

# Combating violent extremism cannot be limited to just security

SHAMSIN AHMED

"MOTHER I know three languages but I can't find a job." "I am tired of all those police checks while I am waiting for my bus." "Why is it the Muslims who are always bullied?"

The words of Sabri blared on the big screen with the red-light of mike regulators blinking in the semi darkness of the Senate Bhaban. Sabri was a 19-year-old Belgian Muslim boy who in 2013 went to Syria to join ISIS and was killed three months later. Sabri's mother, Saliha Ben Ali, in an incredible show of strength, decided to start a movement to counter this problem that was taking the Muslim youths of Belgium at the time. She set up SAVE (Sisters Against Violent Extremism), an organisation that works as a platform for mothers to seek support when dealing with the situation she had faced. On February 14, 2017, she was invited to Bangladesh to work on a campaign on "combating violent extremism" organised by the Innovation for Wellbeing Foundation and the American Center, Bangladesh.

Typically the focus of discussion around violent extremism becomes about national, international security and religious extremism. However, extreme violence is a reaction, a reaction to a problem much bigger than the act of violence.

When people for political reasons or otherwise are referred to as "being de-railed", extremist, terrorists, we fail to acknowledge that at the heart of such violence are social injustices that manifests into a serious emotional reaction for them. For years now we have been waking up to the news of mass killings somewhere in the world almost everyday, mostly Syria and Palestine. While of course, this has not resulted in mass PTSD (Post-traumatic stress disorder), it has been a reason for continuous feelings of frustration and anxiety. As attacks continue around the world, counter attacks in what is called "hate crimes" on Muslims have been taking place across Europe. Do we stop to think what the emotional toll of all this is?

If we were to zoom in from ISIS and the conflict in Syria to Sabri's individual crisis, we would see the problem of violent extremism in its entirety; an emotional struggle with injustice. Sabri was being harassed by police,



Samira (Left), mother of 19-year-old Nora who participated in the Syrian conflict, and Saliha Ben Ali, mother of 19-year-old Sabri who died fighting, protest against Belgian youths fighting in Syria.

PHOTO: LAURENT DUBRULÉ/REUTERS

he was struggling to find a job and when he saw Syrians being persecuted, he related his personal struggles to that. Saliha spoke about the early days of her son's radicalisation when she had sought help from the police who said this is a problem of "your" community. Saliha's community is the Muslim minority of Belgium most of whom had migrated to Belgium after WWII from Morocco to provide the manual labour needed to rebuild Belgium. In 2015 an article published by Al Jazeera America on Saliha and SAVE talked about a fellow mother who lost a son to ISIS, and the encouragement she provides to youths saying "maybe you will never be 100 percent Belgian, but if you work hard you can get a job."

However the terrorist attack in Gulshan, Dhaka in July 2016 where 29 people were killed, is an antithesis to all this because the youths of that incident were from well-off families. The recent church and hotel bombings that caused devastation across Sri Lanka killing over 350 hundred people and injuring over 500 people, was also carried out by members of an extremist group, most of whom were not struggling economically.

Dr Mekhala Sarkar, a psychiatrist at the National Institute of Mental Health

presented a study at the seminar that found that the psychological motivation of youths towards violent extremism is not due to relative economic condition, various forms of brainwashing, criminality, mental illness or deep "Muslim" faith. The potential for radicalisation is due to seeking fulfilment of "some psychological need". These needs are identity and belonging, absoluteness of an idea and "perceived injustice". The Christchurch attack in New Zealand where 50 Muslims were killed was not carried out by a religious extremist but a white supremacist. Brenton Harrison Tarrant, a 28-year-old Australian man who has been arrested and charged with murder in relation to the attacks. Tarrant distributed a 73-page manifesto online minutes before the attack where he expressed anti-immigrant sentiments and called for all non-European immigrants in Europe who he claimed were "invading his land" to be removed. Apparently he also says he supports US president Donald Trump as "a symbol of renewed white identity and common purpose", but not as a leader or policymaker.

At the wake of the Gulshan attack there were numerous media content on how ISIS recruits, criteria they look for, markings of

youngsters who feel strongly about the wars in Palestine and Syria.

Scott Atran, an American and French anthropologist who was the first to observe, interview and carry out systematic studies among people on six continents who were drawn to violent action for a group and its cause, addressed the UN Security Council in April 2015. As a research professor at the University of Michigan and of the Centre for the Resolution of Intractable Conflict at Oxford University, he has studied and written about terrorism, violence and religion, and has done fieldwork with terrorists and Islamic fundamentalists, as well as political leaders. Atran points out that "violent extremism represents not the resurgence of traditional cultures, but their collapse, as young people unmoored from millennial traditions flail about in search of a social identity that gives personal significance and glory. This is the dark side of globalisation. They radicalise to find a firm identity in a flattened world: where vertical lines of communication between the generations are replaced by horizontal peer-to-peer attachments that can span the globe."

Atran added, "unless we understand these powerful cultural forces, we will fail to address the threat. When, as now, the focus is on military solutions and police interdiction, matters have already gone way too far. If that focus remains, we lose the coming generation."

Both Scott Atran and Dr Mekhala Sarkar have suggested positive youth engagements to solve the problem of violent extremism. Scott suggested offering youths something that makes them dream, of a life of significance through struggle and sacrifice in comradeship, a positive personal dream, with a concrete chance of realisation through the chance to create their own local initiatives. Volunteering activities should be part of school and education systems where they work towards establishing equality. Emotional hygiene should also be part of educational curriculums so that young people know how to process information and channel strong emotions. With more concerted systemic efforts and recognition of volunteering activities we could not only utilise the energy of our youth and solve unemployment issues but also create peace builders.

Shamsin Ahmed is founder and project director of Identity Inclusion.

## LEST WE FORGET Tribute to Professor Abdul Momen

MD SHAHJAL ALAM

IT is hard to believe that Professor Momen sir is no longer with us. He left us on May 10, 2016. Professor Momen was a wonderful human being and an empathetic social worker. He was an upright person all his life and was amiable and affectionate towards the people around him.

As a teacher, he was a pioneer, a maverick, and an uncompromising campaigner for strengthening ethics in teaching and contributed to elevating it to a newer height. Professor Momen founded the College of Social Welfare and Research (CSWR) and later became its Director to shoulder the big responsibility with a level of efficiency that earned him great honour and fame. His outstanding quality was to keep his students rapt even on an ordinary issue by presenting it in an extraordinary way with practical examples. His presentations were rich in merit and logic. Students in his class were intrigued by his spellbinding lectures. His commitment to the noble profession had led him to accept the offers of supernumerary and an honorary professorship at his beloved *alma mater* until his last breath.

As a human being, Professor Momen lifted himself to the level of an ideal person. The strength of his character had a unique touch of friendliness in his being that invariably impressed students, colleagues and friends alike. He was never known to be harsh to anyone. Yet, he had a very strong personality. His empathy for the disadvantaged people was unparalleled. He used to say, a man may apparently be educated by academic knowledge while a good human can only be made of the richness of his/her soul. He taught us that one's love for their fellow human beings is what helps one rise to the level of the greatest creation among all living beings.

The last time I met him at his residence was when I had just returned after finishing my studies in Australia. He received me with such warmth that I would never forget. I was exceptionally lucky as he told me about some of the milestones of his eventful career on that day—including his untiring initiative to set up the CSWR (later ISWR), his cutting-edge leadership in founding SOS Shishupolli, Underprivileged Children's Educational Programme (UCEP), and Bangladesh Manabadhikar Bastabayan Sangstha (albeit he left that later on). Professor Momen had the admirable quality of leadership, efficiency, honesty, and transparency in organising people to achieve difficult goals with tremendous ease. He left his distinct footprint wherever he worked during the course of his long professional career. He founded the Social Welfare Alumni Association and was its president until the last day of his life.

Professor Momen is no longer with us—yet he remains a lighthouse for us. The values and ideals that he had disseminated throughout his life will always inspire us. May his soul rest in eternal peace.

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Professor Abdul Momen (February 2, 1933-May 10, 2016)

# Neoliberal reforms strengthening monopoly power and abuses

JOMO KWAME SUNDARAM and ANIS CHOWDHURY

OVER the last four decades, growing concentration of market power in the hands of oligopolies, if not monopolies, has been greatly enabled by ostensibly neoliberal reforms, worsening wealth concentration and gross inequalities in the world.

The "counter-revolution" against Keynesian and development economics four decades ago, which inspired the Washington Consensus, claimed to promote economic liberalisation, including market competition, but strengthening property rights entitlements, especially for intellectual property, has been far more important.

Such oligopolistic and monopolistic trends have recently accelerated in much of the world, while already feeble anti-trust efforts have lagged far behind. Over a century after US President Teddy Roosevelt's anti-trust initiatives, with the neoliberal rhetoric of recent decades, many all over the world still have great expectations of similar US reform initiatives.

**Privacy legislation for?** Responding to the "big data" controversy, Apple CEO Tim Cook's recent *Time* magazine opinion called for US privacy legislation informed by four principles for user rights: first, corporations should collect as little user data as possible; second,

users should know what data has been collected and why; third, users should be able "to access, correct and delete [their] personal data"; and fourth, data should be secure, "without which trust is impossible".

Cook has also proposed a US Federal Trade Commission (FTC) "data-broker clearinghouse", with all entities handling data required to register so that the public can track how their data has been sold, and delete their own, if they so choose.

While national privacy legislation should include these principles, the proposals do not recognise that transparency and post hoc control do not address some of the worst dangers posed by online platform monopolies such as Google and Amazon.

Their monopolistic market power implies that users are often not really able to exercise their notional rights to privacy. For example, without a realistic alternative to Google's search function, people have little option but to provide personal information about themselves, especially when their work or participating in society requires them to use Google.

Effective privacy legislation thus requires regulating such corporations so that they no longer have any incentive to exploit user data. As Cambridge Analytica whistleblower Christopher Wylie has suggested, "We should take a step back from this narrative of

consent and start to look at the fact that people don't have a choice."

**Digital public policy?** Facebook and Google are able to collect considerable personal data, enabling them to secure monopoly profits by renting their platforms and data to third parties.

These third parties can then use the Facebook and Google platforms and their vast personal data troves to manipulate what individual users see, read, think and buy. Google thus earned some USD 95 billion, while Facebook earned about USD 40 billion in 2017 alone.

Appropriate public policy can make this business model far less lucrative. The US has previously used various "common carriage" rules to limit or prevent railways, telecommunication companies and other monopolistic owners of essential infrastructure from discriminating among different users.

For example, AT&T was not allowed to set different rates or terms of service for different people based on what it could learn about their personal lives. Applying similar rules to Google, Facebook and Amazon now would reduce much of their incentive to collect, use, sell or rent personal data by limiting their means to profit from this using such information.

To be sure, Apple also benefits from the Google and Facebook business models. In 2018, Google

paid Apple USD 9 billion to become the default search engine on Apple products, while Goldman Sachs expects such payments to increase to USD 12 billion in 2019.

**US reforms today** The US-based Open Markets Institute (OMI) has proposed new laws to overrule pro-monopoly judicial precedents and to empower employees, consumers and small businesses against abuses by large monopolies.

Accordingly, the OMI has proposed four measures to the US Congress' Judiciary Committee: first, investigate growing concentration in and control of specific industries; second, conduct hearings on the relationship of such concentration to political corruption; third, educate the public about what it describes as the national 'monopoly crisis'; and fourth, advocate anti-monopoly policies and principles with other Congressional committees and federal agencies.

The OMI recommends starting with pharmaceuticals, hospital fees, dominant platforms, advertising, labour, inequality, agriculture, and other FTC priorities, the US Justice Department's Antitrust Division, trade and national security.

**Developing countries?** However, it is doubtful that the rest of the world, especially developing countries, can count on US policy

reforms to protect, let alone advance their best interests, whether in terms of development or even, appropriate competition policy.

Given the limited size of most developing economies, a single-minded obsession with competition may well undermine the likelihood of achieving economies of scale and international competitiveness, both important for accelerating economic development.

Size matters, and what may be appropriate for large economies may not be appropriate for smaller national economies. Furthermore, the limited jurisdiction of US legislation is likely to encourage corporations to engage in regulatory arbitrage abroad to their own advantage.

In any case, even if US lawmakers and regulators are able to protect and advance the US public interest through appropriate and effective regulatory policy, there is little reason to assume that the best interests of others will be best served by the effective exercise of US regulation.

Anis Chowdhury is adjunct professor at Western Sydney University and the University of New South Wales, Australia. He held senior United Nations positions in New York and Bangkok. Jomo Kwame Sundaram, a former economics professor, was United Nations Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Development, and received the Wassily Leontief Prize for Advancing the Frontiers of Economic Thought in 2007.

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**QUOTABLE Quote**

**PATRICK HENRY**  
AMERICAN ATTORNEY

*The Constitution is not an instrument for the government to restrain the people, it is an instrument for the people to restrain the government.*

**CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH**

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**YESTERDAY'S ANSWER**

PACTS Y PECCOS  
IDAHO AWARE  
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TEA S A LASS  
EDIT RETIE  
NAB DAN  
SPRAY X MEN  
CHIRNO S ARE  
LACED UP ROW  
ORALS ANVIL  
NORMA NIECE  
ENDOW SPLAY

**BEETLE BAILEY** by Mort Walker

IT'S PAST YOUR CURFEW!  
I WAS ON A DATE WITH MISS BUXLEY

IT'S HARD TO GET MAD AT BEETLE WHEN HE SMELLS OF MISS BUXLEY'S PERFUME

GREG & MORT WALKER

**BABY BLUES** by Kirkman & Scott

HERE'S YOUR UNICORN ZOE. WHEN DIDN'T MEAN ANN HARM.

SHE'S JUST IN A POSSESSIVE PHASE AND THINKS THAT EVERYTHING BELONGS TO HER.

MINE!  
SEE?  
IMAGINE WHAT IT'S LIKE TO NURSE HER.