

I feel frozen when I start to type on the keyboard. Not because it is 16 degrees and the cold, damp air makes everything icy to touch. It's because I feel numb, speechless, every time I read about another child, another truck helper, another university student, a mother, a father, another helpless victim being burnt, maimed for life or dead.

Selfishly I think it could have been me or any one of my loved ones.

When we read about terror attacks that Al Qaeda or ISIS proudly claim to be their handiwork, as revenge against those who have 'insulted' their version of faith, we are cold with fear. But we are not totally incredulous because that is what they have done again and again – it is an apprehension we have come to expect.

Last year when in the name of a movement the opposition coalition launched a wave of terror, indiscriminately setting people on fire by hurling petrol bombs we were in fact incredulous. How could a political party justify such barbarism on ordinary people for a free and fair election? According to Manusher Jonno Foundation in 2013, 156 children were victims of political violence – 41 died and 107 were severely injured (Prothom Alo, 20.1.2015). This excludes all the other grown up victims – writhing in excruciating pain at the DMCH burn unit before many of them were relieved through the mercy of death. For the people of Bangladesh this was an all time high of savagery in the name of political movement.

So were we not a little bit apprehensive as we were about to step into another new year? Yes we, the ordinary citizens, did have that uneasy feeling when again the BNP announced a fresh new agitation. If we the pathetic, powerless and unimportant people felt this, what did all those powerful, important, influential law enforcing agencies feel at this time? Hundreds of Police patrols, Rab and others were deployed but why couldn't any of them catch these cold blooded murderers when they hurled those petrol bombs with the intention to burn human beings? The Daily Star published a photograph of a car being set on fire – the faces of the arsonists were visible. Have any of these terrorists been caught and brought to book?

Now after being 'freed' from confinement, the BNP chairperson has happily announced that the 'blockade' will continue until the government creates a congenial atmosphere for a free and fair election. She has claimed that her party's movement has been nothing but peaceful. Conveniently she has said that the ruling party is to blame for all the arson attacks and killing!

And now we, the ridiculously resilient people of Bangladesh are caught in the middle of the crossfire. This means again we will have to hear about the 'death by fire' news of more of our fellow, hapless citizens.

The back page of The Daily Star on Tuesday had a photograph of a few men. I thought perhaps they were some of those arsonists who do not think twice before hurling a lethal petrol bomb into a bus full of people. But no, apparently they are suspected members of the militant outfit ISIS. I have to admit that initially I was a bit disappointed. Because right now I really want to see that photograph of those despicable arsonists being caught and handed the harshest punishment under law.

And then that awful uneasy feeling creeps in. I realise that there is no real difference between

Frozen

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PHOTO: STAR FILE

militants of ISIS and the thugs hired by political parties to create maximum terror and mayhem at the cost of innocent lives. I do not even want to understand the justification behind the BNP's implicit support of this kind of barbarity. This is not a 'people's movement' for democracy. This is not a 'struggle for freedom'. These are cowardly terrorist attacks – there can be no other terms to describe it.

The reason history has repeated itself is because there has been no attempt to catch those terrorists who had carried out their arson attacks at the end of 2013 and beginning of 2014. Those children, women and men whose lives were cut short or who have become disfigured and disabled for life did not get any justice. And now in the first month of the New Year at least 25 people (and counting) are dead mainly from arson attacks.

I keep thinking of two-and-a-half-year-old Safi burnt while travelling with the two people who would protect him with their very lives – his mother and father, both of whom were injured while trying to flee the burning bus. I think of that horrible, terrifying scene. And I feel frozen.