

The Loopholes enabling Terrorism must be Shut: Another Sri Lankan Killed!

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“Allahu Akbar! Allahu Akbar! Allahu Akbar!” were the raucous chants of the radical Islamist mob dragging the mutilated body of the Sri Lankan national on the streets of Pakistan before forcing him to a fiery end – a terrible twist to the peaceful Islamic prayer.

Priyantha Kumara was brutally lynched by a mob of hundreds of deadly terrorists who struck the Sri Lankan multiple times with sticks, iron rods, rocks and knives before setting him on fire. His crime – the removal of a poster, for workplace renovation purposes, of an ultra-radical Islamist organisation; the Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP). The mere reason for exasperation by the radical Islamists clearly depicts the shaky fragility of the ideology followed by these pseudo-religious hooligans.

Pakistan Radical religious extremism has become the dominant factor of terrorism in the 21st century, with Islamist extremists topping the charts after having spun the teachings of the peaceful religion for their own political, racial and social benefits. Attacks have been launched through a plethora of Islamist terrorist organisations in almost all continents across the world.

A crucial factor that currently creates alarming statistics across Asia is the increasing level of radicalisation of the Islamic youth across both genders by Salafi-Wahabi doctrines stemming from the Middle East. An array of Islamist terrorist groups are built upon the concept of ‘Al-Wala’ wal-Bara’, a major pillar in Salafism, which ideologically refers to the exercise of loyalty to Muslims and hatred to the disbelievers. Existing regulatory frameworks have continually failed to effectively protect nations’ religious spaces thus enabling radical ideologies to spread at distressing rates.

Seeping into Central Asia, the Salafi-Wahabi doctrine has been overtaking the traditional Pashtun culture of the Afghan Taliban, critically transforming the group from a violent resistance movement into a radical ideologically-powered

terror machine. The Taliban takeover of Afghanistan, which some claim was greatly supported by the Inter-State Intelligence (ISI) of Pakistan, has been a critically motivating factor for Islamist extremism across the world, with multiple groups mobilising with activity and more than 40 terrorist organisations globally pledging allegiance to the Taliban since August 2021.

The Salafi Wahabi doctrine drove the pseudo-Islamist terrorists of the 2019 Easter Sunday bombings in Sri Lanka which took the lives of almost 300 civilians in multiple coordinated attacks across the nation. Regulatory religious frameworks, including the apex Islamic religious body; the All Ceylon Jamiyyathul Ulama (ACJU), was infiltrated by Salafi-Wahabi clerics, whilst the peaceful Sufi clerics were marginalised. Similarly, the government body established to regulate the religious space; the Department of Muslim Religious and Cultural Affairs (DMRCA), lacked civil servants with expertise to clearly comprehend the growing threat and to secure the Muslim community from foreign ideological interference – emanating from Thowheed movements and Jamathi Islami. Likewise, the Waqf Board, did not monitor the Madrasas, Mosques and other institutions being infiltrated by ideologies from overseas. The failure of these institutions, coupled with the overt neglect for national security by the Yahapalanaya government to critically identify, acknowledge and act upon the large-scale radicalisation of the Sri Lankan Muslim community was a major factor that resulted in the bombings. It is important to note that all religions produce extremists and terrorists. In addition to the government, religious leaders are responsible for keeping their clerics in check.

Similarly, the lone wolf terrorist attack launched by Sri Lankan-born Islamist terrorist Mohamed Samsudeen in New Zealand in September 2021, could have been avoided had the New Zealand legislature been revised to close any loopholes in its counter terrorism law, which enabled the terrorist to roam freely despite him advocating for terrorist groups and religious violence.

The failures of the legal, religious and regulatory bodies of multiple nations are the gaps in their national security apparatuses, which have enabled the radical Islamist ideologies and doctrines to penetrate and infiltrate the peaceful Islamic religion.

In order to curb rising radicalisation, it is of absolute necessity that the political leadership of the nation protect its education and religious spaces in order to keep the peaceful Islamic community from getting radicalised by foreign ideologies. In order to achieve this, the current government of Sri Lanka attempted to strictly monitor the education of Islamic schools and restrict lone clerics and unregistered madrasas from operating in the nation. In addition, the government attempts to place a ban on the complete face covering of Muslim

women, namely the niqab and the burqa, which have its origins in fundamentalist Islam – the same traces of the Salafi-Wahabi doctrines.

However, the political opposition of Sri Lanka, consisting of a majority of politicians who oversaw the Easter Sunday Bombings in 2019, made multiple demonstrations and protests against the government's decision to safeguard the nation's education and religious space, citing suppression of religious freedom. The opposition is playing the political card, just like its government did in 2019, in a matter that requires immediate attention to curb future attacks against the people.

Certain members of the opposition attempt to disrupt the current government's actions to secure national security. Why is the opposition pushing demonstrations that can potentially enable another Islamist attack? Do they wish to play the political card after enabling another potential attack? One could opine that the opposition prefers to play politics rather than supporting the government for the betterment of the nation. Are politicians in the opposition afraid that the present government protects the national security of the nation, which would be a huge blow for the publicity of the previous government who failed utterly in this regard? Regardless of the answers, the actions of the political opposition are a major hindrance to achieving national security in Sri Lanka.

It is indispensable that nations ought to work together to strengthen and protect their religious spaces, thus curtailing the possibility of future religiously-motivated terror attacks across the world. It is of strong vitality that the legal, religious and regulatory frameworks in Sri Lanka are moulded to protect the nation from further penetration of radical Islamist doctrines that seek to create division, hate and terror in the life of the Sri Lankan civilian.

Priyantha Kumara's body was diminished to almost nothing. However, the fire that ignited this gruesome murder is still burning; still burning until the leaders of the nations successfully curb the rising threat of Salafi-Wahabism and radical Islamic fundamentalism in the region and the globe as a whole.

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