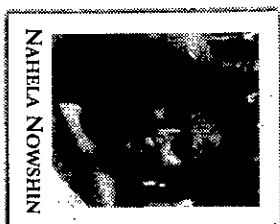


# We must stop singling out NSU



NAHELA NOWSHIN

I T has been three weeks into the carnage at Holey 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 'madrasa-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 of the Gulshan attack and one of the Sholakra 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 madrasas—a notion whose credibility has now been

*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.*

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

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 Munni Saha on ATN News with regard to, accusations against the university of harbouring terrorist elements. "The lengthy, embarrassing interview titled (in extremely poor taste) "Jongbader Uttor Dokhin", 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

*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.*

*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.*

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.