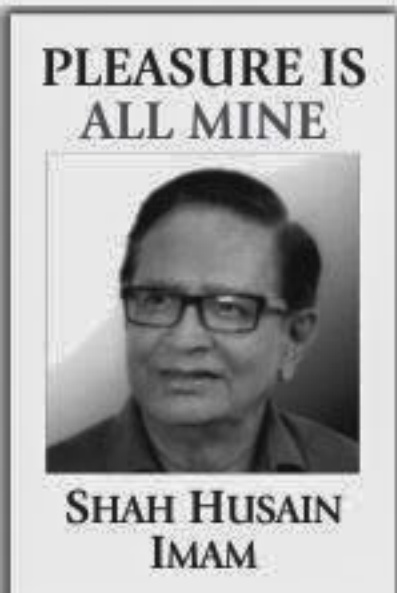


# Stampede deaths: Martyrs of mismanagement



**PLEASURE IS ALL MINE**

**SHAH HUSAIN IMAM**

We are not even five days into the pall of gloom cast by the alms-giving incident at Satkania, Chittagong causing nine deaths, mostly of women and children, and injuries to several others. Yet, attempts are being made to shield the truth and shirk responsibility from what has been an abysmal management failure.

Different versions are coming into play beneath the surface apparently depending on which side of the fence one is sitting on. An atmosphere of hush-hush prevails as people prefer to talk on condition of anonymity lest they fall foul of the potential or real benefactor.

This reminds us of a Graham Greene quote from the novel *The Heart of the Matter*: "In human relations kindness and lies are worth a thousand truths." That it befalls us to unravel some such truths is as much a professional duty as it is a social obligation for us.

It is claimed by people apparently close to Kabir Steel Re-rolling Mills Limited (KSRM) that "heat-stroke" took the lethal toll. But the doctors who treated the injured victims have marked bruises and scars on their bodies put down to *lathi* charge. This cruel method resorted to by the mills' security staff apparently "to reduce

crowd pressure" had the opposite effect on the alms-seekers. They took fright of the ham handedness resulting in them tripping over each other and being trampled underfoot, many of them lethally.

Of course, it was a given that the public on such occasions get impatient, and desperate by a demonstrative effect to get hold of the receivables. They could have been persuaded to wait for their turn and not attempt to jump the queue.

Essentially it must be realised that

the brutality was entirely out of character with the noble purpose of distributing Iftar commodities and Zakat money.

Spiritually, however, acts of piety in Islamic parlance are enjoined to be performed quietly. If, however, a wealthy benefactor should choose to be demonstrative with his pious giveaways, he needs to measure up to the standards of management matching with the scale of event.

It wasn't also a closed space (but a field adjoining an orphanage) where

distribution was planned, so that it admitted of orderly entry, receipt of deliverables and exit—provided the volunteers were deployed and active at the right places.

Were the police in adequate strength at the venue under specific instructions to discipline a potentially chaotic situation? According to one version, the police didn't consider it a matter of security!

It must be said in all fairness to police's reactive dynamism that they are pursuing a case filed by

the husband of his deceased wife Hasina Akhter against KSRM's executive director Shahjahan Mian along with three others. The officer-in-charge of Satkania Thana, Rafiqul Hossain, pointed out "lapse and flaw" on the part of the mill authority.

We are perhaps the quickest to unlearn from the previous experiences of deaths in stampedes. On December 18, 2017 ten persons died and many were injured at the Rima community centre where non-beef

dishes were served to Hindus during the Qul Khawani for the deceased Mayor of Chittagong Mohiuddin Ahmed. Entry to and exit from the community centre entailed negotiating a 10-foot slope where the stampede occurred.

Late mayor Mohiuddin's relatives owned up to the responsibility for the accident. They paid each of the family of the dead Tk 1 lakh, bore the medical expenses of the injured, apart from granting Tk 5,000 to the wounded.

Now it is for the re-rolling mill owners to follow that precedent in taking responsibility for the tragedy and adequately compensating the victims.

In October 2005, a similar stamping incident had occurred at the same spot in Satkania killing five but obviously to little avail. In July 2015, as many as 27, all of them women and children, died in Mymensingh where they had gathered for free Zakat clothes. In March 2015, 16 persons were killed during the Hindu rituals of bath at one of the sites of Sitalakhya.

In more recent years, we have stacked up quite a legacy of management failures when crowds swelled out of control, and as people jostled for space, they would be crushed, mangled and pummelled.

"When one is killed, humanity is diminished"—we would do well to remember that and save life from the avoidable accidents galore.

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PHOTO: STAR

Nine women died in a stampede during the distribution of Zakat and Iftar items at Satkania on May 14, 2018.

*If, however, a wealthy benefactor should choose to be demonstrative with his pious giveaways, he needs to measure up to the standards of management matching with the scale of event.*

## Harnessing the power of modern biotechnology

AHMED A AZAD

**M**ODERN biotechnology made its beginning with the development of molecular cloning and recombinant DNA technologies in the early 1970s, following the discovery of the double-stranded DNA structure and deciphering of the genetic code. A very powerful research tool for genetic manipulation became available, making possible what could not have been dreamt of before.

Although Bangladesh was slow on the uptake, today many of the top universities and some government research organisations have well-trained molecular biologists with the required skills. Selective use of modern (third-generation) biotechnology, supported by information technology, can make a huge impact on meeting our national priorities, generate new intellectual property (IP), and help to make our research internationally competitive. Hopefully, this will also go some way towards improving the dismal international ranking of our major universities.

The sequencing of the jute genome, made possible by a generous, ad hoc grant from the prime minister, is an example of what modern biotechnology could achieve in Bangladesh if adequately supported. The jute genome sequence provided new and valuable information needed to engineer novel varieties of jute with better fibre quality, faster growth and resistance to disease and adverse environmental conditions. Post-genome research would have been faster and more fruitful if the tools for advanced functional genomics and transgenic technologies were in place, and if there was a better understanding of patent laws.

Biotechnologists in Bangladesh are also involved in high-level research in the early stages of developing food and cash crops resistant to adverse effects of climate change and infectious diseases. A number of universities and government research centres are heavily

involved in agricultural biotechnology research. Between them they have the critical mass of manpower to adequately address national priorities such as food security and use of agricultural and forest waste for production of biofuel through biotechnological processes, provided there is adequate funding and access to contemporary cutting-edge technologies.

By contrast, there is very little research being carried out in health biotechnology even though the opportunities are sky high, and many young scientists with expertise in the area have returned home in recent times. Stem cell research, gene-editing technology for in vivo repair of genetic disorders, and personalised medicine made possible by new generation sequencing, are only a fraction of amazing possibilities. But two areas of new biotech medicines, biosimilars and novel medicines from the biota, deserve immediate attention for their potential to meet domestic healthcare needs and generate export earnings.

Highly efficacious monoclonal antibodies like biologic drugs, produced by recombinant DNA technology, totally dominate the international market. Because of the exorbitant cost of these new biologics (more than USD 50,000 per patient per year), there is a huge demand for cheaper copies (biosimilars), which the local pharmaceutical sector should take advantage of. A number of local pharmaceutical companies have started producing this new class of biosimilars by "fill-finish" with imported recombinant proteins, as they are reluctant to invest heavily in new technology and production facilities and feel that clinical trials and regulatory approval (from Directorate General Drug Administration) will be easier with imported and well-characterised active ingredients. These assumptions are misplaced.

Despite its newly-earned economic status, Bangladesh will remain exempt from patent restrictions till 2033 and is, therefore, free to copy any biologic on

the market irrespective of its patent status, giving it a huge competitive advantage over potential rivals such as China, India and Korea. This is a unique opportunity for academia-industry partnerships to open the door for Bangladesh to try to capture even a small percentage of the anticipated USD 3 trillion international market for biologic and biosimilar medicines.

The production of new biosimilars from molecular clones could considerably lower the production costs to bring these new life-saving drugs within the reach of the common man, and boost export earnings for Bangladesh. Local biotechnologists have the technical knowhow to produce molecular

libraries with disease-specific bioassays (measurement of the concentration or potency of a substance by its effect on living cells or tissues) could result in the discovery of novel lead compounds, which could be converted into candidate drugs using a range of cutting-edge molecular technologies. The research requires multidisciplinary collaboration between molecular biologists (local and NRB), ethnobiologists, and pharmaceutical, computational and synthetic chemists. New IP (patents) resulting from the research can foster partnership with industry for commercialisation, and also generate private-sector funding for developmental research and clinical trials.



SOURCE: TECHARTICLES

clones of biosimilars by the reverse engineering of biologics, including those still under patent, but local drug companies will need to be persuaded to manufacture biosimilars from molecular seed clones developed in Bangladesh.

Another area of research that has huge potential is the discovery and development of new medicines from the unique biota and very rich biodiversity of Bangladesh. Local scientists have published extensively on medicinal plants and their chemical constituents but hardly any patents or products have resulted from these studies. The screening of natural product

For optimum use of modern biotechnology and other contemporary technologies for socioeconomic progress, there needs to be long-term planning and coordination at the national level. Research productivity is dependent on a critical mass of full-time researchers including research students (MSc and PhD) and postdoctoral fellows, and access to cutting-edge technologies. Taxpayer-funded research should aim at product development, and local industry should be encouraged, through tax and financial initiatives, to manufacture home-grown products and support developmental research.

*By contrast, there is very little research being carried out in health biotechnology even though the opportunities are sky high, and many young scientists with expertise in the area have returned home in recent times.*

### QUOTABLE Quote



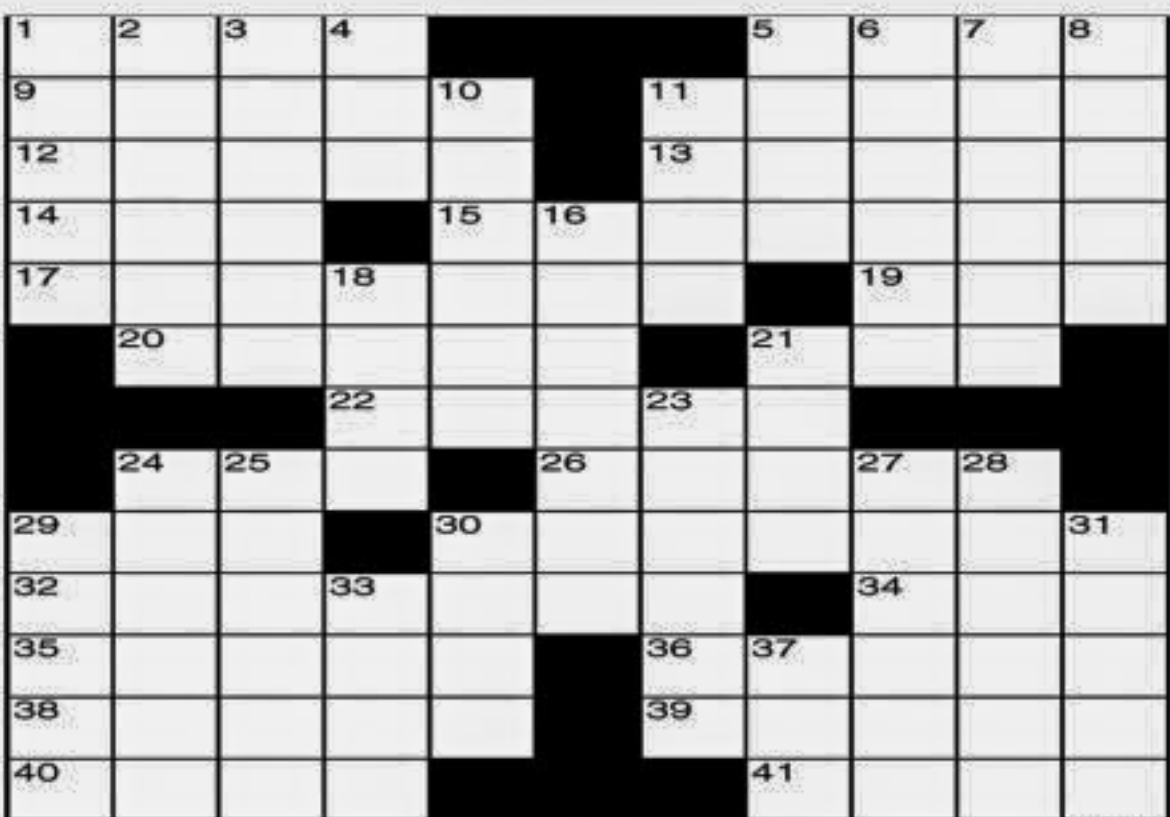
**GEORGE ORWELL (1903-1950)**  
ENGLISH NOVELIST, ESSAYIST, JOURNALIST, AND CRITIC

*If liberty means anything at all, it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear.*

### CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- |                      |                          |                         |
|----------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>ACROSS</b>        | 30 Use up                | 7 Shown to be true      |
| 1 One of a bear trio | 32 Abounding             | 8 Planted               |
| 5 Openings           | 34 Hounds' quarry        | 10 Salad green          |
| 9 Old saying         | 35 Space visitor         | 11 Lab runners          |
| 11 Paris subway      | 36 River of France       | 16 Coin toss call, e.g. |
| 12 Two-dot character | 38 Candidate of the '90s | 18 "Frozen" princess    |
| 13 As a follower     | 39 Less covered          | 21 Holler               |
| 14 Period            | 40 Serpent's spot        | 23 Excellent            |
| 15 Take in           | 41 Midterm, for one      | 24 Disrobed             |
| 17 Take in           |                          | 25 Realm                |
| 19 Checkers side     | <b>DOWN</b>              | 27 Earlier              |
| 20 Search deeply     | 1 Track horse            | 28 Go pieces            |
| 21 Hanking           | 2 Found darling          | 29 Soda flavor          |
| 22 Good judgment     | 3 Royal home             | 30 Car scar             |
| 24 Stew sphere       | 4 In the past            | 31 Bring to bear        |
| 26 Future tulips     | 5 Drummer Krupa          | 33 Writer Uris          |
| 29 Tiara feature     | 6 Duds                   | 37 Bowler, e.g.         |

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### YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

B	L	A	S	T	S	R	I	C	E
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### BEETLE BAILEY



### BY MORT WALKER



### BABY BLUES



### BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

