

# Why young people become radicalised in the west



MIR AFTABUDDIN AHMED

In a world dominated by self-proclaimed specialists and intellectuals, the potency of judgemental verdicts, private attitudes and predisposed

source of all evil in this world, is those second-generation immigrants. What motivates this very small, yet disturbingly growing, number of young people to be attracted towards *Daesh* or Al-Qaeda?

According to Professor Rex Brynen of McGill University, in Montreal, people, especially the youth, attracted to this so-called brand of religious terrorism, tend to be alienated

is not. Mental health is an unaddressed concern in all types of households, whether it is Hispanic, White or Arab. But in the case of the Muslim-majority households, statistics again suggest that the issue of mental health is completely ignored by many families. This is primarily because, parents emigrating to the west from the Middle-East or a South-Asian background, themselves

sense of identity loss, if those around him, treat him in a different way or look at him differently. The teen feels neither Pakistani nor American. Then who is he? It is here where the marketing outreach of groups such as *Daesh* comes through. Saving the world, saving your soul, finding peace through *Jihad* — these are all marketing schemes used by a highly-sophisticated network of cyber

openness which allows people of all kinds, starting from civil rights activists to right-wing preachers, to express all kinds of opinions. One of the drawbacks of total freedom of speech and expression is the exposure to any and all kinds of speeches, literature and information. Statistics suggest that most radicalised youths are not necessarily from a deeply conservative background. In fact, the youths tend to be recent entrants into the world of Islam, as seen with the Brussels attacker in 2016. Amateurs when it comes to understanding a very interpretative faith, these youths are susceptible to whatever is fed to them. Because of the identity crisis, they receive Islam as a tool rather than a philosophy for personal betterment. In a Muslim-majority nation, one is exposed to traditional Islamic norms intertwined with the cultural psyche of the state in question. However, in countries such as Canada or France, the exposure to religion is not from society or observance, rather by biased, dogmatic and marketed texts. If those texts for whatever reason tend to come from an unfortunate source, then more religion, may become bad religion. Mind you, by more religion, it is not being referred to as Islam in its whole. It is political Islam or the pervasive interpretation of Islam preached by *Daesh* which seeps into the ideologies of these youths, which then becomes a cause of concern, especially because these teenagers do not have the academic, mental or societal capacity to determine what is religious and what is not.

It is true that by the basic definition of terrorism or radicalism, a majority of crimes are not committed by so-called Islamist terrorists, but by home-grown individuals. It is also true that Islam as a religion cannot and must not be blamed for creating this modern-day crisis, because under all circumstances this is politically motivated and people-made predicament, wholeheartedly based on a sophisticated business-model, developed by groups such as *Daesh*. However, what is also true is that it is teenagers from families like mine and yours who are disappearing into the pits of radicalisation. As such, rather than making baseless calls of blaming parents or suggesting that because someone prays five times a day at an American mosque, he or she is a radicalised youth, let us observe the facts as they are. The biggest cause of youth radicalisation in the west is a severe lack of attention towards mental health. The sooner we realise this, the sooner we can find a solution.

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notions tend to outweigh the strength of facts, statistics and empirical knowledge. This feature of the human mind is especially visible when it comes to core modern-day global concerns such as terrorism or environmental protection. One should undeniably have a set of core values, ideologies and beliefs, but at the same time, one should also be able to look at facts for what they are, and if proven wrong, have the courage to adapt. In such a scenario, and ironically in an opinion piece, let us look at the statistics behind a fundamental issue which is seemingly dividing families, friends and colleagues. Youth radicalisation, especially in Muslim households in the western world, is a contentious and sensitive topic of discussion for most in Bangladesh, and indeed around the world. Let us try, for once, to observe such from a purely objective lens.

Nations such as Canada, the US, the UK, Germany and France, amongst others, have recently seen a surge in national assets being directed towards preventing radicalisation. As the facts stand, a very low proportion of terrorist attacks are carried out by the Syrian or Libyan immigrants whom the American President feels so threatened by, but rather by members of the domestic population or second-generation immigrants. It is a similar trend across almost the entire western world. Our core concern, especially given the assumption of many that Islam is the

hermits with a mark on their shoulder against society. Essentially, radicalism as proposed by the literature or pervasive ideology of *Daesh* fills a much-needed psychological hole in the lives of young teenagers with unaddressed mental health concerns such as depression, anxiety or loneliness. Why are such cases prevalent in youngsters from Muslim-majority backgrounds? Firstly, in all honesty, it

do not get a basic introduction to mental health. Imagine a Bangladeshi household and ascertain how far we ourselves consider depression to be a serious concern. The answer is right in front of us.

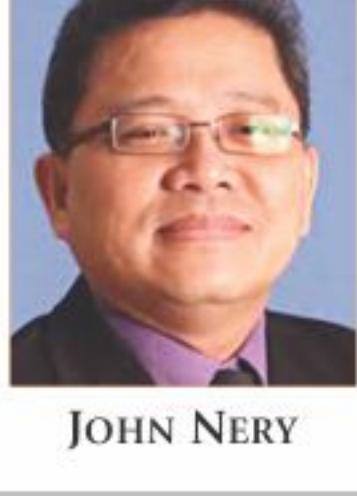
The depression and anxiety is further accentuated when society tells you that you do not belong. A second-generation Pakistani immigrant living in say a conservative part of Texas may very well feel a

terrorists. The market for such are niche groups, especially those teens who struggle in their childhoods or are fed-up with society. Radicalisation literature fills that much needed sense of identity, it gives an immature mind a vicinity to feel belonged.

Why then is youth radicalisation comparatively more prominent in the west than in countries such as Bangladesh? For one, countries such as Canada operate on a level of

the ICT industry in the west has

## Can the world hold Duterte to account?



JOHN NERY

AGAINST the illegal drugs trade in his country, Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte has let slip the dogs of war — and the havoc includes thousands of dead Filipinos, most of them poor. As he prepares to mark a year in office at the end of this month,

those who are anguished about the killings ask: Can the community of nations play a role in holding Duterte to account?

The answer is complicated.

The case can be made that constitutional remedies have been all but exhausted. Impeachment is no longer an option. The controversial practice, copied from American political tradition, has played a role in unseating a president, a chief justice of the Supreme Court, and an Ombudsman (the government's chief graft-buster) in the space of only a dozen years. It is a potent tool, especially given the constitutional provision allowing a mere third of the membership of the House of Representatives to directly send the impeachable official to trial in the Senate.

But the House is firmly in the grip of Duterte's so-called super-majority, and a potentially strong impeachment complaint against him was dismissed last month. A constitutional provision prevents the House from considering more than one impeachment complaint against an official every 12 months; last month's dismissal effectively inoculates Duterte from another impeachment filing until May 2018.

On the issue of the anti-drugs campaign's extrajudicial killings, both chambers have essentially resolved to look away. The evidence

presented by two confessed assassins who testified, against their self-interest, that they took orders to kill from Duterte when he was still mayor of Davao City was ridiculed or trivialised in the Senate, except as a basis to file charges against the two. And the House played a shameful role in laundering so-called evidence against Sen. Leila de Lima, Duterte's staunchest critic. De Lima has since been arrested and is now in detention.

Proclamation No. 216, which imposed martial law on the whole of Mindanao after the educational centre of Marawi City was overrun by terrorists seeking to align with the Daesh network, is a wish come true for Duterte. He has frequently discussed what he describes as the necessity of invoking the so-called commander-in-chief powers; in August 2015, while exploring a presidential candidacy, he was open enough about his plans to establish a "constitutional dictatorship" or a "revolutionary government."

But Duterte's assertion of the martial law prerogative has been received timidly by both the Senate and the House of Representatives. Instead of convening a joint session to deliberate on the proclamation, the super-majorities in each chamber insisted that a joint session was necessary only if Congress wanted to revoke, rather than affirm, the imposition of martial law. Then each chamber promptly passed resolutions affirming Proclamation 216. (Apparently, self-awareness and institutional dignity are not high on the list of values held by Duterte's Congress.)

But the case can also be made — for the moment, at least — that other institutions are helping keep Duterte in check. The Supreme Court continues to hear cases that have the potential to unsettle the Duterte administration. The Armed Forces of the Philippines has by and large acted with hard-won professionalism. Media organisations, despite orchestrated social

media attacks against journalists, have continued to report the hard and necessary news. The Catholic Church, whose nationwide network is the country's most extensive, is helping both the survivors of the anti-drugs campaign and repentant ex-members of the Davao Death Squad.

It cannot be denied, though. The arithmetic of appellate-court collegiality actually favours Duterte; in another two months he would have appointed four justices to the 15-person Supreme Court. The military enjoys an advantage it can easily lose; professional officers are replaceable. Journalists labour under a much more hostile environment. And the institutional Church is slowed by internal conflict between those who support and those who resist Duterte.

There is also the matter of the President's popularity. A year into his single term, he continues to enjoy majority support. (In 2009, President Gloria Arroyo imposed martial law in the province of Maguindanao. Her unpopularity helped lead the chambers of Congress to promptly convene a joint session. Some of the same lawmakers who voted to convene then voted against it now — scratch the surface of their statements, and one finds presidential popularity as a deciding factor.)

But beneath the survey headlines lies a much more complicated reality. While a great majority of voting-age Filipinos say, consistently, that they support Duterte's anti-drugs campaign, about three-fourths of survey respondents also say they do not want suspects in the campaign to be killed. About the same proportion of Filipinos say — and this is where grim reality rears its head — that they fear they will be the next victims of Duterte's war.

What can be done, then, if the usual correctives against presidential excesses (a staunch Senate in Arroyo's time, a stubborn

Supreme Court during the presidency of Benigno Aquino III) will no longer be available?

It is not the ASEAN way to get involved in domestic politics; as exasperating as Duterte's about-face on China is to many of Manila's ASEAN partners, it is difficult to imagine Duterte receiving even a friendly word of advice from a fellow head of state. Duterte's closeness to both China and Russia is based in part on a no-criticism arrangement. On the other hand, and from the start of his presidency, he has taken the United Nations, the United States, and the European Union to task — essentially daring them to take their business, their interests, elsewhere.

The United Nations' special rapporteur for extrajudicial killings, the lawyer Agnes Callamard, has been actively monitoring reports of human rights abuses committed in the anti-drugs campaign, but the government says she is not welcome to come back to the Philippines. To be sure, it is difficult to imagine the UN or the EU dropping its human rights advocacy merely because Duterte refuses to listen, but the question of influence is a legitimate one.

That leaves the International Criminal Court.

A "communication" and a supplemental



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communication have been filed with the office of the ICC Prosecutor, calling for an investigation into alleged "crimes against humanity" perpetrated or masterminded by Duterte. The filing may have momentarily spooked the President; on at least two occasions, he publicly and categorically denied killing anyone. But the moment passed; he is back to making outrageous statements about personally killing criminals. Will ICC Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda take notice?

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This is a series of columns on global affairs written by top editors and columnists from members of the Asia News Network and published in newspapers and websites across the region.

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and a life well lived.

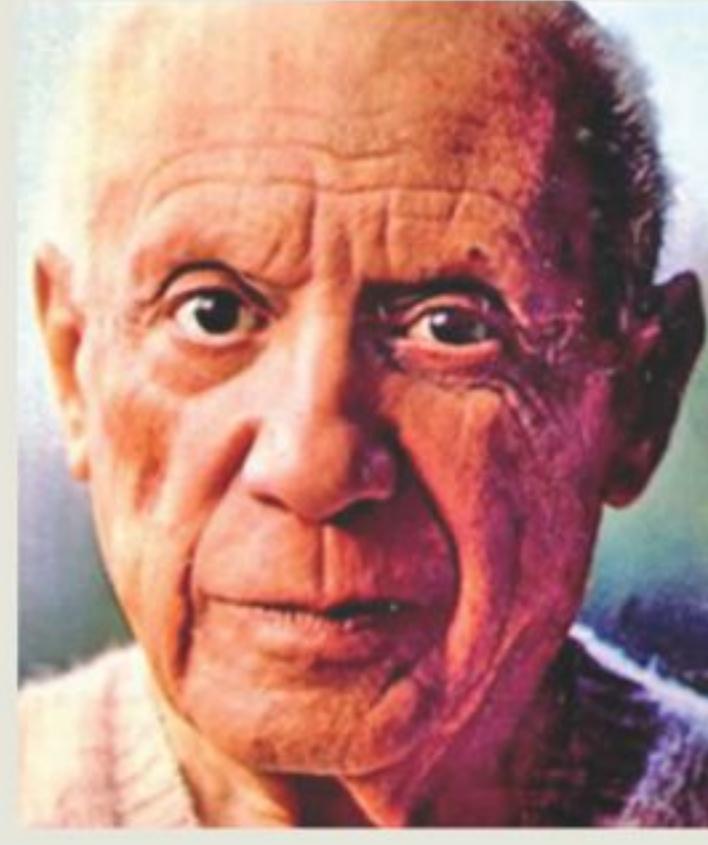
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The purpose of life is to give it away...

### CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

**ACROSS**

- 1 Plays the ponies
- 5 Succeed
- 11 Plot unit
- 12 "The Last Frontier"
- 13 Compared with
- 14 Ran out
- 15 Shake maker
- 17 Seventh Greek letter
- 18 Ticks off
- 22 Propose
- 24 Symbol of slowness
- 25 Farrow of films
- 26 Hot blood
- 27 Figure of speech
- 30 Yawning, perhaps
- 32 Caesar's land
- 33 Museum focus
- 34 Naked
- 38 Slow tempo
- 41 Fancy bash
- 42 Mystery writer - Jackson Braun
- 43 Freshener target
- 44 Bureau
- 45 Must have
- 46 Diamond clubs
- 48 Cave sound
- 49 Expo
- 50 Farrow of films
- 51 Ashen
- 52 Burglardeterents
- 53 Caesar's land
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- 98 Caesar's land
- 99 Museum focus
- 100 Naked

