

Terror suspects go scot-free

Time to plug the holes

WE are shocked, as would every responsible citizen of this country would be, to learn that a large number of terror suspects are going scot free because of loopholes in case filing. Law requires the police to get the district magistrate's approval before investigating and filing any case under the Anti-Terrorism Act. But sadly, it has been observed that a large number of police officers have been oblivious of such requirements. To make matters even more grievous, some of the witnesses amongst police did not make themselves available before the court despite repeated summonses. As a result, twenty accused of terrorism in as many as five cases have so far been freed, the release of 151 more due to such lapse is in the offing.

This points to a serious systematic flaw, that might render the government's anti-terror efforts meaningless. What is the point, after all, of arresting terror suspects if they cannot be brought to book due to procedural flaws? On one hand the government talks of zero tolerance for terrorists and terrorism while on the other hand procedural loopholes allow these people to evade trial.

The problem is manifold in nature. There is a strong rationale to look into the legal flaws which have been exploited. The law enforcers, especially those involved in the investigative process, should be well versed in the Anti-Terror Act and its clauses. Incidents of deliberately weakening terror cases by creating loopholes in the probe process with ulterior motives also need to be looked into. A high-level body should be formed consisting of officials empowered to devise the means to plug both the legal and systematic loopholes. The relevant parliamentary Standing Committee should take a serious note of this matter as should the PMO.

Middlemen take it all

Increase farmers' access to markets

IN a seminar on food security and media's role, representatives from the government and other stakeholders discussed the problems faced by farmers in the country. What came out from it was that middlemen have effectively cut off farmers' access to markets which, on the one hand deprive growers of a justified share in profits whilst hoarders who constitute the "middlemen" class reap windfall profits. This is a practice that has been going on for decades. Needless to say, such a state of affairs is hardly conducive to ensuring food security where the producer is not given any profit incentive to grow crops. The risk of letting the status quo continue of course is forcing the farmers to turn away from growing food crops altogether.

One cannot discount that the lack of adequate infrastructure, in part, has played its role in denying farmers to reach their produce to main wholesale markets in the country. There is also a great need to inform about and provide pesticides that are not harmful to the human anatomy if we are to protect our export market of vegetables and crops. The role of railways in other countries in the region, notably India, has played a major role in allowing for the shipment of perishable food items over long distances. Sadly, that is not the case in Bangladesh. It is good that the railway network is being rebuilt after decades of neglect and should go a long way in addressing the problem of reducing the influence of middlemen in the supply chain.



KNOT SO TRUE
RUBANA HUQ

A young man of 30, sipped his *cha* (not *chai*) in Kolkata yesterday morning at 6:00 am, in 'Tiritty' bazaar and told me, "The English don't use the word "quintessential" anymore, but we do. Just as we stood beside the Chinese serving their "quintessential" morning momos and the Biharis imitating their recipes and serving their own "meed" (i.e. 'meat') ball soup, he talked about anonymity and how anonymous we have all become. The red shot eyes of the 90-year-old opium addict, the Chinese steamed buns, the Chinese rice pudding, all completed the picture of *Chatawala Road*, which is one full stretch of Christians, Muslims and Hindus co-existing, and nothing has been able to change that. The club building, which stands tall in the area, hosts Pujas, Eids and Christmas, as and when they come every year, with puris, plum cakes or *halems*. Right behind the Bow Barracks, it's festive during this time of the year. Anglo-Indians, dressed in suits and their bowties still walk the street with a hope of yet another prosperous new year.

Our friend, a young man with an old soul, Arko Mukherjee, a brilliant young Bangalee musician who links rock to ragas, baul to reggae, while treating us to a full breakfast on the streets, spoke about how comfortable Kolkata is today because of an improved traffic situation, yet how alien it appears to be when one steps into the new "Rajarhat" area, unfamiliarly complete with its little touch of modernity while "Salt Lake" is technically the smart dash in the city. While we walked by the side of the Ganges and looked at Kumartuli, it was an "encore" that's worth sharing. Amidst the gods and goddesses, we stumbled upon a Gandhi in white, sculpted by one of the brilliant artisans of Kumartuli, who apart from just making deities, had, at some point, decided to carve out the figure of the man who, till date,

continues to shape India. In spite of the linguistic legacy, it is because of this same man for who, the Indian Constitution today names English as a co-official language, but only until all states accept Hindi as the sole official language. It is because of Nehru, Gandhi and Ambedkar, there exists, till date, a dichotomous pattern of native and the foreign, traditional and the modern, and inclusive and the exclusive in India's engagements with foreign centres of influence.

So while Arko, my daughter and I walk around figuring out damming western fusions, the focal point of discussion hovers around the critical and the obvious: who are we today and how

doomed to a crash. I know I will be singled out as a Muslim. This is the exact feeling that pushes me to anonymity. This is the same insecurity that crafts the history of fear into my humanity.

Take for example, two incidents that I learnt of, right after I landed in Bangkok two weeks ago. While our Bangkok flight from Dhaka landed, the airport seemed to be in a flurry. An Aeroflot flight SU 271 bound for Moscow from Bangkok was grounded and a Turkish woman had just been detained for three hours at the Suvarnabhumi airport after a misunderstanding over a phone call that she had made. The 38-year old woman, Sefika Kanik, was taken to the Suvarnabhumi Police Station and

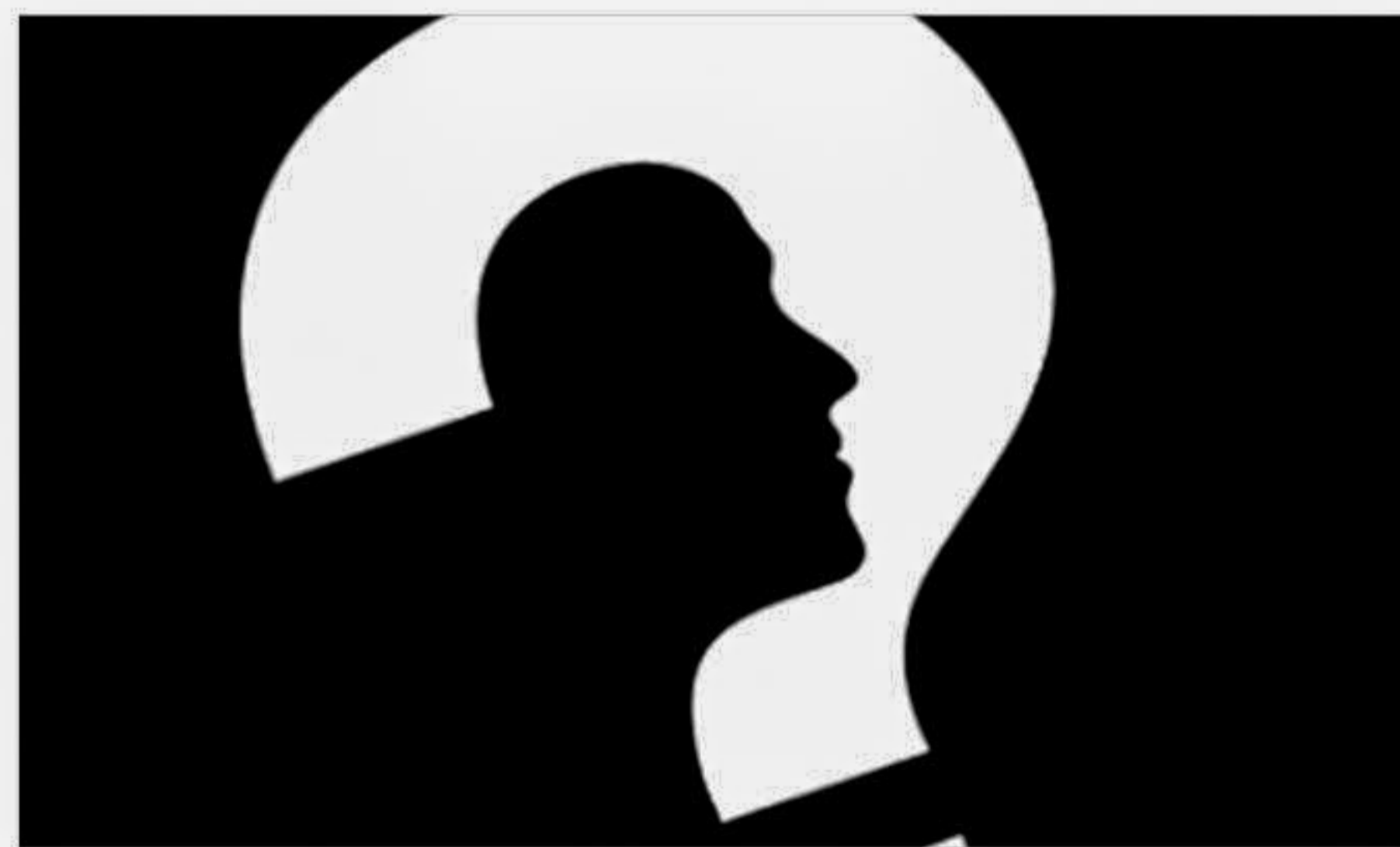
suspected of having links to the Islamic State. His name was Hagop Kassabian, who has had a decade-long connection to Thailand and runs a small trading company from the north-eastern province of Chaiyaphum and has appeared in commercials for ice-cream, yoghurt and a TV series. From December 6, 2015, Hagop has been all over Thai national media as one of the Syrians that Russia's state security agency had warned could have links to the terrorist organisation. Hagop's wife woke him up on the 6th and shared her surprise with him: "All these years, I didn't know that you were a terrorist!" Quite ironically, Hagop is also Christian and that is a fact the Russian intelligence had ignored when they linked him to being recruited by the IS.

At a time like this, while our identities are subjected to microscopic assessment, it is incredibly important to aptly label our identities. Now . . . instead of a religious label, shall we dare to call ourselves South Asians and hashtag "OneSouthAsia"? Shall we? But then, can we, specially at a time when in a major development on Greater Noida's Dadri lynching case, the Uttar Pradesh government's chief veterinary officer's report has just confirmed that the meat piece found in Mohammad Akhlaq's refrigerator was mutton, not beef? Akhlaq was beaten to death by 200-strong mob barging into his house for having consumed "beef". With instances of extreme religious intolerance on the rise, whom do we sync our identities with?

The answer may not be that simple. The alignment may not be tempting. But all of us must remember that when most of Asia today is being discussed for hosting pockets of religiosity, our choices are limited. At a time like this, we have fewer options other than crucially reminding ourselves that the little fences that run through our lands must not run through our minds and no one should be ever be allowed to divide a memory.

Happy 2016!

The writer is Managing Director, Mohammadi Group.



much anonymity have we, in Bangladesh, succumbed to? Which part of our identity, Bangalee or Muslim is under the scanner? Which one are we settling for?

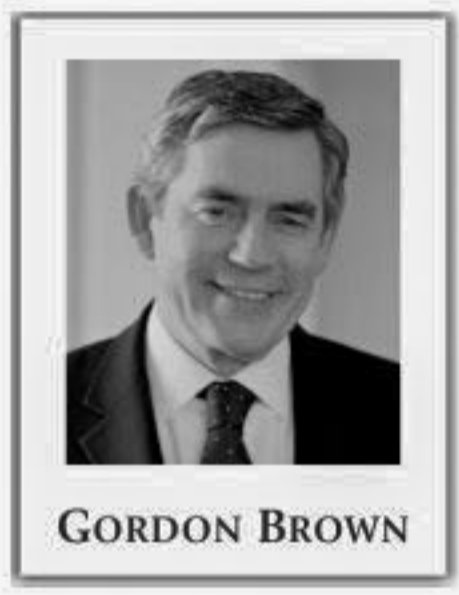
I am much more conscious of my identity when I travel these days. I am critically aware of the fact that I am Muslim and that, much to my discomfort, I will evidently be asked to take my shawl or scarf off at airports. I know for sure that I will also be randomly chosen for an additional security check or questioning. I also know that my fellow passenger will judge me, right before takeoff, when I say my prayers without which I feel

questioned for three hours. Why had she caused this disruption? Truth was, a crew had suspected that Sefika said goodbye to someone she was speaking to over the phone and they had sounded like her "final words". This mere suspicion had delayed the flight and caused havoc in air traffic control in Thailand that day. In reality, Sefika was speaking to her boyfriend on the phone and simply saying goodbye. The panic obviously was a reflection of the fear of Russia being targeted again, after 200 people were killed onboard an airline bound for Saint Petersburg from Syria.

The very next day, the Bangkok Post carried a story of one of four Syrians

PROJECT SYNDICATE

The Education Antidote to Radicalisation



GORDON BROWN

NO visitor to the Middle East can avoid noticing the yawning gap between the educational, entrepreneurial, and occupational aspirations of the region's young people and the harsh reality that deprives so many of them of a positive future. Indeed, in the Middle East, half of those aged 18-25 are either unemployed or underemployed.

Aggravating this situation is the global refugee crisis, which has displaced some 30 million children, six million from Syria alone, very few of whom are likely to return home during their school-age years. It should come as no surprise that the group known in the region as Daesh (the Islamic State) believes that it can find fertile ground for recruitment in this vast population of dispossessed and disaffected young people.

Daesh propagandists are misusing social media in the way that their extremist predecessors and contemporaries have sometimes misused mosques – as a forum for radicalisation. The group consistently posts content that challenges the possibility of coexistence between Islam and the West and calls young people to jihad.

The grotesquely violent videos that Daesh produces have shock appeal. But what really attracts disaffected young people is the invitation to be part of something that seems larger than themselves and the societies in which they live. Shiraz Maher of the International Center for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR) at King's College London identifies a common thread of sentiment among recruits: "righteous indignation, defiance, a sense of persecution, and a refusal to conform." As a recent Quilliam Foundation report concludes, Daesh plays on the youthful desire to be part of something worthwhile; it is the organisation's utopian appeal that is most alluring to new recruits.

Given this, few would disagree that we find ourselves in a generational battle for hearts and minds that cannot be won by military means alone. Hard power can eliminate Daesh's hardcore leaders. But we will need more than that to convince nearly 200 million young Muslims that extremism is, quite literally, a dead end.

There are many examples of under-the-radar operations working to counter extremism across the Indian subcontinent and the Middle East: children's magazines in Pakistan, videos aimed at teenagers in North Africa, radio stations in the Middle East, and books and publications opposing Al Qaeda. They can help to expose the truth about life in Daesh – that it is brutal, corrupt, and prone to internal purges – in several ways,

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including by drawing attention to defections. As a 2014 report states, "[the very existence of defectors] shatters the image of unity and determination that [the group] seeks to convey."

But we must be more ambitious if we are to win the war of ideas, sustaining the cultural space that Daesh calls the "grey zone," which it longs to destroy. It is a space in which Muslims and non-Muslims can coexist,

discover their shared values, and cooperate. Peter Neumann, the director of the ICSR, has proposed a YouTube contest for videos that explain the failings of Daesh. "You would receive 5,000 videos in no time," he says. "Four thousand are junk, but 1,000 of them are effective – 1,000 videos against [Daesh] propaganda."

The best long-term tool for countering extremism, however, is education. In Jaffa, Israel, a school run by the Church of Scotland teaches the virtues of tolerance to Muslim, Jewish, and Christian children. Throughout Lebanon, a common school curriculum championing religious diversity – including the "refusal of any radicalism and religious or sectarian seclusion" – is being taught to Sunni, Shia, and Christian children starting at the age of nine. The country has also introduced double shifts in its school system to accommodate some 200,000 Syrian refugee children.

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The choice could not be clearer. We can stand by and watch a new generation of web-savvy Muslim youth be deluged with false claims that Islam cannot coexist with Western values. Or we can recognise that the young people of the Middle East and the rest of the Muslim world share the aspirations of young people in every other part of the world.

All the evidence indicates that the region's young people want education, employment, and the chance to make the most of their talents. Our resolution for 2016 should be to make that happen.

The writer, former Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer of the United Kingdom, is the United Nations Special Envoy for Global Education.

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(Exclusive to The Daily Star)

COMMENTS

Campaign ends, tension remains
 (December 29, 2015)

S Alam Patowary

What is going on? Why is the government quiet when AL men are attacking the opposition members?

Alamgir Mahmud

The Awami League cadres will control the election forcefully. The law enforcement agencies will do nothing as we have seen in the DCC elections. Anyway, time will say.

"Angela Merkel most influential figure of the year"
 (December 28, 2015)

Tarek Mollah

She defiantly is an "Influential Figure".

Sayed Suvnil

We need her to make the world a better place.

RK Manzu

I always respect her.

A reader

We need more leaders like her.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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"Life in winter nights"

The pictures published in The Daily Star on December 25, 2015 on the above topic, revealing the miserable condition of the poor and the homeless in Dhaka city during winter nights, were heart-wrenching. In the caption it was mentioned that "a little humanitarian help from the affluent could greatly reduce their sufferings." I think individuals going out alone to help is not enough, an organised effort is required.

It will really help if *The Daily Star* can give us the names of some agencies who have a collection point for used clothes, shoes etc. for each broad area of the city, for example, Banani-Gulshan-Baridhara. Bangladesh Red Crescent Society can earn its stripes by running such a countrywide programme on a regular basis.
A senior citizen
 On e-mail



PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN