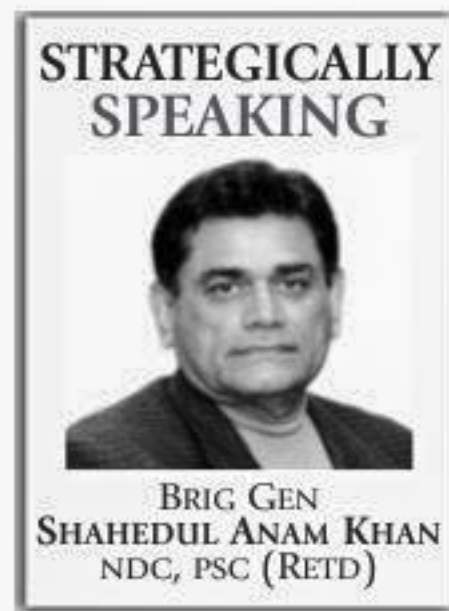


# Bangladesh's 7/16



BRIG GEN  
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**STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING**

**N**OT since the gruesome killings of BDR officers had we been faced with such a heart rending situation. And this was the first time that the country has faced a hostage situation

in forty years, the last was in 1977 when a Japan Airline Flight 472 was hijacked by the Japanese Red Army and flown into Dhaka on 28 September. But that was an entirely different ball game. In that instance we were caught totally unawares with no previous experience of bargaining with hostage takers. However, the negotiations in 1977 were conducted in the most professional manner and the matter fortunately ended without any casualty.

This time too, it seems that the police was caught unawares since the situation they encountered on Friday evening, and which lasted for nearly 12 hours, they had never faced before in recent times. Unfortunately, not all the hostages could be saved. The question is whether the law enforcing agencies should have been caught off guard. They could not have been unaware of the fact that the IS' call to its cohorts around the world to go after the 'infidels' in the month of Ramazan would be picked up in Bangladesh too. And given that there was a spike in the number of targeted killings in the last three months, responsibility of which was claimed by the IS in each of the killings, except for one, something like this should have been anticipated. It seems too that in spite of the much flaunted road checks and heightened security of the diplomatic area, the killers should have been able to slip through the police cordon not only with arms and weapons but also a sword.

What was the aim of the hostage takers one is not sure. There was no demand that we know of as yet that the terrorists made in exchange for the hostages. It was therefore interesting to see the approach of the DG Rab to seek negotiations with the terrorists. One wonders till how long he persisted with his effort, but given that the assailants had not made any demands it should have been clear from the outset that seeking a peaceable solution was not an option. Apparently, it was also not a simple kill-as-many-as-you-can and run action. Apparently it was a suicide mis-

sion, with no intention of going back. The choice of target is also significant, it being one frequented by foreigners.

The gruesome manner of killing of the hostages bears the hallmark of the IS. Interestingly, both the IS and Al Qaeda have claimed responsibility of the killings but one is not sure as to whether the killers are indeed organically linked to either of the terror groups.

One wonders too what the terrorist have achieved by killing the helpless people. While one is not sure that these people are organically linked to the international extremist groups but the government must own up to the reality that the footprints of the IS in this country is very real and no amount of denying can alter the fact.

Apparently, the army was called in, the exact time of requisitioning the army one is not aware, after the first assault by Rab had floundered. It is my assessment that most of the casualties suffered by the police were at the very initial phase of the hostage situation when an attempt was made to rush the building. That was done at a time when the police was not completely cognizant of the actual situation inside the building including about the number of terrorist holding out and the number of hostages they were holding.

The police wanted to surprise the terrorists but unfortunately they were themselves surprised, and it was at that time that they were caught in the terrorist fire particularly hand grenades. But unfortunately, much of the killings of the hostages might have been carried out well before the investment of the army. The commandos managed to rescue 13 hostages and kill all but one of the terrorist and capture one.

It is a natural question in the public mind whether the rescue operation could have been launched sooner and whether more of the hostages could have been rescued alive. In a hostage situation like we encountered Friday night, there are two things that are most vital in considering the course of action and fixing the time of launching the rescue operation. First is the question of time. While the inclination is to go for action immediately since the lives of the hostages are involved, rushing is fraught with danger since ingress into the building must be very carefully planned. There must be reliable intelligence about the terrorists and about the building they are holding out in. And this, one would have hoped, would have been done by the first of the forces to have arrived on the spot, i.e. the police, as part of advance planning.

The second consideration is the weight

of the force that could be brought to bear on the target area. Given that it was a built up area, use of heavy weapons could not be made without risking incurring collateral damage to property and life. And the security forces could not go in without a fairly good idea of the layout of the building, particularly the configuration of the rooms and where the hostages were being held. Doing otherwise might have risked more lives. And that information could be got from anyone of the staff of the hotel /bakery who had managed to escape.

We hope we would not be remiss in asking if there is a crisis management group that would take up the central command and coordination in times of a situation like the one we have just encountered. If not then there should be one that can assess the situation and initiate actions to save time and lives.

One wishes that the security forces could have saved all the hostages, but we are sure there was no dearth of effort to do so. Our condolences and heartfelt sorrow for those brave policemen who put their life in line of fire to save the hostages and for all the unfortunate hostages killed in the Holey Bakery.

The writer is Associate Editor, The Daily Star.

## Our sorrows know no bound Time to rethink our anti-terror strategy

As a people, as a Nation and as a country we are shell shocked at the brutality of the terrorist attack that killed twenty two people at the Holey Restaurant on Friday night. We have no words to express the sorrow that has engulfed us and the sense of revulsion at these killers that overwhelms us. The injustice of it all is unbearable.

Our heart reaches out to all the people who have lost their loved ones, especially to the families of foreign citizens who had come to Bangladesh. We express our deepest sorrow and condolences to each of the families of the twenty people who were so gruesomely killed by the terrorists on the night of July 1. We also extend our condolences to the families of the two police officers who laid down their lives in trying to resist the attackers and sincerely acknowledge their bravery and devotion to duty.

Seven extremists entered and took over the Holey Bakery in the Gulshan area of the capital city and carried out a massacre the likes of which Bangladesh had never seen before. Their action obviously provokes the question that what sort of thinking can turn any human being into such heartless creatures. It was shocking to learn that after end of 'Operation Thunderbolt', the name of the joint operation, that comprised elements of army, navy, air force, RAB and the police, we are confronted with the grisly spectacle of 20 people done to death in such inhuman manner bearing the hallmark of methods that we have seen employed by the IS in Syria and Iraq.

The purpose of these terrorist is quite clear. It is to create a sense of fear in the minds of the people, particularly the expatriates, and draw international attention to them. Going by their lethal preparation, it would seem that the terrorists were geared up for a pitched battle, which became clear when the police had initially tried to mount an assault in the early stages of the hostage situation. That resulted in the deaths of two senior policemen and many more injured, whose numbers are not clear yet.

We are relieved to learn that 13 hostages were rescued unharmed, including 1 Japanese and 2 Sri Lankan nationals. The attack is a major blow to Bangladesh's image. We had reasonably countered the threat of extremism so long, and although there have been a spate of targeted killings in the recent past we had been able to prevent any large-scale attempt until now.

Friday's mayhem brings some new and striking realities to the fore. Our usual response "these are isolated incidents" have proven to be false. The targeted killings and now this massacre may not be organically linked but that they form a part of bigger and more sinister should not be doubted any more. The new realities must galvanise new thinking on our part to the fight the terrorist menace that does not seem to stem in spite of our efforts so far. The message from last Friday's brutal killing is clear; our efforts so far have been inadequate. We need to sharpen our efforts in every sense of the term.

## COMMENTS

**"SP Babul signed resignation letter under pressure" (June 30, 2016)**

Abul Khan

We want to know the truth.

**"Poor man with a heart of gold" (June 30, 2016)**

Bhari Thuattor

What a selfless act of compassion! It should inspire all of us to be more giving.

Robiul Islam

Well done. Congratulations.

Abdus Samad

People like him teach us to sacrifice without expecting anything in return.

Arian Quader

Congratulation Susanta! You have proved that one does not need wealth but empathy to serve others.

## Warning, more Brexit-shockers ahead



WARREN FERNANDEZ

**T**HE shock waves triggered by Britain's decision to quit Europe continue to reverberate around the world, including here in Asia.

It should prompt some soul-searching among the key players: politicians, pollsters, pundits, as well as voters. For unless the right lessons are drawn and acted on, the road the world is now speeding down should be marked with signs that say: Warning, watch out for Brexits ahead.

The questioning should start with politicians and policymakers, to fathom how they allowed such a huge gulf to emerge between them and the electorates they are meant to serve.

Indeed, for many British voters, the so-called "European project" of pushing for "ever-closer union" came to be seen as politically aloof and adrift, while globalisation was thought to be benefiting entrenched elites who cared little for the common man.

The result: Political opportunists, sniffing an electoral opening, played on voters' anger and anxieties to swing

support their way.

This political risk was flagged in a recent interview I had with Professor Klaus Schwab, president and chief executive of the World Economic Forum (WEF), which does more than just about any organisation to champion the benefits of globalisation.

Referring to his new book, The Fourth Industrial Estate, Prof Schwab noted that "social inclusion" – both within and between states – is a key challenge of our time.

This arises because wave upon wave of technological change – robotics, artificial intelligence and 3D printing – is sweeping away jobs, faster than new ones are being created, or the ability of people to retrain for new roles. By the WEF's own reckoning, some 5 million jobs across the world could be lost by 2020.

"We see it in the statistics. If you look at the US, the real income or purchasing power of the middle class has decreased. If you look at jobless rates, again that of the American middle class, it has increased.

"But even if you have jobs and housing, job security has become very precarious. So until now, people could look to the future in a relatively secure way, but that's no longer the case. And there are not just social consequences but also political consequences, which you see in today's rise of what I would call 'demagogic voices'."

Lamentably, these voices are now being heard in many parts of the world, not just in the United States or the United Kingdom, but also elsewhere in Europe, and even here in Asia, where politicians propelled by populism have raced past rivals from the established elites.

Furthermore, for all the economic

progress that has been made, many Asian countries remain reliant on what Prof Schwab calls "low-skill, low-pay" workers whose jobs are especially vulnerable to being disrupted and displaced. Mass unemployment and under-employment loom for this segment of the population, even as those with "high-skill, high-pay" roles gain richly.

Unless the resulting twin gulfs – growing economic inequality and a widening political disconnect between leaders and the people – are bridged, holding off the "demagogic voices" will prove ever more difficult.

Some of these voices were shamelessly "economical with the truth", to borrow that immortal Whitehall euphemism, plumb new depths during the Brexit campaign with misleading election pledges, which they have been busy edging away from after the polls.

But voters too have reason to be red-faced, given how many seemed to be discovering the import of their votes only after the ballots had been cast and counted.

Indeed, one alarming explanation for this was how in this digital age, where many are relying increasingly on social media for snippets and snatches of information, some voters simply did not pay sufficient attention to be able to discern the impact of their electoral actions.

Without a media that is trusted, reliable, financially robust, and yes, widely read, a critical prerequisite of democracy – an informed electorate – is unmet.

Democracy does not function as it is meant to if unscrupulous politicians mislead without qualms or consequences, a responsible media lacks the standing

and the sway to call them out, and voters are just too busy to bother.

Pointing to this in an article in the New York Times, former British prime minister Tony Blair noted: "Those in the political centre were demonised as out-of-touch elites... The campaign made the word "expert" virtually a term of abuse, and when experts warned of the economic harm that would follow Brexit, they were castigated as 'scaremongers'."

He added ominously: "The political centre has lost its power to persuade and its essential means of connection to the people it seeks to represent. Instead, we are seeing a convergence of the far left and far right. The right attacks immigrants while the left rails at bankers, but the spirit of insurgency, the venting of anger at those in power and the addiction to simple, demagogic answers to complex problems are the same for both extremes." Or, as William Butler Yeats put it, poetically and prophetically: Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world, The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere

The ceremony of innocence is drowned; The best lack all conviction, while the worst Are full of passionate intensity.

No one should imagine that Brexit was a uniquely British phenomenon. The political trainwreck that shocked the world should have set off flashing lights all round. Hopefully, we in Asia have watched and learnt.

The writer is Editor-in-Chief, The Straits Times, Singapore.

This is the first in a new series of columns on global affairs which will be written by top editors from members of the Asia News Network and published in newspapers across the region.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### Argentina vs Chile match and some facts

The shocking defeat of Argentina against Chile at the 2016 Copa America silently raised many unanswered questions related to international football with particular reference to Latin America. First, it has once again established that football is a team game and the individual charisma of a megastar is not good enough for victory against tough challenges by a formidable opponent.

Secondly, the two jewels in the crown of Latin American vis-a-vis world football, Brazil and Argentina, are only shadows of their former strengths, skills, charisma, power, and team coordination. Both are loaded with average players too feeble to compete at the tough international competitions. Thirdly, it is time to welcome new emergent powers in world football like Chile, Colombia

and others with full sincerity and appreciation as they deserve their hard earned top positions. Fourthly, Messi has taken the right decision of retiring from international football as he consistently failed to deliver anything big for Argentina, and should focus only on club football, although he is likely to change his decision later.

**Saikat Kumar Basu**  
Lethbridge, AB, Canada

### Extend hand to the needy ones

- As Eid-ul-Fitr is only a few days away, many people have already finished their Eid shopping. We all should remember to buy clothes for the needy ones too so that they also get to celebrate.
- **Nafis Nihal Ferdous**  
Anandaniketan School  
Sylhet

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS