

A missing agenda

Hospitals reeling in shortage of technicians

THIS paper's city page yesterday highlighted the acute dearth of medical technologists as one of the root causes behind the virtually dysfunctional state that our healthcare system has fallen into. Medical technicians represent a vital tier in the many layered structure comprising doctors, nurses, mid-rung technical hands, ward boys and all the rest. As it is, our doctor-population ratio is perhaps among the lowest in the world at 1:4047, the nurses are also in short supply, and the deficit in the technologist category put together portray a dismal picture of fragility in terms of healthcare service. Just how untenable things have become can be realised in the fact that ward boys are performing OT duties instead of trained technicians. The technologist-population ratio is an abysmal 1:39641in rural area and 1:48443 in urban area.

The fallout has been dreadful: sophisticated state-of-the-art equipment and machines are rusting away because of acute shortage of skilled manpower to operate them. Furthermore, some private hospitals are now having to recruit skilled technicians from abroad at a huge cost. This is in spite of the fact that the country has a huge swathe of educated labour who can be developed into skilled technical hands with correct policy emphasis.

There are currently two government and 18 private institutes imparting training to 2,224 students per year in various disciplines viz. lab medicine, radiology, imaging, physiotherapy, radiotherapy and pharmacy.

Successive governments' initiative in this sector has been lukewarm at best. Of the two government facilities, the Institute of Health Technology (IHT) in Mohakhali is itself in bad shape having to hurtle along with shortage of trainers. The poor state of affairs in the IHT is attributed to the fact that the training capacity of the institute remains at the level of 50 students it had started out with even though the number of students over the years has grown nearly six times.

All this is reflective of the governments' lack of emphasis and focus on skill training in the medical sector. One wonders why there are only two government technical institutes in the face of growing demand for technical education! On the other hand, of the 18 private sector institutes there are as many as 11 are located in Dhaka.

We should have more technical institutes equipped with necessary manpower on a priority basis. Private sector may be fiscally encouraged to set up more institutes. Basically, we would like the government to treat medical technology as a potential thrust sector. When this is done, the rest will follow.

Cheating on weights

Law to protect consumer rights brooks no delay

CONSUMERS in Dhaka and elsewhere in the country have long been subjected to being shortchanged by traders through use of faulty scales. In a recent move by RAB at a number of city markets it has been revealed that on an average a consumer was being sold 250 gram less of a product against a kilogram. Most shopkeepers and traders they checked in city's main markets like Karwan Bazaar were found to be in possession of two to three different kinds of scales. To top it all, the scales also had the BSTI's seal of approval!

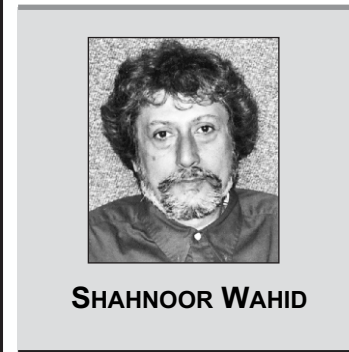
Cheating of customers in "weight" has been in practice for decades in this country, particularly in the metropolitan cities. Consumers are already overburdened by the spiraling of prices; hence being cheated in this way also adds to their miseries.

While checks are being carried out aimed at ensuring sale of commodities in exact weight through use of correct scales it should not be restricted to the traditional items of consumption. Cheating on weight in the sale of fertilizer in sealed bags should also be severely dealt with. We also need to carry out random checks on various items of consumer goods sold by retailers in packs.

We wish to see an end to this evil practice. As much as we are thankful to the administration for initiating the move on this matter of great public interest and welfare we wish to see this as a regular phenomenon. Consumers, particularly those belonging to the lower fixed income groups have already been subjected to all kinds of trials, tribulations and neglect.

We wish to see the much awaited law on consumer protection enacted without any further loss of time. The people must be sensitized about their rights as buyers to take recourse to law when they are not given their money's worth.

Make politics difficult for thugs



SHAHNOOR WAHID

IF the travesty of present politics in Bangladesh does not make us any wiser to take bolder steps, then God help this nation. Now is the time to blow the horn and rend asunder the walls of Jericho. The literate and patriotic people cannot afford to remain detached anymore if they wish to survive the next onslaught that would obliterate them once and for all.

This is Armageddon -- combat against the forces of darkness. To be pointedly precise, against the evil politicians who have been ripping apart this country of immense potential. Unfortunate but true, the present political system is creating more evil-doers than anything else. Therefore, the time has come to rethink the entire system. The time has come to make politics difficult for the thugs.

SENSE & INSENSIBILITY

With such a motley band of looters at the helm, can we expect anything good and noble to happen in the country? When we cannot even trust most of them with our wallets, can we trust them with millions of dollars that are placed under them as development funds? It would be stating the obvious if we say no. And yet, we let these people dupe us during every election with their false promises, with their deceptive smiles, and with their photos taken in some holy shrines.

Think for a while, learned readers. The cleansing drives against the criminalised politicians, now being undertaken by the law-enforcing agencies as per directive of the caretaker government, would have been lot easier had politics been made difficult in the first place. Isn't it downright silly that we vote to power some highly corrupt people, allow them to loot the state coffers unabatedly for five years, and then go after them? What a shame! We have been doing it again and again!

This is perhaps the folly, something of idiotic proportions, that is embedded in the system we call democracy -- that allows thugs, murderers, smugglers, cheats, heroin dealers, and bank loan defaulters to contest general elections and reach the zenith of power! Imagine the orgy of looting

that follows!

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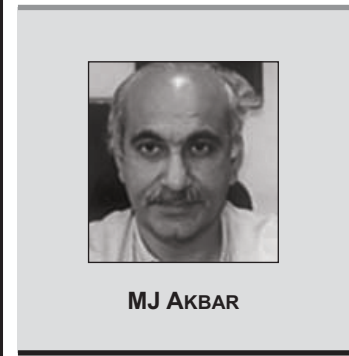
It would be stating the obvious if we say no. And yet, we let these people dupe us during every election with their false promises, with their deceptive smiles, and with their photos taken in some holy shrines. Height of hypocrisy! Without even thinking twice, we go to stand in the queue to cast our precious votes for these ruffians!

Is there any way out? How can we reverse the situation? How can we ensure honest and competent people coming to politics with the

noble mission of undertaking pro-people economic and social welfare projects? Are there such people in this corruption-infested society whom we could trust with our honour, dignity, and money? We have little mental strength left to think of anything that is good. Our faculty of thinking has suffered many bruises in the recent past.

Yes, in the past months we have been going deeper into the whirlpool of despair. There have been none we could turn to. We have been sadly disappointed by the lack of integrity in an elderly university professor. We have been shocked to silence by the arrogant and selfish acts of a number of senior judges. We have been stunned by the partisan role of a large section of civil administration officials. We have been

Three cheers, Bengaluru!



MJ AKBAR

HERE is Geoffrey Boycott when you really need him? Hiding in South Africa, I bet, instead of taking on the yobs who are making Shilpa Shetty cry in England.

Boycott, the dour-faced, sour-tongued Yorkshireman who used to bat for England in the days when England had batsmen, and is now a cricket commentator, rarely misses a chance to tell his television audiences in India about his obsession with Shilpa, a semi-successful Bollywood actress whose USP, in her own words, lies in her curves rather than her thespian skills.

In India, according to confidential sources, each time he has come out to bat for Shilpa, Boycott has had to retire hurt. This was the moment for Boycott to take charge of the airwaves in London, and tell Jackie and Jade Goody how to pronounce Shilpa: a drunken sway, that is, shway, followed by a long "a."

He could have added that the accent comes from Bangalore, the internet city that has taken thousands of jobs away from the Goody's, as well as from the Tweedys, which, I hope, is the real reason why Shilpa makes Jade feel sick.

BYLINE

You could not click open a television screen in India when the story broke, without those heavy-lidded, poignant, tearful eyes looking at you, followed immediately by a shot of bare back or flashing midriff. Jade, Jackie, Jo and Jack have been good for Shilpa. A few weeks ago Shilpa Shetty told an Indian journalist that she wasn't dating anyone at the moment. This was your chance, Geoff Boycott, to don the shining armour, and slay celebrity upstarts with the ferocity of your Yorkshire accent. You blew it, Geoff.

There used to be a time, dear Jade, Jackie, Jo and Jack (do the Channel 4 producers make up these names in pursuit of alliteration, or are they for real?), when grandfather Tweedy, along with grandmother Goody, used to keep dirty black Indians out of their Bangalore compound unless the dirty black Indians were servants.

Sorry, Jade, Jackie, Jo and Jack, but Shilpa is an independent girl now, and when you call her an "Indian" do so in that nice way like when you use "American." We don't even want to hear the little twist you attach to "Frog."

Shilpa has already changed the name of Bangalore, an Anglicisation, to the original Bengaluru. And given the profits that software companies in her city, like Infosys and Wipro, have just declared, she is about to take a few thousand more jobs that the Goody's would have got if they hadn't invested so much of their time into becoming yobs. That is the sort of sickening news that should really make your skin crawl.

In my search for unimpeachable objectivity, I turned to the newspaper that has fought the Crimean War and protected civilisation each time civilisation needed protection from the brown,

black, or yellow races, *The Times*.

This august organ, unable to verify such a lofty incident for itself, reported that Indian media had "also noticed an exchange between Jade Goody's boyfriend Jack Tweedy and Shilpa. In the incident, featured in the Celebrity Big Brother highlights, Tweedy's comment was bleeped out -- although there were reports that he had called her a "[expletive deleted]" Paki.' A Channel 4 spokeswoman denied that he had used that phrase."

I wonder why the British media had not noticed this. Maybe they were at the pub when this was happening. *The Times* clearly did not have the time to ask Channel 4 for the original tapes to find out for itself.

Instead, in the following paragraph, a large number of big words were used to disguise one small word. "A spokesman for the program said that the social interactions and dynamics of the group were integral to the Big Brother story, and viewers had a right to see them. However, there was a need for this to be balanced with the duty not to broadcast offensive material."

Social. Interactions. Dynamics. Integral. Knock me down with a beanstalk celebrity: Is this televi-

sion, or a thesis on cultural dissonance among the remoter tribes of Samoa? That sounds suspiciously like a huge number of letters to screen four letters. Still, we do have an admission. Clearly there was "offensive material."

What would Shilpa have taken offence at? She is a big girl now and fully aware of the facts of life, including one or two that might have escaped ordinary journalists. It must be the "Paki" bit. Did Jack believe that she was a Pakistani? No. Jackie, his girlfriend Jade's mother, had been calling Shilpa an "Indian" if you recall, and unless Jack is totally deaf he must have heard his virtual mother-in-law use the epithet.

Is it possible that Jack doesn't know the difference between an Indian and a Pakistani? That would make Jack an utter ass. While we cannot rule out that possibility, we should discount it.

Let us assume that the splendid British educational system, in which the teaching of history has improved by quantum leaps during the decade of Tony Blair, had informed Jack that although Britain did rule a united sub-continent, India and Pakistan went their separate ways in 1947.

We can only conclude, there-

angered by the hordes of so-called politicians who gave us false promises but remained engaged in cheating, lying, and conniving against the people. We have been surprised by the deceitful acts of some advisers of the previous caretaker government who, we had thought, were above such pettiness.

Now, the newly formed caretaker government, more like the last straw to hold on to, has appeared before the drowning nation. The expectant million eyes are now directed towards the "league of gentlemen" (and one lady) who have volunteered to shoulder the Herculean responsibilities. The nation has placed its full trust on them. They cannot afford to fail and let down the entire nation. They have to be extraordinarily courageous in performing their duties, knowing full-well that this time they have the whole nation, minus some corrupt politicians, behind them. If the people are the ultimate source of all power, then the caretaker government has the people behind it.

This time the caretaker government and the armed forces have to work together to translate the dreams of the common masses

into reality, and not the corrupt dreams of some corrupt politicians who want to go to power stepping on the shoulders of the people, and then loot the coffers. The armed forces are very much a part of the people, as they were during the Liberation War in 1971, therefore they have every right to get involved in taking the nation forward. There is no scope to do politics with, or about, that.

Therefore, purge the nation of the thugs once and for all. Set standards for doing politics. Pave the way for honest, hard working, and pro-progress people to sit in parliament. Let every citizen have an identity card. Let there be transparent ballot boxes in every booth. Let the voter list be corrected and updated. Transfer controversial and partisan polling officers. Apprehend the big and small fries controlling the underworld. Catch the godfathers who wear civil masks during daytime and walk amongst us.

These are the steps that the caretaker government will have to take to make politics difficult for the thugs.

Shahnoor Wahid is Senior Assistant Editor of The Daily Star.

fore, that "Paki" has now become a term of abuse that stretches across national boundaries, like "Blackie" or "Nigger" in Father Tweedy's youth. If the yobs don't want you in their neighbourhood, they call you a "[expletive deleted] Paki."

I think I know what really broke poor Shilpa's heart and turned her large lustrous eyes into limpid pools of unshed tears. It was the fact that her fellow-celebrities refused to eat the chicken/turkey that she made. That was insult upon injury. There is some confusion about whether the bird in question was a chicken or turkey. Even the hallowed *Times* cannot make up its mind.

However, it was dead, and it was in the oven, and Shilpa had cooked it. Or did Shilpa cook more than one meal? But, to get to the point, Jo O'Meara had a few things to say about that chick-turk, but mainly that it was undercooked and too spicy. I really can't see what Jo was so upset about. This is precisely what she gets each time she steps out to a London restaurant for curry.

I would not be surprised if Shilpa had taken advice from other Indians, and been told unambiguously that when she did cook for others on the show she must not think of herself, that she must sacrifice her normal Indian tastes and deliberately under-cook and over-spice the bird. Otherwise, the British would never recognise what is passed off to them as Indian food. The food critic in Danielle shifted gear to health faddist. She taunted Shilpa for using her hands while cooking.

Danielle, who was obviously the class idiot, was not too sure whether Indians or Chinese ate with their hands. No one has taken

poor Danielle to a Chinese restaurant, obviously.

But yes, Danielle, we Indians do eat with our hands when we are not pretending to be British.

Danielle may be uninformed about Chinese culinary habits, but she is no novice when it comes to the sly invective. Channel 4 did not choose her for her intellect, but they had to select her for some reason.

"You don't know where her hands have been," Danielle said. Oooh, We are talking civilisation here, are we Danielle? Danielle, my dear, why don't you have a nice long shower, with a proper scrub, and discover the merits of soap and water? They are good for the soul and terrible for germs.

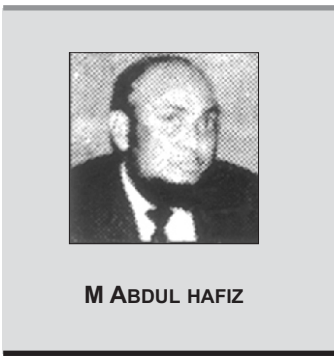
The results are not yet in, so one doesn't know how much this cultural crisis has helped the ratings of Celebrity Big Brother. But it has certainly helped the ratings of Shilpa Shetty, whose film career has been a bit on the wane of late.

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M.J.Akbar is Chief Editor of the Asian Age.

The rumpus over torture



M ABDUL HAFIZ

MAHMOUD Ahmedinejad, the radical president of Iran, is constantly under threat from a bellicose Israel, and her western patrons, for pursuing the country's nuclear ambitions. The embattled president, however, gives a damn to the threats, either of a UN sanction or an outright invasion of Iran, with which the western powers, particularly the US and Israel, have been routinely intimidating the Mullah-ruled Islamic republic.

As the pressure built up on Iran in recent days to suspend her uranium enrichment, Ahmedinejad, in a bold riposte, has doubled the country's enrichment capacity, only to earn more displeasure of the West. Compared to him, his prede-

PERSPECTIVES

Yet Bush, Cheney and Blair parade around, draping themselves in moral justifications for their inhuman deeds and despicable acts, and a torture story is fabricated against none other than a docile Khatami who still believes in, and works for, a dialogue between the sworn enemies. Indeed, it is quite a possibility that the two Iranian exiles in London are acting as neo-conservative agents to block any possible rapprochement with Iran so that a spanking new Armageddon can be staged in the Middle East against that country!

cessor, a docile Muhammad Khatami, is regarded as a moderate in western circles. During his presidency he, for a while, floated the idea of a "dialogue of the civilizations" extensively to repair Iran's strained relations with the West -- particularly the US -- in the aftermath of the 1976 Islamic revolution.

His efforts, however sincere, hardly bore any fruit, but he remained the West's favourite for his reconciliatory stance.

When Khatami visited the US last September he called on the US and Iran to shun verbally assaulting each other in the interest of a dialogue that could build trust and eliminate the friction between the two countries.

Khatami said that the pre-

condition for any dialogue was to "eliminate the language of threat."

In recognition of Khatami's overture to resolve conflict by talking rather than by military confrontation, the venerable university of St. Andrews invited him to United Kingdom for conferring on him an honorary degree, to be followed by a speech at the Royal Institute of International Affairs in London. So far so good.

However, a spanner was thrown in the whole program by two Iranian dissidents based in London, who claimed to have been imprisoned and tortured in Iran during the presidency of Khatami. Under Section 134 of Britain's Criminal Justice Act of 1988, torture, committed wherever in the world, is a

crime under British law, and its perpetrator can be tried in the UK. Thus, Khatami might still be arrested and tried while touring the UK as its valued guest.

The bizarre possibility, duly fanned by interested quarters in the UK itself, exploded like a bombshell, throwing up a plethora of questions. If Khatami can be arrested in the UK for unconfirmed alleged torture, how does British Prime Minister Tony Blair escape arrest for dispatching British troops to Afghanistan and Iraq, where they resorted to the worst forms of torture in numerous detention facilities for the captives?

Why are not Condoleezza Rice, Donald Rumsfeld, Dick Cheney, and even President George Bush -- all responsible for illegal invasion

and slaughter of at least a million civilians including women and children -- arrested when they visit the UK? Does the British law protect the Anglo-Americans from its reach? Does it exempt government officials while they are in office, and punish them when they become private citizens?

Not only that there are no convincing answers to these questions, we are, in fact, witnessing the operation of the neo-conservative assumption that there is one rule of law for the US and its allies and another for those not subsumed in this category.

The neo-cons maintain that whatever the US and its allies or puppets do in the interest of US hegemony is defensible and permissible. When the president and vice president of the United States publicly defend and advocate torture, and ram legislation relating to it through the US Congress, it is downright hypocritical of them and their country to condemn others for torture.

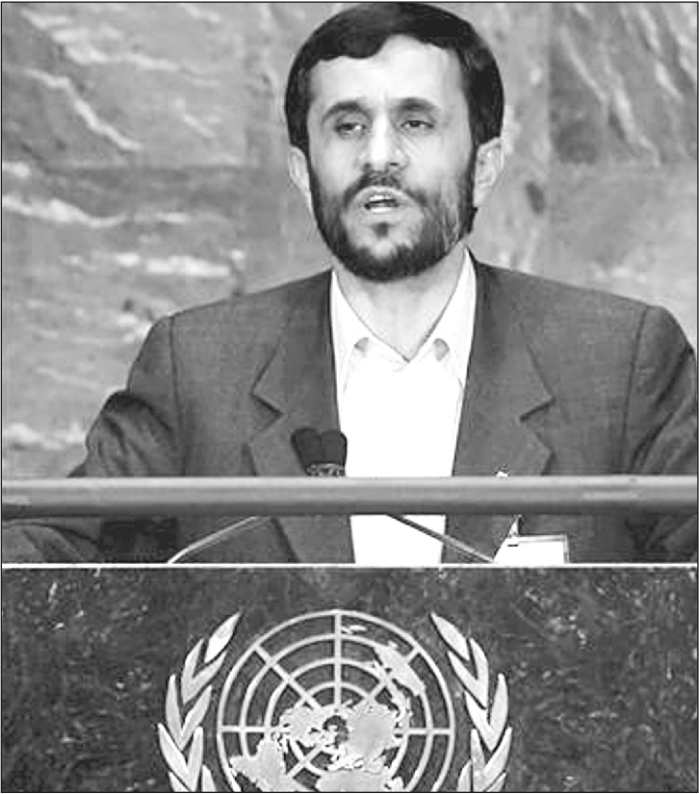
Perhaps the Americans overlooked the naked application of double standards when Iraq's Saddam Hussain was put on a mock trial and subsequently hanged for his crimes, but the rest

of world does observe how the American, British and Israeli governments commit far greater crimes by illegally invading countries, targeting civilian populations, and torturing detainees with impunity.

Notwithstanding enormous bloodshed and destruction of infrastructure in Afghanistan and Iraq by British and American troops, the British left-wing academics and human rights activists continue to help the neo-conservatives in America, and the latter's cohorts in Britain, to star a war in Iran also.

In a way, this is what the British left does when it agitates for the arrest of Khatami, while leaving Labour PM Tony Blair to commit more crimes against humanity. Already his crimes dwarf any that can, if at all, be attributed to a "moderate" Khatami, and even to the just executed Saddam of Iraq.

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Brig (ret'd) Hafiz is former DG of BIISS.