

Home-made prescriptions for home-grown terror



MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

THE perpetrator of the Gulshan attack has been found to be of Bangladeshi origin and therefore, the gruesome incident has been termed as the handiwork of home-grown

terrorists. Investigation into the terror attack has commenced and facts testifying to the veracity of initial assumptions are yet to come by. Leaving aside the probable connection of international terror networks or the unearthing of the identity of the mentors of the slain terrorists, it might be time to focus on home-baked prescriptions to counter the home-grown terror.

The savagery of the Bangladeshi young terrorists must serve as a wake-up call because of the modus-operandi, as it bears similarity with those of the dreaded international terror. The suspected contact and communication with the handler or the mentor located elsewhere during the course of terrorist operations need to be taken note of.

Coming specifically to the home-made measures to combat the extremist menace, the first priority should focus on the paucity of intelligence. Some of the slain terrorists were missing or remained untraced for quite a long time and some cases of unexplained absence were known to the police. It would thus appear that the matter was not looked into as vigorously as it should have been and surely not followed-up by the concerned agencies. Equally alarming is the revelation that

dozens of young men have gone missing under mysterious circumstances during the preceding months. The authorities were not aware of such developments as some parents/guardians have avoided contact with them, perhaps due to the fear of hassles that occur during such reporting.

The missing-persons cell or squad that we may have needs to follow up each of these suspicious disappearances. A dedicated unit needs to work on the subject. If pursued with due diligence and supported by

that have highlighted the plight of co-religionists in distant lands may have shaken the young men and encouraged them to seek 'vengeance'. One has to note that the initial recruits were directed to take on 'soft targets'. Such a possibility cannot be ruled out, as individuals ranging from priests belonging to minority communities, bloggers, writers, publishers, and low profile foreign nationals etc. have been targeted by deploying not so skilled assailants. The hardcore extremists have been tasked at a later stage, as evidenced

thousand. It is also learnt that more than 3,500 HUIJI-B activists took part in the Afghan Jihad where they had trained alongside LET recruits. The question is how effectively such elements have been watched and kept under surveillance in Bangladesh. The HUIJI-B members received grenades from LET and used them to carry out a series of attacks within Bangladesh in 2004 and 2005. Allegedly, the attacks were carried out by a combined HUIJI-LET-Hizb-ul Mujahideen team. These facts came to light during the investigation of the killing of former finance minister Mr. Shah A M S Kibria in January 2005.

Under the circumstances, our concern should be on efforts geared towards explaining the reasons behind the misery of Muslims all over the world, along with framing workable policies to ensure good governance nationally. That violence need not be the course of actions has to be ensured by manifest deeds and programmes, incorporating the wishes and desires of the majority. The real message of Islam has to be culturally internalised.

International cooperation has to be sought discreetly from countries like the USA, UK, France, and Turkey, wherein there is a pool of information about the strategy and tactics of ISIS and Al-Qaeda. Closer to home, in Indonesia, there are admirable educational and rehabilitative programmes that have proved successful in weaning away people from the violent path. We surely can draw on the experience of others and prepare our deradicalisation strategy. If we know the complaints well enough, we can prepare adequate answers thereto. We need to be ready for a long discourse.

The writer is a columnist of The Daily Star.

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actionable intelligence, we should be able to obtain valuable clues about the clandestine operations. A complete and updated inventory of all accused and suspects interrogated and forwarded to court, including their current status, should be available. This has to be a continuous assignment.

We need to understand the so-called indoctrination or brain-washing process of impressionable young minds towards a violent path. Supra-national causes

by the modus-operandi and target population of the Gulshan restaurant attack.

By now much is known about the strategy, tactics, and objectives of deadly terrorist organisations like LET (Lashker-e-Tayyeba) headquartered in Pakistan. It needs to be reminded that a prominent terrorist group that emerged from extremist schools of thought was Harkatul Jihad al Islami-Bangladesh (HUIJI-B). It once boasted a membership of fifteen

Appointment of public prosecutors

Party loyalty shouldn't be the criteria

REGRETTABLY, the partisan considerations that motivate appointment of public prosecutors (PP) have become a systemic problem over the years. Inefficiency of the state appointed lawyers along with flawed investigation results in low rate of conviction. And a minister is on record in 2005 saying that inefficiency in prosecution results in the quashing of 70 percent cases. Today, we are not much better off.

Lawyers appointed by the government to conduct public cases must be selected on his or her proficiency and commitment and not on partisan considerations as has been, and is, the case. And when one takes into account that the remuneration of a PP is only Tk 500 per day, even less for an assistant PP, whether he or she takes up one case or 10, it is hardly any wonder that things have gotten to this dismal state.

It is not surprising that the chief justice himself has come out publicly on the issue. Poor knowledge of criminal laws and politicisation of the office of public prosecutor are severely hampering legal proceedings against alleged criminals and terrorists. Attempts were made in the past to make the public prosecution service non-partisan, but that initiative didn't go anywhere. The last caretaker government too attempted to promulgate an ordinance which would allow for a permanent attorney department and stipulated specific criteria that an individual would have to possess to be deemed qualified to hold such a position. That move also went nowhere. Unless quality of prosecutors is ensured the prosecution system is unlikely to see much improvement.

Minister's earthquake prediction

What are they based on?

IT is with bemusement that we note our Minister for Relief and Disaster Management giving such categorical assurance that Bangladesh will not experience a massive earthquake in the magnitude of 8 or 9 on the Richter scale. This he has said in the backdrop of a study by a geologist at Columbia University in New York City that has found that Dhaka sits on a dangerous fault which could trigger a massive earthquake affecting around 140 million people in the region that includes Bangladesh, India and Myanmar.

While we are not suggesting for a moment that there will be a mega quake, we hesitate to rule out such a possibility altogether without scientific basis. Just because we have been lucky enough to be spared an earthquake of such magnitude for the last 200 years as the Minister has quoted, does not guarantee that it will not occur now or in the near future. While it is important for the minister to tell people not to panic, his dismissal of an earthquake of that scale occurring, we feel, is misplaced. Given that it is not possible to predict whether such an earthquake is imminent, or that it may occur after a few hundred years, the most prudent task for a country under risk would be to boost its preparedness for such a disaster.

What the minister should be telling the public is how prepared the nation is or needs to be for such a disaster should it occur. This includes training rescue teams, mobilizing volunteers, educating the public on survival skills, keeping adequate hospital staff to attend to the injured, enough ambulances, firefighting facilities etc. Only such contingency plans can reassure the public.

Corrigendum

The Daily Star published an article by Kuldip Nayar on July 18, 2016, titled "Kuldip Nayar's tribute to Faraaz Hossain--Death be not proud." In this article there is a sentence as follows: "There is no doubt that Faraaz Hossain sacrificed his life for his friends (one Indian and the other a US citizen)..." The fact is Faraaz's two friends mentioned by Mr. Nayar were--Tarishi Jain, an Indian national and Abinta Kabir, a Bangladeshi national. Abinta Kabir was a Bangladeshi by birth and she spent most of her short life in Bangladesh. In 2010, her father was given citizenship by the US government and being his offspring, she was given an American passport. So, she had dual citizenship of both Bangladesh and USA.

Manzur Murshed
Bereaved grandfather of Abinta Kabir

Has the poison done its work?

RAVINDRA KUMAR



IS Priyanka Gandhi Vadra the antidote to those seeking the demise of the Indian National Congress party, one of the continent's oldest political parties?

This week and in the midst of news of far greater moment from around Asia, India is being asked to focus its energies on the latest instalment of a long-running soap opera that ought either to have ended or been taken off the air a few years ago. This episode has left hanging a question that those writing the script hope will prove tantalising – will Priyanka Gandhi Vadra play a larger role in national politics and lead her party's campaign for crucial polls next year in India's largest province? The fact some people, including commentators across Asia, should consider the answer pivotal is itself surprising for the question has been around long enough to have become boring.

When one of the continent's oldest political parties slips into terminal decline, it is an event worth noting if only because the party in question, the Indian National Congress, once inspired legions of anti-colonialists around Asia (and Africa). Its leaders were icons, but it was the sheer weight of their ideological confabulations as they tried to chart a path for a country on the cusp of freedom that made them interesting.

You could scoff at them today for having debated a mixed economic model for as long as they did; you could ask how naïve non-alignment was in a post-war world bitterly divided by ideology or you could raise puzzled eyebrows at the oddities of their most illustrious member, the man Indians embraced as the father of their free nation. But beginning about this time last century and arguably until the turn of this one you could not ignore the Congress because there was no questioning its leaders' commitment to the idea of building a nation, of wanting a better world. The Congress showed a way, a promise of hope, to people far away from India's shores.

Today, drawn like a moth to the flame by Narendra Modi's 2014 electoral battle-cry for a Congress-free India, the party seems determined to transform its rival's promise into prophesy. Party loyalists argue that success and failure are cyclical in politics, that today's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was once reduced to two seats in Parliament and that the Congress worm too shall one day turn.

They choose to forget that the BJP was less than a decade old when it recorded that dismal electoral score or that it had never ruled except as part of a short-lived makeshift coalition. But crucially they forget that the

BJP re-invented itself in more ways than one to progress from two seats in 1984 to 262 in 2016.

The ground is slipping away from beneath the Congress' feet. From 11 (out of 29) states it ruled within India's federal structure when it was unseated from the Centre in 2014, it is in charge now in five and is a part of shaky coalitions in two others. With the exception of the southern state of Karnataka, the rest are insignificant in terms of their representation in Parliament. In effect, according to one calculation, the Congress now rules just six per cent of India.

Since 2014, when it lost the parliamentary election, the Congress has suffered one political blow after another without once having counter-punched. In any other democratically run party of the world, this would

Is it unfair, you may ask, to be so dismissive of a young lady possessed with charisma, and arguably her grandmother's walk?

To begin with, the lady is not so young; at 44, she is older than her great grand-father Jawaharlal Nehru was when he was elected president of the Congress party or her grandmother Indira Gandhi was when she attained that position. By the time he was 44, her father Rajiv Gandhi was both the focal point of his party and Prime Minister of India.

Next, she has during a decade spent on the fringes of active politics never once been accused of offering a profound thought on the course governance ought to take. Besides Priyanka's occasional repartee during election campaigns, India knows little about her



Can Priyanka Gandhi change the fate of Congress?

PHOTO: AFP

have led at the very least to tough questions being asked of the leadership but more likely to a change. Within the Congress, led by two members of one family for more than a decade, these serial disasters have led to the hope that a third member of the same family might agree to play a larger political role along with the original two.

It is this prescription more than anything else that suggests the party's decline is terminal. For it speaks of a belief that political fortunes are made or marred by individuals, by their names and their faces, and not by their ideas or their vision. To believe that Priyanka Gandhi will resuscitate the Congress because she looks – or as some Congressmen insist, walks – like her grandmother, the redoubtable Indira Gandhi, is about as emphatic a proclamation of decline as anything could be.

politics or priorities; the country doesn't even know if there is anything to know."

Third, she is married to an individual who has managed to become the focal point of corruption investigations by both a commission of inquiry and the country's Enforcement Directorate.

Finally, a larger role for her would be tantamount to admission that her brother, Rahul, the putative Gandhi heir and party vice-president, has failed to make the cut.

The tragedy from India's perspective is that the Congress appears driven to self-destruct at a time when its once-famed inclusive secularism may be needed the most. If Priyanka Gandhi is the antidote to those seeking a Congress-free India, the poison may already have done its work.

The writer is Editor, The Statesman (India).

COMMENTS

"Brutality beyond description"

(July 14, 2016)

Ruhul Insaf

It is so horrible and monstrous!

Ishtiaq A Chisti

I'm completely numb from the horror of it. No words can calm my anger and sadness. I can't even imagine how the families are feeling.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Cancel the Rampal power plant deal

It was indeed very shocking to learn that the government has signed an agreement with India's state-run Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd. to implement the 1320 MW Maitree Super Thermal Power Project at Rampal near the Sundarbans. From the very beginning, people from all walks of life were protesting and urging the government to abandon the plan as the plant will destroy the world's largest mangrove forest.

We learned from media that in the past few

years, the Indian central and state authorities that deal with environmental concerns in India denied the proposal of NTPC (National Thermal Power Corporation Limited) to set up a similar coal-fired thermal power plant at Cajmara in Gadawara of Madhya Pradesh over a number of concerns. How could our government allow that in our country?

Nur Jahan
Chittagong

Stop the blame game

Over the last couple of months our country has been passing through a critical situation. The recent wave of killings of religious minorities, bloggers, writers, publishers, activists, university teachers and foreigners have left people in fear and sceptical of the government's ability to provide adequate security to the citizens. Instead of taking stern actions, our government has played the blame game which has done little to solve the problem.

Aparna Paul
Dhaka