

Combating fundamentalism and terrorism

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FUNDAMENTALISM and terrorism have emerged as a menace to security, co-operation, socio-economic and cultural development at country, regional and international levels. However, defining fundamentalism and terrorism is very sensitive and delicate, more so are the ways to combat it.

Fundamentalism can be defined in a simplified way as strict adherence to specific set of theological doctrines and is generalised to mean strong adherence to any set of beliefs. Extremism, sacrifice, and aggression are some of the characteristics of fundamentalism. The mentality of self-sacrifice is central to fundamentalism. Fundamentalists are scared of attacks on their beliefs and practices, which makes them aggressive.

But for terrorism, there is no universally accepted definition. During the 1970s and 1980s, the United Nations attempted to define "Terrorism" but could not reach a consensus due to differences of opinion between various members about the use of violence in the context of its objective. The "only general characteristic generally agreed upon is that terrorism involves violence and the threat of violence." However, this characterisation alone is oversimplified and not acceptable. Those who fought with arms for our liberation, or the Palestinians who are fighting for their rights, are not terrorists but freedom-fighters, although the colonial powers termed them as "terrorists."

Although -- due to the acts of some fundamentalists like the attack on Twin Towers and western propaganda -- the word "fundamentalism" has become synonymous with "Muslim fundamentalism" and is commonly used as a pejorative term, it has its roots in Christianity, to be more specific, in the Niagara Bible Conference (1878-1897), which defined those things that were fundamental to Christian belief.

In 1910, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church distilled these into what became known as the "five fundamentals." By the late 1910s, theological conservatives rally-

ing around the Five Fundamentals came to be known as "fundamentalists." The movement's (1910-1920) purpose was to reaffirm older beliefs of Protestant Christianity and zealously defend them against the challenges of liberal theology, Darwinism, and other movements which it regarded as harmful to Christianity.

Many scholars attribute the rise of present day Islamic fundamentalism to Wahhabi movement (Wahhabism), which emerged 250 years ago to protect the purity and originality of Islam.

The media, in an attempt to explain the ideology of Ayatollah Khomeini and the Iranian Revolution to a Western audience, described it as a "fundamentalist version of Islam" by way of analogy to the Christian fundamentalist movement in the US during the early twentieth century. This was born the term "Islamic fundamentalist."

Enquiring into the causes of the rise of Hindu fundamentalism in the Indian Sub-continent, historian Prof. Salauddin Ahmed noted: "In the early thirteenth century A.D., Muslim domination was established in the northern part of India through the invasions of the Turks and the Afghans. Introduction of Islam in India posed great challenge to Hinduism. Failing to resist Muslim invasion, the Hindu rulers decided to protect themselves under the cover of religion. They started to strengthen Hindu conservatism -- by orchestrating the old Hindu religious and social 'dos' and 'dons.' Thus was the rise of Hindu Fundamentalism in India.

Fundamentalism emerged in Buddhism also. A Japanese school of Buddhism, called



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Nichiren Buddhism, which believes that other forms of Buddhism are heretical, has been labelled as fundamentalist. However, there are several sects of the Nichiren School. In Tibet, there also exist extremists and fundamentalists among the Buddhists, who are not even able to pick up the idea of a possible dialogue.

Fundamentalism and terrorism conglomerated together have become a menace. The world has witnessed the destruction of the Twin Towers; India has experienced the destruction of the 450-year-old Babri Mosque and many terrorist act-induced deaths; Pakistan has witnessed the assassination of Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto and many killings; Bangladesh has faced bomb attack on a pro-left cultural rally on March 6, 1999, bomb explosion on Bengali New Year Day in 2001, grenade attack on Sheikh Hasina on August 21, 2004, countrywide explosions in 63 out of 64 districts in August 2005, suicide-bombing in courtrooms and court premises in

2005. These are a few of the numerous incidents in these countries. Indonesia, Malaysia are no strangers to acts of terrorism by the fundamentalists.

After one-eleven, the US government has waged its so-called war against terrorism; nevertheless, the US government should take a great part of the responsibility for the spread of international terrorism.

That fundamentalism cannot be fought with counter-fundamentalism, and terrorism cannot be fought with counter-terrorism, has been proved by the failed policies of the US. It is necessary to address the issues which are contributing to their emergence and growth (diagnostic approach).

The new recruits of fundamentalism are taught that violence is the only way of implementing the Shariah, which can rid the society of exploitation and social injustice. To fight this attitude it is necessary to fill the present ideological vacuum with something which will catch the imagination of young boys and girls.

Some madrassas and religious institutions are the recruiting centres of young boys and girls, as the recent arrests in Barguna have shown. The education curriculum of madrassas and other educational institutions have to be reformed so that the young children are exposed to science, literature and culture to inculcate a modern, scientific and progressive outlook. Through education and training, young children have to develop natural inhibition against extremism by inculcating (a) tolerance and endurance (b) democratic principles (to combat chauvinism), (c) believing in peace for mankind (to combat aggression) etc. Also,

religion has to be looked at positively. For example, all religions teach tolerance, but fundamentalism does not; Prophet Muhammad (peace be on Him) warned against overdoing religion, but fundamentalism does the opposite.

It has been observed that young children are recruited from poor families. They are motivated against exploitation and evils of society to have a happy life in the next world. Along with exposing the children to science, literature and culture, meeting the need for socio-economic development to ensure the basic needs like food and shelter, water and sanitation, education and health-care is crucially important for combating conditions for recruitment of potential extremists and terrorists.

People and leaders of all faiths need to be assured of freedom of their religion and religious practices. This should be protected at all times by the state.

All hotbeds of oppression, including Palestine, need to be addressed to establish peace and justice. Playing double standard, i.e. fighting terrorism in one place and aiding terrorism in another, will not help.

As fundamentalism and communalism are undermining the vitals of society, eroding democratic values, norms and institutions, and because these forces are focused on gaining political control by any means, it is necessary to unite all the forces for peace, progress and democracy nationally and internationally.

Let one not forget that fundamentalism -- be it Islamic, Hindu, Christian, Judaic or of any other nature -- is retrogressive and counter-development, and a threat to peace and security. Governments, political parties and social groups should refrain from using fundamentalist and communalist ideologies as well as these forces in furthering their ends.

Finally, presence of strong progressive intelligentsia and conscious media in all countries is a guarantee for carrying forward the struggle for peace and security, solidarity and progress against fundamentalism and terrorism. There lies the opportunity.

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Lessons from Egyptian crisis

KAZI WADUD NAWAZ

THE 'great' Egyptian army has at last displayed its valour and declared war! It has declared war not against Israel or any other external enemy of the country -- it has declared war against its own people! It resorted initially to a lot of hypocritical political maneuvering and finally, on August 14 morning, to extreme brutality to root-out unarmed Brotherhood supporters. Tanks, bulldozers, helicopters and latest automatic firearms, nothing has been left unused to disperse millions of demonstrators demanding release and reinstatement of Md. Morsi, the first democratically elected president in Egyptian history, overthrown recently by a military coup.

The coup was pre-planned and well-calculated, designed and master-minded to serve US-Israeli geopolitical interests in the Middle-East. It also goes in favour of vested interests of the corrupt bureaucracy in the Egyptian army. No matter what the cost may be and the extent of casualties -- let hundreds and thousands die, and be injured, and streams of blood flow in streets of Cairo -- it's nothing to worry about if it serves the interests of the US, Israel and army bureaucracy!

The US government, so-called protagonist of human rights and democracy, has kept mum and refused to call it a military coup and a violation of democratic and human rights on the part of the army-backed interim government pushed forward as a puppet in the political stage with high-sounding promises of democracy. Fulfilling these promises is beyond the scope and capacity of a puppet government, and never to be materialised in the face of resistance and conspiracies of vested interests behind the screen at home and abroad.

US democracy is dominated by multinational and trans-national corporations and serves corporate interests at home and abroad. The hue and cry raised by the US government for democracy and human rights all over the world is nothing but a strategic move to camouflage its offensives for capturing world markets and resources to serve corporate interests.

The history of the Egyptian army clearly shows its anti-people role as a stooge for consolidating powers of military dictators and serving the interests of the army bureaucracy.

After its humiliating defeat in the 1967 Arab-Israel war, the

Egyptian army was totally demoralised. The war fully exposed the moral bankruptcy of the autocratic regimes and their corrupt army bureaucracy. The military dictators, who have no confidence in the people, had no other alternative but to surrender to the will and dictates of their imperialist masters to secure their political and economic empire established through conspiracy, corruption and plunder. The Egyptian army depends mainly on US assistance and is obliged to serve the masters better, rather than acting on national interest.

Brotherhood has a glorious tradition of sacrifice but recently developed a dependency on US support to carry forward "Western Strategy of Political Islam," which goes counter to its strategy of establishing an Islamic state in a single country, in this case Egypt, as a model for rejuvenating Islamic values and culture in the world. It must depend on the people, strive for national unity and at the same time for the unity of Muslim Umma all over the world. It must cast off any illusion of imperialist support and sympathy, if any, and prepare for the long battle ahead for the success of 'Islamic Revolution.'

The Egyptian incident will no doubt act as an eye opener for Muslim communities fighting to safeguard faith and national sovereignty all over the world, particularly in the Middle East, Africa Central and South Asia.

So far as Bangladesh is concerned, the socio-political environment is getting more and more jeopardised with corrosive impact on national unity. In the present unstable political situation in our country, what lessons can we draw from this Egyptian crisis? Of course, it should act as an eye-opener for all of us, including both the ruling party and the opposition.

Let us take note of the danger signal and forge national unity, consolidate our democratic institutions and frustrate the evil designs of any power that might want to use Bangladesh as a geopolitical springboard in its strategic interest. Both the ruling party and the opposition must have confidence in the people and cast off any illusion of foreign support, if any, for ascension to the throne. Let us unite and resist the conspiracies of the vested interests at home and abroad to shape our internal crisis of democracy in the mirror-image of the Egyptian crisis.

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A drop of kindness



MILIA ALI

SOME years ago, I was taking a leisurely walk in a park when I noticed a middle-aged woman sitting on a bench, crying. She was actually sobbing. I paused for a few moments wondering whether I should ask her if she needed any help. But I was scared of being snapped at or, even worse, of being regarded with suspicion by people around me. I chose to continue with my walk.

Each time I recall the incident I am overcome with a feeling of remorse. The question is: Why are we friendly, even helpful, to people we meet at a social level and at the same time extremely wary of the many strangers that we share our city or neighbourhood with? We hesitate to reach out to them and often treat them with a measured indifference. I admit that a few unsavoury experiences may have eroded our trust base, but must we let that destroy the spirit of bonhomie that we could create by treating people with more compassion, respect and understanding?

The nonchalant attitude towards strangers is partially a fall-out of the accentuated sense of privacy and "go-it-alone culture" that are part of the modern lifestyle. According to sociologists who study group behaviour, more people prefer to live alone today than 50 or even 20 years ago. Even people living in nuclear families tend to keep their private lives shielded from the intrusion of acquaintances and neighbours.

This is not just a western phenomenon. During my annual visits to Dhaka I hardly make an effort to interact with people living next door or a seemingly friendly co-walker in the park. Neither is there any overt interest on the part of my neighbours to communicate with me. In contrast, I vividly remember the occasion when my father came home from one of his morning walks accompanied by a total stranger they chatted, laughed, and ended up sharing Sunday breakfast. The gentleman eventually became a close family friend. I cannot remember ever sharing a convivial discussion, let alone a meal, with a person I befriended in a public place!

A negative fallout of this drift toward individualism is that we have become less civil and sensitive to our fellow

human beings. Because we have isolated ourselves from humane interactions, except for a close group of relatives and friends, it is easier for us to treat others with insouciance. The impatient honkers in cars, swearing customers in shopping centres, shoving passers by in city streets and the racist and anti-feminist "trolling" on twitter have now become part of our daily routine. There was a time when people took pride in a society or a community that treated everyone with respect and consideration. Today, achievements are mostly measured in terms of individual gains. Altruism is seldom rewarded -- it may even be perceived as a weakness.

My belief that the culture of civility is on the decline may be partly the result of nostalgia about the good old "gentle" days. However, what I can assert with a degree of certainty is that today people are more rushed and stressed out and opportunities for deep interactions are limited. At the same time, the social media is making it easier for "loners" to be connected to the world. Most people may mistrust a stranger they encounter in a bus but they are quite comfortable sharing the minutest details of their lives with "virtual" friends in Facebook or Twitter!

But all is not lost. There are those rare instances of sharing and kindness that may give us reason to be optimistic. The other day my husband and I drove to downtown DC to watch a movie. After a prolonged search we found a parking space but discovered that we didn't have enough coins for the parking meter. To fetch change from a nearby store would have meant missing the first few minutes of the film. A young woman pulling out her car from the space next to us saw me rummaging through my purse. She asked how much I needed and gave me some quarters. When I offered her dollar bills in exchange she politely refused and drove off.

The incident reminded me of the sobbing woman in the park -- I could have helped her or at least held her hand for a while. The fact that I didn't has gnawed at my conscience for years. It still does. The small gesture of empathy from the young woman made me realise that kindness should not be rationalised, neither is it a calculated act. And, it need not be rewarded -- because the reward of kindness is "feeling good about oneself."

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Crossword puzzle grid with clues for Across and Down sections.

Cryptoquip puzzle with a grid and the clue: 'Yesterday's Cryptoquip: BRITISH ACTRESS JANE JUST GOT BETTER EYEGLASSES. THEY SUDDENLY MADE SEYMOUR SEE MORE.' Today's Cryptoquip Clue: L equals N

Beetle Bailey comic strip by Mort Walker. Panel 1: SARGE SENT US ANOTHER MESSAGE. Panel 2: IS HE STILL MAD? Panel 3: HIS CELLPHONE HAS EXTRA EXPLETIVES.

Henry comic strip by Don Trachte. Panel 1: Henry walking. Panel 2: Henry walking. Panel 3: Henry walking.

Quotable Quotes section featuring a quote by General Colin Powell: "Great leaders are almost always great simplifiers, who can cut through argument, debate, and doubt to offer a solution everybody can understand."