

Oslo tragedy

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“Thus it is not a coincidence that Breivik has unleashed his puritan terror on AUF activists. The AUF (Labour Youth Club) is Norwegian Labour Party’s youth wing. Both Labour party and AUF have been campaigning against racism. Ever since the 1950s, a summer camp at holiday island of Utoya has been a regular feature of AUF’s activities.”

One does not expect funeral processions coming out of a paradise. The horrific July 22 events in Norwegian capital of Oslo, a bomb blast outside Prime Minister’s office followed by a shoot spree claiming 92 lives, delineate such an unusually disastrous tragedy.

The Oslo massacre has bereaved Norway of her innocence the way Olof Palme’s murder in 1986 marked end of Swedish myth.

“Norwegian democracy is unique in that the Prime Minister along with other Ministers can go about their daily lives without security by their side. Norway’s King can travel by public transport without anyone batting an eyelid and it is this democracy which is under attack,” writes Toni Usman in an email to his friends. A successful TV-stage actor and an engaged activist, Toni Usman himself is a shining example of Norwegian tolerance and ingenuousness where not merely royals, elite politicians and celebrities freely mix with commoners, ordinary citizens also live a life unheard of even in Europe let alone South Asia. Living without the fear of theft or violence, the Norwegian lifestyle may appear naive to even Europeans.

Secret addresses or telephone numbers are rare while online Yellow Pages will offer aerial shots of people’s houses, maps where they live, even email accounts. The press runs details of celebrities’ incomes and fortunes. *‘To them, living in an open society has been not just a privilege, but also a statement to the rest of the world; a display of how it is possible to live together in peace,’* aptly says a BBC correspondent.

Even when Olof Palme’s murder, a tragedy aggravated later in 2003 by Swedish Foreign Minister Anna Lindh’s assassination, drew a security-wedge between top politicians and ordinary Swedes, Norway still resisted the calls for greater home security. Will Norway ever be the same again?

Since July 22 all public places such as clubs and restaurants remained shut for a few days while the Parliament House is still surrounded by military troops. Oslo city centre looks like a war zone.

Perhaps this is exactly what Anders Behring Breivik, apparently the lone director and script-writer of the Oslo tragedy, wanted through his bloody act.

He has confessed his crime according to his advocate, Geir Lippestad (Lippestad in the past has defended two accused of a murder with racist motivation. Breivik wanted him as his defense counsel). The Norwegian and Swedish media are rife with reports about his hard-Islamophobic and extreme anti-left views. In one of his hate-Marxism article he wrote: *“The problem is that Europe lost the cold war already in 1950, in that moment when they allowed Marxists and anti-nationalists to do what they wanted.”*

Thus it is not a coincidence that Breivik has unleashed his puritan terror on AUF activists. The AUF (Labour Youth Club) is Norwegian Labour Party's youth wing. Both Labour party and AUF have been campaigning against racism. Ever since the 1950s, a summer camp at holiday island of Utoya has been a regular feature of AUF's activities. In fact, most of the Scandinavian left parties, big as well as small, hold summer schools for the political education of their cadres. Norwegian Labour Party, perhaps the most radical wing of social democracy in Europe, has a unique history. Once a member of Linen's Third International, Norwegian Labour Party has been staunchly pro-immigrant in a country that has seen phenomenal growth of anti-Muslim Fremskrittets Party, or Progress Party (Breivik was a member of the Fremskrittets Party between 1999 and 2006).

In Norway, the word Muslim has become synonymous with the word 'Pakistanien'. The carnage in Oslo, therefore, is extremely significant for Pakistan also because Pakistanis constitute Norway's biggest immigrant community.

Until Breivik's identity was revealed, Pakistani-Norwegians remained shut behind the closed doors, holding their breath and hoping (against hope perhaps) that no Pakistani link is found.

Ironically, when Breivik's identity had been established, the Pakistani community began to invoke victimhood. Whitewashing even the crimes Al-Qaeda & Co. has claimed responsibility for, certain community leaders were heard saying: 'Look! We are always implicated for nothing.'

Luckily Norwegian leadership as well as the media, especially Daily Dagbladet, played a praise-worthy role in the immediate aftermath of blast-and-shoot tragedy. No knee-jerk response.

Outside of Norway, it was however quite different. Refusing to learn any lessons from the News of the World-scandal, Murdoch press was quick to trace Al-Qaeda footprints in Utoya.

Murd(er)och media empire's flagship in Britain, *The Sun*, for instance, while pronouncing the Oslo tragedy as 'Norway's 9/11,' was quick to declare it an: 'AL-QAEDA' MASSACRE (Yes, in capital letters).

Al-Jazeera in its bid to outwit Murdoch media, attributed the tragedy to Mullah Krekar. An asylum-seeker, Mullah Krekar is a controversial character. When his asylum plea was rejected, he appealed to the court to reconsider his case. However, he keeps declaring his mission to annihilate Western civilization. The Pakistani media, out of ignorance perhaps, downplayed the tragedy even if Norway hosts, proportionally, biggest immigrant population of Pakistani origin in any European country.

An Al-Qaeda signature on Oslo tragedy would have proved fatal not merely for Norwegian-Pakistanis but also for sizable Danish-Pakistani and miniscule Swedish-Pakistani populations.

But such 'lucky escapes' do not offer any respite in the face of growing fascism and religious fanaticism. The Oslo tragedy demonstrates yet again the dangers inherent in the 'othering' of European Muslims.

Like elsewhere, Norwegian police it seems have been monitoring extremist Muslim outfits too keenly to keep an eye on their Christian counterparts. Breivik for instance was very active at an anti-Islam website www.document.no. When police arrested him, he did not protest. That's perhaps because members of Fremskrittets Party and members of the ultra-Christian organisations have respect for authorities like police.

Now on, however, one hopes that Norwegian paradise, even if it has been lost temporarily, is not lost forever. The Norwegian Prime Minister, Jens Stoltenberg, has not merely offered a sane advice but also reasons for staying optimistic: "The answer to violence, is even more democracy. Even more

humanity," he says.

Farooq Sulehria

P.S.

* Pictures bA shorter version of this piece has already appeared in The News. From VIEWPOINT ONLINE N° 61, JULY 29, 2011

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<http://www.viewpointonline.net/oslo-tragedy.html>

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