

The Munich shooting rampage

An act of cowardice

WE condemn in the strongest possible terms the shooting rampage carried out in Munich, Germany that left at least nine people dead and several wounded before the lone gunman, an 18-years-old German-Iranian apparently killed himself. While the authorities said it was too early to say if it was a terrorist attack, the fact remains that it was the third attack on civilians in Western Europe in eight days. Previous attacks in France and Germany were claimed by IS. Our condolences and prayers are with the innocent people who lost their lives in the cowardly, mindless acts of violence.

Whatever the motive of the gunman, such attacks will accomplish nothing except fuel the anti-immigrant, xenophobic forces across Europe, jeopardising the condition of the million-plus refugees fleeing persecution in Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan who were accepted by Germany last year. The masterminds of these attacks have probably forgotten that Germany is a country that vehemently opposed the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and has been the most welcoming to refugees. In order to make integration easier for the newly-arrived, the country went as far as suspending a law requiring employers to give preference to German or EU job applicants over asylum seekers for three years.

It is a time to mourn. But it is also time to stay focused. Most of the refugees are hard-working, law-abiding people trying to make a better life for themselves and their families. Such isolated attacks should not be used as an excuse to crack down on immigrants. It is a law enforcement issue, not an immigration one, and Germany would do well to treat it as such.

Another round of price hike

What is the justification?

IT is not without reason that a leading chamber of commerce opposed the latest proposal by Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission (BERC) to raise gas price by as much as 140 percent. This paper has always highlighted the adverse affects of these hikes in prices as they are detrimental to consumers as it is the retail customers who ultimately bear the increase in cost of production. The latest proposal by BERC that is due to hold a public hearing on August 7 intends to up cost of gas at household level by 140 percent, 130 percent for captive power plants and 62 percent for industry. Industrial output for essentials such as fertilisers will go up, as will every product produced in a factory. We are looking at more than doubling of cost of generating electricity and city residents will have to find money somewhere as their electricity bills more than double.

What is the rationale for such increases? Yes, we understand that natural gas is a finite resource. But one should be realistic in such cost revisions. If industrial production becomes so expensive so as to affect demand for products and the average consumer is battered by cost increases of electricity, the monthly budget will require readjustment from somewhere. There is no doubt that such significant rise in cost of energy will precipitate inflation. Policymakers must tread carefully before making such a drastic measure effective as it has been less than a year that BERC raised energy prices across the board.

COMMENTS

"Ramifications of terror attacks in Bangladesh" (July 18, 2016)

Noor Islam Pappu

This is hitting us really hard.

Sadman Hoque

The government has categorically claimed that there would be no effect of terror attacks on economic growth. Really?

LIFE MUST GO ON

SHIFTING IMAGES



MILIA ALI

MORE than three weeks have elapsed since the carnage at the Holy Café and Bakery in Dhaka. Despite assurances by the government to combat terror and assertions by the police about strengthening surveillance, the city remains in a state of deep shock and partial paralysis. People are grappling with the uncertainty of what's to come next. The crucial question seems to be: Will our lives be eclipsed by the dread of terror or can we overcome the setback, through the collective actions and resilience of our brave citizens?

Fighting terrorism is not an easy task given its complex and mutating nature. Terrorists today have splintered and regrouped in unprecedented ways, helped largely by the internet. It is no longer just ISIS, Al Qaeda or even a local Islamist group. We are now dealing with lone wolves inspired by an extremist ideology, but in many cases without a direct operational connection to the base. They are youths from within our community who have been radicalised by some cleric preaching a distorted version of Islam on TV or the internet calls for Jihad. Profiling these individuals is difficult since they may not be Madrassa students/graduates or regular visitors to the mosque. These impressionable youngsters have been sucked into a cult that has given them false hopes of a better world on the other side, tapping into some deep insecurity or frustration that they nurture within them. Hence, this is more of a social and community problem rather than one that can be solved with hardline counter terrorism strategies alone.

The terrorists have also changed their modus operandi – they are not just bombing airports, mosques and churches or hacking liberals who raise their voices against radical Islam. The new strategy seems to be to maximise civilian deaths and generate a high level of chaos and fear among the population! No one so far has clearly defined the objective of the killings except that the perpetrators espouse a monolithic belief that they are

waging a "religious war".

In the last few months, there have been attacks at locations as far apart as Brussels and Istanbul and Dhaka and Nice. The Dhaka Massacre, however, stands out for its cold-blooded brutality. We have been shaken to the core by the fact that six or seven "normal looking" youngsters could walk into a public place, kill and terrorise innocent, unarmed people and sustain a heightened level of violent anger for 12 hours. As we mourn the victims, numerous questions cross

There are no easy and quick fixes to the enormous problem we face. But, the government and civil society need to work in tandem to restore the confidence that has been shattered. The law enforcement agencies must step up surveillance and intelligence, but without overreaching their writ. Yes, there should be zero tolerance for any individual or group fanning intolerance and sectarian violence, but we also need to be conscious of the fact that our civil liberties are not trampled upon.

and social context.

The journey toward healing and recovery is going to be a long and arduous one. The recent tragedy has demonstrated that terrorism is a negative sum game...there are no winners in this fight. The unfortunate victims and their families suffer the most but then the terrorists themselves are also fighting a losing battle. They may temporarily succeed in instilling fear among ordinary citizens, but they are not likely to win the battle of ideas and the mind. On the



ILLUSTRATION: LUCY FAHEY

our minds: Are there sleeper cells in the country that could launch further surprise attacks? Will normalcy return or is the future shrouded in uncertainty? Will Bangladesh become a breeding ground for Islamic extremism?

Experience with terrorist attacks elsewhere shows that life does return to a routine pace. This is bound to happen in Dhaka, but our citizenry will continue to live with a lurking fear. And, it will take a long time for people to move around as freely as they did prior to the tragedy.

It is important that parents become more proactive in guiding and monitoring their children. The family and community must work together to wean radicalised young people back through cultural and sports initiatives that are known to have a salutary impact on the youth. Some countries have introduced rehabilitation programmes for those who either return from a spell with ISIS or are veering toward radicalisation. It may be worthwhile to explore these models and re-design them in line with our cultural

contrary, they are losing public support and their families, mostly innocent, are ostracised and humiliated. In effect, it's a battle where all sides lose out. Sadly, the greatest losers are the ordinary people who want to live normal lives and aspire for a better world for their children. But, as Robert Frost said: "In three words I can sum up everything I have learned about life: It goes on". And it must!

The writer is a renowned Rabindra Sangeet exponent and a former employee of the World Bank. E-mail: shiftingimages@gmail.com

We must stop singling out NSU



NAHELA NOWSHIN

IT has been three weeks into the carnage at Holy bakery and a lot has already been said and written in its aftermath but even so, we are now left with more questions than answers. This is partly due to the terrorists' profile – young, rich and educated – which has defied the typical portrait of militants that is 'madrassa-educated and economically disenfranchised'. One wonders, on what basis were these young men handpicked by recruiters and how were they subsequently brainwashed? How does a well-to-do, seemingly liberal, educated individual who was a law abiding citizen for twenty plus years of his life become radicalised in the span of a year? (This is further complicated by the fact that there is no 'one' path to radicalisation). Do the Gulshan attackers, seen in photos sporting a disturbing grin while posing with guns, have something in common that was exploited as a recruiting tool? Are we, as a society, not somehow complicit in failing these men who saw calculated, cold-blooded murder as the ultimate way out? These are just some of innumerable questions that we, as people of the nation, are struggling to find answers to. But in our desperate, hurried attempts to do so to gain some much needed closure, we ought to be careful before we start looking for 'answers' in all the wrong places.

Amidst the ongoing developments in the aftermath of the attack, the role of educational institutions has come into sharp focus. North South University (NSU) in particular has come under fire since a gunman the Gulshan attack and one of the Sholakia attackers have been found to be students of the

university. A freed hostage of the Gulshan café siege was also a teacher at NSU who was sacked from the university due to his alleged links with Hizb-ut-Tahrir. On July 16, acting pro-VC of the esteemed university, along with two others, were arrested because the militants of the Gulshan attack took shelter in a flat owned by the NSU official who failed to comply with DMP's instruction to collect tenants' information before renting out flats. To add insult to injury, many have expectedly taken up the opportunity to scrutinise the private university in order to ridicule the elitist notion that terrorists are exclusively bred in madrassas—a notion whose credibility has now been

legitimacy. For instance, the Health Minister had to say this about NSU: "What are they teaching there? Actions must be taken against them." More recently, Dr. Atiqul Islam, VC of NSU, was grilled on a talk show hosted by Munnir Saha on ATN News with regard to accusations against the university of harbouring terrorist elements. The lengthy, embarrassing interview titled (in extremely poor taste) "Jongibaader Uttor Dokkhin", and one that seemed designed to make NSU look like a hotbed of terrorism, leaves little room to doubt the propagandist nature that the media plays in times like these. This whole saga is

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torn to shreds.

While there is much truth to the sentiment that the economic status of a person can no longer be considered a primary determinant of his turning to extremism, it is completely unacceptable, not to mention ridiculous, to shift the bulk of the blame onto a single educational institution, i.e. NSU. Dhaka, with a population of around 1.7 crore, is home to a modest number of 60 universities. Is it then so unfathomable that two militants happened to go to the same university? Government officials and the media are adding fuel to the fire by giving these claims an air of

unsurprisingly also being exploited to pursue specific political agendas. For instance, in a laughable attempt to sell the 'virtues' of student politics, a leader of the ruling party's student wing criticised the bar on student politics in private universities as the principal cause for students getting involved in terrorism and militancy.

Singling out NSU as the ultimate terrorist breeding ground not only seems nonsensical, but also seems more like an easy fix, i.e. a diversionary tactic that detracts from addressing the larger, more complex root causes of terrorism at play. There's no doubt that authorities of NSU

must take stricter measures to clamp down on individuals/groups involved in militant activities but let's refrain from making absurd assumptions about the institution as a whole because such gross generalisations could have far-reaching adverse effects for the overwhelming majority of law abiding NSU students. Here, we also see a blatant double standard when it comes to dealing with student wings of political parties at public universities versus campuses as a recruitment ground for militancy. If the commitment to make universities a safe learning space is in fact genuine, then all kinds of violent groups should be dealt with an iron fist, whether it's a terror outfit or wayward members of student political parties. No violent group should be above the law on the basis of its political affiliations.

If we are sincere in our efforts to find answers then first we should be asking the right questions. Framing our concerns is of paramount importance because they have the potential to affect government measures. Instead of devoting our attention and resources to short-term fixes (that may not even be a fix to begin with), we should be introspecting on a much deeper level and asking ourselves some hard questions like: What can be done about the prevailing culture of impunity that emboldens criminals and terrorists? Why are our cultural values, that promote tolerance and harmony, seem to be eroding? Doesn't the lack of public parks, libraries and cultural centres play a vital role in young minds being idle which in turn paves the way for these youths to go astray? It takes being much more honest with ourselves to recognise that terrorism is just as much a social issue as a political one. And we can't possibly be truthful to ourselves if we let the media and the political elites dictate a skewed narrative just because it suits them well.

The writer is a freelance journalist.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

Ordeal of utility bill payers

I want to draw the relevant authorities' kind attention to the ordeal of Titas Gas bill payers of Dhaka city. Unlike DESCO, WASA, and BTCL, clients cannot pay Titas Gas bills in bank branches located in other areas, except in their own areas. And, in general, banks accept payment for utility bills only up to 1 pm, when the banking hour is up to 4pm. The relevant authorities should make necessary adjustments to reduce the suffering of residents. The move will also increase the bill collection rate.

Jawad-U Islam

Uttara

Where's the mastermind?

The recently published Chilcot Report has showed that Iraq invasion had been launched on a false pretext; Tony Blair overstated the threat posed by Saddam Hussein, sent ill-prepared troops into battle and had inadequate plans for the aftermath. As a result, hundreds of thousands of people died.

Now after the report has come out, everyone is pointing their fingers to Blair,

but what about G.W. Bush? He is no less guilty than Blair for that unnecessary war and killings of so many innocents; in fact, he was the mastermind. That meaningless invasion in the name of keeping 'world peace' has turned the world more violent than ever before. Now what we see around i.e. global terrorism, IS etc are the consequences of that.

Chandro, On e-mail

The increasing cost of living

The cost of living is getting higher day by day. People depending on fixed incomes are finding it very hard to cope with the soaring prices of things. House rent, utility bills and the price of food items are increasing by leaps and bounds. I wonder if it has something to do with the implementation of the new pay scale. A small fraction of our population is the beneficiary of this pay hike while everyone else has to bear the brunt of the rising cost of living.

Zabed Wali

Chittagong