

## Racism, ratings and reality TV

### Level 2 • Intermediate

#### 1 Key words

Fill the gaps using these key words from the text.

controversy    allegation    condemn    regulator    petition  
elocution    contestant    fake    overt    prejudice

1. If someone is a \_\_\_\_\_, they pretend to have skills they do not really have.
2. A \_\_\_\_\_ is a document signed by many people asking the authorities to do something.
3. If you have \_\_\_\_\_ lessons, you learn to speak clearly and with an accent that is considered correct.
4. If something is \_\_\_\_\_, it is not hidden or secret.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ is an unreasonable opinion or feeling, especially the feeling of not liking a group of people.
6. An \_\_\_\_\_ is a statement that someone has done something wrong or illegal even though this has not been proved.
7. A \_\_\_\_\_ is a disagreement that a lot of people have strong feelings about.
8. If you \_\_\_\_\_ something, you say publicly that something is bad or wrong.
9. A \_\_\_\_\_ is an organization whose job is to check that companies, systems etc. act fairly and follow rules.
10. A \_\_\_\_\_ is someone who takes part in a contest or competition.

#### 2 Find the information

Look in the text and find this information as quickly as possible.

1. What is Celebrity Big Brother?
2. What TV station broadcasts Celebrity Big Brother?
3. How many people signed the online petition against the programme?
4. How many people watched the Monday night edition of the programme?
5. How many complaints will the police investigate formally?
6. Who is the UK Chancellor of the Exchequer?

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#### Racism, ratings and reality TV: now Big Brother creates a diplomatic incident

*Complaints over Channel 4 show hit record 22,000. Police to investigate abuse of Bollywood film star.*

by Owen Gibson, Vikram Dodd and Randeep Ramesh in Delhi. January 18, 2007

The reality TV show *Celebrity Big Brother* is already in its fifth year. The number of viewers has been falling but now a controversy over the alleged racism of some of the participants in this year's show has led to demonstrations on Indian streets, shock and anger in Downing Street, condemnation from the Chancellor of the Exchequer on a state visit to India and a police investigation.

The Channel 4 show has always been controversial but has never before caused an international incident. However, as the number of complaints from angry viewers grew to 22,000, the Indian government criticised the programme and local police confirmed they would investigate allegations that three white fellow contestants had behaved in a racist way towards Bollywood star Shilpa Shetty.

The number of complaints looked sure to rise last night as Channel 4 broadcast a furious argument between Shetty and Jade Goody, who earned millions after appearing on the non-celebrity version of the show. Speaking to another contestant, Cleo Rocos, after the argument Shetty said: "I'm representing my country. Is that what today's UK is? It's scary. It's quite a shame actually." Rocos said: "I don't think there's anything racist in it." But Shetty replied: "It is, I'm telling you." Later, glamour model Danielle Lloyd, talking to Goody, said that the Bollywood star should go back home.

India's Information and Broadcasting Minister appealed to Shetty to appear before the Indian High Commission in London when she came out of the house. "If there has been some racism shown against her in the show, it is not only an

attack on women but also on the colour of her skin and her country," he said. 19,300 complaints were made to the UK media regulator, more than double the previous record, while a further 3,000 complaints were made direct to Channel 4. Another 20,000 people signed an online petition organised by the newspaper *Eastern Eye*.

The local police said they would formally investigate 30 complaints. A spokesman said: "We are investigating allegations of racist behaviour in the *Big Brother* house, and will conduct an inquiry, including a review of videotapes of the programme." Channel 4 executives and the show's producers met yesterday to discuss the row, but privately they may be delighted. Tuesday night's show was watched by 4.5 million people, one million more than on Monday.

The controversy started after a series of incidents involving a group of contestants led by Goody, and including her boyfriend Jack Tweed, Lloyd and former pop singer Jo O'Meara. At one point Goody, after an argument with Shetty, had said: "You need elocution lessons. You need a day in the slums. Go to those people who look up to you and be real. You're a fake."

Channel 4 released a statement saying that there had been no overt racism, and claiming that the arguments were the result of class and cultural differences. But in India, the row has united all the major political parties. Communists, Hindu nationalists and the ruling Congress party have all demanded action be taken to preserve Shetty's dignity. "[*Big Brother*] is holding a mirror to British society. This is not a one-off situation. We should thank Channel 4 for showing us the hidden prejudices of Britain," Mahesh Bhatt, a Bollywood director, told the *Guardian*.

Dozens of Shetty's fans protested on the streets in Patna, eastern India. In Bangalore, the UK Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown, had to answer questions from journalists about a reality show he said he had never seen. "I understand that in the UK there have already been 10,000 complaints from viewers

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about remarks which people rightly regard as offensive," he said. "I want Britain to be seen as a country of fairness and tolerance. I condemn anything that goes against that view." Tony Blair's spokesman later added that racism is not tolerated in any way in the UK.

In one exchange, Goody said about Shetty: "She makes me feel sick. She makes my skin crawl," while another contestant continually referred to her as "the Indian". Later Lloyd claimed that the Bollywood star "wants to be white" and called her a "dog". After Shetty cooked a roast chicken dinner, Lloyd had said: "They eat with their hands in India, don't they. Or is that China?" She added: "You don't know where those hands have been."

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### 3 Comprehension check

Are these sentences True or False according to the text?

1. This is the first time that Celebrity Big Brother has caused an international incident.
2. People in India are angry because a Bollywood actress appeared on the show.
3. A record number of people have complained to the UK media regulator.
4. The number of people watching the programme has fallen since the controversy started.
5. Channel 4 executives will probably be angry about the controversy.
6. The UK Chancellor of the Exchequer is a fan of the programme.
7. Some of the contestants made fun of Shilpa's accent.
8. The police are not involved.

### 4 Vocabulary 1: Find the word

Look in the text and find the following:

1. An adjective meaning *frightening*. (para 3)
2. A verb meaning *to try to find the facts about something in order to find the truth*. (para 5)
3. A noun meaning *an argument* or *a serious disagreement*. (para 5)
4. An adjective meaning *extremely pleased*. (para 5)
5. A noun meaning *a very poor area of a city where the buildings are in a very bad condition*. (para 6)
6. A noun meaning *the respect that other people have for you*. (para 7)
7. An adjective meaning *unpleasant* or *insulting*. (para 8)
8. An expression meaning *to suddenly feel uncomfortable because you dislike someone very much*. (para 9)

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#### 5 Vocabulary 2: Verb + noun collocations

Match the verbs in the left-hand column with the nouns in the right-hand column.

- |                |                              |
|----------------|------------------------------|
| 1. investigate | a. an inquiry                |
| 2. cause       | b. a petition                |
| 3. make        | c. someone's dignity         |
| 4. sign        | d. action                    |
| 5. conduct     | e. an allegation             |
| 6. release     | f. an international incident |
| 7. demand      | g. a statement               |
| 8. preserve    | h. a complaint               |

#### 6 Vocabulary 3: Word building

Complete the table.

verb	noun
1. tolerate	
2. complain	
3. allege	
4. condemn	
5. behave	
6. refer	
7. criticise	
8. argue	

#### 7 Discussion

Would you appear on a reality TV programme like Big Brother? Why? Why not?