

# Terror in the East and West: Beyond Ankara, Lahore, Paris, and Brussels

## City brought to its knees

### Horrible traffic snarl up

**M**ARCH 30 was a terrible day to be on the road. Commuters were stuck for hours on end as major roads were blocked due to three reasons that resulted in endless gridlock all over Dhaka, namely, a rally demanding justice for Tonu, blocking of roads as there was an unveiling of a flyover and finally, the blocking off of Shahbagh where hundreds of nurses were holding protests.

The protest culture in our country shows complete disregard for public convenience. The fact is that until things get to the stage of public nuisance, authorities do not take cognizance of demands and they are moved to respond only when the city is sent into paralysis, thanks to such demonstrations. And commuters have to bear the brunt of it all. Even political parties have shown total disregard for the public. There have been huge processions where the police have allowed some groups to takeover roads whilst denying others.

There ought to be clear guidelines from the government and traffic authorities that under no circumstances can thoroughfares be blocked or closed to hold rallies and demonstrations. There should be designated areas where people can congregate without disrupting the flow of traffic. In the case of processions, authorities should ensure that only a portion of the road is used and not the whole. We respect the right of people to voice their demands but if protesters want to gain public sympathy, they must respect public interest. We would like to urge the authorities to schedule their inauguration programmes on weekends so that they do not add to the already chaotic traffic conditions prevailing in the city.

## The Fakhru saga

### End the shenanigans

**P**OLITICS in Bangladesh never fails to amuse us. No vaudeville play writer could have scripted the saga of Fakhru Islam Alamgir as well as we have seen the events played out in his life in the last six or so years since he was made the 'acting secretary general' of the BNP. It must have come as a great relief to the gentleman to have been anointed as the substantive party secretary general of the BNP.

The day, we presume, shall be remembered by Fakhru as much for its auspiciousness, made so by his being relieved of the weight of 'acting' as the party chief executive, as for the burlesque nature of the things that followed his elevation in rank in the party. We are at a loss to rationalise the events we saw from the time the announcement of the new party appointments till Fakhru's landing in jail after being denied bail in connection with two cases of violence in January 2015, and then given bail on health grounds only a few hours later. And very soon after he walked out of jail on health grounds, he was at the party office to thank his party chief.

The BNP secretary general is unique in another sense being perhaps the only secretary general of a major party with as many as 80 litigations instituted by the government against him, most of them on very inane and ludicrous grounds. And in between the times since 2011, he has enjoyed the hospitality of the prison authorities for 323 days.

We would like to see an end to people making farce of the system. The legal system should neither be made light of nor misused to chastise political opponents.



TAJ HASHMI

**A**LTHOUGH Islamist or separatist terror groups bomb and kill hundreds of people in Iraq, Syria, Pakistan, Turkey, or Afghanistan on a regular basis, they hardly make headlines in Western media; and the news about these attacks disappear from Western media in hours. This is, however, not the case with any terror attack in the West – in London or Boston, Copenhagen, Madrid, Paris, or Brussels. Unless people and media in the West equally empathise and sympathise with all terror victims, and do something positive to counter terrorism everywhere, there is little hope for durable peace and understanding in the world.

There was yet again another homegrown ISIS terror attack in Europe. In less than four months after the Paris attack that killed 130 innocent people in November 2015, terrorists killed more than 30 and gravely injured scores of people in Brussels last Tuesday (March 22). Apparently, only three ISIS operatives, including two suicide bombers, who are brothers, took part in the world-shattering carnage. They used home-made bombs, or IEDs (improvised explosive devices) made of very powerful TATP explosives, which experts believe are least expensive, and can be made in one's apartment or garage.

For the first three days after the latest terror attacks in Brussels, there was seemingly a total information blackout in Western media outlets on any other news item other than the attack. So much so that, there was hardly any coverage of the US presidential primary in any American TV channel on that "Super Tuesday". On March 29, six days after the Brussels attack, the American media is still giving wide coverage to the minute details of the attack. So far so good! I have only two comments: a) Wide media coverage to terrorist attacks gives free publicity to terrorists – Margaret Thatcher once rightly said: "We must starve terrorists of the oxygen of publicity"; b) Selective publicity of terrorist attacks by Western governments and media smacks of their prejudice, and hence is counterproductive to counterterrorism everywhere.

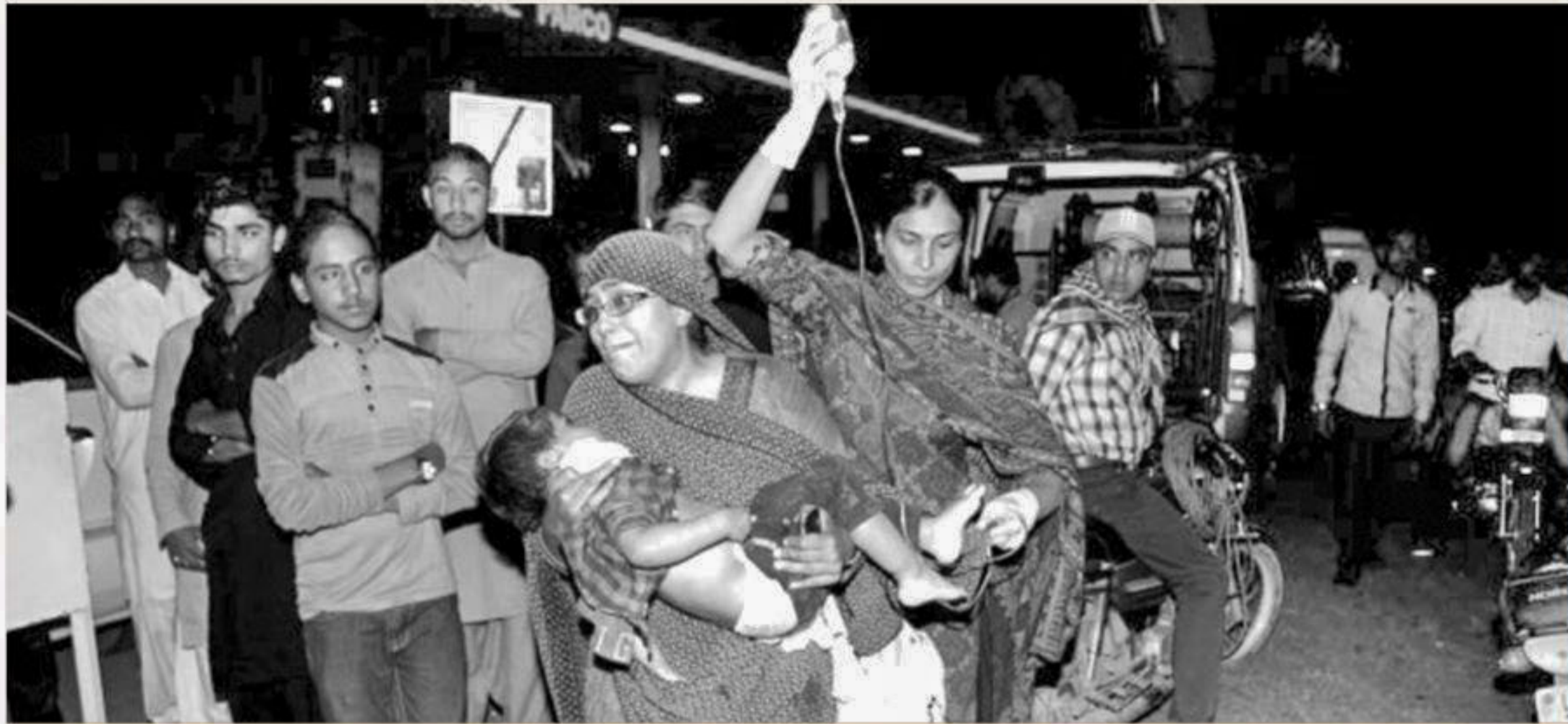
Recently, the *USA Today* exposed Western double standards towards terrorist attacks in the West and in the Muslim world. It asserts that over the years, hundreds of terrorist attacks took place in Afghanistan, Iraq, Turkey, Libya, Syria, Pakistan, Mali, Tunisia, Somalia, Burkina Faso, Indonesia, Ivory Coast and elsewhere; and that "Paris or Brussels were not the first or second terrorist attack in the last four months, though certainly this will be the first- or second-most covered by Western media". While terrorist attacks in Brussels, San Bernardino, and Paris made headlines in Western media, terrorist attacks in Turkey since October 2015, that killed around 200 people, and another 400 in Ivory Coast, Iraq, Libya, Lebanon, Yemen, Tunisia, and Yemen, never made headlines in the West.

On March 27 –Easter Sunday – a Jamaat ul-Ahrar (Pakistani Taliban affiliate) suicide bomber killed more than 70 people, and injured around 300 – mostly women and children – at a public park in Lahore, which got some fleeting coverage in the Western media, may be because it was an Islamist terror attack

on minority Christians in "godforsaken" Pakistan. However, initially, the CNN spent less than 10 seconds to break the news, followed by no comments and elaborations.

Any objective appraisal of terrorism – religious or secular, ISIS or Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) – requires an understanding of the syndrome. Terrorism is a means toward an end, not an end in itself. And far from being the primeval cause or another "original sin", terrorism may in some cases be a retaliatory, reactive violence by victims. In sum, it's a "weapon of

how the Belgian intelligence and police departments failed to preempt the attack. We don't hear why most second- and third-generation Muslim immigrants in Belgium don't consider themselves Belgians. Western media and analysts, in general, don't tell us about the ongoing Saudi-Turkish support for ISIS, which will further destabilise the Arab world, and eventually West Europe and North America. As if the Saudi-Turkish support for the ISIS against their common enemies – Iran, Shiite Arabs, and Kurdish nationalists – would stabilise the Middle East and North Africa!



Lahore, March 27, 2016.

PHOTO: AFP

the weak", which doesn't drop from the heavens. Since terrorists victimise innocent people, we often ignore the fact that terrorists are also victims of persecution, hate, and humiliation. In the backdrop of the recent terror attacks by ISIS, PKK, Taliban and Lashkar-e-Taiba, we mustn't overlook the fine line between terrorism and insurgency. Although it might sound pedestrian, I believe there are three different types of politically inspired violence: a) terrorism; b) insurgency; and c) insurgent-terrorism.

While al Qaeda, Hizbut Tahrir, HUIJ and JMB are terrorist outfits, plain and simple, the ISIS, PKK (in Turkey and adjoining countries) and the Afghan Taliban are terrorist groups, respectively, of a different kind with a claim to re-occupy or free the Levant (Eastern Turkey, Iraq, Syria, Palestine, and Lebanon), Kurdistan, and Pashtunistan. The ISIS, PKK, and Afghan Taliban mainly resort to terrorism, which is neither pure terrorism nor unadulterated insurgency; they attack both innocent civilians and armed law-enforcers and military. Although apparently Islamic by nature, both the Taliban and ISIS can be termed as nationalist outfits upholding Sunni Pashtun and Sunni Arab identities.

As Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, and Western, Saudi, and Pakistani support for the Afghan "jihad" eventually created the Afghan Taliban, as did Western invasions/destructions of Iraq, Syria and Libya lead to the creation of the ISIS. As the overthrow of the Taliban regime in 2001 turned many Taliban fighters into terrorists, so have the recent ISIS losses in Iraq and Syria turned many ISIS fighters into transnational terrorists. It's becoming what al Qaeda turned itself into after five to six years of 9/11.

Interestingly, from the postmortem of the Brussels attack by Western media and analysts, we only hear

We know major wars don't end small wars. The World Wars, the Korean and Vietnam wars, Arab-Israeli and Indio-Pakistani wars, and military interventions anywhere, in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria, far from bringing durable peace, further destabilised the world. As one analyst has put it, prior to the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, there was no suicide bomber in that country; but since the invasion, around 2,000 suicide bombings have taken place in Iraq up to January, 2016. We have also examples of client states and protégées turning into Frankenstein's monsters of their former patrons. As Hamas, a former protégée of Israel, turned into its bitter enemy, so did the Taliban and al Qaeda go against their former patrons, America and Pakistan. The ISIS has already become anti-Western, and is no longer under the tutelage of its Arab and Turkish promoters.

Promoting "our terrorists" against "theirs", demonising "others" as terrorists by promoting Islamophobia or racism, and last but not least, portraying "ourselves" as innocent victims of terrorism by overstating the terrorist threat as the West has been doing for quite some time through blatant lies, deceptive wars and invasions, and the ubiquitous double standards, will neither end terrorism nor restore mutual trust and respect between the West and the Muslim World. In sum, a New York Times (March 28) cartoon has aptly explained the state of affairs in Europe. Perpetual fear mongering and demonising marginalised Muslims as terrorists could give ISIS its state in Europe, called the "State of Emergency"!

The writer teaches security studies at Austin Peay State University. He is the author of several books, including his latest, *Global Jihad and America: The Hundred-Year War Beyond Iraq and Afghanistan* (Sage, 2014). Email: tajhashmi@gmail.com

## Childhood obesity: A public health problem

AHMED HOSSAIN and RASHENDA AZIZ

**W**EIGHT gain of a child is celebrated in our country by many parents at least in the beginning of a child's life. Culturally, we love food; it provides us with a sense of warmth and well-being. But as a parent, many of us don't see the negative impacts of weight gain. If a child crosses a certain weight range, they are at risk of being overweight and eventually, may suffer from obesity.

We conducted a study in two English Medium schools in Dhanmondi with 169 students of class VI to class X in January 2016. It appears that the prevalent rate of overweight/obese students is around 19 percent, which means that 19 out of 100 students were found to be either overweight or obese. This is an increasing concern on the health and well-being of the child. Increased prevalence of childhood obesity may have adverse disturbing and unpleasant implications in the adult life of the child.

The American Heart Association noted that if you are severely overweight or obese at 16, there's an 80 percent chance that you will be obese as an adult. With obesity comes a list of life-threatening ailments: hypertension, Type 2 diabetes, heart disease, cancer, respiratory problems, bone conditions and several other problems. Health problems related to obesity are not only physical but psychological and social as well. Children who are obese can later on have a negative body-image, which leads to lower self-esteem. They tend to feel depressed and are conscious about their weight, and this may have an impact on their behaviour. Some scientists have also predicted that with the increased rates of childhood obesity, today's kids will be the first generation to live shorter lives than their parents.

The weight gain of a child is due to the imbalance

between caloric intake and the calories utilised (for growth, development, metabolism, and physical activities). Typically, the amount of calories a child consumes through food or beverages, if not used for energy activities, leads to weight gain in children. It is seen that children and teens nowadays lack the required amount of physical activity; hence, the calories are not used properly, leading to children being severely overweight or obese. A sedentary lifestyle is also an important factor in abnormal weight gain, as many children nowadays spend most of their time in front of television sets, video games or computers. Children tend to snack more when they are watching a show on TV or browsing the internet, and the fact that they spend little time engaging in physical activities can lead to unnatural weight gain.

Moreover, television advertisements depicting energy-rich and sugar-rich foods influence children to make unhealthy choices. These unhealthy food choices may lead to weight gain and obesity.

At home, a productive parent-child interaction is very crucial, as parents can influence children's food choices and motivate them to have a healthy lifestyle. Effective interventions in a family setting can be beneficial in changing a child's behaviour of overeating and their unhealthy choice of food.

Children spend a significant portion of their time at school. They have at least one meal at school. Hence, schools can encourage kids to make a healthy food choice, like reducing the intake of carbonated drinks or sugary foods, encouraging kids to regularly drink water and healthy fruit juices, and motivate them to increase their consumption of vegetables and fruits. Schools which provide meals in their canteens can have healthy nutritious food items with an emphasis on a balanced diet. Schools can involve kids in mandatory physical

activities like sports or dance, with focus on enjoyment rather than competitiveness. Classroom-based health education can make older children aware of eating a nutritious diet, and engaging in a regular physical activity. Weight-loss programmes like dietary management (eating more fibre-rich foods), and physical activity are recommended for children above seven years of age who are at risk of secondary complications from obesity.

Our community also has insufficient sidewalks, parks, and bike riding facilities. Taking these limitations into consideration, physical activity can be stressed upon through the adoption of simple strategies like walking alongside your children to school or parking cars at a distance from the destination, so that kids can walk there or encouraging them to take the stairs instead of elevators or escalators.

Childhood obesity needs attention as a major public health issue in Bangladesh. The complications caused due to childhood obesity can be severe and as stated earlier, can continue into adulthood. Hence, there is a need to address this problem at every possible step through effective interventions and motivation strategies. Unfortunately, in Bangladesh, the government, along with other health care organisations, have thus far failed to take appropriate actions, such as changing policies and adopting environmentally safe interventions for children to engage in physical activities. Children need to adopt healthy behaviours as a lifelong practice so that they can lead a healthy life. Timely actions from adults can lead to a nationwide healthy future for our kids.

The writers are Associate Professor at the Department of Public Health, North South University, and MPH student at the Department of Public Health, North South University and research fellow at USAID, respectively. E-mail: ahmed.hossain@northsouth.edu

## COMMENTS

**"Trouble over hacker ad"**  
(March 30, 2016)

Asad Rajib

The government must take some rigorous steps against that coaching centre for their misleading advertisement.

Mahbub Alam

Old wine in new bottle. We have been listening to the same thing for the last few years but no significant result is visible.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

### Bring the killers of Tonu to book

We are surprised to notice that nearly two weeks have passed, but the killers of Tonu are still on the loose. Law enforcers have not yet been able to catch anyone relating to that brutal murder. Does it mean that the killers are more powerful than the law enforcers? We strongly urge the government to bring the criminals to book immediately.

Khandker  
On e-mail

### Poor state of roads in hill areas

Indigenous people living in hilly areas suffer badly because of the poor condition of roads. There is no proper transport system and people living in these areas are bound to move on foot. Taking critically ill patients to hospitals is so difficult. We request the government to look into the matter.

Nadia Banu  
On e-mail

### Punish the perpetrators

When we achieved independence in 1971, we dreamt of a secular state where people irrespective of their religion, caste, and creed will enjoy equal status and equal rights. But what do we see in reality? On March 26, the day of our independence, a gang (led by a man named Akbar Ali) swooped on the house of a Hindu family (Ripon Deb's family) in Golapganj upazila of Sylhet to grab their land. They

stabbed three members of that family and vandalised, looted and torched the house. We are extremely upset about the incident. Although police arrested one of the 15 accused, the rest of the gang are still at large. All of them should immediately be arrested and sentenced with rigorous punishment.

Amina Begum  
On e-mail



PHOTO: STAR