

# The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR  
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## Hostage to the greed of a few

### Saline shortage in public hospitals

**A**N unscrupulous nexus of a few corrupt persons in the Institute of Public Health (IPH) has caused scarcity of saline and other key medical supplies in the public hospitals, and there are more than 600 of them in the country, forcing those patients, who are supposed to get this free of cost, to buy from pharmacies outside. For many that is a tall task. But what is reprehensible is the reason behind the shortfall in production of saline bags and the unacceptable explanations that are being given out to us by the IPH.

Persons of responsibility entrusted to hold important positions in such vital establishments dealing with health, cannot get away by saying that the sudden decline in the fall of production of saline, by more than one-fourth of the quantity before the decline started in early July 2018, was because of shortage of raw materials. Senior officers are paid to see that the production cycle is not uninterrupted and unforeseen conditions are factored in the supply chain management, particularly of a fast-moving item such as saline.

The actual reason, as was reported in this paper yesterday, is the unholy alliance between the IPH management and private companies, to benefit them by reducing IPH production. And we are sure such a "magnanimous" gesture to help private saline producers was not without some reciprocity from the private producers. It is equally puzzling to hear different persons at different positions offer different timeframes regarding the duration when the production was zero.

The matter is serious, and those who play with the health safety of poor people should not go unpunished. We would hope that the ministry of health would enquire into the alleged unholy nexus and bring the culprits to book.

## Why the delay in implementation?

### Still no uniform university admission test

**E**IGHT years have passed since the education ministry had in principle decided to introduce a uniform or cluster system for university admission, yet, the government has failed to implement the system still after all these years. Even a decision to begin the uniform admission procedure with the agricultural universities from this year has been cancelled on grounds of "lack of time for preparations", although the decision was made in November last year.

The proposed system would save admission seekers time, cost and travel required to take admission tests at different public universities across the country, and the numerous hassles and pressures they face to prepare for the separate admission tests. In spite of all these benefits, some public universities have been opposing the implementation of the cluster system as it would reduce the income of the universities as well as teachers from the sale of admission forms and from invigilation and checking of answer scripts, according to ministry and UGC sources.

Whether it is due to lobbying from them or because of its own failures, the fact that the government has not been able to implement the cluster system which would save students so much time, money and energy, is unacceptable.

Given that the UGC has also been suggesting modifying the existing admission process for a long time, terming it too expensive, questionable and coaching-oriented, the government has no excuse for delaying the implementation of the uniform admission system. Therefore, we call on the authorities to recognise the importance of implementing the system and thus act accordingly with the appropriate urgency.

# What does Putin have on Trump?



HABIBULLAH N KARIM

**T**HE whole world is afire since the Trump-Putin summit in Helsinki on the 16th of this month. The joint press conference at the summit evidently put on display the peculiar obeisance of the "leader of the free world" towards the successor of "perestroika"—a post-Soviet strongman who wields absolute power in the largest country in the world in terms of geographical expanse spanning 11 time zones.

President Trump's meek submission on the issue of cyber interference by Russian operatives in the 2016 election is understandable since he is presumably the beneficiary of the string-pulling on a range of online interventions by US's arch-enemy on the military front. From seeding social media groups in aid of the then Republican presidential nominee to hacking Democratic National Congress email servers—the strategic cyber infiltrations and tampering, allegedly by

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Russia according to all security and law enforcement agencies of the US, tangibly swayed the elections along electoral college distribution, eking out an improbable election victory for Trump even though he received nearly three



President Putin handing a football to President Donald Trump as a souvenir.

PHOTO: AFP

million fewer votes than his opponent. What, however, is less obvious is why President Trump threw his whole intelligence team "under the bus" according to late night talk-show host Stephen Colbert on CBS, and gave primacy to President Putin's denial of any Russian meddling in the US presidential elections. From CNN to CNBC to even Trump's staunch trumpeter Fox News was in unison in expressing their outrage at this "unpatriotic" behaviour by their president. So much so that President Trump had to come up with a rejoinder of sorts saying that he misspoke at the summit.

American political leaders of all shades came out in droves to vociferously condemn their president's castigation of their traditional allies under the NATO compact while cosying up to their conventional foe having hundreds of nuclear-tipped missiles locked and loaded to strike targets in continental USA and its allies in Europe. USA has the mightiest military establishment in the world today leading a 29-member defence alliance under NATO. The only country in the present geo-political scenario that dares to

challenge the might of the lone super power on the world stage is the Russian Federation—the remnants of the former second superpower, the Soviet Union. The fact that it was the escalating competition in military technology and geographical dominance that caused the economic ruin and collapse of the Soviet Union is not lost on the former Soviet KGB commander turned politician who now runs the Russian Federation. In fact, just a couple of months back in May, President Putin put on display a simulated nuclear missile attack by Russia on Florida—the 4th largest US state.

In this backdrop it is no surprise that Americans from the northern-most glacier-tips of Alaska to the Chihuahuan Desert in New Mexico are scratching their heads on what just happened in Helsinki and despite all the brouhaha why their president is inviting their so-called arch-foe on a state visit to the White House since such warm invites usually are only reserved for the closest of American allies.

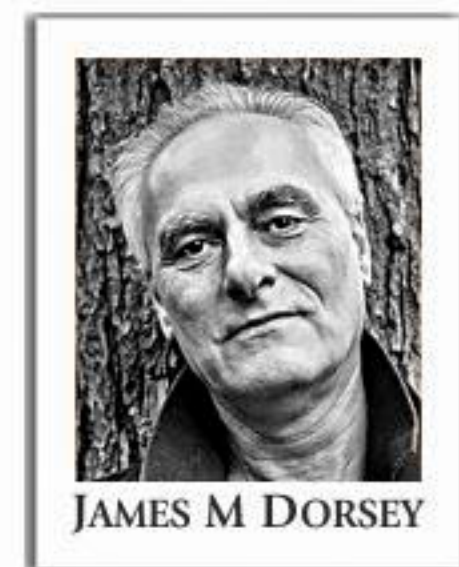
There are all kinds of theories—from so called "golden shower" video tapes of Trump to Russian money funnelled

through mobs linked to President Putin funding the Trump Enterprise—there is no end to salacious anecdotes making the rounds in online news sites and blogs. But for a man who has got away with far worse affairs as a turncoat politician it gives one reasons to ponder what hideous truths are lurking under the facade of mutual admiration and apparent detente between leaders of the two sworn enemies since the Second World War.

Russia is obviously tight-lipped about this whole affair and they simply deny any machinations on their part and why not—why should they jeopardise their strategic advantage in the current state of superpower politics. If any information can be gleaned from this sordid affair it has to be from the Americans. As President Putin aptly said when he handed a World Cup football memento to President Trump during the Helsinki press conference—"the ball is now in your court"!

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# Pakistani elections spotlight the country's contradictory policies



JAMES M DORSEY

**A**virulently anti-Shiite, Saudi-backed candidate for parliament in Pakistan's July 25 election symbolises the country's effort to reconcile contradictory policy objectives in an all but impossible attempt to keep domestic forces and foreign allies happy.

Ramzan Mengal's candidacy highlights Pakistan's convoluted relationship to Islamic militants at a time that the country risks being blacklisted by an international anti-money laundering and terrorism finance watchdog.

It also spotlights Pakistan's tightrope act in balancing relations with Middle Eastern archrivals Saudi Arabia and Iran while trying to ensure security for the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), at USD 50 billion plus the crown jewel of China's infrastructure-driven Belt and Road initiative and its single largest investment.

Finally, it puts on display risks involved in China's backing of Pakistan's selective support of militants as well as the Pakistani military's strategy of trying to counter militancy by allowing some militants to enter the country's mainstream politics.

An Islamic scholar, Mr Mengal heads the Balochistan chapter of Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat (ASWJ), a banned successor to Sipah-e-Sahaba, an earlier outlawed group responsible for the death of a large number of Shiites in the past three decades.

Pakistan last month removed Muhammad Ahmed Ludhianvi, the head of Ahle Sunnat, from the Pakistani terrorism list, at the very moment that it was agreeing with the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) on a plan to strengthen the country's anti-money laundering and terrorism finance regime that would keep it off the group's blacklist.

Pakistani Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi met with Mr Ludhianvi in recent days.

Military support for the participation of militants in elections was "a combination of keeping control over important national matters like security, defence and foreign policy, but also giving these former militant groups that have served the state a route into the mainstream

where their energies can be utilised," a senior military official said.

Critics charge that integration is likely to fail. "Incorporating radical Islamist movements into formal political systems may have some benefits in theory... But the structural limitations in some Muslim countries with prominent radical groups make it unlikely that these groups will adopt such reforms, at least not anytime soon... While Islamabad wants to combat jihadist insurgents in Pakistan, it also wants to maintain influence over groups that are engaged in India and Afghanistan," said Kamran Bokhari, a well-known scholar of violent extremism.

Citing the example of a militant Egyptian group that formed a political party to participate in elections, Mr Bokhari argued that "though such groups remain opposed to democracy in theory, they are willing to participate in electoral

Hazara Shiites in Balochistan, Mr Mengal led crowds in chanting "Kafir, kafir, Shia kafir (Infidels, infidels, Shiites are infidels)," but is now more cautious not to violate Pakistani laws on hate speech.

Pakistan's National Commission for Human Rights reported in May that 509 Hazaras had been killed since 2013.

Many of those killings are laid at the doorstep of Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, a violent group that split from Sipah/ASWJ but, according to a founding member of Sipah, still has close ties to the mother organisation. ASWJ denies that it is still linked to Lashkar-e-Jhangvi.

Suicide bombers killed 129 people this month in an attack on a rally of the newly founded Balochistan Awami Party, widely seen as a military-backed group seeking to counter Baloch nationalists. The Islamic State as well as the Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack.



Ramzan Mengal (L) is escorted as he walks to attend a protest rally in Quetta on February 22, 2013.

PHOTO: BANARAS KHAN/AFP

politics to enhance their influence over the state. Extremist groups thus become incorporated into existing institutions and try to push radical changes from within the system."

Speaking to Al Jazeera, Mr Mengal was uninhibited about his relationship with Pakistan's security forces. "No restrictions at all. I have police security during the election campaign. When I take out a rally in my area, I telephone the police and am given guards for it," he said. Mr Mengal said of the 100 ASWJ operatives arrested in the last two years only five or six remained behind bars. A frequent suspect in the killings of

Mr Mengal was the alleged conduit in the past two years for large amounts of Saudi money that poured into militant madrasas or religious seminaries that dot Balochistan, the Pakistani province of Balochistan.

The funds, despite the fact that it was not clear whether they were government or private monies, and if they were private whether the donations had been tacitly authorised, were widely seen as creating building blocks for a possible Saudi effort to destabilise Iran by fomenting ethnic unrest among the Baloch on the Iranian side of the Pakistani border.

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It would risk putting Saudi and Chinese interests at odds and upset Pakistan's appellation, built on efforts to pacify Balochistan while not allowing its longstanding, close ties to the kingdom to strain relations with its Iranian neighbour.

The Pakistani military's strategy of easing militants into the country's mainstream politics is also not without risks for China that in contrast to its South Asian ally has adopted an iron fist in dealing with dissent of its own, particularly in the troubled north-western province of Xinjiang where China has implemented extreme measures to counter Uyghur nationalism and militant Islam.

If successful, it would create an alternative approach to counterterrorism. If not, it would reflect poorly on China's selective shielding from United Nations designation as a global terrorist of a prominent Pakistani militant, Masood Azhar, a fighter in Afghanistan and an Islamic scholar who is believed to have been responsible for a 2016 attack on India's Pathankot Air Force Station.

Dr James M Dorsey is a senior fellow at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, co-director of the University of Würzburg's Institute for Fan Culture, and co-host of the New Books in Middle Eastern Studies podcast. He is the author of The Turbulent World of Middle East Soccer blog, and a book with the same title among several others.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### A foot overbridge needed at Baipail

Every day thousands of people including students and garment workers have to cross the Baipail Traffic Police Junction in Savar dangerously as there is no foot overbridge in the area. It has also become difficult for the traffic police to control the traffic flow there. I urge the authorities concerned to immediately build a foot overbridge in this intersection which would hopefully improve the traffic situation there. Md Milon Sheikh Savar, Dhaka

### Publish a booklet on FIFA World Cup 2018

We thank *The Daily Star* for magnificently covering all the aspects of the FIFA World Cup 2018, which included the country profiles and backgrounds of the teams, detailed information about the players, photos, news, commentaries and also writings by some of the great players. Besides, the crazy activities of the Bangladeshi fans about their favourite teams and players were also portrayed nicely. I would request *The Daily Star* to consider publishing a booklet on FIFA World Cup 2018 which will contain more informative news on football and which avid readers can buy and keep as a souvenir. Shaikat Rahman BIAM Model School and College, Dhaka