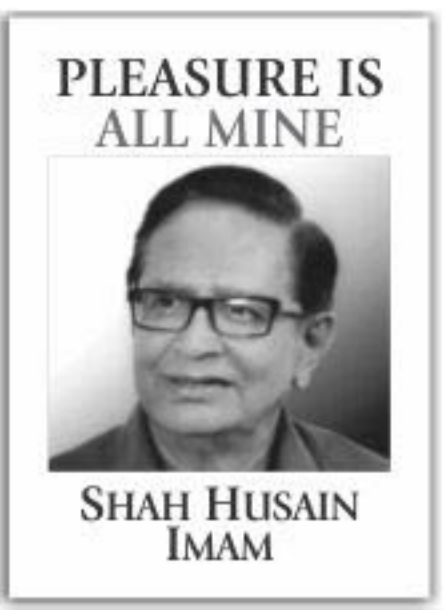


An avoidable mayhem



PLEASURE IS ALL MINE
SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

LAST Tuesday, from the northerly Himalayas, a blustery wind cascaded down to Haripur area of Thakurgaon leaving a patch of ruins in a manner of speaking! An attention-grabbing cattle rattle turned the heads of the local people in a certain direction with digital media and newspapers falling on the trail for the sheer news value of the unfolding incident, and in public interest. In a clash between Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) personnel and locals—on what the former claimed as smuggled cattle and the latter saying they had bought them on auction to put on sale in a *haat*—three persons including a 12-year-old boy were killed. Another 28 people including BGB troopers were injured in the clash.

No regrets or condolences for the deaths and sympathies for the wounded were instantly issued nor any compensation announced for the victims. After all, it all happened in unfortunate—and one would have thought avoidable—circumstances. The



Hours after a clash between a group of locals and BGB personnel in Bahrapur, Thakurgaon, in which at least three people were killed and many others wounded, over the latter's seizure of allegedly illegal cattle, an injured man is being taken to a hospital in Dinajpur.

PHOTO: STAR

immediate sequel has, however, seen the formation of BGB and administrative inquiry committees. While those are routine requirements, there needs to be an independent, broader investigation having regard to the sensitivity of the border areas.

In fact, the BGB's narrative stated that as part of an anti-smuggling drive,

a BGB patrol team seized two "Indian cows" and while on its way back to its camp with the cattle, a mob armed with "staves and bladed weapons" blocked the road and threatened an attack.

The incident has been put in a broader perspective of border deaths being a contentious issue between

India and Bangladesh. The recent spike in border killings by the BSF has left the BGB and the locals "confused in absence of a probable cause behind the Indian forces' trigger-happy behaviour." That the Indian promise on use of non-lethal weapons is often reneged on is an open secret. But the takeaway from the Thakurgaon incident is this: on our side of the border, we need to be wary of any sneaky trigger-happy attitude of which we so very rightly accuse the BSF. Indeed, border management requires specialisation, more so because of a prevailing notion that folks on the border lack loyalty.

It was a full-scale mayhem caused by the security personnel firing on the mob who had allegedly attacked the conveyance carrying the cows from Chandgaon to Betna camp. Without prejudice to an independently carried out inquest into the lethal step, one could raise a question as to whether persuasive methods were exhausted before taking the extreme measure like shooting. Two important missing links in the chain appear to be: a) asking for proof from the alleged smuggler of the purchase of the cows on auction in addition to other forms of verification available to make sure no excess was committed; and b) the lack of blaring out warnings through a microphone to make a mob scurry off. In the first

place, why allow a mob to form? However, it is learnt that the blank shots fired to warn were preceded by directives from the local commander urging people to disperse peacefully. Yet, could these have staved off trouble minus any waving of a red flag to send out a chilling warning? Most of all, one sees a clear need for seeking public cooperation in checkmating smuggling, a powerful motive that should be instilled in both sides. Any adversarial relationship between our border guards and the people in border areas doesn't just fit in with the modern concept of frontier management. On the policing side, mob control techniques are imperative to apply, instead of any ham-handed treatment, even unwittingly. For that does not sit in with democratic norms we have struggled for and hold so dear in our collective consciousness.

The factsheet speaks for itself. Interpretations may vary; versions may be self-righteous and defensive; but truth is self-explanatory making itself felt. Let the facts of the case be bared and whoever is found guilty held to account; for we must know that "every death diminishes humanity."

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A multidimensional approach to food safety



POONAM KHETRAPAL SINGH

UNSAFE food causes a staggering range of diseases. From diarrhoea to cancer and to hepatitis, food containing harmful bacteria, viruses, parasites or chemicals is a

major threat to public health, both globally and in the WHO South-East Asia Region. Every year, an estimated 420,000 people die worldwide due to foodborne diseases, with the South-East Asia Region accounting for a disproportionate share—some 175,000.

Tackling the problem is more important than ever. The globalised nature of modern food chains, alongside emerging hazards such as antimicrobial resistance and climate change, makes the threat of foodborne diseases increasingly acute. Apart from the potential for foodborne diseases to harm public health within and between countries, their occurrence can also compromise development, trade, nutrition and food security. Informal food production at the community level, meanwhile, poses an ongoing challenge, with basic hygiene, adulteration and falsification key concerns.

Countries across the region have been active in addressing the issue. Since 2015, seven of the region's 11 countries have conducted in-depth assessments of their foodborne disease surveillance and response capacity. All have strengthened their national Codex structure—the standards and guidelines created by the Codex Alimentarius Commission to promote food safety and protect consumers, especially in the context of international trade. Notably, with the support of WHO and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), simulation exercises have been carried out to test region-wide coordination and communication, with the International Health Regulations (IHR

2005) anchoring all proceedings. Progress continues. As a show of commitment, more than 30 representatives from nine of the region's countries are attending WHO-supported conferences on the future of food safety in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in February and in Geneva, Switzerland in April. Each event will have a significant impact on a range of food-safety-related issues (both globally and in the region), from dealing with present challenges to aligning food safety strategies across sectors and borders.

Immediate action is both possible and necessary. As outlined in the region's Flagship Priorities and the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda respectively, emergency preparedness must be scaled up, and safe and healthy food made accessible to all. To achieve both, several high-impact interventions should be made.

First, food safety management and regulation frameworks should be strengthened. To do this, multi-sectoral action that involves all stakeholders—from food business operators, both formal and informal, to consumers, academics, scientists and the media—is crucial. By actively engaging each of these groups, food safety authorities have the best chance of achieving the integrated management of food supply chains and ensuring any weaknesses are addressed as a matter of priority. Importantly, each stakeholder must know their responsibilities and the standards and regulations to which they are accountable.

Second, a risk-based approach to monitoring food safety should be developed and implemented in each of the region's countries. To that end, monitoring compliance with food safety and quality regulations should begin at the primary production level, with strong partnerships forged between inspection officials and primary producers to identify potential risks and find ways to mitigate them. This collaborative approach, which should begin at the primary producer level and end at the point of sale, is the



best way to enhance buy-in among all stakeholders. It is also the best way to ensure compliance.

Third, foodborne disease surveillance should be strengthened region-wide. The first step towards securing food safety is knowing when, where, why and how foodborne hazards and resulting illnesses occur. To make that happen, member states region-wide should fully implement the strategies outlined in WHO's manual on strengthening the surveillance of and response to foodborne diseases. That includes the integrated surveillance of antimicrobial resistance in foodborne bacteria. In addition, there is strong potential to increase engagement with the International Network of Food Safety Authorities (INFOSAN) via its communication

platforms, as well as to enhance coordination between national INFOSAN and International Health Regulations (IHR) focal points.

And fourth, investing in all aspects of food safety should be better prioritised. Advocacy is crucial to ensure high-level leaders understand that investing in food safety protects and promotes public health as well as sustainable development more broadly. This is especially the case as rapid changes in food production techniques occur, new technologies are adopted, dietary shifts proceed, and antimicrobial resistance and climate change emerge as significant hazards. Substantial, well-thought-out investments (for example in developing food safety legislation and policy, enhancing risk-based inspections and compliance

enforcement, or improving laboratory services) are crucial to strengthening and accelerating region-wide progress.

There is strong support to achieve this objective. At both the regional and global levels, WHO, FAO and the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) have established a tripartite coordination mechanism to support food safety activities. As part of that tripartite, WHO will continue to support the region's member states to reduce food-related illness and death and diminish the risk of national and transnational foodborne disease outbreaks. Like the process of producing food itself, securing food safety is both science and art. Each must be mastered, and safe and healthy food made accessible to all, all of the time.

Dr Poonam Khetrapal Singh is WHO South-East Asia Regional Director.

A WORD A DAY

CERNVOUS
ADJECTIVE

Drooping, nodding, or bending forward

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

| | | |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
| ACROSS | 36 Early shepherd | 10 Infamous emperor |
| 1 Carried on | 38 Radium discoverer | 16 Course area |
| 6 Cleaner scent | 40 Puzzled | 18 "Tres --!" |
| 11 Center of the Renaissance | 43 Island ring | 19 Lot unit |
| 12 Quite impressed | 44 Chophouse order | 21 Not naked |
| 13 Chutzpah | 45 Angled edge | 23 Con holder |
| 14 Lawn tool | 46 Annual visitor | 24 Forum garb |
| 15 Take it easy | | 25 School near Windsor |
| 17 Edit menu choice | DOWN | 27 Like surgical tools |
| 18 Inlets | 1 Take the title | 30 Pilot's guess: |
| 20 Beige | 2 Put away | Abbr. |
| 22 "That's gross!" | 3 Russian chess grandmaster | 33 Colorful tropical fish |
| 23 Babar's wife | 4 Pole workers | 34 Striker's foe |
| 26 DVR option | 5 Colors | 35 Fetching |
| 28 Wide tie | 6 Tall tale | 37 Deep voice |
| 29 Got comfy | 7 Lasts | 39 Annex |
| 31 In the past | 8 Norwegian chess grandmaster | 41 Put away |
| 32 Hide | 9 Was in debt | 42 Alias letters |
| 33 Muffin makeup | | |
| 34 Fight memento | | |

Write for us. Send us your opinion pieces to dsopinion@gmail.com.

BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER

8-1

BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

10-1

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

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