

## Convene a special session of parliament

*It can be the starting point for consensus building*

EXPORT leaders of the garments and textiles sector have given a clarion call to Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia to prevent recurrence of religious terrorism that rocked the country recently. Their desperate cry for a prime ministerial initiative is impelled by an apprehension that the nerve-wracking security jolts like those of August 17 portend loss of business unless we show sure signs of seeing the back of the problem.

Apparel exports fetch 78 percent of our export earnings and, in spite of the post-MFA quota phase-out, the garment sector keeps thriving, so that the sense of loss would be so much the greater if the new-found bullish trend in the business is even partially eroded due to any negative perception of our internal security scenario.

We share the sense of desperation, despair and urgency reverberating from the concerns voiced by the leaders of Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA) and Bangladesh Textiles Mills Association (BTMA).

Our own sense is that if the dangerously loaded, apocalyptic August 17 serial bombings cannot unite the political parties on the one-point national security agenda, then what will! We know that the several bomb blasts in the past should have provided enough motivation to the political parties to have addressed the rising spectre of ideological terrorism before it could grow into some kind of a sleeping but wily monster it has. If the early signals were heeded and a robust cross-party political will was forged, the extremist menace we face today would have been long neutralised.

It is never too late, and it's the prime minister's role that will play a crucial part in bringing about a bipartisan discussion on the issues thrown up by the countrywide bombings. There is a great need to begin on a clean slate by her, unstuck from the widely shared impressions that the ruling party had given no space to the opposition either in or out of parliament. The rules must now be changed from those of disengagement to that of positive engagement.

The parliament session is scheduled for September 8 and, surprisingly it is not stated to be exclusively devoted to the August 17 concerns. What we suggest is that a special session of parliament be held immediately on the question rather than waiting for what now is frustratingly intended to be some partisan blowing of hot air on floor of the House. This is the government's great opportunity to engage the opposition in parliament by convening a special JS session and assuring the opposition that they will be given more than their share of time to have their say.

### Intelligence agencies under microscope

*Depoliticise and reorientate the apparatus*

IN the wake of the record-breaking bombing incidents of Aug 17th much has been written and said about the performance of the intelligence agencies in Bangladesh. Our worst apprehensions regarding the misutilisation of our intelligence apparatuses, driven more by parochial party, rather than national interest, expressed through this column, has been borne out by the views that emerged at a roundtable on the issue the other day.

The recommendations that came out of the discussion were nothing esoteric but are in the knowledge of the administration. What is lacking is the political will of those that are responsible to task and direct these agencies. It needs no elaboration that this was something that was woefully missing.

The fact that a national asset, entrusted with the task of ensuring our security, has been so brazenly employed for petty party interest is inexcusable, and the government owes it to the people to explain this. One wonders when will the political parties learn to distinguish between the party, the administration and the state. Party interest must never be equated with the national interest.

The intelligence agencies can only provide intelligence to the government. The decision on the subsequent course of action is entirely that of the government. There are reasons to believe that the reports of the intelligence agencies are not always given due credence, or do not find favour with the party in power since that might clash with its overall political and election strategy. Recent reports appearing in some newspapers confirm this view.

There is a large number of intelligence setups in the country. It is the responsibility of the government to both determine the priority of tasks as well as to coordinate their efforts and share their output. This is only possible if the government employs them without political bias, with the national security interest in view. Otherwise we are destined to suffer many more 17th August or even worse.

ABDUL HANNAN

IT is no more crying wolf. It is real, here and now. The well-coordinated and picture perfect precision planning and execution of explosion of over 400 bombs across the country within a span of 30 minutes last Wednesday is proof that the threat and danger is not merely around the corner, but at the doorstep.

The looming shadow of disaster has now taken substance. The hydra-headed Jamat-ul-Mujaheedin (JMB) monster is so widespread in its network and so deep-rooted and strong that in flagrant defiance and contempt of authorities it has claimed responsibility for the bombing incident by distributing JMB leaflets at every place of occurrence, proclaiming its objective of establishing an Islamic state based on sharia law and precepts. The extremists have thrown up an open challenge.

Yet these terrorist activities did not come from the blue without forewarning. For quite some time past -- specially the last three years after 9/11 -- the foreign press including Time, Far Eastern Economic Review, The Economist, and The New York Times Magazine have raised alarm bells about the rise of Islamic fundamentalists and the spectre of an impending Islamic revolution in Bangladesh, which they described as a "safe haven" of Islamic terrorists with links to international Al Qaeda operatives.

US State Department, particularly Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice is on record having said in course of an interview with India Today magazine during her recent visit to India that what was happening in Bangladesh was "troubling." The visiting US Asia Pacific Commander Admiral Fallon during his brief visit to Bangladesh expressed concern at huge cache of arms community, and many others detected in Chittagong and Joypurhat falling into the hands of Islamic terrorists in Bangladesh.

But the government dismissed these warnings as western propaganda against Islam and remained indifferent.

The domestic press published extensive reports and comments on scores of bomb and grenade attacks on cultural functions, cinema halls, theaters, NGOs, mazars (shrines), meetings of the main opposition and communist party, British High Commissioner in Bangladesh at the Shah Jalal Mazar in Sylhet, the Ahmadiyya

tion. There were daily press reports about Jagroto Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB) under the leadership of Bangla Bhai on a rampage of killing, repression, and kidnapping in the northern region apparently with the indulgence of the authorities.

Yet the government tuned a blind eye and deaf ear to these warnings by the local press and dismissed them as a smear campaign supported by the opposition to tarnish the image of the government. It acted only when faced with mounting criticism and concern expressed by the EU and the

donor countries -- banning JMB and JMJB and arresting a few of their activists. But the action was at best piece-meal, half-hearted, and desultory, without any lasting effect. Many of the detainees have since been released on bail as in the past.

It is not entirely fair to blame the failure of intelligence agencies for the rise of terrorist activities by extremists. The agencies make no secret of their frustration at how many arrestees were released on bail and how their prosecution efforts were thwarted at the intervention of higher authorities in Dhaka. Clearly what is at fault is the lack of political will of the government to take the matter seriously. The government, flying in the face of substantive evidence to the contrary, denied time and again the existence of any Islamic terrorist in the country.

The Foreign Minister Morshed Khan reportedly described the

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governments, past and present, without any exception, have pandered to and patronised the Islamic constituency to win electoral gains -- hence their reluctance to alienate their sympathies and support by taking firm steps.

The other explanation is the BNP government does not want to antagonise its Islamic coalition partners Jamat-e-Islami and Islami Oikya Jote by taking stringent action against the Islamic extremists, for fear of losing their vote banks in the next election. Although Jamat has denied any links with any Islami extremists, both the groups have similar objectives -- to establish an Islamic state based on sharia law.

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penetrating into businessmen, engineers, and other professions to establish an Islamic state based on sharia law. Besides, according to some press reports, most of JMB were past members of Islami Chhatra Shibir, the student wing of the Jamat.

The government has an impressive list of achievements to its credit in economic growth, education, health, crime control, and poverty alleviation. Yet observers attribute the credibility loss of its image and credentials at home and abroad to its fundamentalist trappings due to association with its coalition partners. Jamat, by denouncing the August 17 bombing as actions of RAW and Awami League, has betrayed its vulnerability to criticism of its sympathy for perpetrators of terrorist acts and has caused embarrassment to the government. The Indian government reaction was sharp when it denounced the statement of a senior cabinet minister as irresponsible. Jamat evidently is increasingly becoming a liability to the BNP leadership.

What is at stake is not winning or losing a few votes by the BNP. The question is of its political survival. The reaction of people to the events of August 17 is one of overwhelming shock, anger, and dismay at the inaction or inability of the government to deal with the perpetrators with firmness and determination and to stem the tide of terrorist activities in the country. BNP can redeem its popular support confidence if it can wipe

out the Islamic extremists root and branch. It is no time for ambivalence, or to equivocate or to dither. The lesson for the BNP leadership now is: Keep the wolf far hence or with its claws it will kill again.

The nation is confronted with a serious challenge. It is a choice between democracy and theocracy. If the extremists are successful in grabbing power they will foist Taliban style theocracy on Bangladesh. The potential danger is frightening. Under the new dispensation there will be no Prime Minister, no President, no Parliament, but only the rule of an oligarchy of mollahs and clerics. Under the austere rule of the mollahs there will be only madrasas, and no school, college, universities. There will be no cultural activities of arts, literature, television, and music. The first casualty will be the women who, denied of education opportunities, will be reduced to head to foot burkha-clad apparitions, relegated to the confines of four walls.

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# Koizumi's team of assassins gets ready for the kill

MONZURUL HUQ *writes from Tokyo*

NEVER in the modern history of Japan have people seen anything similar to the cut-throat power struggle that now is being waged in country's political arena. It all started with a package of bills voted down in the upper house of the Diet in early August. Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, determined to privatise Japan's asset-heavy postal system, wasted no time to show that he always sticks to what he says. For, before the voting in the lower house in late July, he vowed that he would dissolve the parliament and call snap elections should the bills get rejected.

Though his package of bills barely managed to slip through the lower house, a group of dissidents from his own party played a crucial role in killing the bills once they moved to the upper house for final approval. This prompted Koizumi to show that he is a man of extreme determination who never fails to stick to his words, and despite repeated requests from party stalwarts not to move ahead with what he said earlier, he wasted no time at all to dissolve the lower house and call a general election on September 11.

The prime minister of Japan, who traditionally also holds the leadership post of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, did not stop there. As a clear signal of his desire to wage a two-way battle against the usual opponents as well as party dissidents, he also

declared that none of the 37 lower-house LDP members who voted against his favourite bills would be given nomination from the party in the upcoming election.

For another 14 lower-house members who abstained, a strong guide-line was set to get written commitments from them that should they get nominations and be reelected, they would be duty-

within the fold of LDP. Koizumi himself, for example, is a third generation parliamentarian who inherited the semi-urban seat from his grandfather and father, both of whom were influential politicians of their time. As a result, for the second round of the battle, he was in need of new tactics and strategy that would allow him to extend the lead fur-

came as a total surprise to many in Japan, not only for them being unexpected political pawns pushed in the arena without any past political experience, but also for the attitude that some of them had shown in the process of being chosen as candidates to run for public office. Most prominent among them is definitely the 32-year old Internet

service provider Takafumi Horie, who earlier this year rocked the media world of Japan by trying to take control of the Fuji Television Network Inc. through the radio broadcaster Nippon Broadcasting System.

Like all maverick entrepreneurs everywhere, Horie was quick enough to realise that as the political water in Japan is getting muddier day by day with voices of revenge and counter revenge filling the air around, it is probably the best time for him to reap the benefit as much as possible. He met senior LDP officials early last week to discuss about the possibility for him to run on the party ticket. But he later decided to have an audience with the leader of country's main opposition Demo-

cratic Party of Japan (DPJ), also probably to work out how far the DPJ was keeping options open to serve his own goals.

After having discussions with the leadership of Japan's two major political parties, Horie eventually had an audience with Koizumi and finally decided to run as an independent candidate at the Hiroshima constituency of

one of the LDP rebel leaders, Shizuka Kamei. Koizumi promised him full LDP backing and it's not clear yet what else the prime minister committed, as he might have been willing to go up to any point since his hatred towards Kamei by now has become clear to everyone in Japan. Horie is now sailing in the wind of that hate politics and probably calculating what more this strange atmosphere might bring to him. It is interesting to note that when Horie got involved with his failed bid of taking control of Fuji Television, it was an LDP executive who denounced him for "trying to grab anything that money can buy." Now it seems everything, even the LDP as well, has started to drift towards his own way as the vision of leading politicians in

Japan is increasingly becoming short sighted.

Soon after the lower house of the Japanese parliament was dissolved, Koizumi's aides and LDP executives have been wooing celebrities right and left. Besides Horie, the party has by now found a high-profile bureaucrat, a university professor, a cooking expert, an economist working for a well known think-tank, and a leader of Japan's Nursing Association. No doubt a few more names are to be added to the list in coming days as the official campaign period is to start on August 30.

With the single-minded aim of dislodging the self-created opponents from their positions of power, the leadership of the main ruling party of Japan might have been digging their own graves, as many crucial issues are simply being overlooked and voters are not being given a chance to express their opinions on anything else other than the postal reform bills.

Meanwhile, amid this confusing situation, ousted LDP rebels are also not sitting idly. They have already announced the formation of two different political parties and are trying hard to win over support from the rank and file of the party they until very recently belonged to. The whole situation might eventually further weaken the position of LDP, the political party that for last fifty years had been the main driving force in Japanese politics.

## OPINION

# Moderate Muslim nation?

DR ALAMGIR HUSSAIN

OVER the last decade, there had been scores of bomb blasts in Bangladesh, which have killed about 150 people. The preferred targets for such bombings have been movie theatres, entertainment parks and shows such as Jattras and village fairs, etc.

There has also been a new trend of bombing the opposition political rallies and meetings in recent times, notably the August 21, 2004 bombing of Awami League (AL) rally in Dhaka which killed 22 people including Ivy Rahman and another AL rally bombing in Hobiganj on January 27 that killed 5 people including the former finance minister SAMS Kibria.

There has also been bombing of Sufi shrines, including one in Sylhet

in which the UK High Commissioner to Bangladesh was hurt. On top of that there have been threats to many entertainment shows and festivals, and without heightened security arrangement, no such shows and festivals could be held anywhere in Bangladesh for some time.

Finally, there have been numerous death threats to secular thinkers and writers including targeted assassination attempts as happened to, poet Shamsur Rahman and Humayun Azad.

These sorts of bombing across the country over the last decade clearly display a pattern typical of an orchestrated Islamic terror campaign, since the targets for these bombings are places and events considered sinful by the Islamic fundamentalists. And yet, the government has been in persistent

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denial of the presence of any such terrorist groups in the country whilst innocent people continue to be killed on a regular basis in such bombings.

Most strikingly, the international community, including the United States and United Kingdom, fail to see any such terrorist activities in Bangladesh and label this country a "model moderate Muslim state."

On August 17, a staggering 450 bombs exploded synchronised across the country in an attack that shook the nation. Although the low-

intensity bombs killed two and injured over 100, but such a wave of bombing is unprecedented in the history of terror campaigns by the Islamic zealots anywhere in the world.

Does not this extraordinary bombing clearly say that the country not only harbours terror groups, but also that these groups are very widespread, well-organised, sophisticated, and capable of causing mayhem any time? Is the government still going to stand its traditional ground and claim that

there are no terror groups in Bangladesh? Not impossible, given the lack of responsibility our government has displayed towards the welfare of the nation and the citizens.

But not this time! State Minister in charge of Home Affairs Lutfozzaman Babar conceded: "These are planned incidents. We had intelligence report(s) about such plan but that expired a few days back."

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such massive scale, why then the government has been in consistent denial of the presence of any terror groups in the country? This time, the government clearly does not have any way to deny the fact, given the massive scale of the bombing.

Is the government now going to wake up and do some cleaning-up work? One cannot be very sure of that. From the intelligence report(s) disclosed by the Minister, it becomes evident that the terror attacks were planned for August 15 -- the 30th anniversary of the tragic

and brutal assassination of the nation's founding father, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his family in 1975.

This fact points clearly to who might have unleashed this orchestrated campaign of countrywide bombing. The timing suggests that the perpetrators might be the defeated forces of 1971 war of independence. There is hardly any doubt that one of the main defeated force of 1971 was the Jamaat-e-Islami, which is part of the current alliance government.

In my opinion, it is unlikely that such a huge terror campaign could have been launched by fundamentalists in the country without the support, patronisation, or at least the knowledge of Jamaat. No other Islamic groups in the county have such considerable logistical and organisational capacity. It is under-

standably doubtful that the present government will crack down on these shadowy but menacing extremist groups.

Yet, for the sake of our nation, it is imperative for the government to exterminate these groups. Else the country is well on the march toward becoming a fundamentalist state.

And if that happens, the BNP will also not be saved from the ire of the terror of brutality. The nation learned its lesson in 1971 -- the memory of which is very vivid in the minds of our people. If we have to shed blood one more time at the hands of the obscure adversaries within such a short time, that will not only be extremely unfortunate, but also will prove that Bangladeshis are a nation of simpletons.

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