

# IS A NEW COLD WAR emerging in Syria?

MUHAMMAD RUHUL AMIN

THE recent turmoil in Syria proves that the country has turned into a hot zone for international politics thanks to the dual role of the world's decisive countries. The USA, for example, is interested in the country for the acquisition of the secure inflow of Middle East oil, assurance of the sustained stability of Israel and maintenance of the post-cold war unilateral American domination in the region. The Russian policy in the Middle East, in general, and in Syria, in particular, mainly focuses on preventing US influence there, in order to preserve their political, economic and strategic interests. The cold war policies of the super-powers have reemerged in Syria, in the context of the changed realities of the post-Cold War period.

During the recently held sessions of the UN General Assembly in September, Russia and the US, along with their allies, seem to have constructed an international mega plan to resolve the Syrian crisis. However, as

'two person zero-sum' game. The war threats posed by President Obama and his western allies have been seriously challenged by Russia, their strategic rival in the region.

The Bashar government from the very beginning has continuously declined any use of chemical weapons at a time when UN observers were working on detecting such WMDs in Syria. The media also circulated such news. The noted journalist Dell Gavlas, who has been working closely with AP, NPR and BBC prepared a report that the Syrian rebels had confessed to him about the use of chemical weapons. They admitted that an accident occurred by their wrong-handling of chemical gas which they claimed was supplied to them by Saudi intelligence, as disclosed by the *Voice of Russia*. Gavlas also cited an article in *The Daily Telegraph*, which claimed that Saudi Prince Bandar bin Sultan threatened Russia with the Chechen rebels once Russia did not change its stance on Syria.

We may have a brief look at history to

Marcus George and Janet McBride both columnists for Reuters, Saddam Hussein attacked Iran in 1983 with US-supplied arms of mustard, Sarin and Tabun gas.

In an article by Fred Barbash circulated by Reuters, PM Obama's supposedly earlier isolation with Syria has been aptly described. The objection of the Senate, anti-war groups and global reaction might have prevented Obama's war rhetorics against Syria. In one of its editorials during September 2013, the *China Post* accused the US of violating the international 'red line'. It marks that "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."

What perspectives then are evident in America's war threat? Peter Custers, the author of *Questioning Globalized Militarism* has clearly calculated the political economy of the US war preparations against Syria. He analysed how the US is plotting, under its declared war threat against Syria, a grand strategy to sustain its



soon as Russia initiated air strikes on IS and other extremists, the US and its allies accused it of creating a conflict that went against their interest. This double standard thus flared the fire of almost all conflicts in that region.

For example, efforts toward the chemical disarmament of Syria have been geared up by the great powers in order to safeguard their politico-economic and strategic interests. Double standards in all international interactions have been evident with regard to the manufacturing, selling and transferring weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). We can thus say that these great powers first equipped Arab dictators such as Saddam Hossein, Jain al Abedin Bin Ali, Hosni Mubarak and Bashar al Assad with chemical and biological weapons for their geo-strategic benefit, and then plotted to destroy them when they emerged as threats to their interests.

Russia and the US' and their allies' insistence to be active participants in the Syrian war clearly led them to adopt the

learn how the United States has been using the deadly chemical weapons since 1960s. The American use of 'Agent Orange' in the Vietnamese jungles between the 1960s and 1970s has been instrumental in the killing of humans as well as plants and animals, eventually creating severe ecological imbalance there. In the works of Nick Yuti, there is ample evidence of the use of napalm and white phosphorus. A report by Seymour Harsh in 1968 claims that the US used DM which carries arsenic in containing riots in Vietnam. Moreover, the special forces of the US used Sarin in 1970 to kill the rebels of Laos. CNN had disclosed these events in 1998 after about two decades of the Vietnam War. During the Iran-Iraq war, the US supplied dangerous crop dusters to Iraq, as proven by the recently disclosed secret documents of the CIA. In his article titled *Syria and US Imperial Project*, circulated by ConterPunch.org on September 13-14, 2013, Rob Urie claimed that the Sarin gas which was used in Syria was sent by the global collaborators of Syrian rebels. According to

long term control over Middle East oil, the Western drive to globalise rules of armament systems and the increasing threats posed by the global military industrial complex that have transcended transatlantic boundaries in recent years. The Russian strategy also stems from the spirit of containing the US unilateral hegemony in the Middle East in order to equalise Russian gains by preserving its political, economic and geo-strategic interests that have evolved over the years. Through its recent air and land strikes against IS and allegedly other anti-Bashar rebels, it is noted that Russia is well-prepared to challenge any western or American military operation in Syria that would undermine Russia's long-standing strategic interests in Syria and elsewhere in the Middle East.

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## LOCAL GOVERNMENT POLLS

# Partisan vs Non-partisan

DR. MD. ABDUL ALIM

ON October 12, the cabinet approved the drafts of five laws on local governments which will allow registered political parties to nominate candidates in the local body elections. It will also permit the candidates to use party symbols and even the portrait of their party leader(s) while campaigning. Moreover, similar to parliament elections, party leaders and ministers might be allowed to take part in the campaign.

There are five types of practice for electing or selecting representatives for the local government: (i) no elections are held, local representatives are appointed by the party in power; (ii) elections are held on a partisan basis and candidates compete in the elections as a party candidate; (iii) elections are held on typical non-partisan schemes but parties are allowed to endorse, support and oppose candidates; (iv) elections are totally non-partisan and parties are not allowed to endorse, support and oppose candidates; and (v) elections are held for a few positions while there are reserve seats to be nominated by the government.

In Malaysia, no local government elections are conducted. During the British rule, local structures were governed by commission members who were appointed by the Governor or High Commissioner of British. However, in 1857 and 1858, municipal elections were held to replace the appointment process and thus, municipal commissioner positions were filled by the elected people. But in 1965, the federal government suspended local government elections due to the emergence of several issues such as the Malaysia-Indonesia confrontation. Therefore, there have been no local elections in Malaysia since 1965. Till today, local councilors are appointed by the party in power.

In the UK, all local government elections are partisan. Political parties nominate candidates, selected candidates submit nominations, party leaders participate in the campaigns, parties are accountable for a violation of the code of conduct and submission of election expenditure return, etc. On May 22, 2014, elections in 162 local councils were held in the UK, where the Labor Party received 31 percent of the popular votes, while the Conservative Party received 29 percent of the popular votes.

Most local elections in the USA are non-partisan. Until 1986, local elections in California were typically non-partisan with provisions for political parties to endorse, support or oppose the candidates. In a survey conducted in 1986, voters said that the parties' participation in the elections in this manner defeated several goals of non-partisan electoral system. Hence, the legal framework of California was amended with the provision that all local elections shall be "absolutely" non-partisan and no party or central party committee shall endorse, support or oppose a candidate for non-partisan office.

In Bangladesh, till today, all local body elections have typically been non-partisan. The main characteristics of such elections are: (i) candidates cannot submit nomination along with an authorisation from his/her party (ii) Office bearers such as ministers, state ministers, speakers, etc. are not allowed to conduct the campaign (iii) candidates cannot use the party symbol or the portrait of party leaders while campaigning. However, parties are seen endorsing and supporting

candidates as well as opposing other candidates. Moreover, party chiefs are also seen announcing the name of party-backed candidates openly, as they are introduced to the public by senior party leaders. Senior party leaders often work as campaign coordinators for party-backed candidates. Furthermore, during the election campaign, party slogans and even the name of the party are often used.

The debate on partisan vs. nonpartisan elections is not new. Supporters of partisan elections argue that the absence of party labels confuse voters; in the absence of a party ballot, voters will turn to whatever cue is available, which often turns out to be the ethnicity of a candidate's name. They also argue that non-partisanship tends to produce elected officials who are more representative of the upper socio-economic strata of society than the general populace, thereby aggravating the class bias in voting turnouts, because in a true non-partisan system, local party workers are not allowed to motivate voters from lower class households to visit the polls on Election Day.

Proponents of non-partisan elections suggest that all the issues in local elections are local issues and thus, participation of political parties here is irrelevant. Ideologies connected with political parties cannot be allowed to wrap voters' judgment. They also argue that partisan local polls create the scope of "unhealthy influence of political parties". They believe that party labels lead to unnecessary party alignments and conflicts, and solutions to local problems should not be subjected to party-line political squabbles.

Globally, partisan and non-partisan elections do not necessarily create barriers in conducting credible elections. In the UK, there is no question about the credibility of partisan local elections. In Norway, the local elections are conducted by the local government. However, studies show that conducting credible elections in a partisan manner is always a challenge in developing democracies around the world.

Firstly, election results are frequently manipulated by the party in power. Local elections are always more politically charged. When candidates lose in their own village, there is more of a direct face-to-face rejection by their neighbours, especially if their party is in power. Many studies in developing democracies show that partisan local elections always create a scope for electoral manipulation for the party in power.

Secondly, candidates from opposition parties are often not allowed to compete in local elections in developing countries, especially when there is a chance for the party in power to lose the elections. In 1999, opposition parties were not allowed in nearly three-quarters of the seats after the local elections in Azerbaijan, on the grounds that they were not qualified to compete in the elections.

Thirdly, it always becomes difficult for the election commission to ensure a level playing field for all candidates in partisan local elections. Candidates and leaders from the party in power always try to interpose a "code of conduct", which destroys the level playing field, thereby changing the election outcome.

If we want to ensure democracy in Bangladesh, it is of utmost importance that the government and the EC consider these issues while determining the fate of local government polls.

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## A WORD A DAY

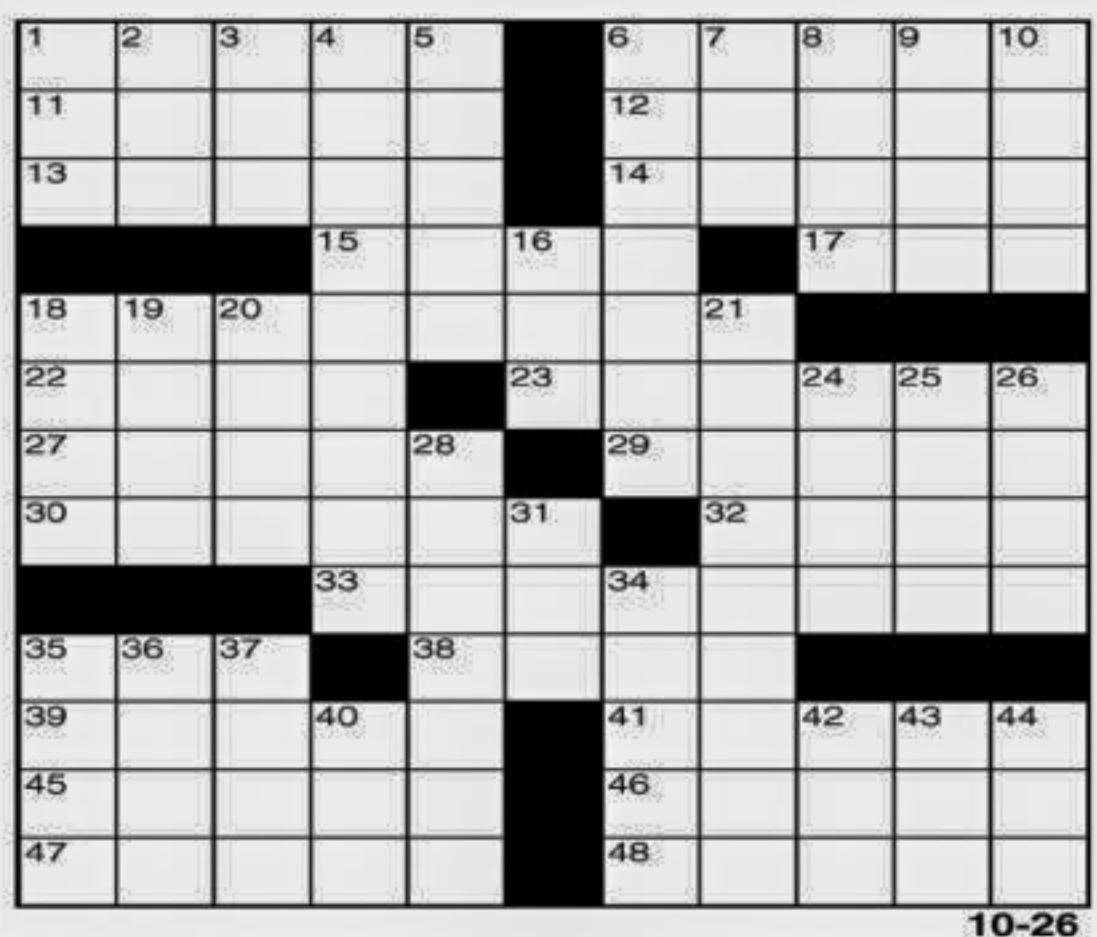
### VENATION

[vi'neiʃ(ə)n]

The arrangement of veins in a leaf or in an insect's wing.

### CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 1 Deluxe hotel room
  - 6 Select group
  - 11 Ohio city
  - 12 Colorless gas
  - 13 Bread-making need
  - 14 Spotted horse
  - 15 Vend
  - 17 Sinking signal
  - 18 2, to 8
  - 22 Mimicked
  - 23 Brides' partners
  - 27 Power provider
  - 29 Long-plumed bird
  - 30 Followed as a result
  - 32 Heredity unit
  - 33 Gets a bigger car, say
  - 35 Judge's concern
  - 38 Looked over
  - 39 Last Greek letter
  - 41 Be immodest
  - 45 Really stoked
  - 46 Henry VIII's house
  - 47 Lector's aid
  - 48 Unemotional
- DOWN**
- 1 Put into words
  - 2 Luau instrument
  - 3 George Gershwin's brother
  - 4 Threw away
  - 5 Door sign
  - 6 Investigate
  - 7 Luau garland
  - 8 Taverns
  - 9 Dorothy's dog
  - 10 Hall of Farmer Slaughter
  - 16 Lumber unit
  - 18 Arrived
  - 19 "Once -- a time..."
  - 20 Wagers
  - 21 In fancy attire
  - 24 Mineral sources
  - 25 Bill of fare
  - 26 Dance move
  - 28 Enjoys a favorite book
  - 31 Week part
  - 34 Owed amounts
  - 35 Bank offering
  - 36 Bullets
  - 37 Showed sorrow
  - 40 "Gosh!"
  - 42 Commotion
  - 43 Junior, to senior
  - 44 Attempt



**YESTERDAY'S ANSWER**

PARKS BEGAT  
 ARENA ERASE  
 RAVEL DAMPS  
 OBIWAN BET  
 DIE COTTONY  
 YAW IDEALS  
 ROUND  
 FIBULA ALA  
 DEMISE GAL  
 VIALS SILENT  
 INLET UNDER  
 SEAMY SEARS

## VACANCY

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Founded in 1992, NSU has emerged as one of the most reputable universities in the sub-continent. NSU follows the US education system and is committed to innovative teaching and research. It has an International Advisory Board comprised of eminent scholars, academics, scientists and administrators from home and abroad. It also has collaboration agreements with leading universities around the world. The faculty members, including the overseas faculty members, hold advanced degrees from North American or equivalent universities. The present student body of some 18000 includes a large number of international students at NSU from 10-12 different countries.

The eligible candidate for the position will be a Professor with a PhD from an internationally recognized university with excellent academic attainments. S/he should have a minimum 20 years of academic, research and administrative experiences, including a minimum 10 years of teaching experience in recognized universities. Experience as Vice Chancellor/Pro-Vice Chancellor or equivalent will be an advantage. Experience of designing academic and administrative strategic and operational planning and having an active portfolio of professional affiliations will be treated as additional qualifications.

The BOT reserves the right to relax the requisite qualifications in the case of an exceptionally suitable candidate. Expression of interest from qualified candidates, with a complete CV and all relevant documents, should reach the following address within three weeks from the publication of this advertisement:

**The Chairman**  
 Board of Trustees  
 North South University  
 Bashundhara, Dhaka-1229  
 e-mail: chairman@northsouth.edu  
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