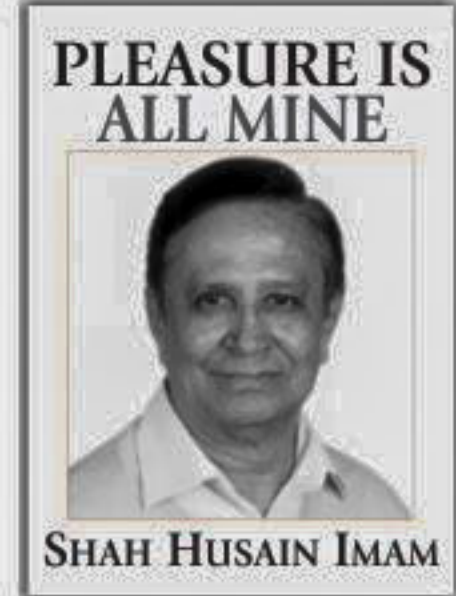


# Focus on the supply side of terrorism



**PLEASURE IS ALL MINE**  
**SHAH HUSAIN IMAM**

**C**LEARLY, this is a tipping point in our understanding of and approach to ideological terrorism so far as Bangladesh is concerned. Since we have been visited by a series of 'firsts' in so-called jihadi manifestations, perhaps a review is in order.

It is for the first time that young men from well-off families educated in secular institutions staged a bloodbath. They formed a 'suicide squad', so far unheard-of in Bangladesh, to carry out their killing mission. A global contagion effect is taking hold.

Bangladesh, however, is not a lone figure on the supply side. A story from Kerala has it that men and women mostly from affluent and highly educated families confided in their friends about an intent to abandon their wealth and go somewhere to lead "a true Islamic way of life."

"Of the 21 missing youths from Kerala, with at least some suspected to have left in a bid to join Islamic State, The Indian Express spoke to the families of 10 from the Padanna and Trikkapur region to piece together a story of rapid radicalisation and a common thread — most were followers of the ultra-conservative Salafi movement."

Sometime ago, even Muslim youths in England including teenage girls left their families travelling to Turkey on way to Iraq and some ISIS strongholds in Syria. The British authorities obviously cried foul but with a major difference that they would approach the returnees from such misadventure debriefing and engaging them in deradicalisation programmes.

Latest reports suggest that the viscera samples of the five deceased participants in the Gulshan killing spree is being preserved. This is for testing whether they had used Captagon, a terrorist drug, before the act. For five young men to have executed 20 individuals in such a brutal fashion has raised a suspicion about the influence of some kind of drug before carrying out the operation. Reportedly, FBI and an organisation in Gujarat have asked for visceral samples to carry out

forensic test along that line. Captagon is an 'ideal' drug to facilitate inhuman acts. "During the Paris attacks on November 13, those who managed to flee the scene have since provided descriptions of the terrorists that could point to the use of Captagon: with empty stares, pallid, expressionless faces, the attackers are said to have looked like the 'walking dead'."

A huge gap in the mechanical surveillance structure has come to light. A Prothom Alo report titled 'Police in the dark about planners' reveals a deficiency in the CCTV camera coverage. They have closed circuit camera footage along Road # 79 showing the militants entering the Holy Artisan Bakery Restaurant, but they have little by way of the route taken to enter Gulshan or if any

**It is true that many a terrorist attack may have been prevented due to good police and Rab work. What is equally true is an ample room for improvement**

vehicle was used by them. So, the police don't have a clear picture of their movement leading up to their barging into the restaurant.

Also importantly, the police and Rab have detected a serious precautionary flaw at the Holy Artisan Bakery itself. It is found that the restaurant's CCTV cameras did not contain any recording device — they only showed the arrival and departure of customers. Without any sequential footage, investigators say that they are left to depend entirely on versions by 13 rescued persons including eyewitness accounts of Artisan employees.

All this is an eye opener to an imperative necessity for getting the basics right. The slack in the maintenance of CCTV cameras with many routinely going out of order and the inability to analyse the fragmentary images when the chips

are down are patently unacceptable. Properly trained personnel should be put in charge and held accountable for each of the CCTV camera installations. It is common knowledge that many private business houses, commercial centres, real estate apartments, transport terminals, banks, hotels have CCTV cameras but a new level of coverage and operational efficiency is called for should the lurking terror threats be staved off.

When terror strikes, the priorities are clear cut: Thoroughly professional investigation into how it happened including relaying orders, training, arming, target fixing and colluding arrangements, if any, behind the act. The rest about financing, mentoring, networking is a grey area not privy to foot soldiers or even the sleeping cells of terrorist organisations. There, credible and focused intelligence exchanges are vital between countries having a common stake.

The overarching concern at this point is to prevent recurrence of a terror attack of the Holy Artisan Bakery type or the attempted one like in Sholakia. A fallout is seen through the postponement of some international conferences and events as hints of change of travel plans by buyers and tourists and a short-term fall in investment appear in the horizon.

We have been through rough patches before which proved transient as we would bounce back every time. This too will be a passing phase in ensuring which we must play our own part.

At any rate, we should view it as a new challenge that we share with the rest of the world requiring a new response to be had.

It is true that many a terrorist attack may have been prevented due to good police and Rab work. What is equally true is an ample room for improvement in their intelligence gathering, collation and analytical activities. Multiplicity of intelligence agencies could hinder coordination between them, even make them work at cross-purposes. The right balance will have to be struck in accordance with best practice methods.

Let you have forgotten, here is a punchy quote from Theodore Roosevelt: 'Nine-tenths of wisdom is being wise in time.' — (Speech 14 June 1917)

The Writer is

## The earthquake prediction is overly conjectural

DR. BADRUL IMAM

**R**ECENT media report on the possibility of a giant earthquake in Bangladesh that could put millions at risk and make Dhaka unliveable, as per a research study, has stirred up panic and controversy in the public domain. The report is based on a research paper entitled "Locked and loading megathrust linked to active subduction beneath the Indo-Burman Ranges," published recently in the online journal Geoscience nature.

While the paper is based on the research of a group of geoscientists with upscale technologies like GPS, the interpretations, as published in newspapers, have been overly conjectural. For example, the position of the plate boundary shown as the mega thrust has been shifted west to a significant distance and is placed to run right underneath the Dhaka city. There is no geological evidence to justify the existence the mega thrust running through the Bengal plain and Dhaka city as shown in the study. It is only a conjecture that geoscientists have put forward. But more importantly, making predictions of an unprecedented mega disaster based on such conjectural elements is even less acceptable.

A news reported quoted one of the co-authors of the paper, an academician in Bangladesh, as follows:

"Mud that has accumulated some 12 miles (19 km) deep in the delta of the Ganges and Brahmaputra rivers could shake like gelatin, and liquefy in many places, sucking in buildings, roads and people."

The above statement is not only unrealistic, but sounds like a fantasy. None of the deep oil and gas wells drilled in the Ganges-Brahmaputra delta encountered 19 kilometres of mud. In the subsurface, the rocks down to about 5 m were drilled and these are found to be hard rock layers and include alternating sandstone and mudstone (shale). Liquefaction is a fact of earthquake geology, but not to the extent the statement suggests.

Bangladesh is positioned in the vicinity of a tectonic plate junction, and is therefore, likely to be more earthquake prone than an average area. But the report has been monstrosly over-emphatic in its judgement of risk of Dhaka city. The suggestion that the "giant earthquake would make Dhaka unliveable" is also overly pessimistic and gives a negative signal to an aspiring mass of people who struggle to be industrially prosperous.

We appreciate academic research which links important national issues, disaster related or otherwise, but one should be more cautious in publicly commenting on the results and interpretations of scientific research. Scientific hypothesis or conjectures should not be translated into a pointed practical prediction that would spread unnecessarily spread panic among the public.

The writer is Professor, Department of Geology, University of Dhaka.

# Seventh anniversary of RTI in Bangladesh: Time for introspection

Authorities have no incentive to publicise and market the Right to Information Act; but that is exactly what they have to do

SHAMSUL BARI AND RUHI NAZ

**Y**OU idiot. You naive, foolish, irresponsible nincompoop. There is really no description of stupidity, no matter how vivid, that is adequate. I quake at the imbecility of it."

These are not the angry ramblings of any ordinary individual. They are in fact words of the former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Tony Blair, addressed to himself in his memoirs while reflecting on his government's introduction of the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act. The latter is the same as our Right to Information (RTI) Act. He was lamenting his "stupidity" for steering the passage of a law that came to hound him subsequently.

The "cash-for-honours-scandal" and the investigation that followed — enabled by the FOI Act — were considered among the most stressful, disruptive and damaging episodes in Blair's premiership. Blair said of the law, "For political leaders, it's like saying to someone who is hitting you over the head with a stick, 'Hey, try this instead', and handing them a mallet." He saw the FOI Act as a blunt instrument for use by citizens against public officials.

And yet the same Mr. Blair thought very differently about FOI when he was the leader of the opposition: "The very fact of its introduction will signal a new relationship between government and people: a relationship which sees the public as legitimate stakeholders in the running of the country and sees election to serve the public as being given on trust."

He justified his government's implementation of FOI by saying: "If a government is genuine about wanting a partnership with the people who it is governing, then the act of government itself must be seen in some sense as a shared responsibility and the government has to empower the people and give them a say in how that politics is conducted."

It is remarkable that the same law gave rise to such opposing points of view. This may be attributed to the immense power of FOI/RTI laws to affect governance issues in different ways. Mr. Blair's laments reflect the frustrations most political leaders and public officials feel at the loss of their authority to hide facts from the public because of transparency provisions of the laws.

On the other hand, his justification of the need for FOI law for the UK demonstrates its importance in the contemporary world. The steady proliferation of transparency laws globally, since the end of the Cold War, testifies to that. No other law has received so much attention in such a short time from so many countries. Out of 108 countries which have adopted the law so far, about 80 did so in the last 25 years. The Sri Lankan Parliament passed the law only last month, fulfilling a commitment of the new President to adopt measures to strengthen democracy and heal war wounds.

The words of another former Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh of India, reflect similar dichotomous views about the law. "Even as we recognise and celebrate the efficacy and the effectiveness of the Right to Information Act", he said, "we must take a critical look at... concerns that need to be discussed and addressed honestly." Singh's successor, Narendra Modi, also made a strong statement, albeit indirectly, when he held up the replacement of the Chief Information Commissioner of India for 11 months.

The position of such powerful leaders on FOI/RTI leads us to ask how our own Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, the leader of another populous democratic nation, views its application in our country. It is more so because her government steered the adoption of the law in the very first session of the new Parliament in 2009. Has she, since then, followed the implementation of the Act very closely? Does she feel strongly about its success?



Alas, little is available on record on the subject. This is surprising, as she must be aware of the tremendous possibilities that have arisen in the country for promotion of good governance through proper use of the law. Moreover, her party had pledged the adoption of an RTI Act in the election manifesto of 2008 in recognition of its immense value to promote democratic governance. Equally importantly, as an astute politician, she must be aware of the tremendous value her support would have on the success of the law.

How to explain then her seeming silence on the subject? It is unlikely she is indifferent to the subject; more likely, she is not kept

informed about critical issues of its implementation.

From all indications, the bulk of our citizens, whose empowerment is the key objective of the law, are not excited by it. So, the demands for information to government offices are few and far between.

Public authorities throughout Bangladesh receive around 10,000 RTI applications annually. The figure in India is almost six million per year. Our Information Commission receives fewer than 200 complaints a year. Its counterpart in India handles some 35,000 complaints/appeals annually (and many more if figures from

individual states are added). The Bangladesh figures show that the law is not catching on here.

The paucity of RTI applications to public authorities lets these authorities off the hook. Public officials are neither burdened by a huge number of applications to respond to, nor are they worried about disclosing embarrassing or sensitive information. They have little to grumble about in terms of this law, and perhaps this is why her officials feel no compulsion to keep the Prime Minister informed of the ground realities of RTI.

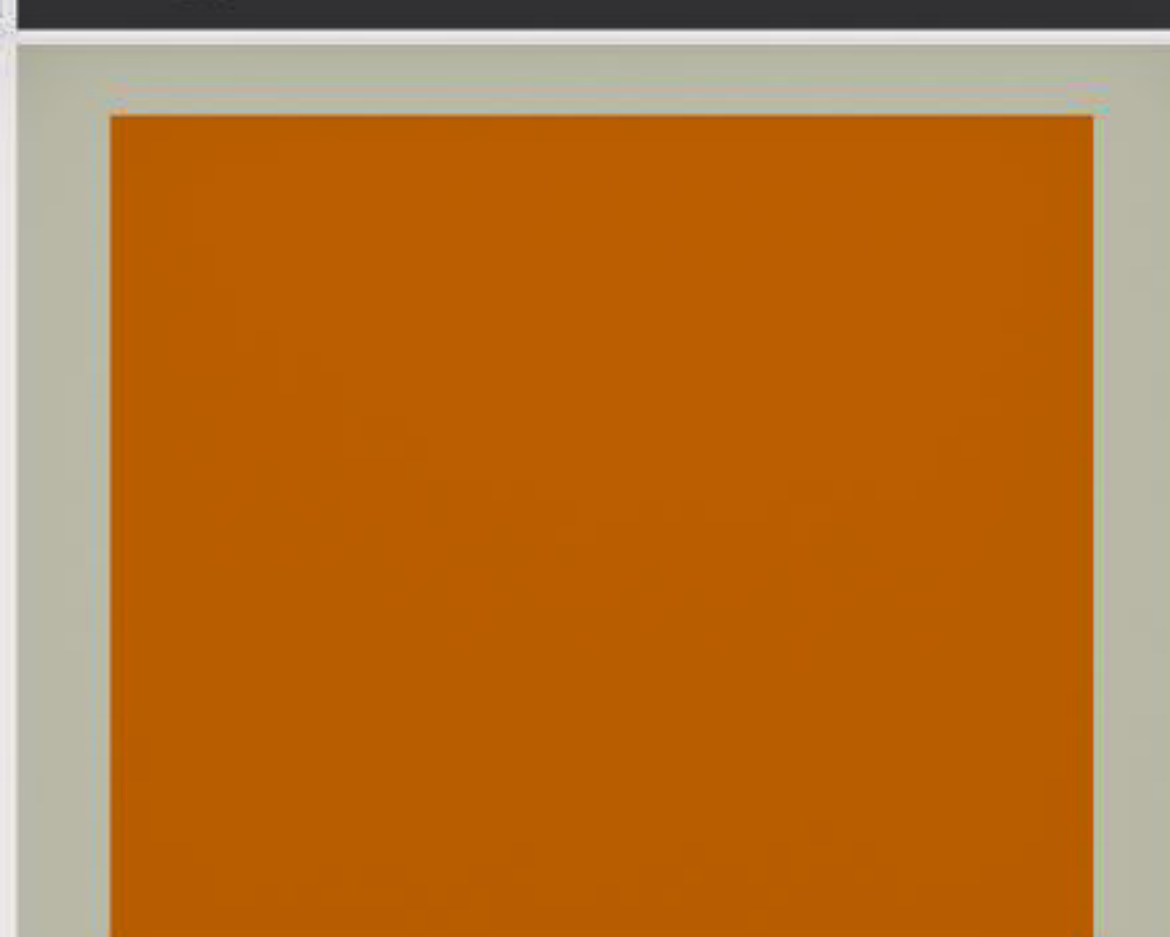
If matters continue this way, there is a real risk that the RTI Act may fall into disuse. While we may be encouraged by a few positive results from a handful of RTI interventions in the country, we cannot expect any systemic change from them. Of course, these examples give hope that all is not lost and that there are a few dedicated NGOs and activists, as well as some committed public officials, to keep the RTI flame alive; but they cannot ensure continuing progress.

In celebrating the seventh anniversary of the entry of the RTI Act into force in Bangladesh this month, we must, therefore, resolve to look back and identify the challenges and impediments we have encountered over the years and work together to find ways of overcoming them. While citizens must bear the bulk of the responsibility because of their pivotal role in making use of the law, the government and the Information Commission must also help, particularly to propagate and facilitate the use of the law by citizens.

In next month's column, we will focus on the role of the Information Commission in steering implementation of the RTI Act. We shall subsequently take a look at some promising recent initiatives of the Cabinet Division of the government in this regard.

The writers are Chairman, Research Initiatives, Bangladesh (RTI) and Project Coordinator (RTI section) of RIB respectively. Their email id is: rib@citech-bd.com.

## QUOTABLE Quote



**JOHN WILLIAM**  
*Life is the art of drawing without an eraser.*

## CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

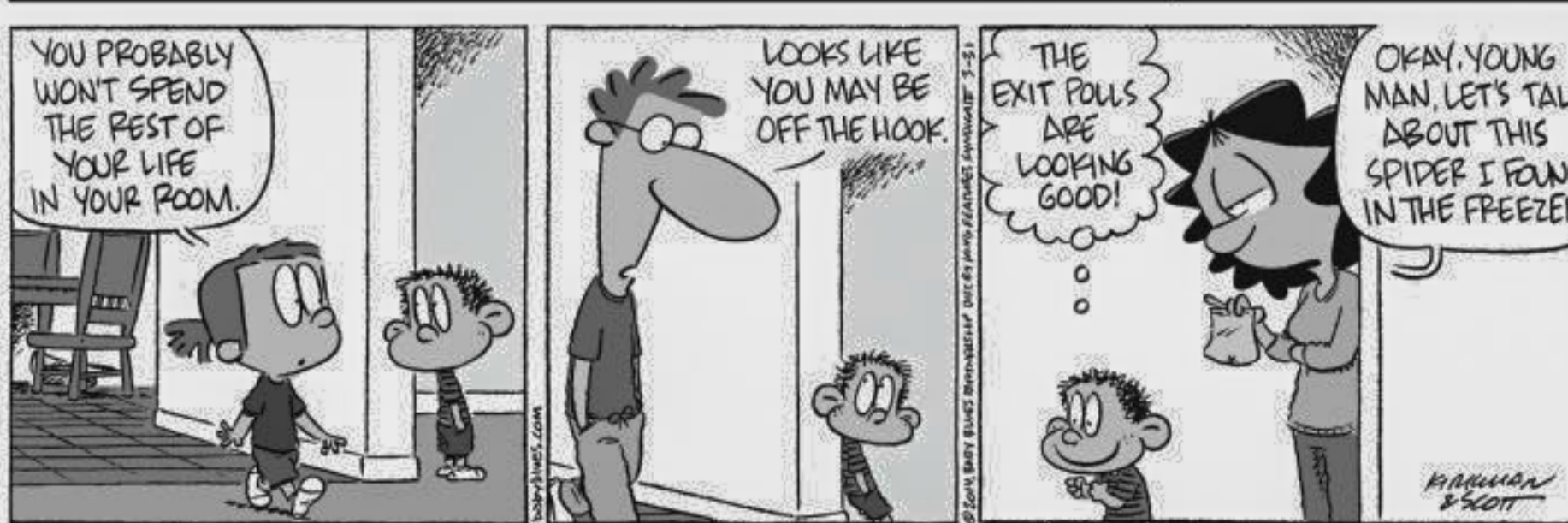
- ACROSS**  
 1 Liner parts  
 6 Soaks up sunshine  
 11 Even a little bit  
 12 Jordan's capital  
 13 Craze  
 14 Half of Hispaniola  
 15 Opposed  
 17 Dance move  
 18 Flank  
 20 Cook's creation  
 22 Letter before omega  
 23 Meticulous  
 26 Texas landmark  
 28 Menzel of "Frozen"  
 29 Gives a new handle  
 31 List-ending abbr.  
 32 Amorphous shape  
 33 Stratagem  
 34 College house  
 36 Small nail  
 38 Daytona events  
 40 Grill waste  
 43 Undermine  
 44 Long look  
 45 Keyed up  
 46 Macho sort
- DOWN**  
 1 Block  
 2 Pilot's guess: Abbr.  
 3 Breakfast meat  
 4 Kevin of "In & Out"  
 5 Louver piece  
 6 Scrooge cry  
 7 Stockpiled  
 8 Virginia product  
 9 Writer Chopin  
 10 Salon sound  
 16 Writer Tarbell  
 18 Ship pole  
 19 Cruise stop  
 21 Fancy flower  
 23 Crooner Perry  
 24 Golden Rule word  
 25 Like some lingerie  
 27 Some shakes  
 30 Decline  
 33 Art class staple  
 34 Worry  
 35 Steak choice  
 37 Reckless  
 39 Notice  
 41 Stretch of years  
 42 Capital Bldg. figure



## YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

G A B S E M P I R E  
 A R L O M E A N I E  
 R E A R T I N N A M E  
 B A C T E R I A  
 K I N A M B L E  
 A R M E D L A L A W  
 M I A A C E  
 I D I O T P A C E S  
 D E L L A E L K  
 D I S P U T E S  
 N E P A L I M A D E  
 W A T E R S A L A S

## BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker



## BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott

