

WORLD FOOD DAY

HEAD TO HEAD

Food security and hidden hunger



SHYKH SERAJ

EVERYDAY 17,000 children around the world die of hunger. And 800.5 million live in extreme hunger. The main reason behind hunger is poverty. According to Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations, a person needs 2,790 kilocalories a day to stay healthy. Overall, food supply has increased, but due to poor distribution, waste of food and other reasons, a huge population in the world remains hungry. According to EU, European countries waste 100 million tonnes of food every year which is almost one-third of produced food. A huge amount of food is also wasted in the Middle East. I have seen this myself at restaurants and homes in the Gulf region. The amount of food wasted in Saudi Arabia during Ramadan and other months could easily feed several non-developed and developing countries for many days. A news report, published on March 8 in *The National* says that emirates of the UAE waste 1.3 billion tonnes of food every year which could easily feed our nation for at least a hundred years.

The world's 10 million poor people, 17 percent of the total population, earn only \$1.24 every day which is less than Tk 100. However, the number increased to 43 percent in 1990 and 52 percent in 1981. Thus, we can see a gradual development in this respect. In fact, with respect to MDG goals, during the past two and a half decades, many successful efforts have been made to combat hunger. During the past decade, 160.7 million have been taken out of the list of extremely impoverished and hungry people. But there are still huge populations vulnerable to hunger. A major reason behind this is global warming and climate change which is having a heavy impact on food production. New challenges are coming to the forefront. And, everyone is accepting the challenges of nature - from hungry Africa to oil-enriched desert lands of the Gulf region. Even inhabitants of deserts around the world are experimenting on deserts to determine how they can get higher yields, and have achieved remarkable success.

United Nations World Food Programme's (WFP) hunger statistics put the number of people who do not get sufficient food to 790.5 million. Most of these people live in developing countries, mainly in Asia. But according to the stats based on the average of population, most of the hungry people live in Sub-Saharan Africa. In that region, one in four persons does not have access to nutritious food. In Asia one in every six children is underweight. In the developing world, one in three children is stunted. According to WFP, if women farmers had enough resources and wealth and could

work on their own, world's hungry and poverty stricken population would decrease by 10.5 million. In African countries, this crisis has become huge among women. They are contributing more to farming but they still lack in wealth and don't have ownership of property or independence. But African women are starting to come out of this shackle. Our women farmers have done a notable job in this regard. This certainly defines 'empowerment'.

In primary schools of the developing world, 60.6 million students go to classes on an empty stomach. 20.3 million African students go to school without eating anything. Recently, on a visit to Luti Saint Henry's Primary School in Uganda's Rakai district, I found that a magical solution called the mid-day meal has revolutionised the level of education there. In Uganda, the literacy rate is pretty high. Now the country's growth is going up fast.

85 percent of the world's poor live in villages (Global Multidimensional Poverty Index). And most of them are hungry. The theme of this year's World Food Day is, 'Social protection and agriculture: breaking the cycle of rural poverty'. Modern agriculture focuses more on commercial aspects and invests accordingly, which is why marginal farming communities are pushed back further against the wall.

This is true for Bangladesh. Children of farmers are no longer interested in the livelihood of their parents and are more eager to go and work in urban areas. The cost of farming is going up with high labour and production costs. Many landowners are leasing their lands and moving to cities for other job opportunities. Labourers and sharecroppers are benefiting. These people don't need to pay extra costs for labourers. They can also cultivate three to four seasons in a year. If they encounter any loss in a season, they can overcome it by getting more profits from other seasons.

Farming is becoming more and more dependent on technology over time. In Europe, farmers say that farming is becoming very expensive with respect to inputs, seeds and use of optimum technology. On a visit to the Netherlands, I saw how they have advanced their farming through the best use of technology. GreenQ, a horticultural research institute, is using LED light treatment and wind turbines. For processing, they use highly efficient and expensive technology, something that is unthinkable for non-developed and developing countries.

To wipe out rural poverty, we first need to empower ordinary farmers so that they can continue to contribute to food security, while using natural resources and sustainable technology. The father of hybrid rice, Yuan Longping, always reminded me about this very simple idea.

Over time, farming has been diversified. To keep up with the pace of agricultural

production, we have to think about family farming, soil health (something which Dr Swaminathan, father of the Green Revolution stressed on), climate change, global commerce and politics. The famous organic farm owner of Scotland, Petty Richie, spoke about this when I visited Scotland in April this year. He said that no one can single-handedly fight climate change. All the countries will need to unite meaningfully to tackle the adverse impacts of it. The UN has to play a big role. With everyone's efforts, we can fight climate change.

Interestingly, despite the constant threat of natural disaster and other challenges, Bangladesh stands tall when it comes to food security. Although Bangladesh is one of the most vulnerable countries facing climate change, we have achieved remarkable success in our farming sector. Bangladesh holds fourth place in producing freshwater fish. We have also done a superb job in producing vegetables. Overall, our achievements are revolutionary with respect to food production and nutrition development. According to the stats of international organisations, however, 41 percent of children below five years of age are stunted, 36 percent of children have low weight, 51 percent of children suffer from anemia and 41 percent of the people of the country have food intake below 2,122 kilocalories. Overall, 57 percent of the poor people of Bangladesh don't have access to nutritious food.

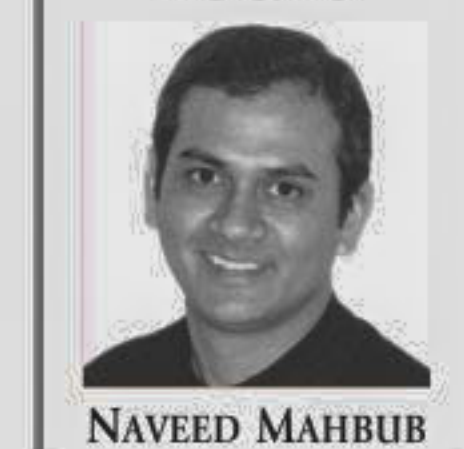
Despite such daunting challenges, we have faith in the government's Vision 2021 where we see the hope of achieving a sustainable and permanent food security solution. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was recently awarded the 'Champion of the Earth' title in policy leadership category. For a country like ours that is vulnerable to climate change, this is a huge achievement. This year, founder of BRAC Dr. Fazole Hasan Abed also won the World Food Prize, which is the highest recognition in the field of food security. Both these achievements are great honours for the nation. Their works truly inspire us and are significant milestones for this year's World Food Day.

These days, global think-tanks focus more on villages. *Hridoye Mati O Manush* has been spreading this message from day one of its telecast. Villages are the roots of this nation and they can save global civilisations. That is why wiping out rural poverty is a crucial factor in global food production planning. That is why I once again repeat the theme of this year's World Food Day - Social Protection and agriculture: breaking the cycle of rural poverty.

The writer is a media and agriculture development activist. He is an Ashoka Fellow and recipient of the Ekushey Padak and FAO A.H. Boerma Award. He is Director and Head of News at Channel I and director and host of the popular agro-documentary *Hridoye Mati O Manush*.
Email: shykhs@gmail.com

For Foreigners Only?

HUMOROUSLY YOURS



NAVEED MAHBUB

THE Russian Ambassador to Bangladesh on the killing of two foreign nationals: "Two drops of water don't mean rainfall." Not sure if that's to reflect the stance of the boss of his boss - the recent Russian air raids in Syria don't mean Hiroshima...

But Bangladesh takes the two killings very seriously. The investigations are on hot trails as we keep the airwaves busy with our rhetoric on the possible, usual, unusual and fantastic suspects while delivering clenched fists promises of impending justice and the eventual appearance of Hercule Poirot. We are eager for the final analysis. After all, for most other crimes that beg to be on the script of CBS's *Unsolved Mysteries*, we have been waiting for Godot.

It is not how much we have, but how much we care, when it comes to being gracious hosts. As a nation, we provide the warmest welcome to foreign nationals even when there is a non-equivalent and in some cases, a non-existent reciprocity. We intend to continue to welcome them and keep them safe here, regardless of if they arrive as diplomats, aid workers, MNC officials on one end, or as visitors from our 'second home' with 45 kg of gold or simply as tourist-turned-trainers (fitness, yoga and corporate) on the other.

Hence, the unprecedented security in Gulshan and Baridhara. The very apartments in the area boasting the 'F' powered signs "To-let for 'F'oreigners only" are giving a break in rents from having shaved off association fees by doing away with the now redundant private security guards, all thanks to the tax payer funded "To-protect, for 'F'oreigners only" programme.

Now, does the security blanket spill over to nearby Maddhya Badda after the murder of the former PDB Chairman? He does have the 'F' associated with him, in fact two - 'F'reedom 'F'ighter. Sorry, doesn't apply. Oh, well, I tried (pouty faced me, a fellow engineer).

Makes sense though. Given our limited resources, it really is not possible to secure every nook and corner of the city, let alone the country, for every 'little' crime committed. We have to first tend to the scolding nations who are clamoring for additional security after Bangladesh provides additional security. Charity begins at home for those who are not from home.

Meanwhile, the taxpayers can wait. Besides, we have to draw the line somewhere. Otherwise, we have to make the (four year) post Sagor-Runi Raja Bazaar area secure, or deal with bullet fearing parents of ten-year-olds in Gaibandha or petrified parents of twelve-year-olds in Sylhet or shocked parents of soccer playing teenagers in Uttara. Uhm. I think I messed up with the last example - the soccer coach in Uttara was a loving friend from Algeria. Given that there is honour among thieves (and graver offenders), I wonder if he's getting unprecedented security as protection from his local inmates at Dhaka Central Jail.

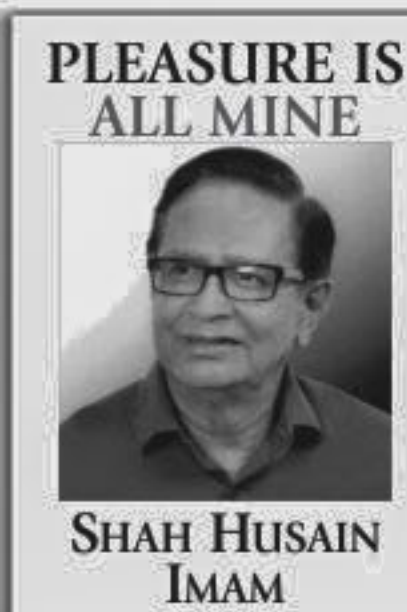
So, is the security limited to just the Green Zone? No, as long as the passport colour is not green. When US national Avijit Roy is killed at the Dhaka University area, there is also unprecedented security - unprecedented in the sense that soon after, there are unabated molestations in broad daylight.

So, what gives? Let's look at Avijit's blue passport. Aha! See that 'No Visa Required' seal? That says Avijit is a 'naturalised' US citizen of Bangladeshi origin. You see, once inside Bangladesh, all foreign nationals are equal, some are more equal than others.

All doom and gloom? No. Zimbabwe will boldly come where the Aussies have sent a lone, loony fan. Considering the random rants of Robert Mugabe, Team Zimbabwe finds Bangladesh much, much safer.

The writer is an engineer at Ford & Qualcomm USA and CEO of IBM & Nokia Siemens Networks Bangladesh turned comedian (by choice), the host of NTV's *The Naveed Mahbub Show* and the founder of *Naveed's Comedy Club*.
E-mail: naveed@naveedmahbub.com

Take a break from the chemistry of fear



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

PLEASURE IS ALL MINE

IN spite of the screaming travel advisories to the contrary, there's been an increase in the number of foreign arrivals at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport.

According to a responsible government source, in a couple of weeks between September 28 and October 11, some 24,653 foreigners had arrived in Dhaka. But in the two weeks preceding Travella's murder on September 28, a lower number, 21,015 set foot on Bangladesh.

The impression is that the flow of overseas visitors to Bangladesh remains steady. It includes visitors, both tourist or business, from China, America, Australia and some other Western countries.

We wonder who should sit up and take note of this 'startling' data in the first place. I believe, the issuing authorities of travel restrictions may have the first call and then it is our turn to draw a sense of relief.

Predictably, they will perhaps take a two-

fold view: One, that they did not prohibit travelling into Bangladesh, only sounded a cautionary note, as regards their movements; and two, they couldn't have put fetters on the free will of their citizens to embark on a trip to any country given their liberal traditions.

In fact, Bangladesh is a late comer to the travel advisory culture which many other countries have been subjected to, for more plausible reasons than perhaps we presented them with. Syria, Libya, Somalia, Ethiopia, Lebanon for instance come to mind. This is not to exclude the internal warnings issued by authorities in some Western countries to their citizens in apprehension of extremist attacks.

For our part, we can take heart from the necessity-driven inflow of foreign visitors to the country which in a way underlines the growing importance of Bangladesh as a country to deal with.

Once a country has been put on a radar screen, it takes time for the country doing it to drop it off. In this context, Bangladesh government's pointer to countries suspecting an IS link to the foreigner killings merits attention. Its call to either produce evidence in support of their observations or delete any

IS reference from their travel advisories, sounds logical.

We shall not fear to act but never act out of fear, something to that effect had been said by former US President John F. Kennedy

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in the thick of the Cold War era.

Cold War subsequently ended with the breakup of Soviet Union, onset of détente (short-lived in hindsight!) and fall of Berlin Wall unifying Germany. But global tension

far from diminishing has only increased with ripple effects across the board. This keeps being spurred on by ideological and sectarian differences fuelled by invisible arms race, interventions and proxy wars.

As establishing a new world order remains an unfinished agenda even to this day, we are no safer than before; in fact, the world has become more complicated and dangerous to live in. Terrorism is a global problem requiring a global approach, national efforts being practically limited to homegrown varieties.

On the one hand, the whole world appears to be scurrying off to duck for safety in the face of fears, known or unknown. On the other, it's having to live with it.

Caught up in such a dilemma, you see the wisdom in the saying, 'Fear nothing more than fear itself.' It can prove handy to retool our strategies to meet ideological threats head-on.

It is, however, disconcerting to note that school teachers and imams who were assigned to exercise their good influence on students and their audience in the mosques have been a bit laidback. We pin hopes on them to instill the essence of Islam in the young hearts and minds.

Well, fear in its most chilling form we had experienced in the two months preceding the January 5, 2014 election. We remember having taken our lives in hands with an intensely corrosive fright eating into the last ounce of our vitality. We moved out of our homes looking over our shoulders all the time lest a petrol bomb were hurled burning us to cinder. Never again!

The latest threat scenario, now tapering off, could be seen as an extension of the terrorisation campaign earlier on. An IT expert working under the Information and Communications Technology Division reportedly said, 'Those trying to create anarchy in the country by killing bloggers are the same people as those claiming responsibility for killing foreigners.'

They may bear different names but essentially they're of the same ilk. This hypothesis is one of the few that the investigators should be working on. We believe it is possible to narrow down to the culprits behind the dual killings and drawing on this, unmask other truths including the invisible phenomenon of mentoring.

The writer is Associate Editor, *The Daily Star*.

QUOTABLE Quote

OSCAR WILDE

Most people are other people. Their thoughts are someone else's opinions, their lives a mimicry, their passions a quotation.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Scooter's cousin
- 6 Elephant of story
- 11 Not available
- 12 Degrade
- 13 Intuit
- 14 Computer pros
- 15 Canine command
- 16 Place
- 18 Young fox
- 19 Hobbit helper
- 20 Bond, e.g.
- 21 Phone bill item
- 22 Skiing spots
- 24 Parachute pull
- 25 Power plant part
- 27 Easy win
- 29 Kitchen come-ons
- 32 Pilot's guess: Abbr.
- 33 Brewery product
- 34 Historic time
- 35 Sulky state
- 36 Grazing spot
- 37 Brewed beverage
- 38 "The Waste Land" poet
- 40 Sully
- 42 Unscorted

DOWN

- 43 Wear down
- 44 Copier need
- 45 Kuwaiti coin

DOWN

- 1 Feels the absence of
- 2 "Ah, Wilderness!" author
- 3 Fourth-down arrangement
- 4 Snaky shape
- 5 Kind of diving
- 6 Cracked
- 7 Justice Fortas
- 8 Word like "burgle" or "bottle"
- 9 More pale
- 10 Took a breather
- 17 Posh
- 23 Vitality
- 24 Dove call
- 26 Ministered
- 27 Do over
- 28 Verdi opera
- 30 To-do list
- 31 Usher, at times
- 33 Modify
- 39 Early hour
- 41 "Exodus" hero

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

LEHAR BANJO
ALONE OCEAN
SLUNG RIDGE
SEATED
BEWILED CODE
ANIMALHOUSE
MANY SUNSET
ALEPODELS
RUNDMC
SITAR LOAFS
EVOKE ELLIE
TYPEE DELTA

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

LET'S HAVE DINNER AT MY PLACE FOR A CHANGE. IT MIGHT BE INTERESTING.

BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott

MOM, WILL YOU TAKE US TO THE PARK? IT'S TOO LATE, ZOE. BUT WE'D HAVE TO PUT ON SUNBLOCK... MAKE SNACKS CHANGE WHEN PACK THE DIAPER BAG, GO PTTTY, FIND SHOES, CHANGE WHEN AGAIN... I SEE WE'LL START EARLY TOMORROW! MAYBE I SHOULD PEE NOW.