

Scrounging off public services



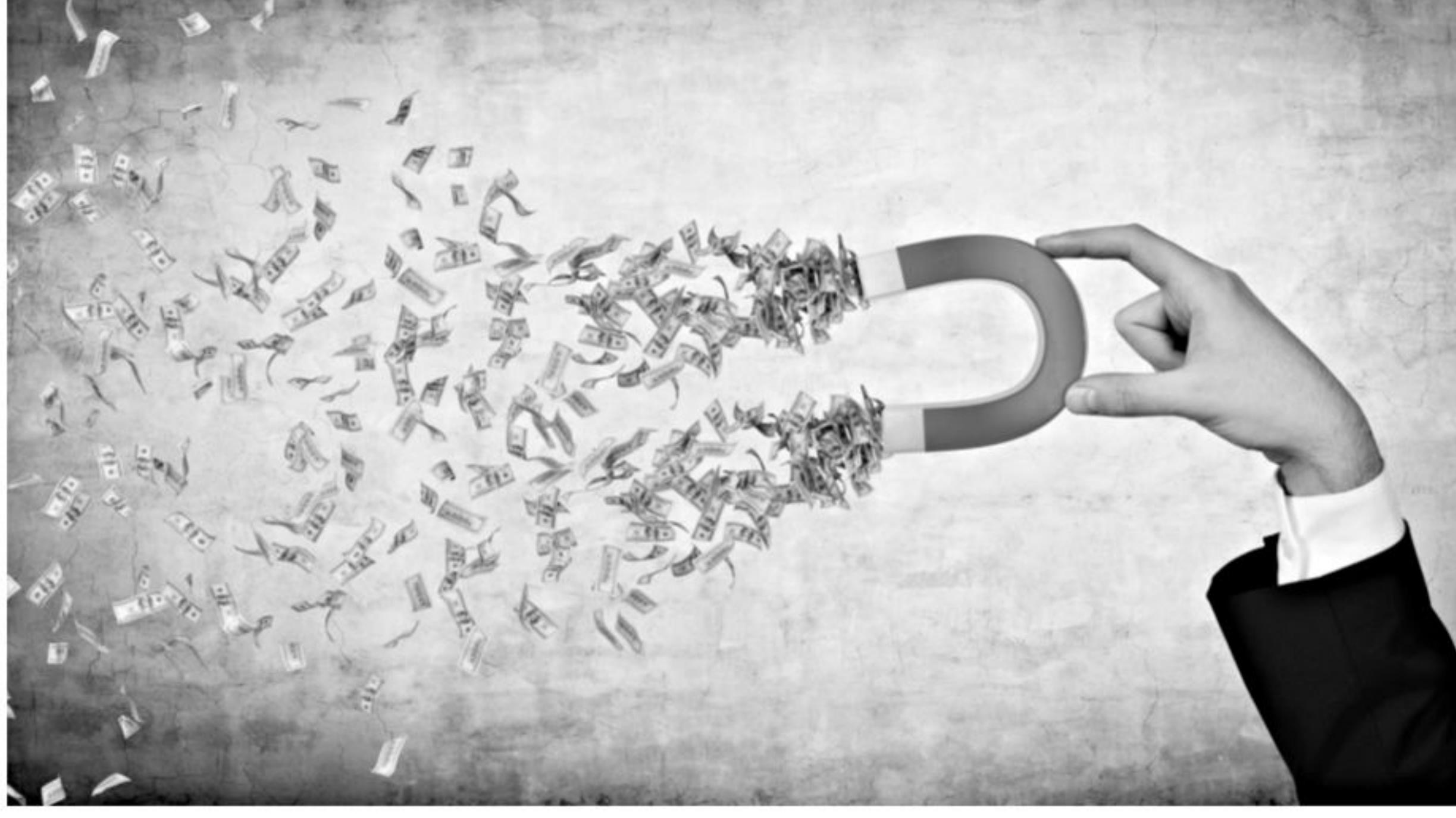
PLEASURE IS ALL MINE
SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

On July 23, the RAB, in a surprise swoop on the National Institute of Traumatology and Orthopedic Rehabilitation (NITOR), popularly known as *Pongu* hospital arrested 18 brokers (*dalals*) who have been exploiting the patients' desperate need for treatment.

The raid and arrest hogged news headlines and the unearthing of an illicit ring—that included a few women members—was laudable. But to ensure a deterrent effect on the tyranny of the self-styled 'fixers' at the public facilities, much more will be needed. We have to eliminate the root-causes of the malady traced to the mismanagement of medicare facilities. This induces collusive arrangements between vested quarters apt to create an artificial scarcity to extort money from the poor and vulnerable landing at the hospitals.

In the Twitter world the catching of the criminals evoked reactions demanding that wicked men behind the petty operatives be apprehended and the networks be busted.

Take the case of 'wheelchair mafia' allegedly operating at some public hospitals. Patients, which include the elderly, in need of wheelchairs arrive; their attendants look around for a wheel chair and then go on a hunt for it. They may spot the wheelchairs neatly lined up at a corner but withheld from potential users. Unless the latter coughs up a 'toll' they can't get their hands on it. Those in charge of welcoming the patients should have



reflexively rolled out the wheelchairs in their direction, have them seated securely and taken them to a designated point; instead they are guilty of a double offence. Not only are they denying the service to care-seekers but also extorting money for it. What are their supervisors doing when employees under their charge create artificial scarcity of patient carriers to make a fast buck?

In a broader spectrum, they fleece the lean pockets of poor patients or their relatives posing/acting as intermediary between the already coerced clients and abetting insiders on a promise of providing certain services. These include helping to jump the queue, fixing appointments and arranging admission, medicine and

treatment, a sort of a package deal dangled before bewildered patients.

In the process, many queued-up patients may be thrown off-line and to their utter frustration, may have to go back home.

Overall, this is reflective of two aberrations of the system making it virtually dysfunctional: In the first place it makes a mockery of public hospitals which have been established with the sole purpose of providing treatment free of cost to ailing people. That's why patients from poor, even middle class households rush to such facilities for treatment. Many do arrive there in terminal condition or otherwise requiring emergency treatment maybe with bleeding injuries requiring immediate attention. And if in that dire

context, their relatives or attendants get pestered by hangers-on, subjected to mercenary bargaining or have to wait for an arrangement to be struck before any treatment can even start, their misery could only compound, often spinning beyond repair.

The second aberration is more serious, more corrosive in its effect: It bears the portents of eating into the vitals of not just a system but the society at large. Simply stated, the government has spent huge amounts of money to establish public facilities with recurring expenditures to keep them running. But alas! There you have parasitical people like locusts invasively living off the cream of such institutions.

This has a multiplier effect. It creates greed and spreads its tentacles. Even

builders of factories or apartments are resigned to the fact that they have to part with some money to the extortionists to ensure trouble-free execution of their projects. The cost of business having increased for the builder, he will mark up the prices of his services. The consumers will suffer in the end.

The ranks of the weak and vulnerable have been growing in Bangladesh as money being made out of thin air plucked by 'you-scratch-my back and I scratch yours' kind of colluding elements thriving on impunity.

It is the same attitude that created stock market bubbles, banking scams, and even globally, the apocalyptic financial meltdown of 2007-8.

One overarching ramification of all this is explained in simple terms: Ill-gotten money without any trace of origin will have evaded taxes or translated into flight of capital to safe havens. In this trend we are emerging as a noticeable player, certainly not our credit!

Unaccounted for money is susceptible to be ill-spent in drug markets, small arms purchases or financing hideous agendas. All this can destabilise a society.

A turn-around requires a Herculean effort. As Gandhi has put it, 'There is enough in the world for human need but not for human greed'. That is a powerful enough message to be heeded now. And, we must be up to the job of containing excessive greed because we are a conscientious nation deserving to see good sense ultimately prevailing in our midst.

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Apologies to Pablo Picasso



CHINTITO SINCE 1995

NIZAMUDDIN AHMED

I was shocked to see Pablo. Well, if you know him as Picasso, that's your shortcoming, rather your admittance of not being on first names with perhaps the world's most multi-talented painter. Neither of us wins because his name is

Pablo Diego José Francisco de Paula Juan Nepomuceno María de los Remedios Cipriano de la Santísima Trinidad Ruiz y Picasso.

He was shivering despite the July heat. Every time he wiped moisture from his balding head, he looked about nervously, head straight, the eyeballs doing the spectator in a tennis match.

His problem was twofold. Firstly, he could not draw Bangabandhu as passionately as a fifth grader. Secondly, his straight lines generate figures that are a distortion of reality, akin to, some may say childlike doodles.

One of the most gifted artists in the history of mankind, despite his notoriety, Pablo can no longer draw a human face that looks real. Acclaimed worldwide, including by French actress Brigitte Bardot when she was 21 and he 75, Pablo never imagined his cubist talent of disfiguring human figures could be rebuked and called to court.

He feared the worst. Would some pseudo connoisseur of the art world file a lawsuit for his oil on canvas "Girl with the Mandolin" (1910) because Ms. Fanny Tellier is distorted? He does not have Tk 5 crore. Would a *bhakto* of music be upset to see "The Three Musicians" (1921) as no one is recognisable? Will the judge start howling seeing "The Weeping Woman" (1937) because a child could do a better job?

Artists are simple people, usually. Pablo was terrified that an ambitious, greedy, fortune-seeking politician might use even the oil of his painting to butter up the high-ups. Would a judge take the case of disfigurement into cognisance? Would the police handle Pablo like a common criminal? They can occasionally be brutal deliberately in their show of loyalty. How would the master of interpenetrative geometrical forms draw if he were to be handcuffed?



Girl with the Mandolin, 1910 (left) and The Weeping Woman, 1937 (right) by Pablo Picasso.



Knowing his early dexterity in painting realistic portraits, the plaintiff politician and the judge asked Pablo Picasso to do a portrait of Bangabandhu so that they could prove how distorted the child drew. But, Pablo's painting of his mother 1896 (drawn when he was 15) was not real enough, no naturalist representational painter is, not even the works of traditional guru, the Frenchman William Bouguereau. And that's why he was shaking. How can he explain to those who remain unenlightened despite having university degrees and responsible appointments?

One of the problems with our educational regime is that all degrees follow a straight line, even peeping left or right is considered taboo and unnecessary. A vast storehouse of information on one theme, albeit relevant to

a degree, is fed to a student with very little time allowed for free thinking.

Generally, a student of law hardly wanders beyond the books of jurisprudence. Most engineers graduate without feeling the pulse of the society in which they will work. The medical practitioner seldom has the scope to realise that there is a life beyond the duty to save lives.

This situation is much due to our higher level education being offered as centric packages, with students almost never encouraged to tread on to other subject matters, even adjacent overlapping patches of knowledge. In the so-called universal education, the "learned" academic acquires knowledge to a certain extent in a particular polarised field without any mix of thoughts or activities that the real world is made of.

The faculty of independent thinking is nipped at primary level, in which stage the child has to write an answer, solve arithmetic or draw a scenery exactly as the teacher showed in class, otherwise the ten-year old gets a zero even if the answer was to the point. We have all seen all too helplessly children devastated because they partook in the exam as shown by Dad or Mom, but the teacher was not impressed, or knew only to go by the book. No prizes for innovation; that is too much hard work for the teacher.

Another major problem in Bangladesh, in a good number of instances, to practice politics, all one needs are materialistic desire, baseless aspiration, and loads of idle money. Pablo knows that. The more desperate candidates, of course, choose the oily path, which the politician and judge found only too slippery.

Being narrow law students, the complainant and the deliverer of justice, seemingly did not know a square from a circle, a Shakib from a Messi, or that there are shades other than black and white. Due to their constricted educational background, all they understood was that with the connivance of others equally intromitted they could gang up on this government officer because their common enemy seemed to have made a slip—printed a card with (distorted) Bangabandhu drawn by a child girl. The conspirators, fanned by their godfathers, obviously had an issue with the Upazilla executive officer because he was following the right path.

Does their lack of information absolve them from their responsibilities as a citizen? Not really, because people with much lesser formal education did not feel that a child's painting was abusive or disrespectful to the Father of the Nation. As for Bangabandhu, he would have in all probability rewarded the child painter for her talent, innocence and patriotism.

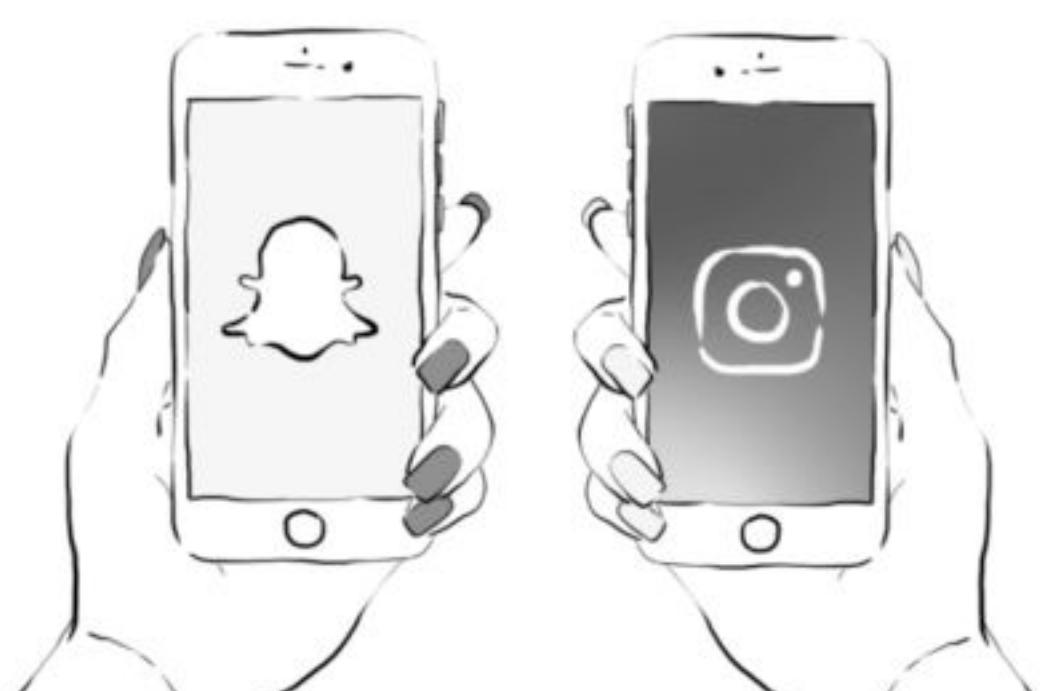
Personally I am put to shame because I was born in that historical town several scores ago. We share honours with the likes of Sher-e-Bangla AK Fazlul Huq, Rupashi Bangla poet Jibanananda Das, Bir Shreshta Captain Mohiuddin Jahangir, poet Sufia Kamal, singer Manabendra Mukherjee, magician Jewel Aich, TV personality Hanif Sanket...the list goes on.

Despite our array of glorious townsfolks, it worries me to a *nairiket* that the *Barishailla* tag may come to mean uneducated, uncouth, and uncivilised, unless we put a stop to such blatant misuse of rights and privileges. By the way, the nefarious practice is rampant in almost every other district.

As for the perpetrators of the conspiracy, the legal case, the judgement, the unlawful mistreatment of an officer, their collective notion about oil is limited to the edible kind and that which is applied to gain notches in the already slippery ladder to undeserved prosperity; obviously not extending to include a work of art. But they will go down in history as the first persons to be officially reprimanded for oiling.

Nizamuddin Ahmed is a practising Architect at BashaBari Ltd., a Commonwealth Scholar and a Fellow, a Baden-Powell Fellow Scout Leader, and a Major Donor Rotarian.

A WORD A DAY



Ephemera

noun

Things that exist or are used or enjoyed for only a short time.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 38 Try out
- 41 Open auditions
- 44 Perfect
- 45 Admit (to)
- 46 Muffles
- 47 Sordid
- 48 Retina setting
- 49 Radio's Glass
- 50 Volcano output
- 51 Phobias
- 52 Recurring theme
- 53 Binge
- 54 Fan's favorite
- 55 Charitable aid
- 56 Church sights
- 57 Lamb's lament
- 58 Corn Belt state
- 59 Judges
- 60 Discourage
- 61 Go bad
- 62 TV spots
- 63 Powerful people
- 64 Try out
- 65 Open auditions
- 66 Perfect
- 67 Admit (to)
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- 99 Charitable aid
- 100 Church sights
- 101 Lamb's lament
- 102 Corn Belt state
- 103 Judges
- 104 Discourage
- 105 Go bad
- 106 TV spots
- 107 Powerful people

DOWN

- 1 Evaluate
- 2 Not at home
- 3 Postmark part
- 4 Museum focus
- 5 Charitable aid
- 6 Church sights
- 7 Lamb's lament
- 8 Island dance
- 9 Mineral sources
- 10 Reckless
- 11 Mindful
- 12 George W.'s wife
- 13 Snitches
- 14 History segment
- 15 Retina setting
- 16 Radio's Glass
- 17 Volcano output
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- 98 Island dance
- 99 Mineral sources
- 100 Reckless

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

PALE	THAW
TAMER	RUNIN
OCEAN	ANGLE
WINDOW	ELS
ENDS	OCELOT
DOS	FOLLOW
WARCRY	SET
FINITO	CAMO
INK	WALLOW
SNAIL	ROUTE
HORNE	ASTER
WANT	BEES

BEETLE BAILEY



by Mort Walker



BABY BLUES



by Kirkman & Scott