

## Get rid of OSD culture Stop the drain on national exchequer

We have written umpteen times on the subject of so-called Officer on Special Duty (OSD) over the last so many years and we do so again just to flag the importance of the matter. We hope that party in power some day would call a halt to the practice of sidelining public officials by putting a label on them.

Bangladesh is unique in the sense that there are perhaps no other government in the world where the state pays a bureaucrat for doing precious little, and that too for years on end. This is perhaps also the only country where promotions are made with such a partisan outlook that the number of personnel exceeds the authorised posts by hundreds. As of today there are 650 public servants on OSD.

What was once adopted as a well meaning arrangement with an honest purpose has been given a bad name because of the way the provision has been used to sort out bureaucrats belonging to the 'other camp' by the party in power. This has been happening during the tenure of all the governments but what is reprehensible is that the system has been used incrementally with successive democratically elected governments. As a result, not only has been the bureaucracy irreparably politicised, the nation has suffered both in terms of wasted money and talent.

The government is yet to answer the High Court's call for explanation on the matter. We too seek answers from the government as to why such a state has been allowed to occur? Why party affiliation and not merit been made the criterion for promotion? Why so much of the tax payers' money wasted?

## Even trees are not spared So abusive has politics become!

AMONG the dreadful dimensions to the opposition's ongoing political agitation, a new phenomenon has sprung up. The incidents of felling trees to put up barricades on roads have fallen into a pattern that is extremely worrying. We are yet to understand why should trees be victimized during a political agitation? Bangladesh's tree cover is not only a paltry 8 percent of the land area which ideally should have been 25 percent, but the cutting of trees unmasks a dreadful aberration of our political culture.

Staggeringly, some 10,042 trees were felled as the verdict of a war criminal was announced barely six months ago. And at least another 130 roadside trees were cut down by the activists of the 18-party alliance in the past ninety-six hours. We wonder what would be the measure of destruction of trees by the time the opposition ends its blockade programme!

When political parties across the globe are embracing environmental issues on their agendas, our political activists are wreaking havoc on ecology and environment by their destructive swipes. In particular, Jamaat-Shibir elements are spearheading and inciting a tree felling orgy. Our major political parties have prioritized the environmental issues on their party manifestos. Therefore it devolves on the 18-party alliance led by BNP to direct their activists to refrain from tree cutting sprees.

Condemning this act is not enough. We want to see exemplary punishment handed to the culprits. There is no point in allowing destruction of the very means that helps us to breathe.

## The frightened tale of Kauar Char

AUDITY FALGUNI

"I was entering my kitchen at around 10:00 AM. It was November 14 when suddenly around two thousand people broke into our yard, and later on our entire village carrying lethal weapons. Setting acts of arson. They plundered some gold ornaments, a TV, a refrigerator and a wardrobe out of my home. Within minutes my sweet home turned into ashes before my very eyes," said Champa Rani Halder (age: 34).

It was Champa Rani and some fellow women of her village Kauar Char who were narrating their witness account. The horrendous tale of their plight to us on November 22 morning when a small team of us, a handful of former members of Dhaka University film society, visited the affected area. We caught up with them just after a communal harmony meeting (Sampriti Samabesh) was over in the panic stricken village. District Commissioner (DC) of Barisal, local Union Parishad Chairman from the present ruling party, Thana Nirbahi Officer (TNO), locally Elected MP from Awami League, members of Maha Nagar Puja Committee and members of Anubhab Samabab Samity (a Hindu community based Cooperative Society) were present in the meeting in presence of the villagers from both the villages: Kauar Char and the nearby village from where the attack came.

The unpleasant incident occurred at Kauar Char is known to all. A young man named Parvez Gazi was murdered on November 14, 2013. It was in the evening when he came to the neighbouring village of Kauar Char. The murder took place in the heat of the moment. Till now Parvez Gazi's murder is shrouded in mystery. But the problem is the two alleged "killers" who were basically outsiders and had fled the scene while many innocent men, absent on the spot on the day, were arrested with their families harassed.

Now who are the real perpetrators behind the fabrication of an ill motivated rumor that ignited mob sentiments to attack their neighbouring village? Some locals have testified on condition of anonymity that the local Union Parishad Chairman of Awami League may be one of the initiators as he could not secure a handsome number of votes from this Hindu village in last general elections. The students of Broja Mohan College of Barisal who pioneered the mob attack are proven cadres of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL). The deceased Parvez Gazi's elder brother is a leader of BCL Barisal. One police officer, on the condition of anonymity, informed that the onus of this arson attack and plundering of the Hindu village basically happened due to the callousness and negligence of the concerned administration.

We grieve and mourn the untimely death of Parvez Gazi and demand stern punishment of the killers. But what can justify plundering 16 families of a minority village?

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# The Mandela magic

### KALEIDOSCOPE



SYED FATTAHUL ALIM

BEFORE Nelson Mandela ascended to the peak of his political career as South Africa's president through a multiracial election held in 1994, his country was an international pariah.

Obviously, the apartheid policy of segregating the majority black population from the mainstream of social and political life pursued by the minority white ruling class was the reason. But how could this near impossible task, of reconciling these two hostile communities be achieved? It was the Mandela magic that proved sceptics wrong and achieved the miracle of bringing the diverse ethnic mosaic of South African society under the single roof of what Archbishop Desmond Tutu conceived of and Mandela elaborated upon as a Rainbow Nation.

It was due to his extraordinary leadership qualities that all South Africans listened to him intently, surrendered their hostilities, joined hands and fell to building a new nation. No 'revolutionary war cry' was raised by the victorious blacks to spill the blood of the racist white settlers who for centuries enslaved the indigenous black inhabitants of South Africa and subjected them to history's cruelest, savage and inhumane treatment.

It would be only natural for the black majority people to take bloody revenge against their white tormentors, once they got political power, to right the historical wrong. But the violent culture of extreme bitterness and hatred against one's political adversary that we are so proud to preach and practice so coolly as something 'revolutionary' and 'sane' was absent in Mandela's dictionary of political and personal values. But the white minority was not merely a political adversary! They were outsiders, who forcibly robbed the original inhabitants of everything they possessed followed by centuries of ruthless subjugation.

Considering ourselves in the black South Africans' place, what would be our response like towards such former tormentors, especially, in our present political mindset? The South Africans are, indeed, lucky to have the gift of a leader of Mandela's height. As a visionary leader, he could see light years ahead of his contemporaries. Even former apartheid president F.W. de Klerk, who in the post-1994 multiracial government became his deputy, could not but appreciate Mandela's great qualities. Upon hearing about Mandela's death, Klerk told the media: "...He was a remarkable man – his biggest legacy will be emphasis on reconciliation, a remarkable lack of bitterness....He lived reconciliation. He was a great unifier."

But Nelson Mandela was not from a different planet and he was not also a stranger to the concept of armed

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struggle against apartheid rule. He had once secretly gone to Morocco and Ethiopia to take training in guerrilla warfare in 1962. He became commander-in-chief of the ANC's armed wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe. Even so, unlike other revolutionaries, his philosophy was not one of overthrowing his enemy in a bloody war, but of defending himself against state-inflicted violence.

"My people, Africans, are turning to deliberate acts of violence and of force against the government in order to persuade the government, in the only language which this government shows by its own behavior that it understands," Mandela explained at that time.

He was tried for going outside of the country illegally as well as inciting strike and was detained for a short period. Then again in the infamous Rivonia Trial he was charged with sabotage and a plot to topple the government. This led to his life imprisonment—a large part of which, some 27 years, he served at Robben Island. The famous hour-long speech that he gave in a defiant mode before the court encapsulates the seminal principles and causes he stood and fought for.

"I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination," he said. "I have cher-



ished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities".

Mandela was not an unmixed revolutionary, nor a pacifist. A leader of the masses was he, though with a regal bearing and an air of aloofness about him. Which was the real Mandela? To fully understand him, one has to trace the social and cultural root from which he emerged and from where he was projected on to the political stage of 20th century. He had to face the leadership challenge of the millennia. That is why he could not be but complex: he had to incorporate in him at once the character of the headman of a patriarchal tribal society, the attributes of a revolutionary to wrest freedom of his people from the domination of a regime whose behaviour was a throwback to the slave-owning society and then take his people out of this time-warp into a free democratic society at the dawn of 21st Century. And it was this complexity of his personality that made him so unique and different from all other leaders of his time.

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## Of rights and pay checks

SYED MANSUR  
HASHIM

THE twin disasters of Rana Plaza and Tazreen were a wakeup call, not just for the 5,000-factory strong sector but the government too. There have been talks and roadmaps agreed upon to improving working conditions, fire safety, compliance on building codes, etc. Bangladesh has been in the international spotlight on the issue of workers' right to unionise in the

sector too. This is something that has been pushed to the limit by the United States and the country apparently lost its GSP facility due to failure to adhere to agreed upon accords. That is a subject, which is open to debate and beyond the scope of this article. What is of importance is the fact that there is no contention on the need to have a collective bargaining agent on the factory floor whereby workers may seek redress from the management on any issue. The other sticking point remains is the compensation package workers will receive as minimum wage.

National media widely covered the statement issued by the visiting European Commissioner that Bangladesh stands to lose GSP facility to the common market unless substantial improvements were made on issues mentioned above. Leaving aside the potential fallout from such an event taking place in the future, the most pressing problem is the issue of minimum wage. One cannot forget that a national election is looming and it is at times like these that policymakers make wild promises of delivering the sun and the moon and everything in between to woo voters. How else can one explain the statement made by a certain minister that the government was going to declare a minimum wage exceeding Tk8,000 even before the wage board had finished its task? The aftermath of that statement sent shockwaves through the "corridors of power" and the economy faced the full brunt of workers' wrath when that demand was not met. Let there be no confusion here. The wage board constituted by the government was not a standalone decision. It was participatory, in the sense that it took into consideration the opinion of all major stakeholders including the unions and garment manufacturers.

That said much remains to be done on the question of labour standards. In Bangladesh, it is not the problem of having requisite laws; rather it is their lack of enforcement that is the issue. Would unionisation automatically translate into a workers' paradise in the sector. What will be its form? Again, for instance, how practical is it to collect signatures from 30 per cent workers in a company having more than 5,000 workers spread across multiple factories.

What is there to stop management from identifying potential labour leaders and axing them from the payroll on one pretext or another? And what happens when angry workers take to the streets, go on a vandalism spree, block the highway, burn factories (e.g. Standard group) and stop production? How helpful is it to portraying the Bangladeshi RMG sector a stable environment to invest in? Let us face certain unfortunate truths. Thanks to the continued "unrest" in the sector, there have been fewer orders coming to Bangladesh for the next quarter. According to a report published in *The Financial Express* on December 07, some buyers are diverting orders away from Bangladesh to India to meet demands for the summer season.

It is very convenient to form laws or make amendments to existing ones in the hope that the problem will go away. Such ad-hoc measures merely delay the rot, it does not solve anything. With the new minimum wage being implemented, it is imperative to find a way out of the current unrest that has gripped the industry – an industry that employs 4 million people and contributes the lion's share of the country's foreign exchange earnings.



We continue to live in a utopia that allowing for unionisation will get rid of the problem. It is only in the interests of self-preservation that the sector should move forward on labour rights. Workers and the unions have a stake in the continued existence of the RMG sector for their livelihoods and the government, being the mediator, must help bridge the gap between these two interest groups. The wage structure is not merely about getting a decent pay at the end of the day. It is tied with worker efficiency and productivity. These are issues that have been sidelined since they are much more difficult to address. Similarly, the enforcement of the building code and having a sufficient pool of factory inspectors to oversee the 5,000 odd factories that constitute the RMG sector has also been put on the backburner. With competitors nipping at the heels of Bangladesh luring away precious orders in the middle of global recession, all stakeholders need to be certain of a workable roadmap that will address the issues at hand.

## LETTERS

### TO THE EDITOR

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### Politicians shouldn't hold people to ransom

The present situation seems very frustrating to me. I do not intend to comment on the validity of the opposition's movement or about the prospect of a one-sided election, as that is a different debate altogether. Whatever is the issue, why should common people bear the brunt of the political 'cat-and-mouse' game? Did the 160 million people of Bangladesh abolish the caretaker government?

We, the younger generation of Bangladesh have lost all our faith and respect in the politics of this country. If they do not bring an end to this violence quickly, the time is not farther when they will have to pay for it.

Tauhidul Islam

Uttara, Dhaka

### Banks should help Standard Group out

I think all banks and financial institutions should offer their best support to the Standard Group owners through possible financial help that they desperately need now. I hope and believe that our police and detective officials will do their best to find out the masterminds behind this barbaric act. I pray to the Almighty that He helps the owners to have patience needed to overcome such a shock and get all the help to make a fresh start.

S. A. Mansoor

Dhaka

### 'Iron ladies' should first talk

All appeals from inside and outside the country have so far failed to bring the two 'iron ladies' at the dialogue table. The two ladies must sit for a dialogue, initially without aides to understand each other better and then get ready for an agenda-based meaningful dialogue with limited number of senior members from both the parties to solve the deadlock.

Anami

CA, USA

### Comments on news report, "A great light has gone out," published on December 7, 2013

#### Shahin Huq

Many world leaders are making statements on the death of Mandela. Even Sheikh Hasina did so! What hypocrisy! Many of the leaders who pretend to mourn his death are oppressive and dictatorial, whereas Mandela was a servant of his people. He became great by serving his people, not by exploiting them.

#### Salim Ullah

I salute Nelson Mandela with all my heart.

#### M Huq

Nelson Mandela was the greatest statesman of twentieth century. I wish Bangladeshi politicians showed at least 1% of his greatness!

#### Faisal

The world lost a wonderful man. After being imprisoned for 27 years because of the colour of his skin, he did not take revenge once he was free and in power. He focused on making a unified South Africa.

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### "UN asks if polls can be deferred" (December 8, 2013)

#### Nds

Hasina has shifted the responsibility to the Election Commission knowing very well that they will not do anything against her will. She wants to give the false impression to the UN team that she has given full autonomy to EC. Very cunning.

#### Zman7

Country's current quandary is not a very complex problem, and I strongly believe this efficient UN team will surely beat the impasse. The basic measure should be as follows: first, to convince the opposition leader and also get a firm assurance from her that the opposition will renounce the path of violence. Second, to get similar assurance from the PM and the Chief of the EC that they will leave no stone unturned to offer a free and credible election.

#### Mortuza Huq

Time is running away very fast to reach a consensus to hold an all inclusive national election which is Taranco's current mission. If government and its baggage porter Election Commission keep throwing tantrums and fail to recognise the ground realities, it may be a matter of days when the servants of the republic including the law enforcing agencies will start to disobey the politically motivated government orders.

#### Shahin Huq

We want to see sincerity from the UN and the international community. We don't believe that Sheikh Hasina is so powerful that the international stakeholders cannot put pressure on her. Or, is it the fact that they need Sheikh Hasina's weak and unpopular government in order to exploit Bangladesh?