

For the love of the camera!



NO STRINGS ATTACHED
AASHA MEHREEN AMIN

CAMERAS have always had a strange effect on people. While there is a group of people who are called camera shy, who will shun any attempts of

anyone trying to photograph them, who will grimace uncomfortably when the camera flashes and who end up looking a bit disoriented in almost all their pictures, there are others who revel in the presence of these contraptions. There are those who even crave for it so much that they will go to many lengths to just get that buzz from knowing that the camera is on them. This is after all, the time of the selfie generation – when anytime, anywhere is a selfie moment – even if it is at the precipice of a mountain, while walking along the rail tracks or perhaps to pose with an irritated grizzly. Needless to say that narcissism often overrides simple common sense or basic instincts of self preservation and thus the terrible selfie tragedies posted on Youtube that get millions of clicks.

When it comes to cameras used to record news for television, the passion for self promotion is much more intense and can reach illogical levels. Hardened criminals, for instance, in front of the news camera, have happily described in gory detail, how they murdered people and put them in sacks, or carried out complicated robberies. On national days there will be endless news clips of leaders of political parties and



THE WATCHER

SOURCE: WWW.NEWSDAY.CO.ZW

their denominations placing wreaths on monuments while their minions unceremoniously elbow each other just to fit into the frame and make it to the news headlines. Yes people may even fight like a pack of frenzied, starving wolves just to get themselves in front of the camera. The latest example of this puzzling obsession is when lawyers of

BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia, on October 19, got into a scuffle while competing to take the centre stage in front of TV cameras on the court premises in Bakshibazar. Thanks to our incorrigible video culture we actually can see a clip of this jaw dropping event through online news outlets. And let me tell you, you really have to see it to

believe it. Lawyers in their black gowns, dancing in the mud like boxers or demented magicians, tearing at each others' clothes, leaving some of them in a state of undress. All this just because they wanted to be in front of the camera during a media briefing soon after Khaleda Zia left the court premises after recording of her self-defense

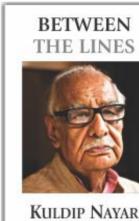
statements in the Zia Orphanage and Zia Charitable Trust graft cases. One must assume that this is one of the most prized positions to hold – to be the spokesperson at a news briefing on such an important case, the consequences of which will have great implications for the BNP. And to resort to physical violence and tearing of each others' garments inside the court premises takes this desire for publicity and party recognition to an insane level.

This, of course, explains why there are hundreds of people jostling around whenever the plaintiffs of a sensational case are in the court premises. Because everyone wants a piece of the limelight. TV cameras ensure instant fame and that is an opportunity nobody will give up. Thus it is quite common during a press conference regarding the trial or verdict of a high profile court case to find lawyers in their black gowns standing uncomfortably close to each other, even swaying to and fro a little with all the pushing and shoving. We see this on our TV screens and wonder with bewilderment – are these really individuals who have prestigious law degrees and have the privilege of representing their clients in the court? Certainly the scuffling lawyers in that highly disturbing yet undoubtedly entertaining video clip, seem to have forgotten where they were or even who they were. Perhaps they thought they were on a WWE stage. Perhaps it was the overbearing heat and humidity. Perhaps it was because there seems to be no insistence on basic decorum or even civilised behaviour required of lawyers in their workplace.

Aasha Mehreen Amin is Deputy Editor, Editorial and Opinion, The Daily Star.

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EC's reputation is on the line



BETWEEN THE LINES
KULDIP NAYAR

THE Election Commission has never done it before and had developed an independent status since TN Seshan. He had given it a stature which was admired by the electorate. But the way in which the EC is dilly-dallying with the poll

dates in Gujarat gives room to several conjectures. Some even see the hand of Prime Minister Narendra Modi who hails from Gujarat.

What it means is that the people have come to doubt the independence of the Commission. The Gujarat assembly's term ends on January 22, 2018 while that of the Himachal Pradesh on January 7. Last week, Chief Election Commissioner AK Joti announced the election date only for Himachal Pradesh and one doesn't know when the dates for Gujarat polls would be notified.

Understandably, this has created a controversy which could have been avoided with better management. Former CEC SY Quraishi has rightly commented that the move to break from the EC's convention of announcing elections together in states where incumbent governments are completing their terms within six months had raised "serious questions."

CEC Joti has cited relief and rehabilitation of the flood-affected in Gujarat as one of the reasons for the delay in poll announcement in the state. But nobody is buying this argument because, as former CEC TS Krishnamurthy said, "the emergency flood relief work is to be done by bureaucrats, not politicians. The Model Code of Conduct does not stand in the way of any emergency relief work. It does not prevent existing projects from continuing. Only new projects should not be announced during the MCC period."

The MCC is a common code that aims to provide a level-playing field to all contesting candidates during election season by guiding the conduct of the incumbent government, political parties and candidates.

"All this controversy could have been avoided with better management," Krishnamurthy said to a newspaper. "I suppose they (EC) could



have announced both (Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh polls) together, either one week before or one week after. I am not looking at whether the decision was influenced or not. I am concerned with whether, administratively, a solution could have been found. I think I would have found a solution."

This observation by the former CEC has put a question mark against the EC. Once again, the doubts that have come to the fore are that the Election Commission is run by the bureaucrats under the guidance of the central government. The image and reputation of the Commission has been severely damaged.

Take for instance what the Gujarat government did anticipating the announcement of poll dates in the state. The officials of the Vadodara Municipal Corporation's standing committee went into a huddle for one and a half hour to push ahead with a string of announcements. Chief Minister Vijay Rupani inaugurated several projects of development work worth Rs 780 crore besides extending free logistical services to Sri Sri Ravishankar's Diwali event in the city.

Not only that the Ahmedabad Municipal Council which conducted the *Shahri Garib Kalyan Mela*, distributed 3,262 kits including cheques, funds and bonds under the *Manav*

Garima Yojana with 4,103 getting the government largesse. The kits distributed included sewing machines, utensils, tri-cycles, dairy products, street-vending carts and other household items. The total sum of the kits and cheques distributed came to Rs 165 crore. The cheques included a minimum of Rs 2,000 given to school girls as Vidya Lakshmi bonds, Rs 5,000 to parents with two girls and who have undergone sterilisation, Rs 10,000 as a revolving fund by the AMC's Urban Community Development department and the highest Rs 50,000 for inter-caste marriage.

The big-ticket schemes include Rs 165.75-crore project for providing drinking water to the city from Mahi River at a capacity of 150 million litres per day and beautification of the Sursagar Lake at a cost of Rs 38 crore. Incidentally, beautification of the iconic lake was also undertaken before the 2012 Assembly polls. Union ministers and chief ministers of BJP-ruled states made a beeline to Gujarat to extol the government schemes.

The Prime Minister, too, visited the state soon after and kick-started the poll campaign with his usual scathing attacks on the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty. He went on to say that the "family will destroy Gujarat because it dislikes Gujarat and Gujaratis" and called the coming

assembly election in the state a fight between "development and dynasty."

The old question that comes to be raised yet again is whether the bureaucrats should at all be made members of the Commission? They are under the discipline of the Central Government and can be influenced. Although Seshan, a bureaucrat, disproved this thesis every bureaucrat cannot be a Seshan. The government's influence is inevitable.

We all remember the political storm created by former CEC N Gopalaswami when he *suo motu* sent a recommendation to the President that Election Commissioner Navin Chawla should be removed from office on the alleged ground of "partisanship". Gopalaswami's action did raise several eyebrows within the government on account of its timing as well as its departure from well-settled readings of the relevant constitutional provisions. Subsequently, Chawla was elevated to CEC's post on the advice of the

government which had rejected Gopalaswami's plea for his removal, saying there was no merit in the allegations against the Election Commissioner.

The noise raised over the appointment of an Election Commissioner makes little sense because it is a constitutional position. The government should itself be careful and not do anything which would cast a shadow on the independence or integrity of the Commission. The Commission itself should act in such a manner that there is no room for any controversy.

There is still time to retrieve the situation. The Election Commission should straightaway announce the dates of Gujarat poll to avoid any further challenge to its non-partisanship. Prime Minister Narendra Modi can save the situation and see to it that the Commission announces the date immediately. He is unnecessarily getting mixed up with the dates of Gujarat poll.

Kuldip Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.

QUOTABLE Quote

HERMANN HESSE
GERMAN-BORN POET, NOVELIST, AND PAINTER

Knowledge can be communicated, but not wisdom. One can find it, live it, be fortified by it, do wonders through it, but one cannot communicate and teach it.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Church group
- 5 Sore
- 11 Canyon sound
- 12 Evening bash
- 13 Teacher to sophs
- 14 Fez feature
- 15 Territorial struggles
- 17 Pot brew
- 18 Malia's sister
- 22 Stray cat's hangout
- 24 One of the Barymores
- 25 Island memento
- 26 Bauxite, for one
- 27 Claire of "Homeland"
- 30 Wood units
- 32 Insecure feeling
- 33 Gifted
- 34 Forensic workplace
- 38 Valiant
- 41 Victory goddess
- 42 Be intemperate
- 43 Foot or fathom
- 44 USC's conference
- 45 Stock holders
- DOWN**
- 1 Fall mo.
- 2 Beige
- 3 Laughing gleefully
- 4 Brittle candy
- 5 Hammett pooch
- 6 Rough Warn, cat-style
- 8 Form 1040 org.
- 9 Once called
- 10 Hair goo
- 16 Path
- 19 Monopoly railroad
- 20 Farm group
- 21 Brighton brews
- 22 Emmy winner
- Alan
- 23 Good for dieters
- 29 Chaperone
- 29 Long step
- 30 Engine part
- 31 Become talkative
- 35 Clickable picture
- 36 Related
- 37 Plays the ponies
- 38 1950s dance
- 39 Juan Peron's wife
- 40 DVR button
- letters

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

VEST SQUEAL
ACME EUROPE
SHOE PANNED
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