

TITLE : If There Was A Bomb Threat!

INTRODUCTION

Terrorists all over the world have targeted many places including schools to create panic and destruction. In the wake of a rise in such situations, students need to know that remaining calm and controlled can be extremely helpful. They should also neither believe in nor spread rumors. This session emphasizes the value of remaining vigilant and disciplined, and introduces the concept of "active curiosity" and "active non-curiosity". The activities carried out during the session are useful not only to meet a threat or the after effects of an explosion but also during other emergency situations like earth quake, fire etc.

1. Objectives : By the end of the session, the students will be able to

- Learn the measures required to remain vigilant at all times.
- Learn the emergency measures to be taken to manage a bomb threat and other emergencies like an earthquake.



2. Time : 70 minutes
(Two continuous Period)

3. Life Skills Being Used : Critical Thinking, Coping with Stress and Emotions, Empathy, Decision Making, Problem Solving.

4. Advance Preparations : 1.Copies of newspaper stories related to any terrorist attacks / attempts. 2. Situations for role play.

5. Linkages : Please see Contents

6. Methodology : Discussion, Brainstorming, Role play



7. Process :

Step 1:

Please read the Fact Sheet carefully and go through this session well in advance before you carry it out with the students.

Step 2:

Greet the students and introduce the topic. Tell them that we will role play a few situations.

Note for Teachers:

Before the students get alarmed, gently tell them that there is no terrorist threat to our school at all - we are doing this activity only to improve our skills and remain prepared!

Step 3:

Divide the class into 3 groups and ask them to do one role play each. Give the following scenarios:

- 1) "How will you help evacuate your own class and floor in case of a bomb threat?"
"How will you help the teachers in evacuating the junior classes?"
- 2) "What will you do if you come to know there that is a bomb threat in the crowded market place where you are shopping?"
- 3) "You are at the railway platform waiting to board a train. You hear a loud explosion and see injured people lying around. What will you do?"

Step 4:

Give them some time to prepare and present their Role plays to the class.

Expected Responses for scenarios 1) and 2):

- Evacuate the class.
- Collect in the open ground and sit.
- Help younger children come out calmly or lift and bring them .
- Form various teams, take various responsibilities.
- Calm the children who panic or start crying.
- Keep children busy by singing to them or chatting with them.
- Inform the police, and fire brigade, also the hospital if necessary.
- Evacuate the school in a calm and quiet manner.
- Do not go near any suspicious object.
- Evacuate the market place, calmly.
- Help others to evacuate, especially children and elderly people.

Expected Responses for scenario 3):

- Inform the police.
- Inform the fire brigade
- Remain calm, don't panic.
- Try to positively help the injured, but be careful not to cause any further injuries.

- Help the injured onto an ambulance.
- Call a hospital
- Donate blood.

Note for Teachers:

Applaud the excellent answers given and write them down on the blackboard. Supplement then from the lists here if the students do not come up with all the se points. **State that similar measures should be taken in the eventuality of other calamities like earthquakes, fire etc.**

Emphasize that remaining calm and patient will be possible only if Life Skills like **Self Awareness, Coping with Stress and Emotions, Critical Thinking** and **Problem Solving** are used. Tell them that our **Empathetic** attitude along with **Effective Communication** will lead us to help other students, especially the younger ones and calm their nerves. Our **clear thinking** (critical and creative thinking, decision making) will help us devise methods to overcome the situation and assist the various agencies that are expected to come into play. Thus **all life skills** are required to effectively respond to a situation like a bomb threat.

Share the information contained in the Fact Sheet with the students, especially the telephone numbers given. Ask them to note these numbers down.

Point out any mistakes e.g. - Students trying to remove a suspicious object that may be there in the role plays and give appropriate instructions to deal with the situations.

It is important to conduct regular drills in the school for all classes. Your Principal has already received detailed instructions from the Directorate of Education on this. Please go through the article “How to Survive a Disaster” in the Fact Sheet and share the basic points with the students. Do remember that the more the school practices what to do in an emergency, the better equipped in will be to handle a real one.

Step 5:

Now ask the students to narrate from their memory some terrorist attack in Delhi or anywhere else. Encourage them to give details. Jog their memory by asking -“What was the date?”, “What happened?”. “How did the city manage it?”, “Do you know of someone whose family was affected?” "Do you know of some instances where the bombs were diffused by the bomb squad, thus saving lives?" “Do you know of any police officer or any one else who showed courage and saved people’s lives?” etc. Encourage the students to speak to get the discussion going. Now show them some of the news reports about terrorist attacks that you had sourced before hand. Do not share anything that you feel may disturb the students.

Note for Teachers:

Assist the students with details. Explain that the cities that **did not panic** and reacted calmly e.g. Delhi after 29th October 2005 (before Diwali) and Mumbai after 11th July, 2006 bomb blasts were able to return to normalcy much earlier. (Refer **Annexure**). Tell them that this actually thwarted the terrorist's plan to create chaos, confusion and strife in the city. When people, though saddened by the happenings, went about their regular work, the city was able to function, children went to school, vegetables and daily necessities were available. Ask them **“What would have happened if everyone had panicked?”** Encourage a small discussion.

The students will use skills of **Critical Thinking** and will develop **Self Awareness** as the discussion progresses. They will start thinking “What would I have done? **Creative Thinking, Problem Solving** and **Decision Making** also are skills that are going to be used here.

State that acts of terrorism can happen anywhere, anytime, thus it is best to remain prepared for them.

Step 6:

Ask now: -

“What are the usual methods used by terrorists to spread terror?”

Expected responses:

- Bombs placed in innocent or attractive looking things like dolls, briefcase, bottles garbage bins etc.
- Bombs placed in stationary scooters, cars, buses etc; or left at crowded places in bags,
- Indiscriminate shooting at a group of people,
- Targeting national buildings like Parliament and Red Fort etc.



Applaud the students. Tell them about being **“actively curious”** e.g.- asking a person NOT to leave his luggage behind in a bus or a train and **“actively non-curious”**- e.g. NOT touching an object-however attractive it may be, which is lying unclaimed. Instead, **raise an alarm** so people can move off and also inform the authorities. Remind them about the brave bus driver Mr. Sukhbir who by his quick thinking and vigilance saved many lives by getting the bus evacuated at the earliest. State the value of maintaining discipline and order in dealing with such threats. You can also smilingly state that we can practice this by remaining disciplined and orderly in the classroom.

You can also share more details from **stories** that you have obtained from newspapers that reflect how being vigilant has helped saving lives. Nagender, a student of class XI of GBSSS Sarojini Nagar helped save 20 people after the bomb blast in Sarojini Nagar Market on 29th October 2005. Also tell them that seeking help from friends, adults etc is better than working alone.

Step 7:

Now ask:-

“How can we reduce the damage that can occur due to terrorist attacks?”

Expected Responses:

- By keeping our eyes and ears open, by keeping ourselves informed,
- By sharing any information with teachers, and Principal.
- By ringing up 100 and informing the police in case of emergencies
- By following the directions of the law enforcement agencies,
- By being vigilant and extra careful in crowded places,
- By not falling prey to rumors,
- By not blaming any one community or religion .



Note for Teachers:

Applaud the students. Draw their attention to other methods used by terrorists like **attacking religious places** to create religious strife, holding hostages, using ai rplanes to hit buildings and mass poisonings with gas, etc. Tell them that we all need to be one step ahead of the terrorists. Adolescents, due to their keen interest, curiosity and capacity for observing minute facts, can notice things that are suspicious or out of place. This skill when used by thousands of adolescents collectively can lead to effective community policing. State that terrorists want to catch people when they are off guard **and only vigilance and alertness can save us all**. Also mention the good work done by the police, para military agencies and armed forces in diffusing bombs and saving lives.

Step 8:

Explain to them that frequently, more damage is done due to panic than by the actual terrorists act. So the value of **remaining calm and orderly** cannot be over emphasized. Also tell them that sometimes rumors lead to riots or attacks on a particular community. Explain that the terrorists have no religion and in fact all religions condemn such acts.

Round off the discussion by telling them that today we examined one scenario in detail, but these principles are equally valid for any kind of **emergency** situation such as an earthquake/gas leak/fire etc.

Remind them to remain vigilant and follow the principles of “**active curiosity**” and “**active non-curiosity**” in all emergencies.

Key Messages:

Highlight and repeat the following to the class:

1. Terrorists can strike in various forms, anytime, anywhere, as their aim is to create chaos and disrupt normalcy.
2. Remaining vigilant, following principles of “**active curiosity**” and “**active non curiosity**” can help prevent many terrorist attacks.
3. Practicing Life Skills such as Critical Thinking, Self Awareness, Effective communication and discipline can help us remain calm , reduce panic and be useful in case of a terrorist threat or its aftermath.



Ideas for Learning More:

Ask the students to:-

1. Plan mock drills for evacuating their class or in their neighborhood for managing a bomb threat/ any other disaster.
2. Collect newspaper stories of how being vigilant prevented some terrorist attacks.
3. Build up Disaster Management Teams in school/neighbourhood.

YUVA SLP

FACT SHEET

IF THERE WAS A BOMB THREAT!

Terrorism is violence or harmful acts committed (or threatened) against civilians for political or other ideological goals.

Terrorism includes

- **Acts of Violence**
- **Acts to create Psychological impact and fear**
- **Acts perpetrated for a political goal**
- **The deliberate targeting of non-combatants**



A terrorist activity in India was the **1993 Bombay bombings** where a series of thirteen bomb explosions took place in Bombay (now Mumbai) on March 12, 1993. The coordinated attacks were the most destructive bomb explosions in Indian history. The single-day attacks resulted in over 250 civilian fatalities and 700 injuries.

Bombings

A **bomb threat** is generally defined as a verbal threat to detonate an explosive or incendiary device, to cause property damage or injuries, whether or not such a device actually exists.

Bomb threat includes the threatened use, release or placement of other harmful agents, such as poisons, biological pathogens, radioactive materials, or even a dangerous weapon. Many bomb threats that are not pranks are made as parts of other crimes, such as extortion, hijacking, or robbery. Actual bombings for malicious destruction of property, terrorism purposes or murder often occur without any warning, let alone threats.

When A Bomb Threat Is Called In, Perform the Following Actions:

- Remain calm
- If telephonic, attempt to keep the caller on the line as long as possible. Ask him/her to repeat the message. Record every word spoken by the person.
- Ask for the exact location where the bomb has been or is going to be planted.
- Get as much information as possible about the caller, e.g., vocal characteristic, sex, group affiliation, why the bomb was placed.
- Clues from background noises, which might indicate caller's identification and location.
- Immediately after the caller hangs up, report the threat to the Police.

If a suspicious package or bomb is found, **evacuate the area**. Do not handle it, move it, immerse it, or cover it.

SOME BASIC DO'S AND DON'TS FOR EVERYONE

Instead of waiting, people available in the area should carry out the following on noticing any suspected object.

- Clearing/evacuating the area
- Ensure that no one touches or approaches the suspected object

Do's and Don'ts in the event of a bomb threat should constitute a major point of focus in all awareness programmes.

THE DO'S

- Remain calm
- Always keep an eye out for suspicious objects.
- Notice your surrounding for anything out of place.
- Evacuate everyone immediately to a safe distance.
- Open all windows and doors.
- Remove all valuable and unstable articles like fuel and electronic items.
- Inform the Police.
- Inform fire brigade, hospital and ambulance.

THE DON'TS

- Do not spread rumors.
- Do not touch, disturb and approach the suspected object.
- Do not try to submerge the suspicious object in water.
- Do not try to open or puncture the suspicious object.

IMPORTANT TELEPHONE NUMBERS

- POLICE 100
- DELHI FIRE SERVICE 101
- AMBULANCE 102
- CENTRALISED ACCIDENT & TRAUMA SERVICES 1099
25769097
25785927
- A.I.I.M.S (All India Institute of Medical Sciences) 26588360
26594800-805
26588500
26588700
- SAFDARJUNG HOSPITAL 26168336
26165060
- RAM MANOHAR LOHIA HOSPITAL 23365525
- LADY HARDINGE (SUCHETA KRIPLANI) HOSPITAL 23363728
- HINDU RAO HOSPITAL 23932362
23912435
23919476
- BLOOD BANK 26561123
- RED CROSS 23716441
- 24 HOUR CHEMIST (AIIMS) 26560110

The Statesman News, 28-8-2007, New Delhi

Hoax bomb call in school

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Aug. 27: A hoax call in a school in Mayur Vihar area of east Delhi today sent the police, already on high alert into tizzy.

Police said that a call was received by the principal of ASN school, Mr R Goyal at around 11.30 a m from an anonymous person that a bomb had been placed in the school and it would explode at noon. The call later turned out to be a hoax. "The students were immediately rushed out of the classrooms and police were informed. Police swung in-



Students being evacuated from ANS school at Mayur Vihar after a hoax bomb call on Monday. ■ SNS

to action, searching the er dogs and bomb disposal school premises with sniff- squads," said the police.

Bomb hoax triggers panic in school

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Friday, 8.30 am. The bell goes off at Salt Lake's Kendriya Vidyalaya No. 1 for start of classes, and the phone rings in the principal's office. A male voice warns that a time bomb

shocked to speak. Police suspect a truant kid — possibly someone who hadn't prepared for the unit test scheduled for that day — was behind the hoax call.

Police detained and later released a Class XII student

Bandyopadhyay said.

She immediately raised the alarm and called the cops. All 1,800-odd students and 74 teachers of the school were evacuated within minutes as a huge police force from Bidhannagar North police station, led by additional SP Asok Biswas, rushed in. The CID's bomb disposal squad and sniffer dogs were also called in. But after a three-hour search, no bomb was found.

By then, panic-stricken guardians had rushed to the school and pandemonium prevailed when they tried to reach their children. "I was terribly worried. We all got scared when a rumour spread that an explosion had occurred in the school and a student was injured," said Tulika Biswas, a guardian.

"It is possible that a student or his friend made the prank call to disrupt the examination. However, there was almost cent-per-cent attendance among students. We have asked BSNL to trace the number. Investigations are on," said additional SP Asok Biswas.

Principal P C Mohapatra said classes would resume on Saturday and that the tests would be rescheduled.



GLIMPSES OF HORROR: Children come out of the school weeping and (inset) a parent breaks down

has been planted and it will go off in one and a half hours. Pandemonium breaks out.

It turned out to be a prank in the end, but for three hours, hundreds of children and their jittery parents hung on the edge of their nerves. Some broke down, others were too

after interrogation.

It was teacher Chhaya Bandyopadhyay, who was standing in as school-in-charge, who received the phone call. "A male caller warned that an explosion was about to occur inside the school premises at 10 am. The caller then hung up,"

Mumbai Bomb Blast (11th July – 2006)



At least 184 people were killed and around 714 injured, many seriously, as seven powerful blasts ripped through packed train cars and on stations during rush hour here Tuesday evening in the worst terror attack in India in over a decade.

Dazed survivors, blood on their faces, stared blankly at the explosion sites, some trying desperately to speak to their families on mobile telephones held by young men who came rushing from neighbourhood buildings. All this while it kept raining all over the city, making the situation much more grim and difficult.

Terror and mayhem struck Mumbai and Srinagar, two cities 1600 km apart in the west and north of India, killing at least 143 people. The majority of them in suburban trains in the country's financial and entertainment capital.

The targets of bombings in Mumbai during the evening rush hour were the suburban train service that is the lifeline of the city. The stations that were targeted were Khar, Mahim, Matunga, Jogeshwari, Borivili, Bhayandra (Mira Road) and the Khar-Santa Cruz subway.



Indian rescue workers and policemen gather at the site of the blast in **Sarojini Nagar** area in **New Delhi**, India on **Saturday, 29 October 2005**. At least 38 people were killed and many injured in **three serial explosions** in markets in New Delhi on Saturday. The explosions took place three days before **Diwali**, and in busy shopping areas, causing authorities to suspect it as the handiwork of terrorists.

New Delhi - At least 38 people were killed and many injured in three serial explosions in markets in New Delhi on Saturday. The explosions took place three days before Diwali, and in busy shopping areas, causing authorities to suspect it as the handiwork of terrorists. There was however, no official confirmation that the explosions were bomb blasts. Police officials however told news channels that it was a 'clear act of terrorism'. The first explosion took place near the vegetable market in Paharganj in the heart of New Delhi, an area popular with foreign tourists. Delhi's Police Commissioner confirmed that 15 people had died in the explosion. Panic gripped the commercial area where thousands of people had gathered to shop for the festive season. The explosion was so powerful that many shops were destroyed.

The second blast took place at South Delhi's Sarojini Nagar Market, which left 20 dead. Shops caught fire, and bodies were being pulled out from them as police cordoned off the area, NDTV network reported. Fire department officials told the channel that three people were killed in the third explosion that took place in a bus in South Delhi's Okhla area. Police teams had reached the sites of the explosions and were trying to determine the nature of the blast. They were scouring the area to find if explosive devices had been used.

Police sounded the red alert in New Delhi and issued orders to close down all market areas, following the blasts. Delhi has not witnessed as many explosions since 2000, when terrorists set off about six blasts in the city.

Alert bus staff averts tragedy

Driver, Conductor Hurt While Disposing Bag Containing Bomb

TIMES NEWS NETWORK, 30th October 2005

New Delhi: Four persons were injured in an explosion that took place near a DTC bus, in the third of the serial blasts that rocked the city at 5.45 pm on Saturday, near Kalkaji bus depot.

Unconfirmed reports said that a man wearing a red shirt got off at C Lal Chowk, leaving a white bag in the bus. The bus staff suspected it to be a bomb and when they opened the bag, they found wires in it.

After parking the bus at an isolated spot, the driver was about to throw the bag out of the bus when it exploded. In the process, the bus conductor and the driver were critically injured.

"It was a miraculous escape for us," said Afzal, one of the bus passengers who was hit by glass shards of the bus while alighting from it.

"There was a cloud of smoke and the driver and the conductor were lying on the ground with injuries," he said. The bus plying on the Outer Mudrika route was heading for Sangam Vihar from Kalkaji Temple and was carrying about 30 passengers when the bomb was detected.

"One of the passengers noticed a white bag lying unclaimed near the driver's seat. When no one came forward to claim it, the driver, fearing it to be a bomb, parked the bus in a relatively isolated place and ordered everyone to get out of the bus," said Narender, another passenger.

"I heard an explosion. Before I could realise what had happened, everybody started running," said Bhavesh Bhushan, security guard of Hi-tech Vocational Centre. "Window panes of our institute were broken due to the explosion," said Bhushan.

"It was like mad rush and there was just a cloud of smoke," said Ramesh, a witness who was returning home after the day's work at a factory. "Initially, everyone thought it was a tyre burst but when we got closer to the spot, we realised it was much more serious," he said.



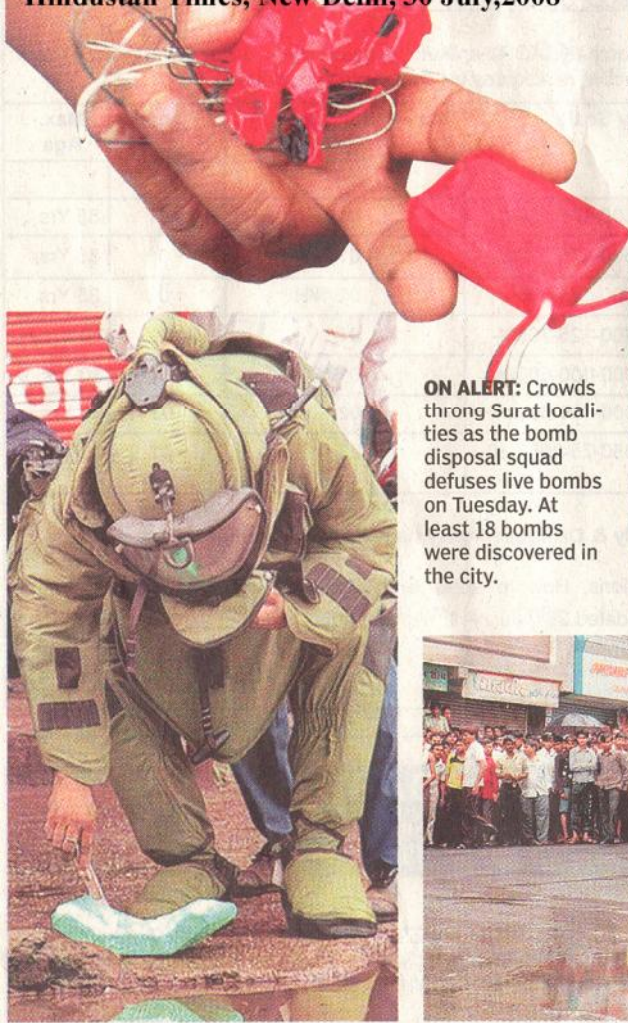
SHATTERED REMAINS: The DTC bus in which the bomb was planted near Kalkaji bus depot on Saturday.

BOMBS

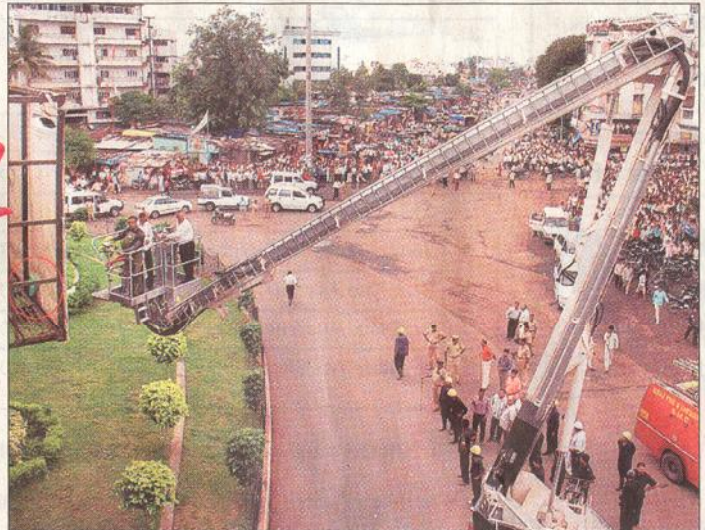
EVERYWHERE

Hindustan Times, New Delhi, 30 July, 2008

BEHIND HOARDING, ON TREE, IN GARBAGE DUMP, AT BUS STOP, NEAR POLICE STATIONS...



ON ALERT: Crowds throng Surat localities as the bomb disposal squad defuses live bombs on Tuesday. At least 18 bombs were discovered in the city.



PTI



7 bombs rock IT city

Hindustan Times, New Delhi, 26 July 2008

THE BOMBS WERE PLACED IN FLOWER POTS AND FILLED WITH EXPLOSIVES, NUTS AND BOLTS

THE INTENSITY WAS LOW. ONE KILLED, 7 INJURED. THE MESSAGE: TERRORISTS CAN STRIKE AT WILL

THE INVESTIGATION BEGAN AS A POLICE TEAM LEFT FOR HYDERABAD TO QUESTION AN MBA STUDENT

B.R. Srikanth, Stavan Desai and Abhishek Sharan
Bangalore/New Delhi, July 25

THE SEVEN low-intensity bombs that panicked Bangalore on Friday were meant to spread fear more than mass destruction or death, said investigators and anti-terrorism experts.

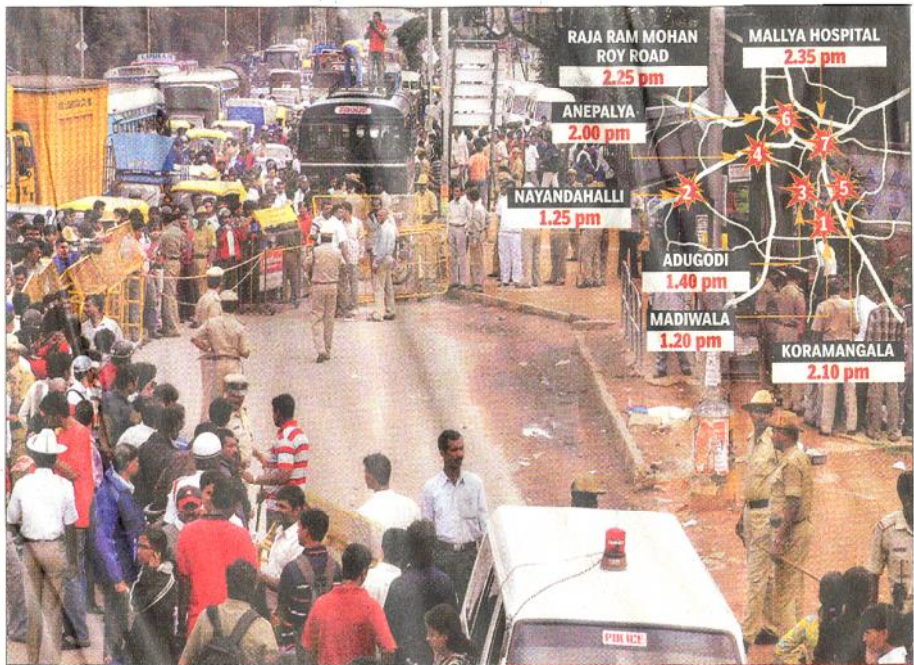
There were no immediate clues to the synchronised explosions — a woman was killed and shrapnel injured seven people — but *HT* has learned that a Karnataka police team left for Hyderabad on Friday night to interrogate an MBA student who was arrested on July 15 in that city.

They hope to interrogate Mohammed Mugeemudin Yasir, brother of Raziuddin Nasir, arrested on January 29 on charges of organising terror-training camps in the forests near Hubli, Karnataka. "During interrogation, he (Yasir) said he had taken operatives to Karnataka and arranged safehouses," Hyderabad Police Commissioner Prasanna Rao told *HT*.

Both men are sons of Hyderabad's Maulana Nasiruddin, convicted of murdering former Gujarat home minister Haren Pandya in March 2003.

"The primary objective (of Friday's bombings) was to convey a message that the terrorists have the capability to hit at will, when and where they want," said Bahukutumbi Raman, former additional secretary in the Research and Analysis Wing. "Their second objective is possibly to spread nervousness among tourists and businessmen."

Many infotech firms and malls shut down after the bombings. "We have increased security on our campus," said a spokesperson for tech giant Infosys. Bomb-disposal units and forensic experts raced from bomb-site to bomb-site in a 10- to 15-km radius after the bombs went off within 70 minutes from 1.20 pm. The bombs were placed in flower pots stuffed with nuts and bolts, preliminary investigations revealed.



JAGADEESH N.V./HT

Curious onlookers flock one of the blast sites in Bangalore on Friday as policemen search for clues.

FIRST CLUES BOMBS WITH TIMER DEVICES

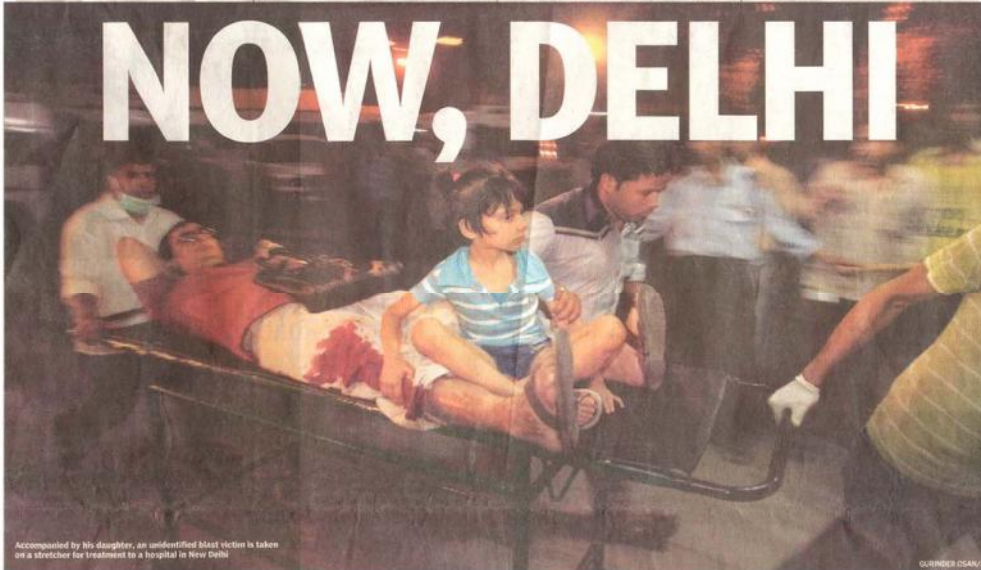
THE IMPROVISED explosive devices were fitted with timers and were concealed in flower pots to avoid detection, investigators said. The flower pots were placed on footpaths, some of them near power transformers.

BOMBED P10

Why Bangalore?

- Is India losing the war on terror?
- Soft bombs are the in thing
- Diary of a bomb-maker

JAIPUR MAY 13 63 DEAD	BANGALORE JULY 25 2 DEAD	AHMEDABAD JULY 26 56 DEAD	6.07 PM GAFFAR MARKET, KAROL BAGH The bomb was: Behind the CNG kit in an autorickshaw parked in the market
6.34 PM BARAKHAMBA ROAD The bomb was: In a dustbin near the entrance to the Barakhamba Metro Station	6.35 PM CENTRAL PARK, CONNAUGHT PLACE The bomb was: In a dustbin near the entrance to the Rajiv Chowk Metro Station	6.37 PM M BLOCK MKT, GREATER KAILASH The bomb was: In a dustbin outside a park in the middle of the shopping complex	6.38 PM M BLOCK MKT, GREATER KAILASH The bomb was: In a bicycle, close to the Prince paan shop at a corner of the market



NOW, DELHI

23 DEAD, 110 HURT. 'INDIAN MUJAHIDEEN' E-MAIL FROM MUMBAI, SENT AFTER FIRST BLAST, PROMISED 9- WITH CHILLING ACCURACY

Vijaita Singh,
New Delhi, 13 September, 2008

IN THE fourth major attack in six month, terrorists struck again, this time in the heart of India's capital. Five consecutive explosions over 31 minute killed 23 people on Saturday evening. More than 110 people were wounded in the attack that offered new proof on India's seeming unwillingness or inability to fight terror even as the threat in not a faraway blip any more. India has already lost an estimated 70,000 lives to terrorism, with little success in investigation or prosecuting most previous terrorist attacks. The targets on Saturday evening included symbols of he evening, everyday India: an upscale market, a movie theatre, a sprawling park, the popular sightseeing hub at India Gate. Five bombs exploded; at least three were found and swiftly defused- two in Connaught Place and one at India Gate- by expert who possibly saved numerous other lives. In a chilling drill also followed earlier, a shadowy group called the Indian Mujahedeen claimed responsibility in an e-mail to the Hindustan Times and other media organizations. "Eye for an eye," said the document, with the image of two men- including a victim of the 2002

Gujarat riots. It threatened. "The dust will never settle down."
"Our intense, accurate and successive attacks like the one you will see exactly five minute form now, Inshallah, will continue to punish you even before your earlier wounds have healed," Said the e-mail, sent shortly after the first explosion. Investigation tracked the e-mail to an Internet protocol address registered in the name of Messrs kamran Power Control Private Limited in Chembur, Mumbai. There was no response when HT tried to call the number for Kamran power and the phone line had been connected to a fax. It is unclear whether the company has any link to the explosions, and investigators have not ruled out the possibility of a hacked Wi-Fi connection being used to send the e-mail, as it was done after the Ahmedabad blasts in July. Source said the e-mail ID, al_arbi_delhi@yahoo.com, used to send the mail, was created on Saturday, and that the person who finally sent the e-mail using the ID had received the mail from someone else on Saturday afternoon. Whoever the attackers were, 11-year- old balloon seller Rahul said he had seen them at Barakhamba Road, one of the blast sites.

Hindustan Times, Sep. 14, 2008

How to Survive a Disaster

Adapted from the article in TIME, June 23, 2008

When a plane crashes or the earth shakes, we tend to view the survivors as the lucky ones.

But survival is not just a product of luck. We can do far more than we think to improve our odds of preventing and surviving even the most horrendous of catastrophes. It's matter of preparation – but also of mental conditioning. Each of us has what I call a “disaster personality,” a state of being that takes over in a crisis. It is at the core of who we are. The fact is, we can refine that personality and teach our brains to work more quickly, maybe even more wisely.

Humans are programmed with basic survival skills. When frightened, we get a shot of performance – enhancing hormones, and the blood pumps to our limbs to help us outrun whatever enemy we face. But in modern times, we're hardly aware of such natural skills, and most of us do little to understand or develop them.

We could, for example, become far better at judging threats before catastrophe strikes. We have technological advantages that our ancestors lacked, and we know where disasters are likely to occur. And yet we flirt shamelessly with risk. We construct city skylines in hurricane alleys and neighbourhoods on top of faults lines – as if nature will be cowed by our audacity and leave us be.

And we rely on a sprawling network of faraway suppliers for necessities like warmth and food. If the power cuts off, many of us still don't know where the stairs are in our skyscrapers.

In every disaster, buried under the rubble is evidence that we can do better. Much of that work is physical - building stronger buildings in safer places, for example. But the work is also psychological. The more control people feel they have over their predicament, the better their performance. When people believe that survival is negotiable, they can be wonderfully creative. All it takes is the audacity to imagine that our behavior matters.

When the planes struck the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001, Rick Rescorla embodied that spirit of survival. The head to security for Morgan Stanley Dean Witter at the World Trade Center, Rescorla believed that regular people were capable of great achievements, with a bit of leadership. He got Morgan Stanley employees to take responsibility for their survival - which happened almost nowhere else that day in the Trade Center.

Rescorla started running the entire company through his own frequent, surprise fire drills. He trained employees to meet in the hallway between the stairwells and go down the stairs, two by two, to the 44th floor.

The radicalism of Rescorla's drills cannot be overstated. Remember, Morgan Stanley is an investment bank. Millionaire, high- performance bankers on the 73rd floor did not appreciate the interruption. Each drill, which pulled brokers off their phones and away from their computers, cost the company money. But Rescorla did it anyway. His military training had taught him a simple rule of human nature; the best way to get the brain to perform under extreme stress is to repeatedly run it through rehearsals beforehand.

After the first few drills, Rescorla chastised employees for moving too slowly in the stairwell. He started timing them with a stopwatch, and they got faster. He also lectured employees about some of the basics of fire emergencies: Because roof rescues are rare and extremely dangerous, people should always do down.

On the morning of 9/11, Rescorla heard an explosion and saw Tower I burning from his office window. A Port Authority official came over the P.A system and urged people to stay at their desks. But Rescorla grabbed his megaphone and cell phone and began systematically ordering Morgan Stanley employees to get out. They performed beautifully.

They already knew what to do, even the 250 visitors taking a stockbroker training class. They had already been shown, the nearest stairway.

“Knowing where to go was the most important thing. Because your brain – at least mine- just shut down. When that happens, you need to know what to do next,” says Bill McMahon, a Morgan Stanley executive.

“One thing you don't ever want to do is to have to think in a disaster.”

On 9/11, some of the dead might well have survived if they had received Rescorla's warnings to always go down rather than up. But in the absence of other information, some people remembered that victims had been evacuated from the roof in 1993. So they used the last minutes of their lives to climb to the top of the towers - only to find the doors locked.

As Rescorla stood directing people down the stairwell on the 44th floor, the second plane hit- this time striking about 38 floors above his head. The building lunged violently, and some people were thrown to the floor. “Stop,” Rescorla ordered through the megaphone. “Be still. Be silent. Be calm.” In response, “No one spoke or moved,” Stewart writes. “It was as if Rescorla had cast a spell.”

Rescorla had once led soldiers through the night in the Vietcong – controlled Central Highlands of Vietnam. He knew the brain responded poorly to fear- but he also knew it could be distracted. Back then, he had calmed his men by singing Cornish songs from his youth. Now, in the crowded stairwell, Rescorla sang into the bullhorn. “Men of Cornwall stand ye steady. It cannot be ever said ye for the battle were not ready. Stand and never yield!”

Rescorla taught Morgan Stanley employees to save themselves. It’s lesson that has become, somehow, rare and precious. When the tower collapsed, only 13 Morgan Stanley Colleagues – including Rescorla and four of his security officers- were inside. The other 2,687 were safe.

5 ways to improve your “Disaster Personality”

1. **ATTITUDE** – People who respond well to trauma tend to have three underlying advantages: a belief that they can influence events, an ability to find meaningful purpose in life’s turmoil and a conviction that they can learn from positive and negative experiences. They may be largely a matter of genetic makeup, but it is possible to teach yourself to be more proactive and avoid the victimization trap(“if it happens to me, there’s nothing I can do”)
2. **KNOWLEDGE** - Sometimes a small amount to information can help us tap into a vein of resilience we didn’t know we had. Did you know that most serious plane accidents are survivable? The statistics are clear: of all passengers involved in serious accidents between 1983 and 2000, 56% survived. Once we know that one fact, we may become more attentive to in -flight safety briefings, which in turn can help us move faster to get out of a plane should we ever need to.
3. **ANXIETY LEVEL**- Research into scuba- diving and firefighting accidents has shown that people with generally high anxiety levels tend to overreact to extreme stress. Their brains, overwhelmed by the situation, sort through their database of responses and choose the wrong one (like pulling the breathing apparatus out of their mouth underwater). But certain coping devices – like controlled, rhythmic breathing- can keep anxiety under control. Many police officers are now trained to do such breathing whenever their guns are drawn.
4. **BODY WEIGHT** - Get in shape! The cruel reality of physics is that overweight people move more slowly and need more space, so they have more trouble fleeing. On 9/11, people with low physical abilities were three times as likely to be hurt while evacuating the Towers.
5. **TRAINING** – the best way to improve performance is to practice. Consider what you are most afraid of (or, even better, which risks are most statistically relevant to you). If you work in a skyscraper, go into the stair way on a regular basis. Walk down to the ground a few times a year. If you live in a hurricane alley, pack a suitcase and make a plan for evacuating your family. It could make a difference.

Be Alert, Be Vigilant, Be Watchful.



Call 1090
to report anything
suspicious,
your identity will be kept secret.



SIMPLE TIPS TO FIGHT CRIME & TERRORISM.

In case you suspect something • Call 1090 at once, and give as many details as possible about the suspect or the vehicle • Keep an eye on the suspect or vehicle while giving information to the police

YOU CAN HELP

If you are a car dealer

- Satisfy yourself about the antecedents of both parties, particularly the buyer, before finalizing the deal and more so if the buyer is from outside Delhi.
- Insist on their identification documents; photocopies of which should be retained by you.
- Be careful while organizing a deal particularly involving Ambassador Cars and Motorcycles as they are most likely to be used by terrorists.

If you are a landlord or a property dealer

- Do not let out your premises without satisfying yourself about the antecedents of the tenant.

If you own a Guest house, Lodge or a Hotel

- Insist on identification documents before booking a room for the guest.
- Call 100 or report to the nearest police station about any suspicious guest.

Report to the police on Tel. 100

- Suspicious and unclaimed objects like Hand Bags, Packets etc.
- Suspicious person in your vicinity.



Do not touch unclaimed objects.



Do not rent your premises to unverified persons.



Before selling a car, motorcycle or scooter, check the credentials of buyers.

Rehdiwalas, Patriwalas, Motor Vehicle Parking Attendants, TSR /Taxi Drivers, Chowkidars, RWAs/ MTAs
YOU ARE OUR EYES & EARS - INFORM US AND PREVENT CRIME & TERRORISM.



Hindustan Times, New Delhi, July 28, 2008



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