

The Politics of Terrorism

ABU AFSARUL HAIDER

IT'S not the religion that creates terrorists, it's the politics. Terrorism is driven by politics even when the justifications given for the killing of innocents and the recruiting tools of terrorist groups are cast in religious, ethnic, linguistic or moral terms. Terrorism, for instance, is not fundamentally caused or driven by the theological differences between religions or by the differences in legal precepts between a religion and a state system. During an attack on Paris on Friday, November 13, 2015, gunmen and suicide bombers shouted "Allahu Akbar" as they detonated bombs in a concert at the Bataclan venue; the attacks have left at least 129 people dead and countless more injured. It would seem that their act has something to do with their religion. Taking advantage of the situation, many media platforms defamed Islam by portraying these bombers as 'Islamists' or 'Jihadists', as though they were sanctioned by Islam, or had any legitimate spokespersonship on behalf of the 1.6 billion Muslims around the world. Jihad is not a declaration of war against other religions; that is a misconception. The word "Jihad" means struggling or striving while a holy war in Arabic would be "al harb al muqaddasa".

Terrorists do not do Jihad, they do terrorism. Throughout history, people have perpetrated extreme terrorism in the name of religion, whether it be Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism or any other faith. There has been violence between Sinhalese and Tamils in Sri Lanka, Buddhists and Hindus in Bhutan, Hindus and Sikhs in Punjab, Eritreans and Ethiopians in the Horn of Africa, Hutu and Tutsi in Rwanda, ethnic Russians and Ukrainians in the former Soviet Union. But because of the mainstream media's narrow and often misplaced focus, most Westerners believe that religious extremism is primarily a problem of Islam. Today, Islam has been associated with terrorism and violence due to the actions of a few extreme individuals. Just as Christianity was not represented by the churchgoing militias of Radovan Karadzic in Bosnia some 20 years ago or Judaism is not represented by West Bank settlers who burn mosques, Islam too is not represented by ISIS or its affiliated organisations.

Attacks on the West by IS or their affiliated groups were never over theological differences between Islam, Judaism and Christianity. The grievances expressed are broadly political in nature, and address, explicitly and implicitly,

issues such as economic oppression, colonialism and political corruption. While public documents and communiqués put forth by these organisations or their followers normally start with statements invoking religious themes, the grievances expressed, real or imagined, and the objectives are always political in nature. However, if one were to question these attackers about why they do what they do, I am sure that they would present a religious justification. Indeed, religious slogans and quotes from the Qur'an are constantly on their lips. But the fact remains that these young males are often jobless, powerless, disaffected, and angry. They see Western powers as hegemonic and exploitative in their actions and intentions. They live in oppressive, autocratic, or dysfunctional societies that offer them few

opportunities for economic advancement and none for political participation. As a consequence, they become radicalised. While their radicalism is superficially religious, and while religion may serve as a catalyst for their radicalisation, the true underlying motivation is a sense of outrage that is politically and economically induced. Terrorism is rooted in concrete social and economic conditions - in deprivation, joblessness, discrimination, poverty and social marginality. Terrorism is the inevitable byproduct of inequality and injustice of the existing social and economic system. According to officials, at least three of the suicide bombers of the Paris attacks were French. France is home to an estimated 4.7 million Muslims who are highly segregated from the rest of the French society. In Paris, many Muslims live in the city's suburbs, known as banlieues. Tension between

France and its Muslim population is strong and historic, rooted in the country's colonial activities and its treatment of French Algerians. Today, discrimination, poor employment opportunities, poverty, and isolation are all common in Paris' banlieues. Now, the question is why do terrorists kill innocent people? When survival is at stake, it should not be surprising that such heinous activities come to be viewed by the offender as an opportunity rather than a cost. They think that force is the most direct way of achieving their goal or to take revenge upon an injustice against them. Such terrorists first practice by attacking soft targets until they are empowered to achieve their desired political influence. They then try to create panic with the hope that civilians, out of desperation, will demand that their state end the horror by any means, including

Unwarranted delay in 7-murder trial

Charge sheet still remains defective!

IT is discouraging to note that after almost 19 months since the gruesome murder of seven individuals in Narayanganj, there are still flaws in the charge sheet of the case. The HC on Tuesday concluded that the charge sheet was defective. It has also expressed its apprehension that delays in the trial could benefit the accused persons.

The observation came as a response to a petition filed by one of the victims' family members. The petition said that five people who had been earlier included in the first information report (FIR) were dropped from the charge sheet. This is a serious allegation that might call into question the whole investigation process as well as the investigative agency.

It is rare in our system to see serving, high level law enforcers being held responsible for their crimes. It was only after widespread public outcry and media coverage that some of the accused who happened to be law enforcement members were arrested. Even after the prime accused was brought back to Bangladesh, questions have been raised as to why he was not taken on remand but sent straight to jail. We urge the government to make the necessary corrections to the charge sheet following the HC's directives and ensure an expeditious and unblemished trial. We must set a precedent of bringing to justice rogue elements within law enforcement agencies and restore public confidence in them.

Bravo Bengal Foundation

Towards Dhaka as a cultural hub

WE would like to congratulate the Bengal Foundation, its chair, executive director and its team, for a magnificent job accomplished. The level of performance, the meticulous organisation and the beautiful and tasteful setting together made the Classical Music Festival perhaps the best of its kind in the world.

A lot needs to be said about the nearly 50,000 listeners who thronged the army stadium for the last five nights for more than ten hours a day, and listened with rapt attention and discipline to the music legends, prompting some of them to say that they had never before seen such a huge and appreciative audience anywhere else, proving, once again, the quality of the Dhaka audience.

Some words of thanks are also due to our law enforcement agencies who spared no effort to make the festival trouble free. The volunteers - young, eager and highly trained - did a wonderful job.

The festival is a fitting reply to those fringe elements in society who have sought, albeit vainly, to portray Bangladesh as a country infested with religious terrorists. The five-day event is a celebration of more than just music; the massive turnout of people goes to prove that we will not cower down to attacks on our culture and identity. The enthusiasm generated by the Classical Music Festival as well as the jazz, folk and literary festivals that have taken place preceding it indicates a vibrant, pluralistic nation that will not be intimidated by cowardly acts of terror.



PHOTO: DEVIANTART

Terrorism is rooted in concrete social and economic conditions - in deprivation, joblessness, discrimination, poverty and social marginality.

giving in to the terrorists' demands. The primary weapon of terrorism is fear - not bombs or guns. Their attacks, in most cases, have a strategic objective to compel a regime to hear their voices or force 'aliens' to leave the territory that they view as their homeland. Here, to seek an explanation for terrorism is not to excuse the terrorists' monstrous attacks on innocent civilians but understanding what motivates them to kill could help find ways to reduce terrorism.

Terrorism needs to be confronted by a state's political will, not by its physical power. On September 26, 2001, fifteen days after 9/11, America invaded Afghanistan and they are at war even today. Similarly, just two days after bombing and gun attacks in Paris, twelve French warplanes bombarded Raqqa, the de facto 'capital' of IS in Syria. The thirst for revenge or declaring a 'war on terror' is not the solution. Terrorism cannot be eradicated as long as oppression or the

machines with which they can destroy countries twenty times over, take the satisfaction in taking away the life of others, in the name of killing their perceived enemies and even killing in the name of their so-called suspected enemies, and in their belief that they are also doing a glorious job (as if Jesus Christ is standing there to absolve all their crimes against humanity). It goes without saying, therefore, that both these parties apply the same technique for achieving their political goals, i.e. terrorism. One party terrorises by suicide-bombing, while the other party terrorises by 'shock-and-awe' military invasions and deadly air-raids. Therefore, they are nothing else but two sides of the same coin. Both are therefore evil. But for an answer to the question on who is the greater evil, ask your conscience.

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INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES FOCUS ON THE ABILITY

MIZANUR RAHMAN KIRON

MILLENNIUM Development Goals (MDGs) set by the United Nations (UN) in 2000 could hardly fulfil its pledge to ensure the rights of people with disabilities. As a result, disability rights activists from across the world raised their voice to bring a change in the policy so that the tendency of making empty promises could not be repeated in the draft of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which will be in effect for the next 15 years, that is until 2030.

And the most hopeful thing is that their recommended changes have finally been adopted in the SDGs. It is a historic turning point for people with disabilities. Since from now on, the signatories of the SDGs will have to include disabled people in their development policies from which they have long been excluded. It is obviously massive progress, nonetheless, that rights activists across the world, especially those who have been working in the developing or least developed countries, are eagerly waiting to see its tangible implementation. From our observations we have learned that people of developed countries always enjoy the maximum benefits from any welfare plan adopted by the UN.

But why can't we extract the best out of these humanitarian initiatives? We have a common tendency to point fingers to the apathy of our lawmakers. However, there are examples in the world which can help

us to think more positively and differently. When asked about what actually changed the lives of the disabled people in the USA, whether it is the enforcement of Americans with Disability

DISABILITY IS INCLUDED IN THE FOLLOWING SDGs:

GOAL 4: Guaranteeing equal and accessible education by building inclusive learning environments and providing the needed assistance for persons with disabilities

GOAL 8: Promoting inclusive economic growth, full and productive employment allowing persons with disabilities to fully access the job market

GOAL 10: Emphasising the social, economic and political inclusion of persons with disabilities

GOAL 11: Creating accessible cities and water resources, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems, providing universal access to safe, inclusive green public spaces

GOAL 17: Underlining the importance of data collection and monitoring of the SDGs, emphasis on disability disaggregated data

Act (ADA) by the State Department or positive response from the citizens towards people with disabilities, Judith E Heumann, Special Advisor for International Disability Rights,

Department of State, USA, says, "Definitely the ADA was a key issue but no doubt that if the citizens could not understand the significance of the act, our initiative would not have been so successful. ADA helped us to portray the rights of the disabled people but if people would not recognise it and cooperate with us, it would have been very difficult for us to enforce the act."

However, in Bangladesh, the scenario is quite depressing. We have good policies and some sympathetic policymakers who also feel (at least that's the impression we get) the necessity to ensure the rights of disabled people, but are we, the common people, conscious enough about this important humanitarian issue?

The answer is written in every public place of our metropolitan cities and districts. There is no visible facility for people with disabilities in public places such as streets, footpaths, parks, railway stations, etc. In many areas, disabled people are treated as lunatics, fools and burdens to society, for whom begging is the only means of income. In most educational institutions, even the reputed public universities of Bangladesh, there are no ramps for students with disabilities. As a result, students cannot use their wheelchairs and have to move around their own campus with the help of another person. In Jahangirnagar University, it is commonly seen that ramps reserved for students with disabilities are occupied by the parked private cars of professors,

although there are significant numbers of disabled students in that university. Not only in Jahangirnagar University, this unfortunately is a common scene in most places of our country.

Like the USA, we have good policies, and our Disability Welfare Act is not that outdated either. However, we are still lagging far behind in changing our attitude towards these people. If university professors, the most educated people of our nation, show such level of reluctance to recognise the rights of people with disabilities, what can we expect from the people en masse?

After such development with the SDGs, we are now expecting our government to ensure inclusion of the rights of the disabled in development policies. Therefore, it is high time to maximise our efforts to ensure the full implementation of these policies in our country. Our media, social organisations, government officials, rights groups and all other stakeholders must come forward to sensitise people by focusing on the abilities of people with special needs. They should realise that people with disabilities are not actually "disabled". Rather they have potential, they have talents and they can contribute to our society like any of us, provided that we come forward to cooperate with them by recognising their special needs.

The writer is the founder of Physically Challenged Development Foundation and a fellow of the Atlas Corps.

COMMENTS

"Pakistan denies committing war crimes in 1971" (December 1, 2015)

Habiba Akhter

They are such liars!

Lutfia Begum

Everyone except them knows the truth. There is no scope to deny it.

Oporbo

Bangladesh should cut all ties with Pakistan.

Naila Karim

If Pakistan really wanted to develop relations with Bangladesh, it should immediately initiate trial of the 195 Pakistani prisoners.

Jahan Ara

About three million Bangalees were killed and a quarter million women raped by the Pakistani army and their local collaborators during 1971. And now they are denying it all! Utter lies!

"Leaders pledge climate rescue" (December 1, 2015)

Latifa

If climate deals fail, a war-torn future will be waiting for us.

Karim Abdullah

Leaders always pledge climate rescue in front of the camera. But behind the scenes, they do things which benefit their countries only.

"It was a criminal conspiracy" (December 2, 2015)

Jainab Binte Rashad

The killing of four national leaders was part of the conspiracy to destabilise Bangladesh.

Imtiaz

The government must work harder to bring the culprits to book. It's too late already.

Only fools cut the head to cure headache

Shutting down social networking sites like Facebook and apps like Viber and WhatsApp is not the solution to the security threat of the country. It is rather the contrary. People who have little knowledge of technology know full well that when people use these sites, they leave a clear trace of every activity behind. Law enforcing agencies and secret service agencies can track down criminals if they want.

Criminals will always find alternative ways but they will be careful to not leave traces behind. If

criminals find it hard to figure out alternative paths then it will be even harder for our intelligence to trace them and track them down. It's not only social networking sites that criminals use. Cell phones are used more often. Will our government shut down those services too? So shutting sites is not the solution. Proper surveillance of these sites is necessary. The bottom line is that those who are in charge of protecting innocent citizens have to be smarter than these criminals. Shutting down these sites is like cutting the head to cure headache.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Aamir Khan and Indian democracy

Indian movie star Aamir Khan's claim of rising intolerance in India has proved to be true through the reactions of Shiv Sena. Their zealotry is demonstrated by the fact that they offered Rs 1 lakh to anyone who would slap Aamir Khan. India claims to be the "larger democracy-practicing nation". But these actions are not the hallmark of a true democracy.
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