who will ultimately grab power and

set terms for you. They will win in the end and you are the one who

will always get defeated, and stay

It is a never-ending story in this

country. But is there no way out?

Can't we change and improve the

system? A pertinent question at

the most pertinent time. We are in

the know of good attempts that are

being made by various civil society

groups to create awareness about

such unknown faces seeking your

vote, dishing out false promises of

development. But the professional

politicians are opposing such

moves for obvious reasons. They

defeated.



#### LATE S. M. ALI

DHAKA SUNDAY AUGUST 27, 2006

### Outlaws go berserk

Support law enforcers to neutralise them

HERE is hardly any word that can amply express the profundity of our shock and condemnation for the savagery unleashed by some outlaws in Noagaon under Rajshahi district on Friday. The brazen attack resulted in the murder of five people including four policemen and looting of arms and ammunition. About 30 members of a banned group known as Purba Banglar Communist Party (PBCP) attacked a market opening fire and blasting bombs indiscriminately. The brutality reached its horrendous finale when the outlaws slaughtered the policemen in front of hundreds of people in the bazaar.

It has transpired from first hand reports that the raid came as some form of vendetta for the killing of a number of top leaders and operatives of the banned political parties like PBCP in the region, and especially for the latest shooting and lynching incident in which eleven members had lost their lives. Some are also apt to link the incident of recent crossfire killing of some leaders of the same outfit to the recent slaying in Rajshahi.

The heinous attack on the law enforcers by the outlaws came after a pause but it did come with full ferocity as the description of the incident indicates. The way the bandits carried out the operation and left the scene raising slogans in favour of their party, runs counter to the notion that law and order is under control. Through the brutal act the marauders demonstrated their ability to terrorise and achieve the objective, which, in this case was slaughtering the policemen on duty.

We feel the onus now rests on the government to go all out to apprehend the outlaws in order to ensure law and order in the country. The law enforcement apparatus needs to be strengthened for the purpose. It is worth noting that the outlaws belonging to the banned political parties in the northern region have no support base as they have degenerated themselves from whatever ideological orientation they claimed into outright banditry. Therefore, it should not be a daunting task to uproot them from their hideouts.

## Attack on free speech

#### Take action against them

LL those that are for free speech and freedom of opinion, and against bigotry and obscurantism should condemn the threats made against the life of professors Hasan Azizul Haque and Zafar Iqbal, by elements of Islami Chhatra Shibir. This tendency poses very grave risk for our democratic values and practice. We couldn't condemn the aggressive posture of the reactionaries enough.

We wonder what type of political environment we are living in, where the student wing of a political party, more so one that is part of an alliance that is in charge of running the country, issues death threats to teachers for having ventilated their individual views. And nobody in the ruling alliance, let alone the Jamaat-e-Islami, have so much as protested, not to speak of taking cognizance of the death threat, which itself constitutes an offence under the law of the land.

Are we to understand that the Jamaat-e-Islami, by their silence on the issue, condones the matter? Are they in accord with the line taken by their student wing, which perhaps they themselves would like to take, but have been prevented only by consideration of political propriety? Are



#### SHAHNOOR WAHID

HOUGH politicians never read the writing on the

walls, they merrily indulge in polluting walls of others by writing all sorts of messages, come election time. And with the faint hint of an election approaching, cadres of politicians have already begun to write the entire CVs of the candidates they support on the roadside walls in their respective localities. Most of the messages come in rhymes and the rhyming scheme is peculiar to our politics.

But, what beats us is why the very first thing that the politicians prefer to write on the walls is: "The character of our brother is as pure as a flower (amar bhaier charitra phooler moto pabitra)." Now, one may ask: Why should the question of your brother's character be raised in the first place? Is there something wrong about it? Is there

SENSE & INSENSIBILITY

Your afternoon sleep will be disturbed regularly from this point onwards with the sound of microphones, band parties and vehicles roaming noisily on the roads in a bid to drive home the message of the good character of the brother, the retina of the people. There is every chance that from that day onwards you will often bump into the man in the local shops, and definitely in the local mosque. And every time you meet him, he will grab your hand with his two sweaty hands and squeeze your palm mightily, calling you "bhaisaab (big brother)."

a dark and sinister past that you want to cover behind those words? If not, then why bother to shout so loudly about how pure it is? And who is interested to know about the character of your brother in the first place? Why should the voters be interested in his character? Have they fallen at his feet to persuade him to contest the election? Who is he by the way?

Wall pollution has begun

never seen him before in any social gathering, you may wonder aloud. Before you have an answer, the boundary walls of your house will be covered with posters of unknown faces claiming to be the retina, the "apple of your eye (nayaner moni!)." Good Lord! We are already having myriad problems with our eyes. Who wants those unknown guys to mess with our evesight any further?

And before you can ask some respectable elders in the locality about the identity and background of those faces on the posters, you will hear vour doorbell ringing. Your Man Friday will come in and report that some unknown men have come to exchange greetings. No, he has not seen them before. The very term "unknown men" sends shivers down the spine these days. Reluctantly, you go to the front room. A dark, tall and overweight man, profusely sweating, extends his hands to you introducing himself as the ring leader of the locality, who is dying to serve the people after getting elected in the next election.

"Why after, why not now?" you say in a soft voice, forcing a funny smile on your face. There is a round of guffaws that you hardly can join in. The young men behind the tall

man try to look inside your living room through the half closed door behind you. Your Man Friday quickly closes it. The men leave

Your afternoon sleep will be disturbed regularly from this point onwards with the sound of microphones, band parties and vehicles roaming noisily on the roads in a bid to drive home the message of the good character of the brother, the retina of the people. There is every chance that from that day onwards you will often bump into the man in the local shops, and definitely in the local mosque. And every time you meet him, he will grab your hand with his two sweaty hands and squeeze you

palm mightily, calling you "bhaisaab (big brother)."

This is how the politicians and their cadres have been operating in this country following an ancient recipe of public relations. Soft intimidation is the name of the dame. Yes. sir. In many ways you will notice that they have a way of imposing themselves on you. If they cannot get to you, piercing your thick armour of conscience, they will get to you through your close friends or brothers or nephews. There is no way you can get off the merry-go-round. Those circus clowns are a dangerous lot who are ready to do anything to get the votes of your entire family.

do not want anything to improve You see, they have to come to the rotten environment since they power. They have to undo what feel comfortable to do politics in such a system. you have done so painstakingly, working so hard throughout the Therefore, it will require a years. You are the one who has renaissance, a revolution, and a been going to the factory at eight in bloody one perhaps, to rid our the morning and returning home at society of the present lot of twelve at night. You are the one marauders who go about wearing who has to run from one bank to the tag of "politician" on their another in search of a loan to meet chests. They have no dignity and

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no self-respect. They have got to

be replaced by honest and consci-

entious people who will salvage

from the dirt our lost pride, self-

respect, and honour.

# **Religious education and politics**



KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

HERE is a peculiar coincidence between the

public meeting held recently by the leaders of the banned Hirkatul Jihad (HUJI), on August 18, and the government's decision to recognize Dawra degree of the Qwami madrasas as equivalent to Masters degree in Islamic Studies or Arabic Literature. It is understood that a process is in the final stages to award Fazil-Kamil degree equivalence to Masters degree as vell.

The decisions, apparently, were made more with a political motivation than with the aim of improving the quality of education. This apprehension is based on the fact that, while Jamaat-e-Islami backs

Many eminent educationists and political leaders were taken by surprise at the governmental decision to accord equivalence of madrasa degrees with that of Masters. While the educationists questioned the quality of Qwami madrasas and the educational system of the institutions giving Kamil and Fazil degrees, the politicians saw in this move the distinct possibility of encouragement to Islamic fundamentalism with disastrous consequences for like ours (other languages being Undeniably, Bangladesh is a

Muslim majority country. But if Bangladesh is to be rescued from the vortex of under-development. then it is not Islamic education, however satisfactory spiritually it nealiaible?

their workers, one has to conclude that the current precept is "to each according to his contribution to the wealth of the company" and ultimately to the country. Pursuit of such a policy will not only induce the people to increase their efficiency but may also result in. depending on the degree of good governance, prevention of dishonest people from aspiring for windfall and abnormal profits, and discouragement of price spiral through syndication.

Western security, particularly after 9/11 terrorist attacks, has intensified its scrutiny of the madrasa system of education. US Congressional Research Service

with incalculable impact on future generations, and on the competitiveness of Bangladesh in the globalized world. Spiritual development, however noble, may be useful only after death and is unlikely to promote socioeconomic development of the country in the pre-death world.

the export deadline. You are the

one who has to return the bank

loan with interest to avoid going to

return in time to avoid aetting

Compounded with this decision is the reemergence of HUJI, under a different name, whose leaders have contradicted the government's assertion of its total ignorance of HUJI's public meeting. On the contrary, the HUJI leaders have claimed to have had held discussions at various levels of the government for a long time for permission to come out in the open, and had informed the government in advance about Friday's rally. One wonders whether the composition of the four party alliance government, and the recent events recounted above, do not substantiate Sreeradha Dutta's assertion on communal divide in Bangladesh politics.

In Bangladesh's Political Evolution: Growing Uncertainties, ignored at one's own peril. she writes: "Having realized secession from West Pakistan in 1971, Bengali nationalism lost its relevance. The dividing line once

bolic of serious diminution of rule of law in Bangladesh, the recently published report in The Washington Post on Islamic militancy, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service's report expressing concern over activities of Islamic extremists and their suspected links with al-Qaeda. Bertil Lintner's monograph on Religious Extremism and Nationalism in Bangladesh, Joseph Schatz's enquiry into the US Foreign Policy and Religious Extremism in a Developing Country (with Bangladesh as a case study), reports carried by Time magazine and Jane's Intelligence Review on shifting of some al-Qaeda elements to Bangladesh from Pakistan after US military action on Afghanistan and many others -- President Bush's determination to rid the world of "Islamic radicalism, Islamic fascism" trying to stop the advance of democracy (albeit the comment was made in the context of Lebanon crisis) can only be

In a country where eighty percent of the national wealth is possessed by twenty percent of the people, and the gul

GOING DEEPER In a country where eighty percent of the national wealth is possessed by twenty percent of the people, and the gulf between the rich and the poor is so vast that vertical movement from one social class to another is almost impossible, social explosion, fuelled by unwavering religious conviction, is all too possible. It is truly regrettable that the Bangladesh government has found it expedient to exploit one of the most vital sectors of societal development -education -- for transient political advantage.

> of the world. To sharpen these skills Bangladeshis, in large numbers, have to go to foreign institutions of excellence where the medium of instruction is mostly English. In this age of globalization the language of computer and internet, essential ingredients in all walks of life, is English. The World Trade Organization's negotiations, vital to safeguard the economic and trade interests of Bangladesh, are conducted in English for the benefit of countries

irrelevant for us). In the Hong Kong round of WTO negotiations, our poor negotiating skills were mainly to blame for Bangladesh's poor showing. How will the challenges of the 21st century, when we are already placed in a disadvantaged position as a least developed country, be faced by embracing religious education and producing thousands of young graduates whose contribution to national development, apart from Islamic spiritual development, is bound to be The days of "each according to his needs" -- however ethical the premise may be -- are over because the kitty from which the needs of the unemployed, the underemployed and the retirees could be met has become smaller. If one looks at the behaviour of the Western multi-national compa-

only after you have promised them your precious vote for him. You go inside wondering: "Who is he anyway? What is the source of his money?'

iail. You are the one who has to pay income tax and submit the arrested. But it is they, the unknown faces, who never have to bother about all these. It is they

Yes, who is he, brother? I have

we to believe that their underlings are doing all these at their biddings?

One may not agree with what has been said. But disagreements cannot manifest itself in the form of threats to the life of a person one disagrees with. Views should be countered with plausible arguments and let the people be the judge of which to accept. At least that is the civilised norm of human interaction. Nobody or group can take it upon himself or itself the right to determine what others can or cannot say.

We want the Jamaat to come out against the Chhatra Shibir for the utterances, punish the errant leaders and make clear to the country that they are against what has been said by disassociating themselves with the death threats. Otherwise, their silence will further reinforce the common perception of their role in this matter.

We also ask whether the government can do without taking cognisance of death threats made openly that is liable for action under the law of the land?

Alia madrasas offering Fazil-Kamil degree, the Islami Okya Jote (OIJ) chairman is deeply involved in the task of drawing up a curriculum and overseeing examinations of the Qwami madrasas.

Both Jamaat and OLI are coalition partners of the present government. Islami Chatra Shibir, the student wing of Jamaat, reportedly controls 98% of the Alia madrasas from which over 25,000 students obtain degree every year. The degree equivalence will mean that a large number of students who. until now, could not sit for examinations for government and nongovernmental positions will now be able to compete, and given the politicization of the Public Service Commission, get absorbed in the

may be, but secular education that is required. As it is, divorce from English language education for the last several decades has regressed our socio-economic development vis-a-vis many countries of the world. The argument given by some that countries like Japan, China and Russia have developed retaining education in their own language may not be applicable for countries like Bangladesh. For an open economy like ours, dependant on politico-economic interaction with the international community, our skills have to be sharpened through competition, not amongst ourselves, but firstly with the civil administration of Bangladesh. neighbourhood, then with the rest

the country.

in one of its reports, has underlined the revitalization of madrasas in South Asia since the 1970s: "Offering food, lodging and free education," the report states, "madrasas spread rapidly throughout the Muslim world, and although the curricula varied from place to place, it was always religious in character because these schools ultimately were intended to prepare future Islamic religious scholars for their work ... in recent years and in more impoverished nations, the rising costs and shortages of public educational institutions have encouraged parents to send their children

to the madrasas." The present government's decision on equivalence of religious degrees is a retrograde step

again moved back to religion. Now Bangladesh has to differentiate itself from West Bengal and not from West Pakistan." She makes the further point that, with tens of thousands of madrasas, the country's religious education has significantly supplanted statesupported education in some urban areas as well as in most in rural areas

Even if the government were to describe it as an "international conspiracy," the eighteen congressmen's letter to the prime minister asking for a new, and fully independent, enquiry into the August 21 grenade attack to assassinate Sheikh Hasina and

describing the government's

failure of investigation as "sym-

tion to the certificate of Qwami

madrasas, ignoring intelligence

reports that hundreds of such

madrasas are being used to

recruit and train Islamist militants.

The intelligence agencies of the

country launched investigations

into the activities of the Qwami

madrasas after the series of blasts

on August 17, 2005, and found

many of these madrasas providing

militancy training to their students.

The Daily Star in an exhaustive

report published on August 4,

2005 focused a very sharp obser-

vation of the state of madrasa

education in the country vis-a-vis

the mainstream education.

the rich and the poor is so vast that vertical movement from one social class to another is almost impossible, social explosion, fuelled by unwavering religious conviction, is all too possible. It is truly regrettable that the Bangladesh government has found it expedient to exploit one of the most vital sectors of societal development -education -- for transient political advantage, a sector that philosophers, from Aristotle to many modern day thinkers, consider a vitally important brick for the foundation of civilized society.

Kazi Anwarul Masud is a former Secretary and

Ambassador

The comeback of the militants



ANM NURUL HAQUE

T is really regrettable for the nation that the threat from the Islamist militants is renewed once again as the government has failed to deal squarely with the extremist outfits. According to the media reports, more than two dozen Islamist groups are now active in Bangladesh, pursuing the same mission as the banned Jamatul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) to establish Islamic rule in the country. These smaller groups, who went underground in the face of the intense anti-militancy drive by the joint forces, are now regrouping under a new banner and planning to carry on JMB's mission.

Police broke up a militant net-

# BY THE NUMBERS

It is really alarming that Islamist extremists are now regrouping under different names and imparting training to launch bigger assaults. They have become so emboldened that they are now carrying on their activities almost openly. Most of the JMB leaders, including the two king-pins, were arrested and put into jail, but it has had no effect as numerous reports reveal that these groups are increasing in strength and becoming a formidable menace. It really belies the government's assertion that extremist outfits have been

#### nipped in the bud.

work of the Islamic fundamentalist group Hizbut Tauhid on August 11 Chittagong and arrested its seven members. Rab captured 26 Islamist militants who had been form his own group, had been receiving military training in a hiding since the series of blasts on remote jungle from Bhaluka August 17, 2005 There are at least 22 organisaupazila in Mymensingh on August The arrestees include one tions reportedly active to establish Islamic rule in the country through Afghan war veteran and two suiarmed revolution. These groups cide bombers. The elite battalion also recovered some bombinclude: Jamaat-e-Al-Turat, Jamaat-e-lahiya Trust, Hizbut making materials and training

equipment from their den. The Afghan war veteran Mufti Abdur Rouf had been running the militant camp at a madrasa in

Jibontota village under Bhaluka Mohammad, Laskar-e-Jangi, Arakan Rohingva Force, Loskarupazila for years under the nose of the law enforcers. Mufti Abdur e-Taiba, and Islamic Solidarity Rouf who left Harkat-ul Jihad to Front.

Surprisingly, the government is unaware about the activities of these militant outfits including Harkat-ul-Jihad. Jagrata Muslim Janata, and Al-Hikma, who were banned for their anti-state activities. Harkat-ul-Jihad, that comprises Afghan war veterans, is now carrying out activities openly Tawhid, Jamaatul Falaiya, Tawhidi in the city and the government Janata, Biswa Islamic Front, appears not to bother at all. It held Jamaat-as-Shahdat, Shahdat-ea rally at Baitul Mukarram mosque Nabuwat, Al-Khidmat, Jayasi on August 18 under a new banner

of Sachetan Islami Janata. It is learnt that they had been holding discussions at different levels of the government for a long time in pursuit of open activities.

nies, and the extent of lay-offs of

According to the latest newspaper reports, a top leader of an Islami Oikya Jote faction is now visiting Pakistan to raise funds for the Sachetan Islami Janata, whose main leaders are Afghan war veterans and are known for running militant activities.

According to home ministry records, 698 people have been arrested so far in connection with 154 cases on the blasts of August 17. 2005 and 87 cases for the blasts that took place later on. The police submitted charge sheet in 183 cases and 56 are still under investigation. The trial of 18 cases has also been completed. Of the charge, the JMB king-pin Shaikh Abdur Rahman is accused in 70 cases while Sidduqul Islam Bangla Bhai is accused in 67, and operations commander Ataur Rahman Sunny in 62 cases. Thirty-two militants, including Abdur Rahman, Bangla Bhai, and Sunny, have been sentenced to

It is pertinent to call into question the real success of the government to root out the extremist outfits, as the threat from the extremists has not yet been disappeared. The government did a lot of things to capture the top JMB leaders, but hardly did anything of substance to trace the financers and patrons, who have been pulling the strings from behind the scenes.

During interrogation by the Task Force Intelligence (TFI), the JMB chief Abdur Rahman admitted that his militant outfit had been fuelled through funding both from home and abroad. According to a media report, the government has already listed 25 local JMB financiers, including some high profile politicians, who have been put under surveillance. Some NGOs have been allegedly supplying funds to militants. The home ministry on March 16 formed a three-member probe committee to investigate into source of funds of the JMB. But the government is quite silent over the issue which calls into serious question its sincerity in searching out the patrons and the financers.

BNP-led alliance government The government decided on August 21 to give official recognicame to power in 2001.

> It is really alarming that Islamist extremists are now regrouping under different names and imparting training to launch bigger assaults. They have become so emboldened that they are now carrying on their activities almost openly. Most of the JMB leaders, including the two king-pins, were arrested and put into jail, but it has had no effect as numerous reports reveal that these groups are increasing in strength and becoming a formidable menace. It really belies the government's assertion that extremist outfits have been nipped in the bud.

According to the report, madrasa The government now needs to education received more state thoroughly recast its militancy favour than general education in tackling strategy and be sincere the last five years, leading to a in its efforts for providing public significant growth of madrasas in safety and security. All the politithe country. Apart from 9.000 cal parties must be united now government registered madrasas against the machination of the there are about 15,000 other Islamist outfits, setting aside their institutions across the country partisan rivalry and considering it offering religious education withas a burning national issue. out registration. The madrasas got

such a robust growth after the ANM Nurul Hague is a columnist of The Daily Star