

## Jamaat MPs' stand on Aug 17

*Denial is not borne out by facts*

**T**WO Jamaat-e-Islami lawmakers have dismissed as baseless the statement by the state minister for home in parliament that intelligence agencies have gathered information on involvement of the Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) and another outlawed party in the August 17 bombings. The lawmakers went to the extent of terming the reports of militancy training imparted by JMB and Harkatul Jihad to turn Bangladesh into an Islamic country as propaganda.

Let's place the issue in its right perspective. Those convinced that the JMB or any such fanatic group was not involved in extremist acts are either living in a fool's paradise or refusing to accept the facts that are emerging on a daily basis. It's a matter of grave concern that the Jamaat's rebuttal came on the floor of the House by way of what appears to be a counter-offensive to prove the intelligence reports wrong.

The Jamaat is supposed to have the political grasp and awareness needed to see through the situation arising out of the countrywide bombings. So we can't believe that it is being naive to conclude that there was no involvement of Islamic extremists in the bomb attacks. The only deduction that one can draw from the two Jamaat MPs' statement, therefore, is that they were trying to blur the picture and mislead people on the bombings. That's not responsible politics. The party has also sent a cautionary note to the government by advising it to refrain from arresting bearded people using caps.

To the government's credit, we must say it has been very careful about and sensitive to the issue. Now, it must not allow any party or individual to make any attempt to derail the investigation into the bomb attacks. The grave threat that the militants pose to national security must be countered effectively. Here we can ill afford to consider how a party or some parties are affected by the direction of the investigation and the resultant digging out of truths that might not be palatable to all parties. Not only that JMB is very much involved, facts are increasingly coming to light that link Jamaat and JMB. Far too frequently it is turning out that JMB members were integral part of Jamaat at some early date. JMB members were, in many areas, former activists of Jamaat. We strongly suggest that government investigate the possible links. The Jamaat is trying to ignore the findings of the intelligence agencies without substantiating their claims to the contrary. It is a clear case of politics getting the better of our security needs.

## Koizumi landslide

*This is how democracy works*

**T**HE results are in, and Japan's Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi has triumphed, giving powerful momentum to his agenda of economic reform. Koizumi supporters in the long-ruling Liberal Democratic Party won 296 seats in the 480-seat lower house of parliament, an impressive gain of 47 seats.

The snap elections had been a calculated gamble on the part of Koizumi, following the defeat in the upper house of the Diet, with the help of rebel LDP lawmakers, of his bill to privatise Japan's giant postal system (which also operates banking services). Its \$3 trillion in assets have long been used as a back door for old-guard lawmakers to finance projects in their own constituencies.

Koizumi's message to the voters was simply stated and simply understood. The election was a virtual referendum on Koizumi and his reform agenda. The entire process has been a credit to Japan, and stands as a fine example of how representative democracy should work.

The upshot of his landslide win is that he now has a mandate for reform, and has also succeeded in shaking up the moribund LDP old guard which had dominated politics for decades. The process was dynamic and spontaneous, and the elections were held in less than three weeks, with a minimum of confusion or fuss.

This is democracy as it should be. The old horse-traders and vested interests swept out in favour of new faces who better represent the will of the people.

As always, there are down-sides to the election result. The decimation of the opposition DPJ has moved further away the day that Japan will be a fully functioning two party democracy. Surely, Koizumi will have to use his new-found power to meet the higher aspirations of the electorate, strengthen internal democracy within LDP and reach out to the opposition when the national interest so demands.

There is an underlying message in this for Bangladesh. One and a half years before our next elections, the entire process is mired in chaos and uncertainty. We should take heed of democracy functioning elsewhere in the way it ought to here. The challenge for us is to make our democracy smooth, efficient, and responsive. The benefits of mature democracy are incalculable.



ABDUL BAYES

**T**HE sub-committee on education and human resources development of Bangladesh Awami League recently organised round table discussions. The topic was the proposed change in the system of secondary education. En passant, the government recently declared that it has changed the courses of learning at secondary level and opted for a unitary mode, as opposed to a multi-track mode existing for about forty years. I personally appreciate the organisers of the seminar for opening the windows for discussion on a topic that is likely to affect almost 10 million students at secondary level in the country.

At the very outset, allow me to clarify the position about changes in education system in particular. We all fought for independence and an exploitation-free society. One of the instruments of exploitation in the society is

education. For a pretty long time, the country had been witnessing a multi-track system in the whole arena of education—from primary to university levels. We have kindergarten schools for richer segments of the society compared to a primary stage for the poorer ones. We have public universities for the poor and middle compared to the private ones for the rich and upper middle

in fact they may differ even between states of a country. But the basic tenets of education remains same everywhere. Access to the types of education is mostly determined by merit and the least by money. The education system is not as much differentiated elsewhere as it is in our country.

We were under uni- or one-track system in 1960s. All

choices as per competence, access to science and commerce-based subjects that are likely to rule the world in the new century.

Let us assume that the unitrak system holds good prospects for the society. The pertinent question then is: has the government held any discussions with stakeholders before embarking on the new experiment? I am told that just through a

faction over the upcoming change.

The government tends to use the experience of other countries in support of their hypothesis. We are told that many countries were visited at the cost of millions of Takas. But in this age of internet, you need not have to travel as much to countries just to know about their syllabus. The discussion meeting also noticed

based subjects. In a country where religious teaching is taking place in Madrasahs which are not inadequate in number, let us ponder, whether it would be wise to put 100 marks for another subject at secondary level. The tone of the discussions that followed on the day seems to hint at the dominance of a partner in the alliance in power in making decisions particularly in the case of education. The discussion also alleged that through this type of unilateral declaration on unitrak system in the secondary education system, the country's human resources development is destined for decline.

Man, society and civilization step forward and not backward. It seems that on the heels of some faults in existing system, we have the tendency to go back to the system that dates back to 50 or 100 years. If change for better is envisaged then, suffice it to say, the whole system of education should be changed, not a part. And to do that a nation-wide discussion with stakeholders is urgently needed. Introducing the new system in a hurry might hurt not heal us. We can only expect that the government would look twice before it leaps once.

Abdul Bayes is a Professor of Economics at Jahangirnagar University.

## BENEATH THE SURFACE

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class. We have cadet institutions, madrasahs and all that grievously give an unequal society. By and large, education has become a commodity to be bought and sold in the market and the price, in some cases, is determined by the play of market forces. Therefore, the current exploitative -- and expensive from societal point of view -- system must be replaced with a relatively egalitarian one if we really mean human resources development.

It is, perhaps, not wise to comment that education system

does not differ among countries; secondary students had to go through similar kind of courses. After a long experiment, the system had to be abandoned keeping in mind the growing needs of the society and the intellectual competence of the students. If we have to forgo the traditional route that ruled us for 40 years, we have to show sufficient account of the ailment in the system. Our observation is that, despite severe limitations in the multi-track system, the system performed better than the earlier one. The present system is likely to deprive students of their

press briefing by the honourable Education Minister, the country came to know that from January 2005, the new system is going to work. The minister is also reported to have said that the new system would create enlightened citizens in the country. A participant student in the discussion -- who bagged GPA 5 Gold during the last examination -- quirked: "Should we assume that all those in the current cabinet studying under the multi-track system of education are not enlightened?" He and another brilliant girl expressed dissatisfaction

that no discussion or dialogues were held with teachers' federation, student organisations or civil society organisation before shifting the system. Most disconcertingly though, a number of clippings from news papers show that a burgeoning book business await on the wings to seize upon the opportunity of the new system. The clippings also hinted at mounting corruption crawling behind the scene.

One would also raise another important issue. Religious learning seemingly rose to prominence compared to science-

## Nepal: Any light at the end of the tunnel ?



ZAGLUL AHMED CHOWDHURY

**T**HE turbulent scenario in the Himalayan kingdom of Nepal unfortunately continues unabated. However, two developments appear to have emerged as silver lining in the otherwise dark cloud. The ultra leftist Maoists, who have intensified their activities in recent times, have of late unilaterally suspended their anti-government operations. This augurs well as far as lessening of the government-Maoists belligerence is concerned even though none really expects much out of this decision since stance of the radicals is evidently quite tough and the government responds with similar postures.

Nevertheless, this may help open a window for cessation of the hostilities while expectation of any settlement of the "Maoist" problem is still a height of folly. On the other front, there seems a positive development in government-opposition relations as King Gyanendra has offered dialogue with main opposition parties to resolve the political instability that is haunting the impoverished country. Here too, much can not be expected from the King's offer since it contains nothing substantial to resolve the crisis. But this along with release of opposition leaders and

activists including octogenarian former premier Girija Prasad Koirala from custody may assuage the feelings of the opposition to some extent and pave the way for a discussion with the government.

Nepal painstakingly introduced democracy in 1990, but the last nail was carried on the fragile political situation with the sacking of the elected prime minister in February this year by

executive monarchy. The developments in the country in the form of sacking the elected prime minister and vesting of all powers in the monarchy cannot be commended since these measures are certainly taking the nation further away from representative character of governance. The current millennium had certainly begun on an ominous note for Nepal, which was otherwise a largely calm and

a new parliamentary democracy as intra-party rivalries as well as squabbles within the main Nepali Congress kept all at bay about the fate of democracy even though people favour representative system of government.

The murky political situation can be well judged by the fact that Nepal witnessed as many as thirteen premiers in fifteen years history of introduction of democracy in 1990. Nonetheless

both sides. By this time they control a large area in the countryside. Efforts for a government-Maoists negotiation did not bear much fruit and consequently a stand-off situation exists as far as the fighting is concerned. Recently, the radicals hit headlines by killing a large number of soldiers and taking another big number as hostage. This has compounded the imbroglio since the

### MATTERS AROUND US

A country like Nepal can ill afford to absorb two serious crises—political instability and the Maoist insurgency. If the reprieve as announced by the radicals temporarily halting their armed activities is properly used by the government for facilitating better ties with the ultras, this may create some scope for cessation of hostilities. In the political front, unambiguous pledge by the King of restoring democratic government preferably through fresh polls may encourage the opposition for a dialogue with the government. While the ball is largely in the King's court, maintaining restraint and rationale by all parties concerned may help Nepal bail out from the current precarious situation.

the King when a state of emergency was declared and many other restrictions imposed. The stringent moves expectedly drew sharp criticisms internally and internationally as these were seen as "killing of democracy" by the monarch, whose role was supposed to be largely ceremonial. Facing orchestrated clamour for restoration of democracy, King Gyanendra slowly relaxed his absolute control and later withdrew the emergency. But he is demonstrating little sign to revert to democratic system even though pressure continues to mount on him for early elections and withdrawal of all undemocratic measures.

The landlocked nation admirably introduced parliamentary democracy in 1990 replacing

peaceful country drawing huge tourists from all over and was making significant strides to change its economically weak image. The monarch remained the constitutional head with an elected parliament and leader of the majority party or alliance at the helm as the prime minister to run the nation. But over the last five years, conditions have changed and the political situation is getting murkier.

A popular monarch King Birendra had to loosen his grip on power facing a pro-democracy movement when he conceded to the demand of parliamentary democracy in the country. However, political parties -- the Nepali Congress, the Communist party (Marxist-Leninist) and other smaller

groups could not show maturity in

less, nascent democracy was gaining experience. A palace massacre wiped out King Birendra along with the mainstream royal family and this brought King's younger brother Gyanendra on the throne. He slowly consolidated power and turned the ceremonial monarchy once again into executive one. Finally, he dismissed the elected prime minister early this year and political instability has since been continuing.

The armed campaign by ultra leftists to dismantle the monarchy and set up a communist republic is costing the country heavily. Undoubtedly, the biggest headache for the King is the activities of the Maoists, who often engage themselves in fierce battles with the army and police causing big toll of lives on

government spares no effort to contain the exacerbating situation. The army has gone all out against the ultras with some success, but crushing the radicals remains a tall order. It is in this circumstance the "Maoists" have come out with the decision to cease their actions for three months.

Seven political parties which controlled 190 of the 205 seats in parliament are clambering for return to democracy and early polls in that direction. But so far the King turned a blind eye to this demand although he says that representative governance will be restored in due course.

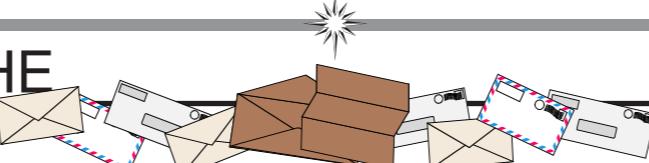
Recently, two main political parties—the Nepali Congress and the Communist party (UML) -- expressed their opposition to King's earlier measures in

turning the country constitutionally an effective monarchy. Obviously, this has further queered pitch of govt-opposition relationship. The King has come out with an offer to discuss all issues with the political parties. Earlier, the government was annoyed by the decision of the political parties of their readiness for a dialogue with the "Maoists" whom the government sees as the enemy of the country.

Evidently, a country like Nepal can ill afford to absorb two serious crises—political instability and the long-drawn Maoist insurgency. If the reprieve as announced by the radicals temporarily halting their armed activities is properly used by the government for facilitating better ties with the ultras, this may create some scope for cessation of hostilities. In the political front, unambiguous pledge by the King of restoring democratic government preferably through fresh polls may encourage the opposition for a dialogue with the government. Without any such assurances, the political parties are unlikely to go for talks with the monarch. While the ball is largely in the King's court, maintaining restraint and rationale by all parties concerned may help Nepal bail out from the current precarious situation. Otherwise things may move for the worse.

Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury is a senior journalist.

## TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE



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Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

### Promotion of BAEC officials

Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission (BAEC) is, no doubt, an elite research organisation of the country. And I am proud to be part of this organisation. But I become frustrated when I see that the Commission issues some controversial administrative orders, which have a great bearing on the future of the Scientific Officers. It is discouraging to see that the Commission's order does not comply with its service rules and its employees are not equal in its eyes. The BAEC office order No 125/2005 (dated 28-02-2005) declares, among others, promotion of Scientific Officers to Senior Scientific Officers. Unfortunately there are some irregularities in the order but I will point out only two of them.

Junior officers have been promoted, despite the seniors being better qualified.

Only two Scientific Officers, who are on study leave among many others, have been promoted.

If the Commission takes the stand not to promote the officers who are on study leave right at the moment, why does the Commission takes the self contradictory decision giving promotion to only two of them? To the best of my knowledge not less than 15 Scientific Officers, who deserve promotion, are on study leave presently and working for their Doctoral Research with good reputation in various countries of the world. In short, these two 'Lucky Officers', (I congratulate them on their due promotion), who got promotion despite being on study leave, and the 'Deprived Officers' hold the identical GO (Government Order) by which study leave with full benefit of the service is granted by the Commission. And these two 'Lucky Officers' and the 'Deprived Officers' had to sign the identical

security bonds and submit to the Commission prior to getting the study leave as part of ensuring their return to the office after the completion of study. The Commission did permit all of these officers to study abroad. Then why is this discrimination in promotion?

A scientific officer  
Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission

### JFK

In one of her speeches Arundhati Roy described the Hollywood movies as the propaganda machines of the US. Honestly, they are experts in movie-making but in most of their political movies instead of protesting their wrongdoings across the globe, the American filmmakers try to prove that various actions of their country in other parts of the world are logical and thus they are saving many nations in the world from dictatorship, anarchy, communism and other evil influences. But a

movie named JFK (John F. Kennedy) has changed my view on American political movies a lot.

This movie with strong proofs has revealed that the assassination of the most popular American president John F. Kennedy in 1963 was engineered by the CIA, FBI and US Army Intelligence. Kennedy was assassinated before he completed his third year as president and the reasons behind his killing were some of his attempts like rapid solution of Cuban missile crisis, advancing a peace process with Russia, an attempt at pulling out the US army from Vietnam etc. The CIA thus didn't allow even its own president to live who had tried to get out of the typical US international strategy. This movie has also pictured some short clippings on American illegal invasions, CIA's involvement in ousting governments and election manipulations in several countries of the world.

So this is a must-see for those who seek truth.

Kamrul Hasan  
BUET

### Rethinking on Islam

I agree with Saleh Ahmed (29 Aug) that such 'rethinking' must not imply 'reform' of Islam and that 'Islam' is comprehensive enough to be able to deal with modern realities'. I would also like to point out that the term 'reform' is transported from other religions where a mechanism and overall authority to sanction and implement reform exists.

So what we need is to re-appraise and re-emphasise the fundamental purpose of Islam (and any other traditional religion for devotees if they are non-Muslim). Before learning to read the scriptures or its practices, the question, which everyone must ask, is 'What is it all for?' Like soldiers going into a battle the 'objective' needs to be understood first and foremost and later 'how'

this objective is to be attained by religious learning and practices.

In Islam there is no doubt about this objective. It is to follow a righteous path (siratul mustaqeem) in this world, as we are compulsorily made to recite in Sura Fateha in every rakat of every prayer. This sura is the mother of the Holy Quran, and its verses after praising Allah directs us to want from Him only a single gift, a guidance for remaining on this righteous path. Heaven, hell, etc in the hereafter or any other reward or punishment in this world are mere subsidiary consequences of whether one remains on this path or not. This path is also the path of Justice, Fair Play, Ethics and Morality etc of the Greek