

KALEIDOSCOPE

Contractual appointments

Selectivity essential

CONTRACTUAL appointments are not unique to any administration, but when these become a pervasive phenomenon they cause more harm than good to the very system that the appointments are supposed to invigorate. In the case of our administration the latter is more likely to be the case if the number of public servants reemployed after retirement or have had their service tenure extended, continues to be at the current level. One wonders what the compulsions are for the government to fill up more than 200 administrative posts with retirees and even outsiders, as reported in this newspaper recently.

Admittedly, employing people on contract is needed sometimes to fill up a technical post, or the job sensitivity requires continuity that might be snapped if the incumbent goes on retirement. But this obligation should occur rarely and the option should be exercised carefully and indeed very selectively. It is regrettable that in most cases these appointments have been motivated by partisan consideration rather than that of benefit to the state. Looking at the list of the appointees the criticism in large part appears valid.

Apart from the tag of partisanship that the government has to wear because of this, the impression such appointments give is that there are not enough qualified persons to step into the shoes of those that are going on retirement. And this impression is even more reinforced when one finds that most of the top appointments at present are being held by retirees, including that of the cabinet secretary.

And when the situation is juxtaposed with the number of senior officers that are OSD, the matter assumes a critical proportion. Can we endure a situation where in the administration there are several hundred public servants on so-called special duty, and getting paid for doing nothing, while at the same time several are being retained after retirement or inducted from outside.

The arrangement is counterproductive for many reasons, not least of all for the fact that it saps the morale of the incumbents since it stunts the prospect of promotion and vertical rise of the serving cadres. We urge the government to be very selective in this regard if not do away with it altogether.

Bangladeshi nurses in Libya

They must be free to leave

REPORTS of Bangladeshi medical staff, especially nurses, not being allowed to leave embattled Libya are worrying. As our correspondent now in Choucha on the Tunisia-Libya frontier notes, a number of Bangladeshis fleeing Libya have spoken of many nurses being compelled to work in hospitals, tending to those wounded in the armed clashes between government and rebel forces. It is also quite natural to suppose that many of the wounded are individuals caught in the air raids over Libya by western forces. While it is perfectly understandable that those wounded in the war as also others will be in need of treatment, it is inconceivable that foreigners working in these hospitals will be detained against their will.

Libya is now in a state of increasing devastation as a result of the military clashes between Col. Gaddafi's forces and the opposition. Add to that the attacks launched on his forces by the West. In such conditions, with uncertainty surrounding the state of things, tens of thousands of foreign migrant workers have chosen to make their way out of the country. Bangladeshis working in Libya happen to include a diversity of professional groups --- doctors, nurses, teachers, factory workers and others --- all of whom are now in a quandary as to how to save themselves by fleeing. Many have already returned home, albeit empty-handed. But with the Libyan forces reportedly not allowing some women nurses from Bangladesh by having them get off a vehicle taking them to the border, the situation can only be imagined.

We think the Libyan authorities, for all the desperate straits they are in, should be approached by the Bangladesh mission in Tripoli regarding an uninterrupted departure of our nurses from that country. Obviously the Libyans cannot guarantee their safety of life. And compelling the nurses to stay back amounts to treating them as hostages. That is unac-



SYED FATTAHUL ALAM

USE of unparliamentary language has become a culture in the Jatiya Sangsad (JS) or National

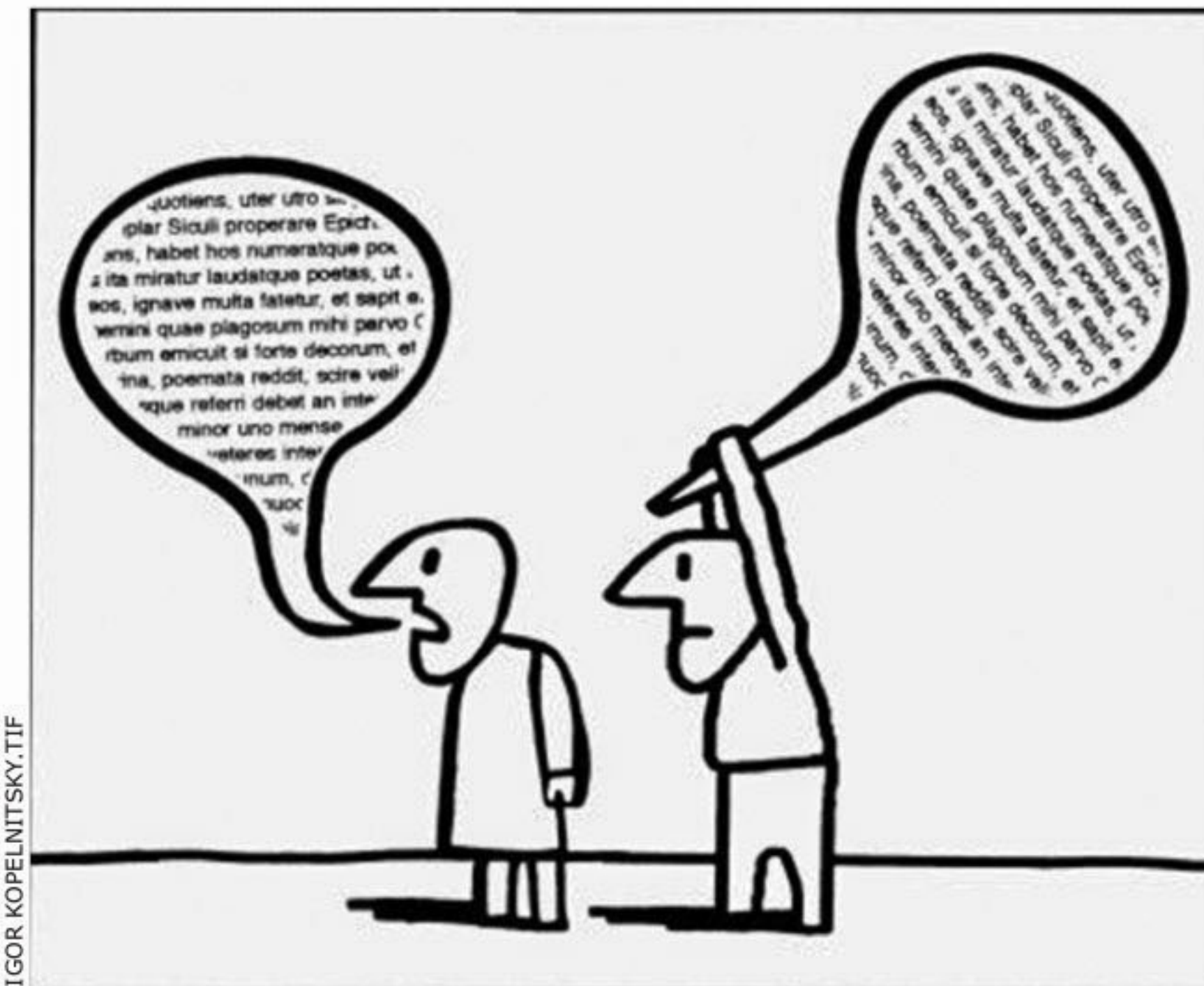
Assembly. In fact,

the term unparliamentary is rather too broad to convey its exact connotation, especially in the particular context. We are not aware if any other democracy in the world has this matchless culture of addressing the leaders of their opponent party with violently offensive and unspeakable words. But it is so common in our Parliament that the lawmakers have no qualm about it.

Exchange of vile language became so intense in the Parliament last Wednesday (March 23) in our parliament that a lawmaker from the Treasury bench was compelled to protest vehemently. Abdul Matin Khasru, who was law minister during Awami League's (AL) previous stint in power found the invective being traded between members of Parliament from the ruling party and the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) so intolerable that he compared he compared that with the kind of abusive language used in the "red light districts."

Even the Speaker of the House expressed his helplessness in the face of swear words-riddled tirades the parliamentarians were hurling at one another. Though the barrage of rude words used in the JS by the "honourable" Members of Parliament (MPs) against one another -- between the Treasury and Opposition members, to be precise -- are generally expunged from the minutes of the discussions that hardly matters in practice. For once those foul words are uttered and are on air, what is the use of expunging them from records?

But while parliamentarian Matin Khasru was forced in desperation to draw the "red light district" analogy to describe the obscenities being



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hurled at each other in that JS session, he was not exaggerating. Interestingly, as if not to be out-matched by their male colleagues, some women MPs, too, were found engaged in a similar exercise of showing their opponent party leaders, no matter if they are alive or dead, with all kinds of abuse in existence.

It was at least one instance that the lawmakers were oblivious of their gender differences and proved to be equally at ease in calling one another (of course between opposite benches) names! A rare occasion of oneness, indeed!

The once-customary commonly held belief that parliament was the domain of the educated and cultured people has of late become of a tale of old. But those good words have lost their usual meaning nowadays. One would hardly like to use those good words when one is talking about our

parliamentary discourses. One of our journalists in an exclusive of his in this paper used the term "debate" to describe the exchange of tirades in the JS.

If truth be told, the proper term is yet to be invented or coined to relate what happens during JS sessions. Guardians of children avoid listening to the parliamentary sessions for fear of spoiling them. One wonders if the MPs who with a vengeance resort to shouting such swearwords at their opponents in the JS would really want their elders and children to hear those unspeakable words in their drawing room. Had not the media, especially the newspapers, self-censored the so-called "debates" in printed form, then no one would dare to bring those papers to the breakfast table.

It is hardly surprising that many political leaders are used to throwing

a tantrum in that manner unabashedly show up in public functions like heroes. Shame is a word that is not in their dictionary.

Do these lawmakers have no sympathy for the people who took the trouble of standing in long queues to cast their votes for them? Or have our parliamentarians taken their constituents for granted? It, however, will not be fair to say "our parliamentarians" here because we have also MPs of the stature of Abdul Matin Khasru, who have protested against such practice in the JS in the strongest terms and justly criticised them in the strongest possible terms in the House.

But why the parliamentary debates have come to such a pass? When have decency and civility bidden the JS farewell? Is it only the confrontational nature of our politics or something with a deeper root behind the unhealthy growth of this "culture"? It is for the researchers in social psychology to unearth its cause. Aghast at manner of our MPs' speaking in Parliament, the well-meaning have been giving vent to their resentments in both the electronic and the print media.

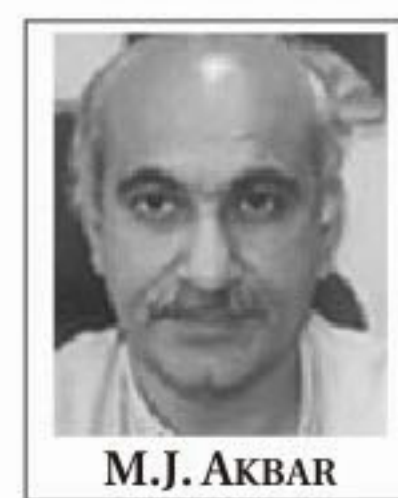
But it is clear from their stubbornness in this particular aspect of their behaviour at the JS, criticism in the media is not enough to persuade the errant lawmakers to refrain from their obnoxious culture of verbal abuse in the House. Even the plea of the Speaker Abdul Hamid in God's name could not prevail upon those lawmakers hell bent on using abusive words.

To all appearances, pleas and requests are not adequate to make our abuse-happy lawmakers stop. Mere words are generally lost on them. The Speaker of House has a big role to play. It will perhaps be necessary to introduce the provision to penalise such lawmakers who use abusive words in the House. Without these means, making JS effective and functional will remain a far cry.

The writer is Editor, Science@Life, The Daily Star.

BYLINE

Cool Domestic Happiness



M.J. AKBAR

THE British existed in India for over two centuries. They should have co-existed. They would not have needed a prime minister in

2011, David Cameron, to fiddle around with ideas like Gross Domestic Happiness, his latest barometer to gauge the welfare of society. Indians have long preferred GDS to GDP: Gross Domestic Self-satisfaction. A 19th century Cameron would have caught on to the fact that life is something more than a mere industrial revolution.

GDS cannot be either measured or implemented by governments, whose only obsession is to boss around or pocket paybacks whenever possible. Indians do like a bit of authority, but, alas, only in areas where they don't get any, like municipal services. When it comes to pleasure, they don't hang around waiting for permission.

On Thursday March 24, when India defeated Australia in the quarter-finals of the World Cup, an estimated 50% of the country's cricket fans took a half-holiday. This estimate is mine, based on empirical evidence collected from morning traffic in Delhi. There was no snarl on the roads, just a grudging smile. On Wednesday March 30, when India plays Pakistan in the semi-finals, the roads will be beaming with joy, since 90% of the fans will stay at home. Most of them will begin their half-

holiday at 10 am, arguing, quite correctly, that it is anti-national to waste as precious a national resource as petrol at post-Libya prices just to show your face for a few minutes in the office. I can proudly lay claim to the proposition that the half-holiday is an Indian invention, particularly one that begins at 10 am. A full holiday to watch cricket on TV is for wimps. Strong men stick to half-holidays.

Prayers will be offered, and emotions invested in victory, because we Indians take our cricket-nationalism very seriously indeed. But that is not the only spirit that will consume

Pakistani fans waving the Indian flag as a gesture of friendship.

May God ensure that on Wednesday Pakistan succumb for less than a hundred runs, and Sachin Tendulkar alone scores that many to win and get his 100th 100 simultaneously, but just in case God is in a different mood, I hope Mohali and Chandigarh will display the sportsman's spirit that turned Lahore into a magic city in 2004. It would be too depressing if the culture of our subcontinent became hostage to political conflict.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has seized the moment by inviting

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fans, or many fans will consume, on Wednesday. The moment the last ball is bowled, there will be a frenzy of conversation since India is a nation of analysts. Emotional Pakistan will be elated or depressed, but India will analyse whatever the result, whether over tea or something more sensational.

The good news, however, is that India and Pakistan no longer treat cricket as an existential conflict. One of the most moving moments of my life came in Lahore in 2004, when the joy of an Indian victory in a one-dayer soared at the sight of young

Asif Zardari and his technical counterpart Yousaf Raza Gilani to Mohali. "Cricket diplomacy" is a bit of a misnomer since nothing actually moves on the diplomatic front as a consequence. Rajiv Gandhi invited General Zia ul Haq to Jaipur in 1987; and Dr. Singh was host to General Pervez Musharraf in 2005. Later, Dr Singh declined a reciprocal gesture.

The first did not lead to a breakthrough, and the second did instigate collapse. But governments are only one part of the India-Pakistan equation. Friendship between the people is far more important than friendship between two govern-

ments. Cricket builds relations at the broad, popular base, even if the apex of the pyramid is withering.

Cricket-chemistry is such alchemy on the subcontinent precisely because India and Pakistan have equal tubs of talent. Their individual and collective behaviour is visibly different. India is a professionally inter-woven unit; while Pakistan gives the impression of being a collection of temperamental mavericks. But environment, and opportunity, could make Pakistan's seeming weakness into an asset; when such talent is watered by passion, it can blossom. You can never tell on which day who will become the genie in the Pakistan bottle.

India, on the other hand, revolves around four batsmen and one bowler: Sachin Tendulkar, Virender Sehwag, Gautam Gambhir, Yuvraj Singh and Zaheer Khan. Yuvraj is on song, but the defining difference is Sachin, who, after two decades at the crease, has become the coolest, most disciplined genius in the history of the game. We will not be privileged to see his like again. Sachin Tendulkar has nothing left to prove, but he does have something left to say: that when the history of the game is written victory at Mohali on March 30, 2010 will be among his laurels.

That would be the ultimate in Cool Domestic Satisfaction.

The writer is editor of *The Sunday Guardian*, published from Delhi, *India on Sunday*, published from London and Editorial Director, *India Today* and *Headlines Today*.

THIS DAY IN HISTORY

March 28

1930

Constantinople and Angora change their names to Istanbul and Ankara.

1942

World War II: In occupied France, British naval forces raid the German-occupied port of St. Nazaire.

1946

Cold War: The United States State Department releases the Acheson-Lilienthal Report, outlining a plan for the international control of nuclear power.

1959

The State Council of the People's Republic of China dissolves the Government of Tibet.

1965

Thousands join Dr King in Alabama rally. Martin Luther King leads protests to the steps of the state capital of Montgomery in Alabama.

1971

Bengali military officers as well as civilian officials successfully keep Chittagong free. However, fighting between the Pakistan army and personnel of East Pakistan Rifles and the policies reported from different parts of the country. The army continues its operations in Dhaka, killing Bengali academics, students and other professionals at random.

1999

Kosovo War: Serb paramilitary and military forces kill 146 Kosovo Albanians in the Izbica massacre.