



The government seems to be finally clamping down on Islamic extremists found guilty of terrorist attacks but has itself allowed them to grow and flourish.

repression in the country. Like religious persecution, religious extremism has remained a taboo subject for the FPA ministers until over 500 bombs exploded in 63 districts on August 17 this year. Wary of the AL's implicit indictment of its junior partner Jamaat-e-Islami's (JI) hands in religious extremism, the BNP has been summarily denying the presence of Jihadis in the country.

When grenades were lobbed at an AL meeting in downtown Dhaka killing 21 people on August 21 last year, the BNP and its intelligentsia fed several conspiracy theories. Of them one blames Sheikh Hasina, the AL chief, for planning to bomb her own rally. Detectives from British Scotland Yard were flown in to help local investigators find out the culprits behind the ghastliest terrorist attack in the country's history. The government's insouciance regarding the attack is the prime cause for the investigation's failure. A man, with petty criminal records, was arrested, and was coerced to confess to the attack. The government, one has every reason to believe, is waiting for public interest in the probe to die down.

From the assassination attempt on British High

Commissioner to Bangladesh, Anwarullah Chowdhury, to the killing of AL leader SAMS Kibria, the government has failed to bring the culprits to book. When it comes to curbing terrorism or hunting down religious extremists, the government lacks sincerity. According to a newspaper report 40 percent of the arrestees nabbed for carrying out the August 17 bomb blasts are members of the JI, most of who are being released on JI leaders' intervention.

In the Second Punic war, Roman dictator Fabius Maximus earned the notorious title of 'tortoise' for procrastinating the impending war with Carthaginian general Hannibal's force. Maximus the tortoise later struck hard and eventually had won the war. Except for the winning part, Khaleda Zia eerily acts like Fabius the great delayer. It has taken numerous bomb blasts to make Khaleda realise that enough is enough and now is the time to stamp out Islamic extremism.

In clamping down Jihadis the BNP faces an inevitable quandary: a no-nonsense approach to Islamic extremism will anger its allies, whose support the BNP heavily relies on to retain the 60 marginal seats in the parliament.