

Dhaka Attack: The Aftermath

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JULY 1, 2016: The day our way of life changed, perhaps forever. In admitting that, to ourselves and to our loved ones, we give a lot away to the perpetrators of this inhumane act. We let them get away with changing us, shackling our freedom and mutating our definition of love and trust.

That's why so many avoid that view. Nothing has changed, they exclaim. We will celebrate life with so much colour and joy and heart, that the earth will tremble with our shared laughter. And that is good and necessary and what the victims would want us to do - fight against the ideology of hate that their killers preach. But perhaps more than anything, the victims would want us to get the real message behind the veil of terror.

It is no coincidence that the people they chose to represent them in this vile act were young, well-off and educated. Neither is it coincidence, or generosity of heart, that led them to spare the Muslims and locals. No terrorist organisation has ever flinched from causing more deaths than necessary, there's no controlled radius of destruction. When the well-spoken assassins treated the locals politely, in an almost refined manner, when they spoke of the importance of prayer and good deeds, they did so with the full knowledge of what would happen when the stories got out about them.

Make no mistake of it - the attackers were not leaders. They were pawns. And this fundamental fact is important in understanding the purpose of the people behind the scene.

Because, unlike every attack that foreshadowed what happened in Gulshan, this was carefully orchestrated to appear as an act of terror by the elite against the elite.

So when you find out the identities of these terrorists, the likes of Nibras and Sameh - bright, young, privileged - two very different reactions emerge in society.

The vast majority of people, who do not belong to the elite and whose daily lives have nothing to do with foreigners, care less about the event. They simply don't feel as invested, and even when they do, they perceive it as a 'rich issue' - English medium kids with unstable family lives and too much free time. The average Bangladeshi, with their daily struggles, at best brushes off the attacks as follies of the rich, or at worst, empathises with the

anti-Western sentiments of the terrorists. Of all the people, they seem to be the only ones who understand the burden of living in a post-colonial subcontinent.

The second, smaller and relatively well off, section of society are shocked. They move through the stages of grief - denial ('the perpetrators aren't like us at all, not really'), anger ('how dare their families and friends not take greater check of them'), bargaining

depresses us.

But it doesn't stop there, it makes us second guess each other. The people who go to places like Holey Artisan are the policymakers of tomorrow. Indeed, if you're reading this, you are likely one of the politicians, the businessmen, the bureaucrats and the diplomats of future Bangladesh, and if any terrorist organisation can make you question the legitimacy of foreigners on our soil or enforce

consciously suppress, even one should find solace in the arms of those organisations - that is the next weapon launched against us.

Bangladesh has expected this for a long time. From the churches to the pagodas - the religious sanctuaries we have burned have left entire communities broken. They have suffered the brunt of nameless militancy and lost, but this is the first time that the terrorists have a face - they want to be known, to be

country, getting richer. You have heard the struggles your parents went through, and so your internal turmoil is not worthy of recognition, even to yourself.

That is a breeding ground of insecurity and lack of meaning. That is why terrorists deliver an unreal reward - a slice of heaven - for a puny worldly sacrifice - your life. Is it so hard to see now how easy it is, in our unquestioning, non confrontational society? We would rather hug someone than disagree in theology or spirituality with near ones. We would rather have a fatwa than a tea stall debate about religion.

This collective mindset is why our way of life needs to change, for the better. From an ethics course in school to an opening up of family formalities, every sphere of life needs to accommodate this shift. It's no longer Us vs. Them; no otherisation exists. We are our own protectors and our own villains. So we must speak for making safe spaces around us for discourse, for religious practices, for non religious practices.

If your newly religious friend feels compelled to leave hangouts because there is no place to pray nearby, make room. Ask your imam to speak against extremism, reward him with donations for being kind and moderate. If you're a teacher or a student, introduce discussions in the classroom. Talk about uncomfortable issues, agree to disagree. Speak.

This cultural shift needs to be represented in every part of society - any section you leave out, is a section weak to our enemies. Educate the uneducated, soothe the mentally ill, talk amongst each other. Even then, many will slip through the cracks of our society, but if one man is swayed away from the path, if you rescue one person from the clutches of extremism, you not only save his life but many more.

So fight against the message they want you to accept - that the elite are callous, that foreigners are the root of the problem, that there is no incorruptible mind. Don't build walls, build a future. A future where we are aware and fighting every day, in every way.

Most importantly, listen. Listen to the voice of dissent, and learn to accept it - no, to embrace it. Otherwise, all may be lost already.

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PHOTO: STAR

How will we heal the wounds?

(‘maybe if we all reach out, they will respond’) and acceptance (‘we can't reach all of them’). Fact is, there is at least one person in your acquaintance list who read the reactions of hostages and is wondering right now about the legitimacy of the claims they made. One person, slightly frustrated with their life, with an internet connection and a bad day - that's all it takes at this point. The terrorists know that, we realise that and that's what

laws that clamp down on people's religious rights - that is a victory for them. And that's exactly what they want from you.

Not only to fear the rise of militancy but to try and counteract it in extreme ways - such as witch hunting people with religious leanings, scouring people's social media data for clues and, shaming family and friends who have tried everything they could. Banning specialised channels. If, among the many you sub-

shared, to inspire.

They know that this will work because of the way we are as a country. We are secular, without being tolerant. You will cheerily attend other religious festivals - then mutter stereotype reinforcing comments when minorities aren't around. We are family-oriented and conservative. You were taught to respect and love your elders, but never taught how to talk to them. Above all, we are a poor

PROJECT SYNDICATE

India's censored fight back



SHASHI THAROOR

AWAKENING INDIA

GO to see a movie in India nowadays, and despite the elaborate musical numbers and extravagant sets, you may well find the content pretty bland. The reason is simple: the industry is reeling under severe censorship. This flies in the face of India's democratic tradition - and it needs to stop. Censorship has a peculiar status in India. When it comes to news media, print or broadcast, censorship is utterly unacceptable, even unthinkable. Yet all films produced by India's prolific film industry must be reviewed and approved by the Central Board of Film Certification, which has the authority to demand that scenes be cut or language changed before a film can be screened publicly. The discrepancy is a matter of elitism. Decades ago, the supposed guardians of India's public morals decided that those with the education and good taste to read a newspaper can handle its contents, but ordinary people seeking diversion must be protected from the pernicious effects of the "wrong" kinds of entertainment.

To be sure, violence often makes it past the censors. But sexuality is another story. While images of nudity appear in urban glossy magazines to titillate the bourgeoisie, city-based censors make sure that villagers do not see a woman's bare breast on a movie screen. Until recently, not even a kiss could appear in a Bollywood movie; instead, as the man and

woman tilted their heads toward each other, the camera would pan to two birds pecking or two flowers brushing together.

Other perceived threats to Indian culture include offensive language, gay themes, and unconventional views, especially on socially and politically sensitive topics. Sentiments that we take for granted in the opinion pages of newspapers rarely find their way into Bollywood blockbusters.

Even on television, entertainment is subject to rules that don't apply to news. A fashion show, for example, would be rigorously reviewed to ensure that no non-conformist attire that shocks the sensibilities of Indian culture's custodians makes it on screen. Fashion channels have been taken off the air for showing models in revealing clothes.

India's film industry has long suffered stoically under the pressure of the paternalistic censors. But it has never had it so bad as it does under the current chief censor, Pahlaj Nihalani.

To get an idea of the scale of the Nihalani-led review board's moral policing, a kiss in the James Bond movie Spectre was deemed too long (and therefore trimmed). A scene in the superhero hit Deadpool got the same treatment. Nihalani went so far as to declare that engaging in a long kiss "means you want to do sex in your house with your door open, and show to people the way you are doing sex." Needless to say, that comment attracted considerable derision.

Gay themes have also met with Nihalani's disapproval, with the film Aligarh, about the persecution of a gay professor, receiving an "A" rating, which restricted the film to adults,

despite the lack of nudity or sex. The board demanded that the word "lesbian" be removed from another film.

Last month, Nihalani's reign of cultural terror came to a head, with the review board demanding 72 cuts from the big-budget

Decades ago, the supposed guardians of India's public morals decided that those with the education and good taste to read a newspaper can handle its contents, but ordinary people seeking diversion must be protected from the pernicious effects of the "wrong" kinds of entertainment.

Bollywood film Uda Punjab ("Flying Punjab"), a gritty tale centered on the drug culture that is prevalent in the eponymous northwestern Indian state. That decision was, it seems, entirely political.

Punjab is controlled by India's governing Bharatiya Janata Party, in alliance with a powerful regional party, the Shiromani Akali Dal, neither of which was pleased by the film's portrayal of the state they rule. And, unsurprisingly, the cuts largely targeted scenes and dialogue highlighting the government's failure to curb - and some politicians' complicity in promoting - Punjab's widespread drug abuse. To add insult to injury, the censors asked the filmmakers to remove all 94 references to Punjab in the film, including from its title.

"All the characters are negative," Nihalani reportedly said. But when he declared that the film would "hurt the whole community," what he really meant was that it would hurt the BJP and its allies. (Nihalani, a BJP appointee, had made a campaign video for Prime Minister Narendra Modi.) The fact that the cuts would have gutted the film - as if Woody Allen were forced to remove Barcelona from Vicky Cristina Barcelona - was apparently irrelevant.

But Nihalani failed to reckon with Uda Punjab's feisty producer, Anurag Kashyap, a luminary of Bollywood's avant-garde. Kashyap launched a Twitter attack on Nihalani, calling him a "dictatorial man" and an "oligarch" - and not stopping there. "I always wondered what it felt like to live in North Korea," Kashyap tweeted. "Now I don't even need to catch a plane."

Kashyap continued his resistance offline, taking the almost unprecedented step of suing the review board - and winning. The Mumbai High Court ordered that the film be shown with only one scene cut. It was

promptly released, and has since broken all of India's box-office records.

The offensive by Kashyap may have fired up an already frustrated film industry, which is united in wanting Nihalani gone. Even one of Nihalani's fellow review-board members, the filmmaker Ashoke Pandit, accused him of undermining the body's credibility and even of threatening to "Talibanise" the industry.

But even if Nihalani is ousted, and the review board goes back to its old ways, India will still be a modern democracy engaged in the thoroughly undemocratic practice of limiting freedom of speech, if only in the film industry. A government-appointed committee recently recommended that the board be confined to certification (or issuing audience ratings), with the power to censor content only in rare circumstances. The recommendations should be adopted (though the report's approval of full bans of films by the board is unacceptable).

The practice of film censorship is yet another relic of a bygone colonial era, the values of which Indians have too readily internalised. Nearly seven decades after independence, Indians must recognise that our democracy is mature enough to end censorship.

The writer, a former UN under-secretary-general and former Indian Minister of State for External Affairs and Minister of State for Human Resource Development, is currently Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs and an MP for the Indian National Congress.

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QUOTABLE Quote

E J HOBBSBAWM
British Marxist historian of the rise of industrial capitalism, socialism and nationalism

"Very few modern national movements are actually based on a strong ethnic consciousness, though they often invent one once they have got going, in the form of racism."

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS	DOWN
1 Yaks it up	1 Dress
5 Kingdom	2 Open space
11 Woody's son	3 Extortion
12 Nasty fellow	4 Raid
13 Caboose setting	5 Mideast ruler
14 Titularly	6 Domestic servant
15 Study of Louis Pasteur	7 Famed isthmus
17 Relatives	8 One -- million
18 Stroll	9 Crater part
22 Packing	10 Wide shoe letters
24 Harry Hamlin series	16 Purpose
25 Farrow of films	19 Mule deer
26 One in a hand	20 Doily stuff
27 Blockhead	21 Some sheep
30 Duel count	22 In the thick of
32 Singer Reese	23 Carousel, e.g.
33 Moose's cousin	28 Geriatrics study
34 Quarrels	29 Suit expert
38 Kathmandu native	30 Energy
41 Constructed	31 Radcliffe grad
42 Salem's state	35 Moral no-nos
43 Three squared	36 Writer Ferber
44 Spa attraction	37 Espies
45 Woeful cry	38 At present
	39 Historic age
	40 Sulky state

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

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BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott