

To all the armchair generals

Let me make it easier: can you cite an example of armed hostage-taking by a heavily armed force in a dense urban setting where an assault team has immediately and successfully stormed the premises?

MUHIH RAHMAN

RECENTLY, in discussions around the country and in the blogosphere, I see and hear extensive criticism and second guessing of how the sad and despicable affair of the BDR incident was handled. A principal refrain seems to be that the army should have been rushed in to shoot their way to a glorious rescue. Are we serious?

All you armchair generals: can you cite one instance of a situation in known history where an armed force of thousands took over a barricaded area with a large trapped civilian population in a dense urban setting and another armed force attacked immediately (within two to three hours) and successfully rescued the hostages and/or disarmed the "rebels"?

Let me make it easier: can you cite an example of armed hostage-taking by a heavily armed force in a dense urban setting where an assault team has immediately and successfully stormed the premises? By successful storming, I mean with no or minimal unintended deaths or collateral damage.

Here are some examples: On October 23, 2002, approximately 30-40 heavily armed Chechens took about 800-900

people hostage in a Moscow theatre. The highly trained and fully equipped Russian security apparatus negotiated and waited four days before pumping in poison gas and storming the theatre and killing a reported 39 of the Chechens. Even then somewhere between 129 and 200 civilians died -- all but one as a result of the "rescue" operation.

A special forces operative was reported as saying that had they not used the poison gas, there could have been more than 150 casualties amongst the rescuers.

There are other examples: On February 28, 1993, agents from United States Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF) attempted to execute a search warrant at the Branch Davidian ranch in Waco, Texas. The resulting siege situation lasted 51 days. When FBI agents ultimately moved in, the "rescue" caused 76 deaths.

The moral is not that you do not ever attack terrorists and hostage-takers, but that you do it with a cool head, after all other means of recourse have failed, and that it almost always results in massive casualties.

According to a "hostage negotiation study guide" developed with the help of the International Association of Chiefs of Police and the Federal Law

Enforcement Training Center, the first rule is ICER: isolate, contain, evaluate and report. Note that "assault" is not on the menu for first responders!

The reality is that the world's most highly trained forces could not have secured Pikhana by force without massive loss of innocent lives ranging from innocent BDR personnel and their families who may have been coerced or were swept up in the mutiny, to the very hostages that they were going to save.

Even the army officers who remained alive were wearing BDR uniforms (as is customary) and they had taken off their rank markings -- they too would very possibly have been killed in a rushed, ill-conceived attack. The ringleaders and outside agents, if they had done their planning (as seems likely) could very well have escaped and in the middle of the hundreds, if not thousands of victims, truth would have been the first casualty.

As it is, few seem to want to wait for the truth to emerge before pointing at their favourite scapegoats. No one can ever say for certain what could have happened from the path not taken. But there is plenty of evidence that hot-headed assaults are minimally effective and cause maximum anguish.

There is no play-book where massive armed conflict is precipitated in a dense urban civilian zone in the midst of the fog of lack of information and disinformation. The other reality is that our security forces have very little preparation for this type of event.

While we have many brave men, we have no such well-equipped, elite, trained units. So all we seem to be doing

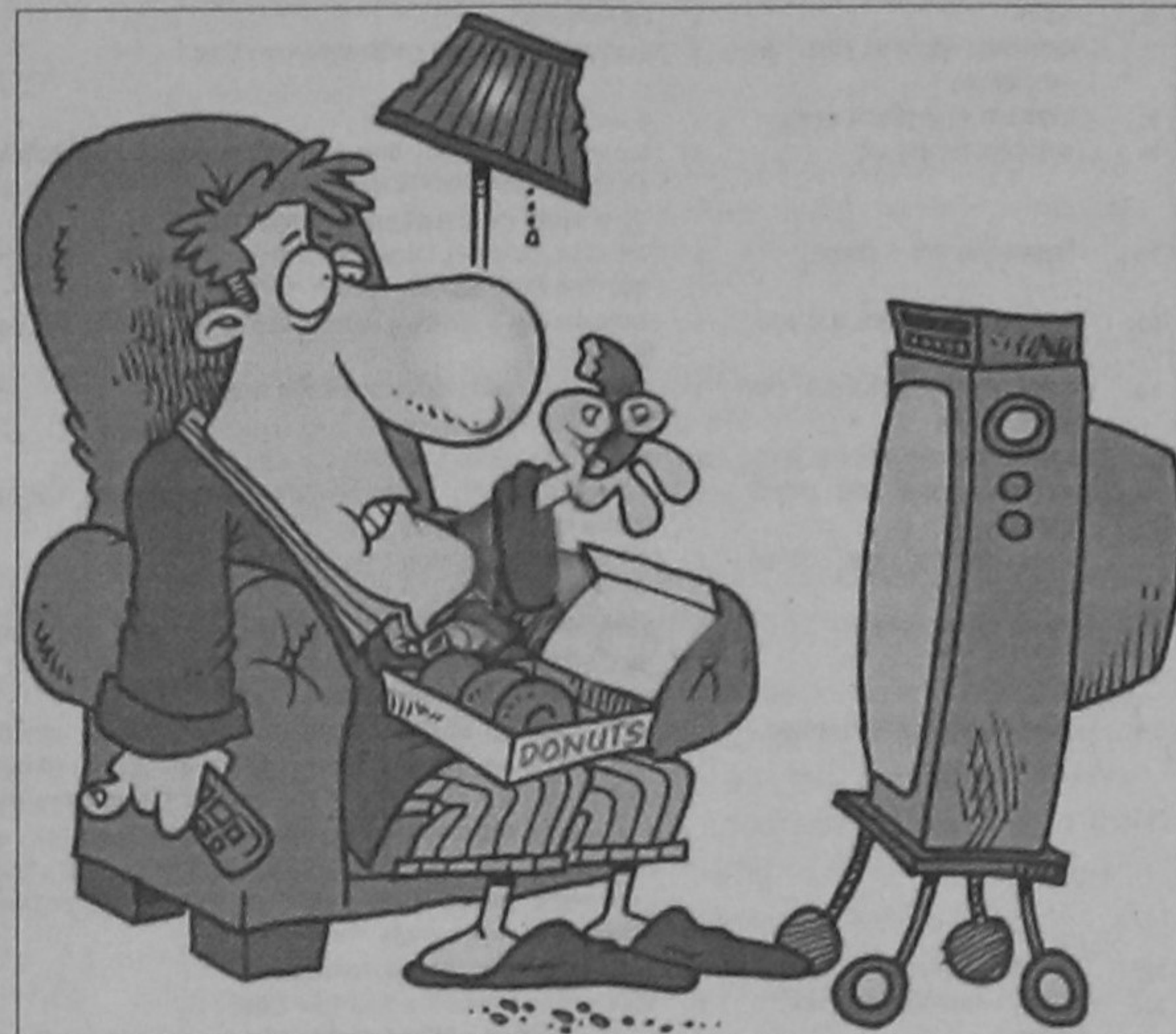
is crying about the darkness, instead of wondering why we didn't take advantage of a situation when advantage normally reverts to those who have better plans, equipment, and capabilities.

Whoever had the responsibility of securing the perimeter (if there was such a person or entity), did not even seem to know exactly how the perimeter worked. Reportedly, they were guarding the principal gates and left much of the perimeter wall around Gate 5, including, perhaps Gate 5, unsecured.

Did someone order that Gate 5 and the surrounds be left unguarded -- or did they just forget about it? Whose job was it? It is not the prime minister or even the home minister's job to secure an area. The buck may stop there, but they only recently got that charter. The responsibility for controlling the security forces and maintaining discipline and command and of staying informed about their morale lies with the command structure and this was a massive command failure. It was likely also a cynical and brutal attempt by as yet unknown parties to start a civil war and precipitate the fall of the government.

I commend the civilian government as well as the military high command for handling a terrible situation about as well as they could have -- perhaps even brilliantly! Moreover, the prime minister showed excellent responsiveness in going in front of the officers and I do not blame the officers for being emotional -- they are Bengalis!

All in all, I give the civilian government an A for their handling of the crisis



and the army an A for its restraint. The intelligence agencies, however, all of them, get an F. And as for those trying to make hay out of this sad moment by undue finger pointing and second guessing (certain political leaders come to mind), I give a U for unsatisfactory conduct.

So, enough already! Let the investigations proceed and let the nation try to heal its wounds! Let the investigations be thorough, just, and transparent. Let the institutions that govern and guard the country show their true strength by

being fair and open and by being accountable to the people they serve.

Justice must be sure -- not just sure as in inevitable, but also sure as in certain. The past is the past and will always colour our thoughts and actions -- but think of the future and what ought to be done now -- not what could have been done. And pray for the souls of the departed and for the safety and security of Bangladesh and its people, and thank God that a larger calamity was avoided.

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Home they brought her warrior dead

We hope and pray that a true enquiry will bring up the real culprits, who not only killed our valiant soldiers, but also wanted to destabilise the country

MAMUN RASHID

SHE can't weep, she can't talk -- devastated by the tragic death of her beloved husband who was respected for the love for his motherland, the strength of his personality and his kindness towards others. Lieutenant Colonel Enshad Ibn Amin, the gentle but fearless military officer, was supposed to retire on March 2. His birthday was on March 3, but he accepted martyrdom just about a week earlier.

Like many other officers killed on February 25, Enshad was a symbol of a true patriotic soul who always wanted to sacrifice his life for the country and accept the greatness of martyrdom.

His children were crying while describing their forever-lost yet ever-beloved father. He used to enquire about the well being of his driver, batman, and even wanted to know if they had taken their meals before taking his own. Such was the kindness of this humble, down to earth, gentleman. Therefore, nobody ever imagined that he would be killed by any of his colleagues or jawans who were commanded by him.

The coward attack on the defenceless army officers, the killings on the top brass officers who were the strategists of Bangladesh Rifles, essentially repeats the cold-blooded murders of intellectuals in December 1971 with an objective to intellectually cripple down the country, if not, the most disciplined and 'chain of com-

mand' driven folks.

Did that really happen? No. Bangladeshis went ahead with the might of their spirit and the strength of their determination. The same will happen in the Bangladesh Army and Bangladesh Rifles. Young patriotic officers will come up to fill in the gaps with utmost determination, to protect the country from being destabilised.

We know that the lives of the martyrs' families will go on. We all know that time is the best healer. The family members of each martyr will come out of the grief of losing their husband, father, son, brother, uncle and friend. Children of martyrs will grow up and be enlightened by the spirit of the Liberation War and commit to the progress of Bangladesh, beholding their father's depiction in their daily lives.

But we, as a nation, will never be able to make up for the loss of these families. No one can ever replace the loss of a father. A child's soul will always crave for

his love. When the entire city will sleep, while the stars will twinkle in the dark cobalt blue sky, these children will look for their fathers in those stars. And why not? Their fathers were the living stars on earth.

The wives, who lost their husbands, are in a state of shock. Who knows? These women may repent throughout their entire lives, because they are now facing the challenges of becoming the father of their children too.

There were some women who were just recently married. With the passage of time, these young widows may get solace by starting a new life with new men in new environments. But will they be able to forget the cruelty and the brutality life offered to them at their very young age? The hard truth is that each man is unique and each man has his own colour and hence it is always difficult to forget.

I visited Lt. Colonel Enshad's kids, so I met the two sons of Colonel Mujib.

I offered fateha at the banani graveyard of all armed forced officials killed in BDR Mutiny. I have seen their wives, sons and daughters too, in the graveyard, crying and praying for their loved one's salvation. We need to take care of the upbringing of these children, these wives and support these families so that they can bear the pain and anguish, and stand up to exceed even greater heights than their fathers or husbands achieved.

The door of *shahadat* is open for those who are determined to sacrifice their lives to protect the country, its people and are killed without any defence. They were all heroes who were made martyrs, and they remain heroes in the hearts of the nation.

Let's work as one family like we have never worked before, and join together to let these families survive the great loss. We will never forget you martyrs.

I have borrowed the title of this article from a poem written by the great English

poet Alfred Lord Tennyson. In the poem he laments: "Then they praised him, soft and low / Called him worthy to be loved / Truest friend and noblest foe / Yet she neither spoke nor moved."

To let the motherland get rid of her shock effect, to let her move, we need to respect the true spirit of liberation, respect her heroes, implement their dreams, and punish those who betrayed her, belittled the spirit of liberation, and killed her heroes, tortured her, and deserted her in her time of utmost need.

We hope and pray that a true enquiry will bring up the real culprits, who not only killed our valiant soldiers, but also wanted to destabilise the country and add slurs on our history and future. Besides, Almighty Allah will take care of the innocent souls, who were killed while on duty, and punish the evils who killed them without allowing them to fight back.

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Nepal in the brink of failure?

Despite tremendous possibilities and enormous resources, Nepal is the poorest country in the region. People had high hopes that their fate would change after the former rebel took the helm.

INDRA DHOJ KSHETRI

NEPAL is the youngest Republic in the world. It is the only country in South Asia ruled by the Communist Party that rose from rebellion and grabbed power through democratic election. There are many things which make this beautiful Himalayan Sangri-la unique. Despite tremendous possibilities and enormous resources, Nepal is the poorest country in the region. People had high hopes that their fate would change after the former rebel took the helm. In just three years, the Maoists held two different fronts; the rebellion and the government. However, most of the indexes in the last three years have become nothing but

negative. Nepal has been fighting with a number of problems and the enormity of them could even turn the country as a failed state.

The most vicious of the problems is the intertwined ties between Feudalism and Hindu Fundamentalism. As the Maoist rebels ascended to power and the country is declared Republic, the most important and daring challenge is to root out the feudalism from the country. As they were threatened, the remnants of the feudal system have tried to play in various fronts, most significantly and gravely in southern plains. Terai plains were already under the control of the feudal lords and land mafias who descended there from northern hills or southern India. Their ownership of large chunks of plain and fertile land has been

time and again threatened by 'land reforms', first time initiated by the first democratically elected Prime Minister BP Koirala in 1960. They are most dreaded by the rise of the revolutionary communists in the country which, by ideology, stand against the private ownership. To effectively bring the Maoist into size, they have used terai. The regional politics has begun and the parties which advocate the mainstreaming of terai plain minority people against hilly origin majorities are nothing but coteries of the high-caste feudal lords. Using this card, a regional party stood fourth largest in the constituent assembly elections and is now the important constituent of the Maoist led coalition government.

This conflict also provides a safe haven to the Hindu fundamentalists who think to be disgraced after the only Hindu Kingdom in the world sank. Nepal's King was believed to be the incarnation of Lord Bishnu, and thus the living god. There were protests against the parliament declaring Nepal a secular nation and also in support of the dethroned King. Though, it could not stop the tide, they will try their best to

regain their safe harbour. They want to destabilise the government in Kathmandu so that they could anytime regain their safe harbour. Though, it looks like a far cry, it is never out of possibility; the former King continues his pilgrimage to various deities and political parleys in Nepal India. Gyanendra is in India now where a few leaders of former ruling Nepali Congress and CPN UML are to shortly join him. There are rumors that something is being cooked in Delhi. Given India's over-possessive attitude towards its northern neighbour, it is never impossible.

This feudalist movement is given ethnic camouflage of the movement for emancipation of nearly a third of the Indian origin people dwelling in terai plains. It is no good debating their nationality; of course, they are the citizens of Nepal and have proved themselves as patriotic as the hilly origin people. It is also clear that the state discriminated them for centuries; lately placating this huge population with a few ministerial or high ranking administrative posts. However, the feudal system can never be an alternative to avert such discrimination.

The demagoguery of the leaders has portrayed each other communities which total almost equal in the plains as enemies and the rift is widening. The emotions of the youths are filled with hatred towards each other. Besides, owing to open border with India, tackling criminal and terrorist activities in these plains is so complicated, especially when this land borders with India's poorest and highly volatile states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh; it is beyond capacity of poorly equipped Nepal Police. Criminal groups are using this as an excuse to expand their network and pace up their activities. Should the army be deployed, the situation will wholly change and even turn to secessionist movement as heard in rhetoric of a few demagogues.

The situation is no better in the eastern hills. The so called high-caste continue to dominate the public and the social sphere in the hills inhabited largely by the ethnic Mongolian origin people. Thus accumulated discriminatory feeling in the hills east from Kathmandu is bursting out with the demand for autonomous states. Some

radicalists have even threatened secession. Though it also seems to be a far cry now, the case is similar as in the terai region; never out of possibility especially when the Kathmandu government grossly fails to address people's melancholies.

Recently, the much overlooked Tharu community which is the indigenous dweller of terai plains, waged all out struggle against their recognition by the state as Madheshis, the term which signifies the Indian origin people. Their week-long protest brought the whole country into standstill and people fear more such showdowns may be on the cards. People are skeptic whether this government and the constituent assembly which also works as the legislature will be able to maneuver country through these mounting problems. For the people in Nepal, the situation is never better, if not worse, than during the rule of parliamentary parties and the autocratic monarchy.

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Getting mommy arrested



THINK hard before having your parents arrested, especially if I am one of them, says Nury Vittachi. Today, boys and girls, we are going to talk about an extremely important subject: ethics. It is very important to be completely ethical sometimes. At other times, it is very important to look the other way.

Huh? Confused? If you think that's confusing, just wait. You see, there have been quite a few cases lately of young people being just a little bit too ethical recently, which is why your parents have asked me to give you this little talk.

Earlier this month, police officers knocked at the door of a house in the United States and asked to see a woman. "She's not here," her husband lied.

"Oh yes, she is. She's hiding under the bed," said the woman's four-year-old daughter. The infant led police to the bed and pointed at her mother. Police took the Mommy away.

In another case in the same country, a boy told school teachers that his dad, a musician who had played in an anti-drug concert at the school, had a stash of illegal drugs. Police came and took Daddy away.

ostensibly communist countries such as China and Vietnam, turning in your parents is officially recommended and rather common. But probably the worst recent Asian case took place in Pakistan in December.

A young man in his teens or early 20s was shocked to spot his stepmother having an affair. To express his disapproval of her ethics, he killed her with an axe.

That young man I would definitely list under the heading "WAY too ethical."

So, kids how do you know when you are being too ethical? It's easier than you might think. All you have to do is ask yourself some simple questions. First, will my ethical action result in one or more of my parents being arrested?

If the answer is Yes, ask a second question. Is the present speaker/ columnist your father? If the answer to that is also Yes, then the automatic conclusion is: You are being way too ethical, just forget what you saw and go back to watching television.

However, if the answer to the second question is no, then you should take steps.

Go talk to a trustworthy adult, by which I mean your teacher or a police officer. Over-friendly adults you meet in Internet chat-rooms with names such as deathzombie95 do not count as trustworthy adults.

But first, learn the following principles to see if your parents are committing crimes.

1. Encouraging you to eat vegetables is not a crime.
2. Unless they do it with weapons.
3. Encouraging you to do your homework is not a crime.
4. Unless they use torture techniques of barbarians such as Emperor Caligula or

Dick Cheney.

5. Watching television soap operas while you are in the room is not illegal, but perhaps should be. Anyway, if any of my children are thinking of reporting me to the police for any reason, I would just remind them of the case of Deanna Young, aged 13, of California. She told police that her parents were drug users. Cops arrested the parents and then released them on bail.

And Deanna? They sent her home.

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