

# First ladies, in the truest sense

# Living in a valley of blasts

ANM NURUL HAQUE

**T**WO senior assistant judges were killed and four other were injured on November 14 at Jhalakathi district town when a militant member of the Jamaat Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) suicide squad hurled a bomb at the microbus carrying the judges. Police arrested a JMB member for his involvement in the bomb attack and also recovered a live bomb from his possession. The arrested militant member of the JMB, identified as Mamun, confessed to being a member of the suicide squad of JMB, and was ready to give up his life for the cause of Islam. Police arrested 11 more people including the principal of a madrasa and recovered huge bomb-making materials, books, and leaflets of banned JMB from the house of Mamun.

In an unprecedented development of the JMB, whose successful attack on August 17 rocked the country, now has targeted to hit the most respected institution -- the judiciary. Five serial bomb blasts at the courts in Chandpur, Laxmipur and Chittagong occurred on October 3 leaving two people dead and 38 others, including a district judge and a policeman injured. Two perpetrators held from the Chandpur blast site and one from Laxmipur said JMB assigned them to carry out the attacks. Two of the three perpetrators caught in the Chittagong court premises admitted to being members of Shaheed Nasrullah Al Arafat Brigade (SNAB), the newly formed military wing of the JMB. The militants tried to kill a Speedy Trial Tribunal judge by throwing a bomb at him in Sylhet on October 18, but fortunately the judge escaped unhurt.

The most worrying part of the story is that the banned JMB has already acquired the capability to explode bombs anywhere and at any time and to do so they have formed a suicide squad. The suicide squad has threatened to blow up Rajshahi central jail by blasting bombs unless all the detainees belonging to JMB are released immediately. The JMB suicide squad has threatened to kill the Law Minister and upazila nirbahi officers including all officials of Companyganj upazila under Noakhali district by December 16. It has also threatened a district joint judge of Pabna Judge Court with dire consequence if he failed to deliver justice "properly." The judges in the country are now under threat and unable to conduct the court proceedings fearing bomb attacks.

The government has provided gunmen for the Supreme Court and High Court judges after the killing of the two judges in Jhalakathi. But the

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Islamist militants' attack killed two judges in a microbus in Jhalakathi on November 14 last.

judges of the lower courts across the country were yet to get security even when they continued to receive death threats from the JMB suicide squad. Judges from across the country in a meeting held on November 21 demanded tax-free private cars, firearms, and personal gunmen and guards at their residences by December 21. Otherwise they will go for tougher movement including abstention from the courts and taking of leaves en masse. Security has also been geared up in the Secretariat to check subversive activities and ensure foolproof security. A scanner has been set up at the Secretariat's entrances, where each bag and parcel is checked in the wake of the threats of bombing the Secretariat.

Prime Minister Khakeda Zia ordered to ensure immediate arrest and punishment of the culprits through the Speedy Trial Tribunal. She issued this order in the regular cabinet meeting on November 18 in reference to the killing of two judges in Jhalakathi bomb attack. The police have so far arrested more than 400 suspected militants from across the country, but most of them are the carriers of bombs and field level activists. Police could not yet arrest the main leaders of the JMB. The JMB

chief Abdur Rahman narrowly escaped arrest on November 18, disappearing from a house in the capital before a raid by Rab. Easy arrest and hasty trials are not the answer to this grave problem. Some ministers and senior leaders of the ruling BNP also believe that the efforts to deliver quick results will weaken investigation and allow the top military kingpins involved in the attacks to elude arrest.

Is there any government in the country? This was the question asked by the Secretary General of Bangladesh Judicial Service Association and Dhaka Division Special Judge Rezaul Karim Khan in a meeting with Communication Minister Barrister Nazmul Huda held at the Dhaka Judge Court on November 16. The question asked by an angry judge against the backdrop of the gruesome murder of his two colleagues also posed some other burning questions regarding the seriousness of the government in containing militancy. According to the media reports, many of the government functionaries, particularly some MPs from the greater Rajshahi district, had been instrumental in the JMB members in launching their operations. Abu Hena, a legislator of the ruling BNP from Rajshahi said

that four-party alliance government may have had a hand in the recent rise of Islamic militancy in the country. He made this remark to the BBC's Bengali Service very recently.

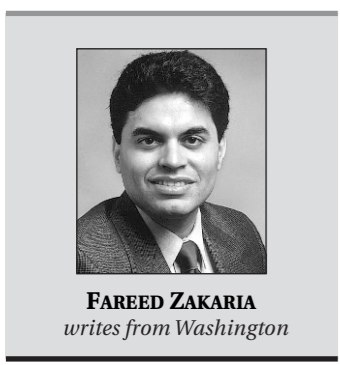
Questions have also been raised in the minds of the people whether the government has that much efficacy to tackle the Islamist outfit which is a menacing threat to peace and stability across the country. The people from all the strata of society are now quite worried over the growing inability of the government in tackling the outlawed Islamist outfits. The government cannot deny the grisly reality that the people of the country are now hostage to an organised group of religious fundamentalists. The government allowed the Islamist outfits enough time to organise themselves, denying their very existence despite the mainstream newspapers repeatedly published reports on the outlawed Islamist outfits to alert the government. Surprisingly the State Minister for Home Lutfozzaman Babor said after his meeting with the British State Minister for Foreign Affairs and Commonwealth Dr Kim Howells, that he still does not think the militant threat is too alarming. Really it is most unfortunate for the nation that the denial mindset of the

government level is still at work when the danger with outlawed Islamist outfits lurks very ominously. It is widely believed that some of the BNP leaders along with their most important ally in the government have close association with the militant outfits. The Daily Star in its editorial on November 16, has contained a very sharp observation on the subject. It said: "In all the attacks, direct or indirect links have been found to alliance members of BNP led government. In fact many of JMB members have confessed to links with Jamaat, both present and past. BNP leadership should have no doubt in its mind as to the veracity of these facts, all of which are contained in numerous reports of the intelligence agencies." The international development partners of the country on November 17 came down heavily on the government for its failure to combat continuous killing and terrorism, lack of justice, malgovernance and massive corruption for which the country is known in the world. "If the trends continue, Bangladesh will be known to the global community as a land of more and more killings, terrorism and insecurity," World Bank Vice President Praful C Patel told newsmen following the concluding session of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Implementation Forum in the city. "If you want us to work with you should curb terrorism and militancy in iron fist hand," the World Bank Vice President was further quoted to have said in the meeting.

Public anger and agitation against the government is growing apace for its failure to deal squarely with the issue of home-grown militants. The outlawed Islamist militants have already made people aware of growing inability of the government to show its competency to put down these elements. This has made people apprehensive of the motives of these anti-state elements and to feel that they are now hostage to an "enemy within."

Government failure to contain militants has made them so defiant that they have now dared to threaten to blow up all Liberation War Memorials in Rangamati if the law of Allah is not introduced and the Martyred Intellectuals Day or the Victory Day is observed. The killing of two judges in Jhalakathi has already proved beyond doubt that their threats are real. The government now needs to thoroughly recast its militancy tackling strategy and be sincere in its efforts for providing public safety and security. The whole nation must also be united against the machination of the Islamist outfits, considering it as a national crisis.

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FAREED ZAKARIA writes from Washington

**S**OMETIMES the most important stories in the world don't get much attention because they're powerful but slow trends that can't be easily covered. They provide no single great event for cameras to focus on, nor a powerful image everyone can easily grasp. (How do you televise globalisation?) Last week, however, something happened that gives us a rare opportunity to look at one such trend. On November 8, Liberians elected the Harvard-educated Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, 67, to be their next leader. This is newsworthy by itself because Johnson-Sirleaf will be Africa's first female president. But it's an even bigger story because, on the world stage, it's not an isolated event. One of the quiet, underreported tidal waves of the past decade has been the rise of women in public life. It could reshape politics as we know it.

Look at what's happening elsewhere. Next week, Angela Merkel will become the first female chancellor of Germany. In voting over the next two months, Michelle Bachelet will likely be elected president of Chile; if so, she will be the first woman elected to lead a major Latin American country. Since the 1990s, more than 30 women have become heads of government. In the 1950s there was just one. (I doubt anyone remembers: Subbaatary Yanjmaa, president of Mongolia.)

It's not just heads of state. Whatever else happens in the Iraqi elections on December 15, we know one thing for sure: women will fill at least 25 percent of seats in the new parliament. That's because the Iraqi Constitution has a quota requiring it. (The current parliament is actually 31 percent female, and six of the government's 32 ministers are women.) The Afghan Constitution has a similar 25 percent quota. And these are part of a global pattern.

Overall, 50 countries have quotas for female representation in their

legislatures. In many countries, like Sweden, political parties have adopted rules that force them to field a set number of women candidates. (Forty-five percent of the Swedish Legislature is female.) The world record for female representation is held by Rwanda, with women making up 49 percent of its lower house. The United States ranks 67th in the world by this measure, with only 15 percent of the House of Representatives being female. The lowest representation by region is in the Arab world, with women making up only 8 percent of legislatures.

What difference does it make? Does it really matter that a president or a representative is male or female? Many voters seem to think so. A 2000 Gallup poll in Latin America found that 62 percent of people believed that women would do better than men at fighting poverty, 72 percent favoured women for improving education and 53 percent thought women would make better diplomats. There is growing evidence that, at the very least, where women make up a significant percentage of government, they tend to hold priorities that are different from men's. The World Economic Forum found, in a study of just three countries, that women wanted more money for health care, education and social welfare, and less for the military. Across the globe, women are perceived as less corrupt.

This is consistent with growing evidence at a micro level that women are better recipients of aid than men. Around the world, if you give cash to a mother, she tends to use it to invest in children's health and education. (A man, on the other hand, will often take it and head to the local watering hole.) "Studies from Brazil show that survival possibilities of a child increase by 20 percent if the income is in the hands of the mother rather than the father," says the World Bank's

Mayra Buvinic. There is another perceived difference between men and women. Seven years ago, Francis Fukuyama published an article in Foreign Affairs in which he drew on the rapidly growing field of evolutionary biology to argue that "aggression, violence, war, and intense competition for dominance ... are more closely associated with men than women." He concluded that "a world run by women would follow different rules ... and it is towards this kind of world that all postindustrial societies in the West are moving. As women gain power in these countries, the latter should become less aggressive, adventurous, competitive, and violent." He even asks the politically incorrect question, could some "female" traits have negative effects for governance.

Fukuyama's view was denounced by some feminists for ignoring the reality that war is a complex event produced by many forces not just machismo and for propagating a stereotypical view of women as "soft" and men as "hard." But there does appear to be growing scientific evidence that certain basic distinctions between men and women are hard-wired. There are always the female exceptions Margaret Thatcher, Golda Meir, Indira Gandhi just as there are male ones like Buddha, Gandhi but there are some studies that support the general distinction between most men and women.

It is much too soon to be able to tell how different the world would be if women were equal partners in government. But it's a trend that's coming soon to a country near you, so keep watching.

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# Terrorism is a home-grown problem, not international

ABDUL QUADER writes from Canberra

**T**HE government appears to have gone the wrong way in diagnosing the continued scourge of terrorism being committed by the religious extremists in the country. The donors raised grave concerns about the deteriorating law and order situation, especially the acts of terrorism, at the just concluded three-day Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) Forum in Dhaka. In response to the donor concerns, the Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman said: "We have told them it is more of an international phenomenon than a national one. It is difficult to contain such type of terrorism with the normal enforcement tools."

The Finance Minister also referred to international terrorism confronted by the United States of America and the United Kingdom, apparently to suggest that the kind of terrorism faced by Bangladesh is also international. This observation of the Finance Minister is absolutely preposterous and implies avoiding government responsibility to contain and root out the problem.

**No parallel**

The terrorism that the US and the UK are facing has originated elsewhere in that a group of people at different places have felt aggrieved at the military intervention of these two countries in Iraq and Afghanistan, particularly the invasion and occupation of Iraq. We cannot draw parallel to the terrorism that Bangladesh faces and the kind of terrorism being faced by the United States or the United Kingdom. The problem in Bangladesh is home-grown and is related to domestic politics, whereas the US or UK problem is international in nature, and the apparent causes which gave rise to terrorist activities are different to those concerning Bangladesh.

At the present time, there are two dimensions of crimes in Bangladesh. One is the persistent increase of

incidence of criminal activities such as extortion, murders, rapes, mugging, armed robberies, tender corruption, smuggling of arms from abroad etc. and the failure of the government to contain or drastically reduce these crimes. The other, which is more alarming, is the growing terrorist bombing associated with Islamic religious zeal at different parts of the country that included the killing of two judges at Jhalakathi a couple of weeks ago.

The recent religiously motivated criminal activities are alleged to have been committed by the banned Jama'at ul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB). It has been reported in the newspapers that the JMB wants to turn Bangladesh into an Islamic state and as a mark of their protest against the current legal system, which is not based on Sharia law, the JMB operatives have mounted several bomb attacks across the country and killed the judges.

It will not be unusual if it is found that the terrorists in Bangladesh have got financial or other support from outside the country. They may have also received spiritual inspiration from other Islamists elsewhere who hold extreme views (such as religious extremists in Saudi Arabia or Taliban in Afghanistan). But the core issue surrounding Islamist terrorism in Bangladesh is rooted in the country's politics.

**Shifting responsibility**

I think the government has allowed the situation to grow to such a miserable and alarming state in which certain sections of the community (eg judges and those working in administration) in particular and the public in general are now living in constant fear and threat. The government has ignored the terrorist threat for a long time, claiming it is the creation of the media and those who oppose the government. The failure of the government to take notice of the growing threats of

**Justice demands that the government must respond to the call of the time to secure the lives and property of the people by counter-terrorism measures, including death sentence for those who deserve such punishment under the law. One way to root out terrorism is to "terrorise the terrorists" by harsh punishments. All high profile cases of terrorist acts should be quickly disposed of so that the government's actions are proven credible in the eyes of the public and they feel safe and secure to live their normal daily lives.**



Terrorists' grenade attack on AL rally in Dhaka killed more than 20 people on August 21 last year.

terrorism might have encouraged the religious extremists to be brave enough to continue their bombing activities.

It appears that the government is still trying to shift its responsibility and downplay its failure by claiming that

the terrorist problem in the country is an international problem and that it requires international cooperation to contain or root out the menace. As mentioned above, according to the finance minister the normal law enforcement forces are incapable of

effectively dealing with the terrorist acts in the country.

We know the government has reinforced and strengthened the capacity of law enforcement by establishing the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab), Cobra force and Cheatah

force. Where necessary the government has the power to engage the military to assist the civil administration to check terrorism in the country.

Avoiding responsibility and saying that the law enforcement tools are

inadequate are counter-productive that may give the signal to the extremists that the government is weak and cannot catch them.

**Prevention and cure**

Any politically motivated terrorism, be it Islamic or otherwise, is complex and is generally rooted in some sections of people in the society. It is associated with the belief system of these people, some of whom may have been misled and brainwashed by their leaders and masterminds.

In case of Bangladesh, these religious extremists, especially the operatives at the grass roots level, appear to have come from poor or lower middle class backgrounds. Some of these people may have little education while others may have only madrasa education at the primary or secondary level. These people can easily fall prey to illusion and enticement from these leaders who are out there to wreck havoc in the name of religion.

The government needs both "preventive" and "curative" actions to effectively deal with the festering ills of religious extremism in the country. That is to say, we need both short-term and long-term solution to the scourge of terrorism. In this context, "prevention" is associated with education, awareness, motivation and persuasion for people who are prone to committing acts of terrorism now and also in the future. The threats of terrorism are most likely to continue given the current trends and developments.

To prevent the recurrence of acts of terrorism on a longer-term basis, the government needs to correctly identify the social and economic status or class of the leaders and their followers who hold extremist views and ideas so that it can target these classes of people to influence their thinking, behaviour and actions. This could help in persuading them to understand gradually that religiously motivated violence or terrorist activities do not bring any good to them, the people or the society. The

message should be made loud and clear that radicalisation and politicisation of extreme views will not be tolerated and that terrorism is simply a criminal activity which deserves punishment under the law of the land.

Moreover, it should be emphasised in government-sponsored education awareness and motivation campaigns that any violence in which innocent people are killed and public property damaged is against the principles of the religion of Islam. It should also be emphasised that everybody is entitled to have a view on politics, government or legal system of the country and that they are free to campaign to enlist public support to their cause through peaceful means allowed in a democratic society. But there is no scope for intimidation, coercion and violence on the part of any individual or any group of people to pressure their political or religious message.

The "curative" actions taken by the government includes the arrest, prosecution and appropriate sentencing of those responsible for terrorist activities by applying the law. It is said that example is better than precept. The public are still not convinced about the seriousness with which the government has so far handled the prosecution and punishment of the perpetrators of the barbaric terrorist attacks.

**Terrorising the terrorists**

Justice demands that the government must respond to the call of the time to secure the lives and property of the people by counter-terrorism measures, including death sentence for those who deserve such punishment under the law. One way to root out terrorism is to "terrorise the terrorists" by harsh punishments. All high profile cases of terrorist acts should be quickly disposed of so that the government's actions are proven credible in the eyes of the public and they feel safe and secure to live their normal daily lives.

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