

# The Tireless Politicking of the Tires



RUBANA HUQ

**H**E found a tall stalk of fennel by the seashore, broke it off and discovered that in the hollow centre contained a dry, soft substance that would burn and stay alight for an extended period of time. He climbed to the top of Mount Olympus, snuck quietly into a den and stole

a spark from lightning, lit the dry substance and carried the reed back. This is how Prometheus stole fire from Zeus and saved mankind. Today, the young Prometheus is someone very different. He pours gas or anything else that can burn quickly on the tire, lights a match, and starts the fire. Besides this, he talks to television channels while setting fire on tires instead of reeds, and instead of saving mankind, he tirelessly fuels fear in the minds of the audience. Today he throws bricks and stones at cars, and attacks journalists. At the end, he even says, "Bhua" (bogus). While our young Prometheus chants slogans and provides fire for the mankind, we stay hooked to our television screens and watch the reporters run for their lives with the cameras rocking from one side to the other and often even doing 360 degree turns. Often, the tires burn and we watch tales of fear unfold in high definition.

Well, that's all it takes to define and set the parameters of violence in this city these days. Life has been so uneventful for us that only a few bricks and two burning tires symbolise revolution. Maybe we have all ignored young Prometheus long enough for him to have his pockets fill up with the neighbourhood Borobhai's generosity oozing from the bus stand revenues. Maybe our neighbourhood Borobhai needs young Prometheus to chant a few slogans, spread rumours, use megaphones and then stage lame demonstrations to illegally occupy areas that belong to the public. Maybe all of us get too scared too soon. Or maybe... it just suits us to feign fear.

Why are tires set on fire on our streets? Why do bricks injure our drivers who work to shield us with their lives and loyalty? Why are stones pelted at uncompromising journalists who cover events at the cost of endangering their own lives? Whose interest is in question here? How is private interest in any way greater than that of the public? Basically, what is "public" interest and does it exist at all? And most importantly, who is the young Prometheus? And why have we given birth to him?

The concept of the 'public interest', most plainly, refers to considerations affecting the good order and the wellbeing and the 'common good' of the citizens. In case of a conflict between public interest and a private interest, it often takes a public servant to resolve and promote confidence in the integrity of public administration. In cases where conflicts between public and private interests invariably happen, the cases then must be appropriately disclosed and managed.

*If clearing roads and illegal occupancy are publicly opposed, how will this city ever see the light of the day? Perhaps we should then just let the mayor kill the mosquitoes and clean the streets?*

On November 29, 2015, the eviction drive of the mayor of Dhaka North had caused quite a stir. A drive that should have been ideally handled by a magistrate was in reality handled by the mayor himself. The mayor went aided by police and even had a minister with him. Later on, the RAB joined in too. If just an eviction of illegal occupation requires such a huge number of security personnel, then how will the city deal with recovery drives of illegally occupied lakes and areas? With serious water logging issues, which will begin from April, how will the mayor handle the endless number of *mastaans* (many of whom live within our own circles) and recapture occupied water bodies? Point is, if it takes a mayor to lead an eviction drive and serve public interest, who will it take to decide on far greater issues that directly relate to the daily interests of the citizens? If clearing roads and illegal occupancy are publicly opposed, how will this city ever see the light of the day? Perhaps we should then just let the mayor kill the mosquitoes and clean the streets?

While watching live coverage on television the other day, even I felt that fear was indeed infectious. Watching the close shots of the two tires burning was painful as all the channels ran the event live. I guess we need to also remember that positive changes need to happen behind camera coverage. Cameras capture truth but over-coverage often damages the purpose. Had the rumour of a worker being killed not spread so quickly, the event would have ended long back and without so much noise.

Way back in the 1990s, a number of reforming mayors transformed Bogotá into an enlightened municipal government in an apparently troubled country, through creating an extensive bus rapid-transport (BRT) network, parks and public libraries. The same needs to happen in this city of ours. Transformations and corrections can take place in public spaces but the media needs to decide what to focus on. I am certain that had we not seen the two tires burn throughout the day, the responsible thugs would have surrendered long ago and would have abided by law.

A lake or a land has just not been grabbed without compensating someone who wields authority of one kind or the other. Therefore, those who occupy our footpaths are not to be singularly blamed, rather the circle of the beneficiaries who grow rich at the expense of these hapless vendors, needs to be exposed. If anyone is using the name of the public office and violating the basic norms of public interest, the media should bring those elements to task. To put it simply, since private interests unfortunately attempt to influence public policy, since money tends to tamper with the policymaking process, ordinary citizens along with the media must look away from the flame of the tires and refocus on the flame of corruption that takes place under the guise of public interest.



Transport workers burn tires to block a street near the Tejgaon Truck Terminal in the capital on November 29, 2015, protesting an eviction drive against illegal structures.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

## Collaterals of Terrorism

ZIAUDDIN CHOUDHURY

**T**HE recent acts of terrorism in several parts of the globe shook the world, but the victims of the terror acts were not confined in the cities where these acts took place. The direct victims may be those who died in these sordid actions, but the other collateral victims are from the community to which the perpetrators apparently belonged.

Muslims all over the globe, at least the overwhelming majority, were obviously shocked and ashamed that people from their faith could launch such cold-blooded acts of terror on innocent people. But they have been shocked several times before by similar incidents of terror that were unleashed on innocent people in various parts of the world including Muslim-majority countries. And like before, they are the ones forced to bear the backlash of these acts.

Terrorism is not a new phenomenon, it has shook the world many times in the past. The most common kind of terrorism is by an organised group fighting for independence or to advance a cause such as by the Maoists in the subcontinent, Basque nationalists in Spain, Sean Fein in Ireland, etc. The other type is lone wolf acts where the individuals have gone on mass shooting of people because they have personal grievances against their government or because they simply snapped. In the US, 934 people died in the last seven years from mass shooting by individuals. Significant

among these incidents were the killing of 32 people by a student in Virginia Technical Institute in 2011, killing of 26 elementary school students and teachers in New Hampshire the same year by a single gunman, killing of 12 people by an individual in Navy Yard, Washington DC, in 2013 and the killing of a dozen people in a college campus in Oregon in 2015. In 2011, two sequential lone wolf attacks killed a total of 77 people.

What is the difference between these attacks and those that we witnessed recently in Europe or elsewhere? Why are the perpetrators of these attacks not identified by their religious persuasion or ethnic identity? Why are the causes for these acts, at least most of them, attributed to a deranged state of mind of the executors and their sociopathy and no other association is investigated? Do the horrific acts of these individuals make their families and neighbours guilty by association?

Dalia Mogahed, co-author of the book *Who Speaks for Islam?* recently echoed some of these thoughts in a TV interview. She said, "When you look at the majority of terrorist attacks in the United States, according to the FBI, these... attacks are actually committed by white male Christians. When those things occur, we don't suspect other people would share their faith and ethnicity of condoning. We assume that these things outrage them just as much as they do anyone else. And you have to afford that same assumption of innocence to Muslims."

These are some questions that the recent tragedy in Paris and previous such acts raise. Why should the adherents of the faith to which the lone wolf terrorist belongs be viewed differently?

A simple answer would be that in recent lone wolf acts of terrorism or politically sponsored terror events of the past, the executors did not carry out their acts to uphold a religious mission or objective. The lone wolf terrorists or mass shooters in the US or Norway were not claimed by any radical religious group and hailed as heroes or martyrs by any radical group.

The terrorism that we are now facing is posed by a highly committed group of people who are determined to bring about changes based on their idea of religion and its laws. These changes that they seek are first for their 'religionists', and later for others. They do not care if their actions turn their 'co-religionists' into collaterals. In fact, it is a part of the strategy of this radical group.

The terror acts of France, and more recently Mali, have turned the attention of all countries, particularly the West, not only on the terror groups and their affiliates but also on Muslims. In many countries, Muslims now find themselves not only defending their faith but also themselves. They find themselves as suspects in their country of adoption which they love and are loyal to. Two Republican Party Presidential candidates in the US have gone on record to demand that all Muslims in the US be subjected to some kind of surveillance. Some members of the Congress and several

State Governors have demanded that refugees from certain parts of the Middle East, mainly Muslims, not be allowed entry to the US. These may be rhetoric during an election season, but the words uttered by them do not speak of a benign view of Muslims and the view was formed only because some terrorists are misusing Islam to be their main driver.

The suspicion and hatred that Muslims face today cannot simply be removed by condemnation of the terror acts and dissociation from these acts by calling them un-Islamic. It will not be achieved by simply defeating the militant groups. The real action that needs to be taken is to reform the thought process of people, and make people aware about real Islam.

This phenomenon is a result of the failure of most Muslim countries and Muslim leaders to provide a broad-based education to their people that not only exposes them to the correct interpretation of their religion but also teaches them values of human rights, diversity of opinions, and equality of human beings. Our leaders will do well if they inculcate these teachings in people they know and ask them to turn to the future instead of harking back thousands of years back for inspiration. Otherwise our youths will continue to be attracted to false prophets who are darkening the horizon and engaging them, directly or indirectly, to many more such disasters.

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The writer is a political commentator and analyst.

**QUOTABLE Quote**

**ROBERTO BOLAÑO**  
**THE INSUFFERABLE GAUCHO**

*If you're going to say what you want to say, you're going to hear what you don't want to hear.*

**CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH**

**ACROSS**

- Sir's counterpart
- Accept eagerly
- Mistreat
- Singly
- Pack for players
- Altered animal
- Stir-fry pan
- Tyke
- Sides in an eternal battle
- Like a judge
- Valleys
- First person
- Molten rock
- Danger
- Defy authority
- Blood fluid
- Harvest goddess
- Chess pieces
- "I - Rock"
- Ship authority
- Sink feature
- Duo quadrupled
- Bright
- Work breaks

**DOWN**

- Created
- Third person
- Pond paddler
- Invite
- Sounded catty?
- Didn't have
- In the style of
- Cruise stop
- Computer menu choice
- Nuisance
- Hounds' quarry
- Big trucks
- Oregon's capital
- Public Enemy's music
- Poem type
- Hotel feature
- Research spot
- Second person
- Picher Maglie
- Like some furniture polishes
- Seek, as office
- 33 Game official
- Track figures
- Lima's land
- Checkout swipe
- Play makeup
- Convene
- Fine study
- Family
- Rink surface

**BEETLE BAILEY** by Mort Walker

COOKIE, YOU JUST THREW THE DINNER INTO THE GARBAGE

AND PUT THE GARBAGE ON THE STOVE!

HOW COULD I DO THAT?

YOU DO IT EVERY NIGHT!

**BABY BLUES** by Kirkman & Scott

HOW COULD I BE SO STUPID?

EVERYBODY KNOWS TEXTING AND DRIVING CAN CAUSE ACCIDENTS...

...NOT TO MENTION A WRONG TURN DOWN THE CANDY AISLE.