

Child heroism, mother's loss, deaths in stampede!

PLEASURE IS ALL MINE



SHAH HUSSAIN IMAM

THREE human stories hogged news headlines last Monday and Tuesday touching the deeper chords of our sensibilities. Evocative of mixed emotions of hope, optimism, tragedy, and callous indifference to human lives, the tales are instructive in their own ways.

On Monday, Shihabur Rahman and Tilon Ali, aged six and seven respectively, warned off a goods train from derailling by waving their red muffers in a last-minute improvisation of a danger signal short of Arni railway station at Baghatish in Rajshahi.

Minutes earlier, a train had left behind a broken fishplate on the railway tracks making a big din. The sound alerting the two children to the risk facing an on-coming train, they quickly moved into action preventing an accident—some lives and assets were saved.

There is an angelic quality about what they did, true to their unspooled innocence just past the babyhood. Leave aside that subjective attribution, in purely objective terms, the two kept their wits about them in a land of intelligence, imagination, courage, and a sense of responsibility—the adults, sadly becoming rarer in the quality world.

The heroes of the two minor children can be better extolled through this gem of a verse: "Whoever saves one life, saves the world entire."

Shahriar Alam, local MP and state minister for foreign affairs, has taken the two boys under his wing, their education up to the highest level, if they so wish. Rewarding good work adequately is life inspiring more of it.

In a break with the cynicism, you have Politi-British writer Joseph Conrad, who writes: "Men alone are capable of every wickedness." Thus, you get to see mugging coming back with new vengeance: A six-and-a-half-month-old fell off the lap of his riskward-mother when her handbag was being snatched away by a swooping mugger. The mother, thrown off balance, the infant rolled down onto the street only to perish under the wheels of a vehicle. The mother's trauma is nerve-racking even to an observer, let alone the victim herself.

As one wise man put it, "Every death is unnatural" diminishes me as I am involved in mankind." "Another stage went further, saying that every killing diminishes humanity.

In a stark contrast to such noble sentiments, we are appalled by witnessing how cheap human lives have become, how expendable they are. Ah, the deaths in stampede last Tuesday! The tragically ended through the *Qulhunnai Meehan* (farewell feast)



Ten persons died and 44 others were injured in a stampede at the funeral of former Chittagang mayor ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury on December 18.

following the demise of the highly popular former Chittagang mayor ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury.

An extensive community feeding had been properly thought through: One of two venues to avoid crowding. In one but all locations—the Rima community centre. This was the only venue designated for the minority community members for whom a non-beef meal had been arranged. But it appears some crucial issues had not been properly thought through: One of the number of Hindus including other Chittagang community members in Chittagang was large enough to call for two venues to avoid crowding.

More to the point, Rima community centre has narrow, single entrance and exit points, that too sloping with the result that people rushing in and out would have clogged the passage virtually shut. According to reports, as the guests having finished eating

rushed to the only exit and pushed forward, they got trampled tumbling down the slope with one cluster of bodies falling over another and four were hospitalised, three of them in critical condition.

Ironically, three batches had been seated, fed and laid away without any incident, but suddenly things went awry. Why? Mohiuddin's family reportedly suspected an act of sabotage—some young people towards the end having created some row.

What, however, exactly triggered the accident is being investigated by two teams. We expect their findings will unflatteringly pinpoint the causes of this largely man-made disaster. But experts in event management, civil engineering, and architecture put the disaster down to the choice of venue—faulty construction of the

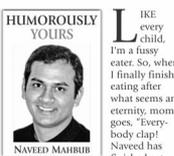
community centre, single and yet narrow entry and exit points to and from the building, and above all, lack of fool-proof policing event management. The orchestrated role, too, will naturally come under focus.

We are no strangers to deaths in stampede. Poor people have died from it while collecting clothes given away as zakat. Workers of garment factories have been trampled to death or wounded as they tripped on some other rushing down the stairs on hearing the news of a fire break-out. Then, the final mangle would come as survivors tried to slouch through the single, narrow exit from the building.

Deaths in stampede are especially lamentable because they are avoidable. Shah Hussain Imam is adjunct faculty at East West University, a commentator in current affairs, and former Associate Editor, The Daily Star. Email: shahhussainimam@gmail.com

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The Flight to Foredom



NAVEED MAHBUB

HUMOROUSLY YOURS
I'm a fussy eater. So, when I finally finish eating after what seems an eternity, mom goes, "Everybody clap!" Naveed has finished eating.

"The statement hasn't changed after all these years when I finish eating as mom goes, "Everybody clap!" Naveed has finished eating and there's STILL some food left for all of us!" In fact, it's not a recent phenomenon, but from as far back as I can remember, so to intervene so, that Alam Auntie has to see me by pleading to the little boy Naveed, "Mom smiles—partly at the little boy's statement and partly because she and all the fussy sister have just been served the third party."

I may be a little boy, but to me, civility is far from dead. Ok, fine, here you go, Alam Auntie. Take some, but not before I reprimand mommy. "Amma, can't you make this at home? This is the best I've ever had!" Mom smiles—partly at the little boy's statement and partly because she and all the fussy sister have just been served the third party."

And you know what it is that has been "served" to a small crowd of disbelieved Bengalis. This is probably the Kaluchi equivalent of Boro Bauper 183

where the ingredients are up to anybody's imagination. It is a sea of oily grasy with specks of sheep (I hope) fat floating around and served in a huge bowl to be shared by 20 women and children. Oh, there's a huge, coffee table sized bread to be pecked from. Parents, including myself, who feak out at children who "simply don't eat at all", just stare them for a day. Trust me, they will eat leaves from a mango tree with relish.

Anyway, back to the sheep feast. We are at the Pakistanis' den in Balochistan, still well inside the borders of (West) Pakistan and there's a few weeks from. And not only that, a few weeks ago we are apprehended in Quetta—all 10 Bangali families who'd boarded a train in the dead of night from Karachi. But sure enough, we get a warm welcome from armed policemen waiting exactly at the right time in front of the right carriages to apprehend exactly the specified number of Bangalis. If we complain about no harmony among ourselves, just imagine that time when some are sitting on the fence. Some disgruntled uncle or auntie had tipped off the (authoritarian) authorities. After all, two Bangalis form three parties—I'm one party, you're the second party, and together we form the third party.

And you think we 50 odd FBI or Cobseed Indigenous) Bangalis are a cohesive? The few, the proud, the brave, the mighty, who have been as angry as friends? Absolutely not! As we are fleeing from Pakistan, a little



boy following of a speeding jalopy four-by-four in the Balochi desert is quite acceptable compared to losing a coveted Samsonite suitcase. And we escape from our of Quetta and do not pass "Go" and do not collect 200. In fact, you pay much, much higher than 200 to smugglers to smuggle us across the border into Afghanistan through stealthy train rides, bribery, incarceration, desert treks on jalopies, camels

and foam (including through waist deep streams) and morsels that at best can be described as food. It is still far less a trauma than that of fighting through the near-death experience of getting jets dropping munitions on a petrol pump just half a mile from our house in Karachi as we cower under the stacks amidst air raids and total black-outs. That's no carnival—fighter jets are only only during a peacetime air cruise or when Lt. Mawret's aka, Tom Cruise, flies one in Top Gun.

Balochistan, Kandahar, Kabul. A geography lesson and a stage a long time before the Soviet invasion. Dr Najibullah, the Mujahideens, the Taliban, al-Qaeda, the US invasion teach the whole world their own share of geography lessons. We are finally in Kandahar, then Kابل, then (New) Delhi, then Calcutta (Kolkata) and finally into "Dacca". A harrowing flight to freedom taking a whole one month in lieu of a two-hour flight. Forty-six years later it is still our Dhaka, our Bangladesh. We MOAN, groan, complain, but you know what, it's all fine—better to be a poor yet independent soul than be a rich, second rate citizen.

QUOTABLE QUOTE

JAMES BALDWIN
American writer and social critic (1924-1987)

People pay for what they do, and still more for what they have allowed themselves to become. And they pay for it very simply: by the lives they lead.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

1 ACROSS
15 Erase
5 Because of
10 Writer Primo
11 Chilly season
12 Milky stone
13 Leaves dripper
14 Loss of nerve
16 Frigid spell
17 Balochistan
20 "Hurry—Manager"
24 Lull of fate
25 Allowance
27 Day in Tijuana
28 Track events
29 Telemarketer's action
32 Frigid spell
36 It's removed for a

39 Fill-up
18 Cap of the comics
19 Fall to fall
20 "Back in Black"
band
21 Scott of "Janie Loves Chachi"
22 Spoken
25 Pinocchio score
26 Malice
28 Fashion's Lauren
30 M! Movie
31 Pankaj
33 Berlog
34 Concluding
35 Movements
36 "Psy-g-trillion" author's mono-gran
37 Museum stuff
38 Salt source

BEETLE GOODLY

HERE'S THE PASS
GAILLY WITH THE LADIES
NO PROBLEM

BY MORT WALKER

WAIT A MINUTE!
WHAT'S THAT INSIGNIA YOU'RE WEARING?

BABY BUDS

AT FIRST, JOE THUMBAT ALLIE WAS WEIRD, NOW THEY'RE BEST PALS!

BY KIRKMAN & QUATT

WE SHOULD HATE ALLIE FOR BEING ON HIS OWN'S PARENTS!

DO GET TO KNOW THEM, DADDY!

WHAT IS THAT THEY'RE WEIRD?

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

PEEL	LEAD	BEAR
INNER	TENSE	
PASTA	DATHS	
EMIL	GORP	CE
SERVICE	RAT	
LEAS	TERIN	
SLASH	TRIPS	
PET	TIT	WME
ALL	SIENE	NAP
YAINIS	DOENE	
SLAT	TOYS	