

TERRORISTS' cannon fodder

ZIAUDDIN CHOUDHURY

A principal objective of terrorists is to immobilise their targets and the people by the suddenness of their actions like stealthy attack in public areas with bombs or firearms, random killing, arson or vandalism of public property. The actions are pre-planned but the places or targets are chosen at random. These are hallmarks of people who want to stage an insurrection or destabilise societies or governments they are fighting against. The irony of these insurrectionist attacks is that while the strategy or the grand plan is designed by the leaders of these movements, the foot soldiers of these attacks are people who are recruited through either false ideology or money. The recruits tend to be malleable young people who have grown up in societies with great inequality, or with great economic adversity. There may be some who are drawn by misguided political philosophies, but they tend to be more recruiters than recruits.

Currently, two separate battles are being fought in two different parts of the world. One in some European countries, and the other in Bangladesh. One may raise one's eyebrows at this odd parallel. But when



you look deeper you will find the similarities. The battle in the streets of Europe is being waged against terrorists by law enforcing agencies. These terrorists are not foreign agents or foreign implants, but are home grown, albeit not from the mainstream ethnic group of those countries. But nevertheless, they are citizens who seem to have resorted to extreme means to vent their outrage against their own government in a violent manner. These countries are highly democratic with democratic institutions that date back over a hun-

ded years. But unfortunately, the groups that carry out these acts do not consider themselves to be part of these institutions, and resort to violent acts to vent their feelings instead of choosing a more civilised way to do so.

In Bangladesh, we had an opposition that chose to stay out of parliament and took to the streets to express their outrage for an entire five-year period. This was followed by an unsuccessful boycott of the next elections, but not before countless street battles, deaths, and severe damage to the econ-

omy. One would expect that, unlike the fringe groups of Belgium, France, and other parts of Europe who have a tremendous feeling of non-assimilation and neglect, no such groups exist in Bangladesh that have a strong dislike for the country and its people. But how do you explain mindless attacks on children and women, uprooting of railway lines, burning of public transports, and total mayhem in the name of enforcing strikes? How do you explain blitzkrieg-like attacks on people, property and law enforcers,

which are in no way different from the terrorist attacks in Europe?

The similarities do not end here. In both parts of the world people who are in the front line laying down their lives are not the leaders who have recruited them, but the ones who have been recruited. In European countries, the recruits may have been brainwashed by misguided and misinterpreted ideology; in Bangladesh they have been mostly recruited through money. In both cases the leaders are safely managing the battles from their secure forts of money and influence.

There are more similarities between the two news making events. The recruits in Europe have several things in common. They are mostly young, children of immigrants who were raised in impoverished ethnic neighbourhoods with little skills fit for gainful employment. They were drawn to extremism by radical preachers who probably inspired them to vent their outrage in ways that would destabilise the society for the long term goals of these false ideologues. The anarchists in Bangladesh are mostly poor, unemployed, and available for hire to anybody who would pay them money. These are not trained terrorists in the sense their European counterparts are. They are mercenaries who play to the

tune the political pipers play. However, the one unifying factor of these recruits in both battlegrounds is that they are the ones who are most likely to lose their lives, not their recruiters.

There is no difference between political terrorism and religious terrorism. It is simply intimidation of people to deprive them of their right to move, speak, or practice their beliefs openly. In mature societies rule of law prevails because people respect law and each other's rights. Sadly, it is not so in countries which have yet to show respect for each other let alone for law. Europeans will be ultimately able to contain the temporary disruptions in their societies because they have transparent and democratic governance in place. Regrettably, we cannot be that confident about Bangladesh. Our political leaders use people as pawns and hold them hostage by outsourcing their loathsome acts to delinquents who are willing to be used. Good governance, accountability and responsibility are not in their vocabulary. That is why the fights will continue with temporary respites now and then, and the cannon fodder will continue to lay down their lives because the pied pipers of politics will continue to play their tunes.

The writer is a political analyst and commentator.

A marriage across the political divide

MAYA AWAL

Every citizen must be presumed innocent until proven guilty; our constitution guarantees that right and our democratic values underline the centrality of the rule of law.

LAST week, my family home was bombed twice. This was the house where I lived with my parents, until last year, when I got married and moved across the avenue to live with my husband and my in laws. Two days after my parents' house was bombed, my new house -- my *shoshur bari* -- was attacked by a gunman and his accomplice. These two incidents, just a couple of many violent episodes across the country, left me contemplating my place not only on the avenue but on the political divide. My father is an advisor to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, my father-in-law is an advisor to former prime minister Khaleda Zia.

In Dhaka, especially in the elegant drawing rooms of the Gulshan elite, political affiliations are mostly hereditary, with grandfathers who were ministers and mothers who were MPs brandished as credentials of party pedigree. I am often told that I am blinded to reality

by my sympathy to the Awami League. It is true that I am a great admirer of our prime minister and of her father, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Our family, like many others, is proud to claim an intergenerational relationship with that of Bangabandhu. And of course my father, Gowher Rizvi, serves in this government. But as a firm believer in a secular Bangladesh, one that is inclusive of all our citizens, I support this government not simply out of habit, ancestral loyalty or family obligation, but because of a shared view of what Bangladesh can and should be. Like many other of my contemporaries born long after independence, I have imbibed the values of the Liberation War -- democracy, secularism, nationalism and social justice.

The BNP's alliance with Jamaat, whether strategic or ideological, is abhorrent to those of us who value tolerance and plurality. As a student of politics and history, I am well aware of the dangers of the politicisation of religion. I cannot support a party that discrimi-

nates based on gender and creed. Nor can I support the current blockade, which -- peaceful intentions or not -- has resulted in violence and deaths across the country, or its desire to bring the nation to its knees in order to oust a constitutionally sound government.

But equally I cannot support the harassment and physical intimidation of opposition leaders. I have seen with my own eyes how numerous false cases have been placed against my father-in-law, Abdul Awal Mintoo, in an effort to force him out of politics and silence him. In the past fortnight, he has been accused in seven cases of arson and violence across the capital. On January 6 alone, he was charged in three cases, including burning a bus and throwing a cocktail bomb at a police officer, on a day which he spent indoors from morning till night. His whereabouts aside (and to be clear: I can attest that he did not go out on January 6), the charges are absurd and categorically false, as anyone who knows my father-in-law's character will affirm. And

though I may disagree with some of his politics, about which we often debate in his library at home, I am horrified to see how an upstanding citizen and respected business leader, who employs thousands of people and has contributed to the development of our private sector, is being targeted for his political leanings.

People often jokingly ask whether my political allegiance shifted after my marriage. Despite my husband's best efforts, I remain steadfastly loyal to the Awami League. But having moved in, quite literally, with the opposition, I have had the privilege to get to know many of its leaders and supporters. While I may not share their views nor agree with their vision for Bangladesh, I have a deep admiration for their personal commitment to what they view as the right course for the nation. And I firmly believe that they have the right to peacefully express their views and should take their rightful place in the decision-making process.

A reader may think that I am influenced by my filial loyalties to my father-in-

law, to which I will readily admit. I do not ask for my word to be taken at face value but I do demand that the allegations and charges against him be heard fairly in our courts. Every citizen must be presumed innocent until proven guilty; our constitutional guarantees that right and our democratic values underline the centrality of the rule of law.

In this charged up environment, I find myself in the middle of the political divide, with personal sympathies that go both ways, even though my political position has not shifted. My support for the Awami League does not translate into a blanket approval of all its policies or an inability to recognise injustice when I see it. Our society is polarised along political lines but we can have differences, and agree to disagree, and it should not stand between social relationships. And in fact, if we one day hope to overcome our differences, it will be our social bonds that will help us to bridge the growing gap.

The writer is an anthropologist and a consultant.

QUOTABLE Quote

The learner always begins by finding fault, but the scholar sees the positive merit in everything.

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

HENRY by Don Trachte

CROSSWORD by THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1	Hotel room feature	19	Golfer Travino	35	Visitor from afar	4	Major lang.	23	Wrestling hold
5	Cartoonist Kelly	20	Mailer's need	36	UV stopper	5	Tip off	24	Used an old phone
9	Static problem	21	Despondent	38	Harvest goddess	6	Lansbury of Broad-way	25	Strike caller
11	Rivervessel	22	Inclined	39	John-Garner	7	Pillaged	27	Geisha garb
12	Help drummer	24	Bill stamp	40	Serpent's spot	8	Uptight	28	Torch holder
13	Inert gas	26	High points	41	Couplet creator	10	Leave work	29	Vestige
14	Homer's dad	29	Director Burton	DOWN		11	2006 Pixar film	30	Debate group
15	NBA team	30	NBA team	1	Throw away	16	In theory	31	Adorable
17	NBA team	32	NBA team	2	Suspect's stories	18	Yarn	33	Prom attendee
		34	Do a yard job	3	Of the best quality	21	RBI or ERA	37	Use a ray-gun on

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

CEREAL MATH
 OTELLO IDEA
 NAVALVESSEL
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 OPEN NEST
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