

# Terrorist mastermind: Dead or alive?

ALI RIAZ

THE killing of Tamim Chowdhury, the alleged 'mastermind' of the terrorist attack on July 1 at Holy Artisan Café in Dhaka and the failed bomb attack at Sholakia on July 7, is a breakthrough in the ongoing counter-terrorism efforts in Bangladesh. Chowdhury was identified as the key planner of these attacks and according to the ISIS propaganda magazine; he was 'the Emir' of the Bangladesh chapter of the Islamic State. The death of Tamim Chowdhury is expected to deliver a serious blow to the organisation of which he was a member. The Bangladesh government, which denies the presence of any international terrorist organisation in the country, described him as the leader of the 'neo-JMB (Jamaat-ul Mujahideen Bangladesh)', a local militant organisation. However, the Inspector General of Police, in an impromptu press briefing at the scene of the operation, acknowledged that Chowdhury was trained in Syria. Information about the pathways of Chowdhury traced by media and security sources in Bangladesh inform that he was a Bangladesh-born Canadian citizen who travelled to and was trained in Syria and arrived in Bangladesh to lead the IS operations. Besides, we are aware that a number of alleged terrorists who are on the wanted list along with Tamim Chowdhury are of Bangladeshi-origin and are operating from outside the country; and that the Bangladeshi militant groups have had connections with regional militant groups since their inception in the 1990s. International media and security analysts insist on the presence of the IS, highlighting these external connections.

Notwithstanding the debate on the international connection, the description of the security operation available from Bangladeshi media seems to show that the operation was quite well executed as there was no collateral damage. It is expected that more information will be forthcoming with regard to the tactics to make a definitive statement on this. In the meantime, two important points can be made with respect to the death of Chowdhury: first, the Bangladeshi authorities can claim a success - indeed, the security forces have successfully traced, tracked, pinned down and killed Tamim Chowdhury. Second, this killing will have some ramifications.

Operations like this prompt debates in society and the media, particularly in the social media. The central point of the debate, in the recent past, has been whether the militant could have been apprehended and interrogated to gather information of accomplices and plans. In the hours after it became known that Chowdhury and his two accomplices had been killed, the debate re-ignited. One of the reasons for such debate is of a palpable trend: killing of alleged terrorists. In the past months, the main thrust of the counter terrorism strategy seems to be 'killing' of

alleged militants after being arrested. Information provided by the law-enforcing agencies to the press show that between June 6 and August 5, at least 19 alleged militants were killed in so-called 'crossfire' or 'gunfight' while in police custody. Although extrajudicial killings are not new, killings of alleged militants, especially those who were reportedly connected to specific attacks, began in November 2015. Human rights activists and ordinary citizens have expressed deep concerns in this regard; many have expressed apprehension whether these killings hide the kingpins. But when it comes to a security operation, where police and security forces are under fire

the objective was to 'neutralise' him, whether or not the US government acknowledged it. The killing of Al Qaeda leader in Arab Peninsula, Anwar al-Awlaki, in a drone attack in 2011, is indicative of a decision well ahead of tracking him in Yemen. The legality of his killing was questioned by human rights activists; the question was whether the US had a legal basis to target one of its own citizens with deadly force. Often a decision to 'kill' is made when the likelihood of capturing is slim, at best, and none, at worst. There are ample examples, suffice it to recollect the killing of the AQ leader Abu Musab al Jarqawi in Iraq in 2006; the TTP

the country. Initially, the BNP-led government denied their existence and insisted for quite some time that they were 'figments of imagination of journalists'; but eventually, the government had to accept the reality on the ground, especially after the series of bomb blasts in August 2005. Under international pressure and public outcry, not only was the JMB proscribed but the leaders were also captured by early 2006. Six of the high ranking leaders were put through speedy trials and sentenced to death. They were executed in the following year under the caretaker government. According to official records, in the past decade, 179 JMB members have been

but his primary role was as a recruiter/motivator through the internet. Both their deaths weakened global terrorism but their role as inspirer-in-chief has not been denied. In Bangladesh, the Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT), the precursor of the Ansar-ul-Islam connected to the AQIS, continues to use Awlaki's recorded sermons as inspiration and guidance. This is what leads security analysts to conclude that Awlaki's influence is 'enduring'. Killings of these kind of terrorist leaders usually do not dent their respective organisations. On the contrary, their appeal grows. The second kind of terrorists, the operational commanders, seems to be quickly replaced. The succession of Taliban leadership in Pakistan and Afghanistan bears this out.

The question then is where does Tamim Chowdhury fit? Evidently, he was not a charismatic inspiration for the militants in Bangladesh; instead, he was an operational commander of the newly built organisation. We can glean from the reports published in the ISIS propaganda magazine *Dabiq* that the Bangladesh chapter of the ISIS was built through bringing together various groups of the JMB, but we also witnessed that it has attracted new recruits. It has far better external connections than the old JMB. Execution of JMB leaders in 2007 and counter-terrorism strategy until 2012 kept JMB on the run. The shift of focus of the government and the global environment allowed the IS to build its edifice.

If the experiences of other countries are any indication, there will be a new operational commander. The death of Tamim Chowdhury will have significant impacts. The other impacts could be a change in the strategy of the militants, akin to the 2008-2012 strategy: to lay low and regroup. Alternatively, there could be a reaction with more audacious attacks, to demonstrate that the organisation has the wherewithal to continue. It is too early to be euphoric or complacent.

Additionally, two issues must be kept in mind; that there are other militants with external connections who are at large; and that the organisational strength of the Bangladesh chapter of the Islamic State is unknown, neither do we know the strength of the AQIS in the country.

The foregoing discussion leaves us with larger questions: Will the death of Tamim deter others from joining the organisation? Will the factors which allow the proliferation of militant groups be changed? Will this have any impacts on the enabling environment which encourages people to join militant organisations? These questions need to be discussed to build on the success of the security operations.

The writer is Professor and Chair of the Department of Politics and Government at Illinois State University, USA. His recent publication is titled *Bangladesh: A Political History Since Independence* (London: I B Tauris).



Three alleged militants, including mastermind of the July 1 Attack, Tamim Chowdhury, were killed in a gunfight with law enforcers in Paikpara, Narayanganj on August 27, 2016.

PHOTO: STAR

after cornering a suspect, few options may remain without using deadly force. For example, five days after the attacks in Paris in November 2015, the alleged mastermind of the attacks, Abdelhamid Abaaoud, was killed in a shootout. But, there are situations where decisions are made well ahead to 'neutralise' the terrorist instead of 'capturing' them. The decision with regard to Osama bin Laden was said to be find him 'Dead or Alive' - a clear indication that the 'killing' of bin Laden was not off the table at any point. The details available on the nature of the operation in Abbottabad provide a clear impression that

leader of Pakistan Baitullah Meshud in 2009; his successor and brother, Hekimullah Mashud, in 2013; and Afghan Taliban leader Mullah Mansoor in 2016. This is not to suggest that they were legal or justified, but to demonstrate that such actions are not uncommon. What is worth noting is that in most of these instances, terrorists were killed in the 'safe zones' of the terrorists and via drone attacks.

The experience of Bangladesh in dealing with militants in the past provides another kind of example too. In 2005, the JMB emerged as a serious threat to the security of

sentenced to death; more than 500 have received various jail terms.

Broadly speaking, we can divide terrorists, particularly high-profile terrorists killed in security operations, into two categories: those who inspire and those who are operational commanders. Bin-Laden and Awlaki fall into the first category, while the remainder fall into the second category. Therefore, results of their absence impacts differently. By the time bin-Laden was killed, he was removed from operational decision-making, yet he remained the global symbol of terrorism; Awlaki was reportedly involved in training

# Waiting for a medal at the Olympics

NAHELA NOWSHIN

BANGLADESH, once again, returned empty-handed from the Olympics this year, retaining its title of the "most populous country of never having won an Olympic medal". At the beginning of the Rio Olympics, Bangladesh was one of 75 countries with no Olympic medals. Fiji too was one of them until the country squashed its record of Olympics duck when its rugby team won the gold (and first ever Olympic medal) in the inaugural men's rugby sevens competition. Kosovo achieved a similar feat as double world champion Majlinda Kelmendi clinched the gold in the women's 52 kg category of judo and put a recently-independent Kosovo on the medal table for the first time. But Bangladesh, along with the likes of war-ravaged Congo and Rwanda, failed to secure any medals at Rio, prompting very little curiosity or concern from Bangladeshis worldwide, who seem to only have high expectations when it comes to the national cricket team.

Funnily enough, Bangladesh's poor performance at Rio or at the Olympics in general wasn't a talking point until the Margarita Mamun saga came into focus. Margarita, the gold medalist in women's individual all-around rhythmic gymnastics at Rio, born to a Bangladeshi father and a Russian mother, called her win a "victory for two countries". When the war of words played out on social media between those who took her statement at face value and those who asserted that Bangladesh had no role to play in her success, it was clear that the majority, like myself, conceded that Margarita would have never had the opportunities to become the star gymnast she is today had she built a life in Bangladesh. There is no question that her dreams of being a world champion rhythmic gymnast wouldn't have seen the light of day; from being ridiculed and shamed for wearing "tight, skimpy" clothes to never being afforded proper training or basic facilities to practice, Margarita would

have never stood a chance in her paternal homeland. This tug-of-war between the two camps debating the contribution of Bangladesh, or a lack thereof, to Margarita's achievements, nonetheless made one thing clear: Bangladesh is desperate to claim an Olympic victory. Perhaps we ought to ask ourselves, why are we failing so miserably at providing an environment conducive for producing world-class athletes who will be able to excel in platforms like the Olympics? Our misplaced urge to jump on the glory bandwagon, as a lot of us did when Margarita won, upon a nationalistic whim, and our subsequent refusal to acknowledge why we're wrong in claiming something that is not rightfully ours, is strongly indicative of a lack of trust in our own athletes.

With the better part of our focus and investment expended on cricket - a colonial legacy and a powerful expression of cultural nationalism for not only Bangladesh but also for South Asia as a whole - it is little wonder that other types of sports are widely neglected. The lack of sports infrastructure, facilities, opportunities and incentives available to youngsters to professionally take up a career in sports (other than cricket) is a major obstacle to our ability to venture past the likes of cricket and football. With the exception of trailblazers like mountaineer-activist Wasfia Nazreen, young men and women hardly have a non-cricket role model to look up to. Even a rudimentary Google search will show you the glaring paucity of Bangladeshi athletes competing at the international level in various kinds of sports. A general societal attitude that discourages youngsters to pursue their passion (including aspirations of becoming an athlete) and pushes them to pick the "safer" career path such as engineering, medicine, BBA, etc., is killing the hopes of all those who dare to dream. Thankfully, we have a number of non-cricket sporting achievements, albeit rare, to show for, thanks to athletes such as Abdullah Baki (silver medalist in shooting at the 2014

Commonwealth Games) and Asif Hossain Khan (gold medalist in shooting at the 2002 Commonwealth Games). But it is still a far cry from tasting a victory at the Olympics.

The gravity of our underperformance at the Olympics is underpinned by the population factor. Besides being the eighth most populous country in the world, Bangladesh is undergoing a demographic transition thanks to its increasing growth rate in the working age population in the last decade. An overwhelming portion of the present population is below 25 years of age. It is, therefore, an embarrassment of sorts for Bangladesh to be grouped together in the 'zero Olympic medal' category with countries with a minute fraction of our population (Lesotho: population of 2 million; Swaziland: population of 1.25 million). The population profile of the rest of the countries in this category in its entirety makes our incompetence incomprehensible. How have we not been able to harness

our youth potential and produce a single viable contender good enough to make it to the finals in a single sport at the Olympics since our first appearance in 1984?

Reportedly, the contingent of Bangladeshi athletes arrived in Rio without their original coaches. Instead, officials accompanied these athletes, in effect replacing their coaches. Swimmers Mahfizur Rahman Sagor and Sonia Akter Tumpa's coach at Rio was Bangladesh Swimming Federation general secretary Rafizuddin Rafiz who has no coaching background. Moreover, Bangladesh Athletics Federation's senior vice-president Shah Alam was nominated to be the coach for sprinters Mezbahuddin Ahmed and Shirin Akter despite the fact that Alam left his coaching career more than a decade ago. Although athletes have repeatedly voiced their opinions on the integral role that a coach plays during such big, competitive events, bureaucracy and nepotism often

trump the demands and needs of athletes. These malpractices are a manifestation of a broader culture of nonchalance and institutional corruption and a complete disregard for any sport that is not cricket.

Recently, British journalist Piers Morgan came under heavy fire on social media for tweeting this about India, "1,200,000,000 people and not a single Gold medal at the Olympics? Come on India, this is shameful. Put the bunting away & get training." India won two medals at Rio, none of which were gold, and Morgan simply didn't understand the cause for so much celebration. Many Indians didn't take his words lightly and reacted with some fiery comebacks. It now makes me wonder, if Morgan had hurled criticism at Bangladesh for being the most populous country with an Olympic duck, what would have been our reaction?

The writer is a freelance contributor.

**The Magnificent**  
79 Chandmari,  
Chittagong

**HOTLINE: 01755 66 24 24**  
email: info@btibd.org • www.btibd.com

**AA3** REHAB MEMBERSHIP #001  
Credit Rating ISO 9001:2008 CERTIFIED

**btibd** building technology & ideas ltd.  
since 1984 in pursuit of excellence...

Our customers speak for us...

"We are elated to be customers of bti. Their customer service is unparalleled in real estate sector and they have successfully helped us in making our dream of owning a home come true."

Capt. Jamal Hossain & Family  
The Magnificent  
79 Chandmari, Chittagong

**বাংলাদেশ উন্মুক্ত বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়**  
**BANGLADESH OPEN UNIVERSITY**

**Admission Eligibility**

- Graduate with minimum CGPA of 2.5/2nd Class (may be relaxed for experienced executives)
- Acceptable score in viva-voce

**MBA Major Areas:**

- Human Resource Management
- Marketing
- Accounting & Information Systems
- Finance & Banking

Contact No: 01729224499, 01711955537; Gazipur : 01920984162; Dhaka: 01920984164

**MBA (Evening) Program**

**Application Procedure**

- Download application form from BOU website: www.bou.edu.bd/index.php/all-forms or collect from Dhaka Regional center or Gazipur Campus.
- Submit the filled-in form along with 3 passport size photographs, copies of marksheets & certificates attested by Gazetted Officers or BOU teachers at Dhaka Campus or Gazipur Campus from 10:00 am to 5:00 pm.
- Deposit application fee of Tk.1000 (one thousand) in any branch of Janata Bank Ltd. to "Evening MBA Central A/C (Special Notice Deposit) No. 09030310033888" (Online) at Janata Bank, BOU Branch, Gazipur and submit the copy of deposit slip with application form.

**Admission- Fall, 2016**

**Viva-Voce**

Gazipur Campus: 09 September, 2016; 9:00 am  
Dhaka Campus: 09 September, 2016; 4:00 pm  
Gazipur Campus Address: Board Bazar, Gazipur- 1705  
Dhaka Campus Address: 4/Ka, Govt. Laboratory School Road, Dhanmondi, Dhaka

**Application: August 07 to September 07, 2016**

**List of selected applicants: 10 September, 2016**

**Class starts: 29 September, 2016**

**www.bou.edu.bd**