

A case of imported terror

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Following Bangladeshi Akayed Ullah's attempt at detonating a homemade bomb strapped to his person at a New York commuter hub in December last year, analysts and journalists the world over have penned numerous op-eds and policy briefs on Bangladesh's own problems with extremism.

Curiously, the tone and argument in most of these articles are almost uniform.

The core argument of these articles seems to be: A new generation of Jihadists are emerging in Bangladesh and the terrorist activities in our country are being neglected within the policy circle.

An Indian writer and journalist based in Washington, Mr Sadanand Dhume, in a Wall Street Journal op-ed ("East Is East: Bangladesh exports a new generation of jihadists"), took a particularly harsh stance and showed his prejudice towards Bangladesh and the Bangladeshi people, by suggesting that our country was exporting terror to other countries.

It's rather baffling that, in light of such unfortunate events and words, Bangladeshi policy-makers and think-tanks have remained uncharacteristically silent.

After a careful read of articles of such ilk, it's not easy to spot many of the factual errors.

For example, Georgetown University Associate Professor C Christine Fair, in her article "Political Islam and Islamist terrorism in Bangladesh: What you need to know" published in Lawfare, misspelled the name of a former Bangladeshi President, Khondaker Mostaq Ahmad.

In the article "Will religious instability destroy Bangladesh?" Cato Institute's senior fellow Doug Bandow wrote that blogger Asaduzzaman (Asad) Noor is an atheist of Hindu background and that the Holey Artisan attack occurred in 2017. However, he did correct that little misinformation down the line.

The point is, of course, that such factual errors about our nation point to a gross lack of knowledge about Bangladesh throughout the world.

Hell, most don't even know that we exist as a country.

Then again, it is to be expected when commenting on the socio-political situation of a nation that you are so far removed from.

While it is undeniable that terror has easy access to the hearts and minds of our youth, which has manifested in a few deadly incidents in the recent past, we cannot deny that this is not a phenomenon that is unique to Bangladesh.

When analysts try to blame Bangladesh and each and every one of our citizens for "exporting terrorists," it is nothing short of prejudice against us as a nation and as a people.

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Most such commentary pieces fail to understand that radicalization — at least in the case of Bangladeshi youth — is mostly carried out while they are abroad.

Akayed Ullah has no known criminal record in Bangladesh, possibly becoming radicalized during his time in the US. Two of the terrorists involved in the Gulshan attack were radicalized while they were studying in Malaysia, as well.

It's imperative that this trend be taken into consideration by policy analysts, both domestic and foreign.

The way Bangladesh has cracked down on suspected militants after the eye-opener that was the Gulshan terrorist attack is worthy of applause, if anything.

Though there have been some concerns about rights violation in the process of these crack-down, the numerous raids and operations that we've witnessed in the last couple of years point to a degree of success on the part of our law enforcement agencies.

In 1971, Bangladesh proved that we are, first and foremost, a secular nation, able to separate the dominant religion that is Islam from the way a successful, democratic society is able to be run.

While we all have our differences, at the end of the day, what unites us is our identity as a nation that fought for its freedom, freedom from the clutches of linguistic and religious persecution. And there is no chance in hell that we are going to allow ourselves to slide back into that mess.