us, the public, to avoid making the same mistakes.

Nasirullah Mridha, USA

If it is proved that they denigrated our prophet and religion, then they should be given punishment. Not only that, if anyone hurts any other religion, they should be punished in the same way.