

## The real culprit

**FROM PAGE 1**  
The military stories were ignored or given only scant coverage then the religious extremism would not have risen.

Let us examine the insidious and totally false nature of this argument. By every intelligence agency account and on the basis of confessional statements of those arrested after the recent bomb blasts, the terrorists have been preparing over the last several years for the recent bombings. The role of Afghan Mujahideen returnees, the extremism funding from the Middle East and the secret training at numerous madrasas in several districts have been going on over the past several years, during which the media coverage was abysmally low, almost non-existent. In fact, so clever were the militants in hiding their terrorist activities and so deep they penetrated the high and the mighty that the government and the ruling alliance went on a vigorous denial when the media first started revealing the militants' activities. It was only after the recent countrywide bombings that the government has taken our recent vigorous reportage somewhat seriously.

Mr. Nizami has very good reasons to castigate the media for doing their job well. How else would it have been revealed that many of the arrested extremists have either confessed to being Jamaat members in the past or being guided by those who hold leadership positions in that party or its front organisations, especially Shibir, its student wing. The so-called Bangla Bhai himself, in an interview published in this paper in May 2004, claimed, "I was a Shibir member until 1995." Another wanted militant, Montezar, was the Jamaat chief of Bariatala union of Jajpurhat district when the police raided his house following a serious armed encounter. Jamaat denied any link with him, but the police found out from his diary that he had applied to be made a Rokan, a coveted post in Jamaat. Sohul of Sunamgang Govt College, arrested in August 2003, was a member of Shibir. His brother Selim told the press, "Shibir turned my brother into an ultra-religious man and forced him to work for the JMB." In November 2004 three militants were arrested with 124 electronic bomb detonators from a Shantahar-bound train. All the three confessed to being Shibir workers. In February 2004 militant Azizul was arrested in Deviganj upazila of Panchagarh district, who told the police that he had formerly belonged to Shibir and was now working for the JMB. In February 2005 two JMB members, Samiul Al Siju and Fazlul Huq, arrested in Gangachara upazila of Rangpur district were listed as 'Jamaat activists' in the police probe report. In July 2005, 11 people were arrested at Puthiagara of Paba upazila in Rajshahi district. Their team leader, Enamul, confessed to having been a Shibir member only a year ago. Two of them, Ibrahim Hossain and Golam Mustafa, students of the Rajshahi University, told the police they belonged to Shibir. These are just a few of a large number of similar cases.

It may be noted here that whenever any militant linked with Jamaat has been arrested, the party either denied any relation with the arrestee or said he was a former member. Many political analysts believe such statements are but a part of Jamaat's tactics.

Nizami's own response, in the aforementioned ATN interview, to the question whether he acknowledged the existence of Bangla Bhai or not is quite revealing. He said, "I don't have any comments on whether he exists or not. If a man really exists he won't disappear by my saying he doesn't exist." Why such an evasive answer to a very simple question? Can this be the answer of a cabinet minister of a government in genuine search of Bangla Bhai? He seemed almost in pain to acknowledge that such a man exists. He would have preferred the media to have ignored him and allowed him to carry out his mission.

That is where we have fallen foul of the Jamaat's Ameer. His party's desire to keep its militant connections under wrap has been put to naught by the brave members of the media. The bogey of media coverage contributing to the rise of the militants is nothing but a devious attempt to stop the media from uncovering the dangerous activities the militants have now embarked on.

In fact, the true fault of the media is that we have not done enough to expose the leaders, the groups and the parties who have taken advantage of our democracy, our tolerance and our forgiving attitude towards the war criminals of 1971 to destroy the Bangladesh created through a hard-fought Liberation War. As Jamaat professed to join our democratic polity, we gave them a chance and literally forgot how they had butchered our valiant freedom fighters, how they helped the Pakistan army to destroy our people, our land and our future by conducting genocide. Nothing revealed their viciousness more than the cold-blooded and merciless killing of our intellectuals just three days before their defeat.

The media will continue to do everything to defend democracy, freedom, rule of law and our Constitution. We will fight extremism and terrorism, notwithstanding Mr. Nizami's umbrage.

## Dhaka

**FROM PAGE 16**  
delegation to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) which began on November 25.

Other members of the Bangladesh delegation include Foreign Secretary Hemayetuddin, Bangladesh High Commissioner to UK Sabihuddin Ahmed and senior Foreign Ministry officials.

The Commonwealth foreign ministers, in the first session of the meeting, reviewed the recent global developments and discussed political, economic and social issues. On the sidelines of the Pre-CHOGM Ministerial, Khan held bilateral meetings with his counterparts from Singapore, New Zealand, the Maldives and Pakistan. Matters of mutual interest, cooperation and bilateral relations were discussed in the meetings.

The Maldives and Pakistan both expressed their appreciation for the success of the recently held 13th South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc) Summit in Dhaka.

The Foreign Minister stressed the need for expeditious follow-up of the summit decisions to make Saarc more meaningful to the peoples of South Asia.

## DERAILMENT Rail link with Dhaka snapped for 5 hours

**BDNEWS, Bhairab**

Train communications on the Dhaka-Chittagong, Dhaka-Sylhet and Dhaka-Noakhali routes resumed after five hours of the derailment of two wagons of a freight train near Bhairab yesterday.

Railway sources said the two wagons of the Lalmonirhat-bound goods train coming from Akhaura slipped off the tracks on Monomora Bridge at 11:00am, disrupting rail links between Dhaka and the eastern zone for five hours.

Train services resumed after a relief train cleared the line at about 4:00pm.

A five-member committee headed by traffic Inspector Mujibur Rahman was formed to investigate the accident.

A number of passenger trains, including Dhaka-bound Subarna Express and Mohanagar Express and Chittagong-bound Karnaphuli Express and Nasirabad Express, remained stranded at different stations.

## Lara

**FROM PAGE 16**  
McGrath some 20 minutes into the second day.

The 36-year-old Trinidad left-hander raised his bat to the appreciative crowd and was hugged by batting partner Daren Powell in tribute to his achievement.

It was Lara's eighth double-century in his 121st Test match. He has now scored 31 Test centuries and nine against Australia.

"It's testimony that I've been batting for 15 to 16 years in Test cricket, anybody who spends that sort of time and is any sort of a decent batsman is going to be in and around certain records," Lara said Friday of the approaching world record.

Former Australian captain Border took 156 Tests to set the old record and had held it since his final Test year in 1994.

## JMB threatens

**FROM PAGE 1**  
arrest and harass its activists."

The letter also said, "The administration will never be able to find out our strong network and dens in the district. So, through you we want to inform the administration that if we are barred from our activities, we will blow up your office any time."

UNO Mustafizur Rahman yesterday told reporters that he filed the case following directives from higher authorities.

Following the threat, the police took up special security measures on the upazila nirbahi office premises. **CHUADANGA BLAST CASES** Sources said higher authorities ordered to transfer the August 17 serial blast cases to the CID as the three-month police investigation into the four bomb blasts on the judge court premises in the city yielded no result.

Sub-Inspector (SI) Abdul Motaleb of the sadar thana was investigating the cases and the police so far arrested four persons in this connection. **KHULNA**

Our staff correspondent in Khulna reports: The intelligence agencies are watching movement of some students residing in different dormitories of Khulna University, suspecting their link with Islamist militant groups.

Besides, hostels and messes in the city are also under watch as information came that JMB cadres are hiding in those places.

## Canal choker

**FROM PAGE 1**  
cannot allow mechanised boats to pass through the canal, the last remaining natural canal near the city.

Besides, the water level will rise during the rains, blocking the sluice gate, they said.

"Hundreds of farmers and traders in the nearby villages now have to spend more money to carry their products to the city by road," said Imamuddin of Wasspur.

Boatmen, who used to ferry commuters, traders and goods through the canal, complained they have lost their livelihood due to the closure of the canal.

"We have used Atir Khal for over a century and now someone comes and shows papers to build a road on it," said Khorshed, a boatman in his sixties.

Deputy Commissioner of Dhaka MD Abdul Bari told The Daily Star his office has finalised 'everything to sue the kiln owner' for obstructing a natural canal.

The DC said he has directed his officials to stop the construction of the sluice gate immediately.

Latt Mia, however, claimed he is doing a favour to the villagers by building the gate, which will benefit them as water from the Buriganga will enter the canal through it.

## Heads go to retreat

**FROM PAGE 16**

while there was already a lot of cooperation between the states, including intelligence-sharing, leaders were trying to find a way to "institutionalise" such cooperation.

"We need to ponder the root causes of terrorism," he said.

The leaders also grappled with how to avert threats to greater democracy in member countries like Uganda and correct world trade imbalances ahead of a key meeting in Hong Kong.

Many officials and analysts say repression and poverty fuel terrorism.

Outside a honey-coloured stone mansion, framed by palm trees and cactus groves, Prime Minister Tony Blair of Britain, the former colonial power from which the Commonwealth sprang, set the tone for the weekend.

"We talked about common issues, in particular the threat of terrorism," Blair said late Friday after emerging with Pak Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz from the British High Commissioner's residence in Malta.

"And we need to do all we possibly can to cooperate together to defeat it," Blair said on the rear steps of the residence, with Aziz on his right.

Though other Commonwealth countries like Kenya, Tanzania, Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka have also been hit hard by terrorism, Pakistan moved to the fore in the US-led war on terror in the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks.

Behind its main ally the United States, Britain gave support to Pakistan and its troops joined both US forces and those from Commonwealth nations like Australia in driving the Taliban and al-Qaeda from neighbouring Afghanistan.

Cooperation with Pakistan deepened when British police explored possible links between shadowy groups in Pakistan and three of the four British-born men who allegedly killed themselves and 52 commuters in London on July 7.

Nothing conclusive has emerged publicly linking the ethnic Pakistanis with their ancestral land.

"We have to stand together, we have to share security information, we have to go after those elements who are trying to destabilise the world," Aziz said.

It was one of the first of a whole array of weekend meetings between various Commonwealth leaders before the summit ends on Sunday, though most of them would not even be followed by a press briefing.

Threatening to overshadow the summit was the jailing of Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni's main rival in upcoming elections.

At a press conference with Malta's Prime Minister Lawrence Gonzi, Blair

said the arrest of opposition leader Kizza Besigye "is causing us a great deal of concern" and that he would discuss the matter with Museveni during the summit.

Blair told journalists one of the main Commonwealth principles was "proper respect for the proper functioning of democracy."

In a rambling news conference Friday, Museveni denounced "misinformation" surrounding the case against Besigye.

A Commonwealth human rights forum has said Uganda would not be appropriate as the planned venue for the next summit in 2007 because of its poor record on democracy and good governance.

Leaders of the Commonwealth, a loose collection of 53 mainly former British colonies, also heard a plea at their opening session from President Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigera for a "zero-tolerance" attitude to corruption.

"Corruption has been one of the major sources of under-development, instability, conflicts, illegitimation of leadership and government structures..." said Obasanjo, who hosted the last summit in 2003.

Obasanjo called for all Commonwealth states to "sign, ratify and implement" the UN Convention on corruption, which is due to come into force next month. Nigeria's view is that no member of the Commonwealth should remain outside the convention, a senior member of Abuja's delegation said.

The focus of the summit is to make a strong push for progress in tearing down trade barriers at next month's World Trade Organisation talks in Hong Kong and give poor countries greater access to rich markets.

Blair is being targeted here for lobbying by small countries -- the bulk of member states represented here -- to press for additional cuts in protective EU trade tariffs.

"It is trade not aid which in the long run will help make the difference. We have to fight poverty, we have to rebuild in the earthquake affected areas," Aziz said during the press conference with Blair.

Pakistan wanted a "level playing field, nothing more..." he said.

The summit was opened Friday morning amid pomp and ceremony in a Valetta conference centre by Britain's Queen Elizabeth II, who hailed the Commonwealth's spirit of solidarity, praising members for their generosity and aid after last December's tsunami in Asia, the London bombings in July and the devastating earthquake in Pakistan in October.

## Quake kills 14 in China

**REUTERS, Beijing**

An earthquake killed 14 people, injured nearly 400 and destroyed 8,500 homes in Jiangxi province in eastern China on Saturday morning, the official Xinhua agency reported.

Some 1,30,000 homes were damaged in the worst-hit Jiujiang and Ruicheng counties, while 4,20,000 people moved to safer areas. Emergency officials rushed tents to the zone to shelter the homeless and earthquake specialists flew down from Beijing.

The quake, which measured 5.7 on the Richter scale, hit at 8:49 am local time. It was followed around 20 minutes later by two aftershocks, Xinhua said.

## Group opposing

**FROM PAGE 16**

the secondary education system, the committee convenor said, adding, "If the plan is materialised, our new generation will face the greatest disaster."

Referring to the education minister's television interview where he said the main objective of the unified education system is to trim down differences between the mainstream secondary education and the madrasa education, he said madrasa education should be improved but the plan to bring down the standard of secondary education cannot be appreciated.

Those who do not have any concern for the nation are conspiring to move the education system 50 years backwards, and planning to change the education system into a "fundamentalist" one, he said, adding, "We urge the education minister or any official nominated by him to take part in a television debate on the issue."

Prof Iqbal urged the students of classes nine and ten to preserve their current textbooks and said the books that are being printed for the "unified system" will not be of any use for long.

Any attempt to initiate the "unified education system" by force will fail within a few months, eventually robbing 12 lakh students of their valuable time, he said.

"Teachers' authority to provide 30 per cent marks will open a floodgate for commercialisation of education."

"The new system downgrades one third of the science syllabus, whereas in addition to religious studies, another language (Arabic, Sanskrit or Pali) has been made compulsory, although religious education is not compulsory in any other country of the world except Afghanistan."

Business students have been made compulsory though there are no teachers of the subject in half of the schools of the country, and students of 1500 schools, who cannot take science stream due to lack of teachers, now will have to study science without any subject-based teachers, he said.

The authorities neither have preparation for the new system nor are the teachers properly informed or trained, Prof Iqbal said, adding that there is no information about the standard of the books under the system though their printing is going on in full swing, making arrangement for doubling the price.

He said some people have looted around Tk 500 crore in the name of formulating the system.

Dhaka University Teachers' Association President Prof AAMS Arefin Siddique, Abu Bakar Siddiq and Khan Mosharraf Hossain, Dr M Akhtaruzzaman, and Prof Kazi Faruq Ahmed spoke, among others, at the press conference.

## BNP reels

**FROM PAGE 1**

seeking anonymity told The Daily Star that the party chairperson should convene a meeting of standing committee or national executive committee for an open discussion about the issues, allowing the divergent opinions to be expressed.

A standing committee member of the party said the prime minister herself has voiced strong disapproval of the militants and termed them the enemies of the country and Islam. "So, before taking action against those speaking against the militants, she should first listen to them," he observed.

A senior leader of BNP said a section of the ruling party lawmakers and leaders in the country's northern and southern districts are patronising the militant groups, hoping that they [militants] will come in handy in the next election. But the tactics are very likely to backfire as those elements, which are now being considered as the party's "vote bank", may turn out to be strengthening Jamaat even more.

"If that happens, we might have to face a huge election debacle," observed the veteran leader.

Another quarter in the BNP however believes the militants are actually being patronised by an international force and the opposition parties.

BNP Vice-president and Communications Minister Nazmul Huda had blamed the alarming rise in the militant activities on the opposition and some anti-Jamaat Islamist organisations.

"The announcement of the opposition that extremism will not end until the government is toppled itself indicates that they [opposition] are the patrons of the extremists," Huda said at a party meeting in Dohar recently.

Corruption of some ministers is another issue that has angered BNP lawmakers as well as workers. A ruling party lawmaker, preferring not to be named, alleged that he had to bribe a minister a hefty amount for setting up a small power plant.

## Journos hit out

**FROM PAGE 1**

placed in parliament on Wednesday said, "I am in favour of adding a punitive provision to the act to make it effective and to strengthen the council."

Justice Ahammed, who was appointed the chairman of Bangladesh Press Council on May 26 this year, said amending the law has become an urgent matter. "I discussed the issue with the president, prime minister and information minister. They expressed their willingness to amend the provision," he said in the report.

**ATAUS SAMAD**  
Opposing the idea of inclusion of punitive provision in the Press Council Act, Ataus Samad said it may lead to further oppression and torture on the journalists.

"The issue is complex, because we journalists have always opposed the practice of taking us to criminal courts on the charge of defamation and being sent to jail or locked up," Samad told The Daily Star yesterday.

"We argued that complaints against us, when there are any, should be filed with the Press Council. But those who want us get punished, put forward the counter argument that the council doesn't have any punitive power, and therefore it is not effective," he said.

In such a situation, the Press Council chairman's recent recommendation may appear to have some grounds, he pointed out.

"But I feel that whatever the legal position, journalists have suffered for their work. They have been killed, beaten up and jailed. So, as journalists, we are rightly apprehensive that any proposal for punitive action against journalists will lead to further repression and torture," Samad continued.

He said: "We cannot ignore the fact that this proposal has come at a time when the ruling party lawmaker including the ministers have accused journalists from the floor of the parliament of indulging in yellow journalism."

"Therefore, we are left with no alternative but to suspect the recommendation of the chairman of the Press Council and to oppose it. However, the entire issue of laws relating to the press including access to information can be discussed by us with appropriate quarters on correct forums at a most suitable time" he said.

"I like to put on record that honourable ministers and members of the parliament as well as other important political figures frequently make 'yellow' speeches, which can easily put to shame the author of the 'yellowiest' writing published in any newspaper."

**REAZUDDIN AHMED**  
Jatiya Press Club President and the Editor of The News Today Reazuddin Ahmed told The Daily Star yesterday that the Press Council is like a quasi-judicial body, which monitors whether the journalists are following the ethics.

The inclusion of a punitive provision in the act goes against the very concept of the press council to make it as good as a court, he observed.

"There is no provision of appeal in the existing Press Council, but if punitive provision is included in the council, the system of appeal has to be included," he said.

Reazuddin said the Press Council can censure and admonish the errant newspapers and the reporters concerned. It can instruct the editor of the errant newspapers to carry the press council verdict in a designated place prescribed by the council.

He, however, suggested expediting the process of remedy to defamation through the Press Council to make it more effective. "One, if defamed

through any news item, goes to the Press Council to restore his fame. But, one of the weaknesses of the Press Council is that it prolongs the decision," Reazuddin pointed out.

**BFUJ STATEMENT**  
Meanwhile, leaders of the BFUJ and its front organisations have strongly condemned the move to enact a law aimed at controlling journalists and the mass media.

In the statement yesterday, they said the journalist community of the country would never accept any initiative to enact such law.

They said the journalists in the country would not let any vested quarter to curb their freedom that they achieved at a high price.

The leaders said they want an effective and reputable Press Council. But the incumbent government has been restraining the institution from playing its proper role by using it to serve its political interests.

The leaders laid emphasis on running the Press Council neutrally and independently shunning the path of its alleged partisan role.

The signatories to the statement include BFUJ President Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury, Secretary General Manjurul Anshul Bulbul, Dhaka Union of Journalists (DUJ) President Altaf Mahmud, General Secretary Shah Alamgir, Chittagong Union of Journalists (CUJ) President Moshtaque

Ahmed and General Secretary Shaheed Ul Alam, Khulna Union of Journalists (KUJ) President Makbul Hossain Mintu and General Secretary Md Saheb Ali, Rajshahi Union of Journalists (RUJ) President Mustafizur Rahman Khan and General Secretary Jaminur Rahman, Jessore Union of Journalists President Sajed Rahman and General Secretary Moinul Haq, Dinajpur Union of Journalists President Swaroop Kumar Bakshi and General Secretary Shaheen Hossain, Bogra Union of Journalists President AHM Akhtaruzzaman and General Secretary Mahmudur Rahman Monon, Mymensingh Union of Journalists President Kazi Yasin and General Secretary Ataul Karim.

## Hena to launch

**FROM PAGE 1**  
out plans in a couple of days."

The legislator on Friday hinted about 100 ruling BNP lawmakers and leaders will join hands with him against militancy in time.

Hena said several senior political leaders and members of the civil society and professional bodies have already congratulated him on his stance.

"I believe they will also stand against the rise of militancy in the country," said Hena, who was long involved in professionals' movements before joining politics.

The lawmaker hinted he would hold a series of discussions and rallies to gather public support before launching the movement.

However, the expelled BNP leader who is passing his days in panic categorically said he has no plan to form a new political party.

Hena, who had alleged a section of the government and BNP leaders are behind the rise of militants, said the people must resist the Frankenstein as the government is indifferent to this burning issue.

"There is no alternative to launching a vigorous movement against militancy and rampant corruption in the country."

On the recent statements of BNP's standing committee member Col (ret'd) Oli Ahmed, KM Obaidur Rahman and Whip Ashraf Hossain, Hena said it is a good sign that senior leaders are becoming vocal against the militants.

## Asian nations agree

**FROM PAGE 1**

China, Pakistan, Iran and Central Asia, right up to the Caspian Sea, Indian Petroleum Minister Mani Shankar Aiyar told reporters in New Delhi on Friday.

It was decided at the round-table dialogue that there was a need to take steps bilaterally, regionally as well as globally for networking the knowledge base of participating countries in the development of Asian gas and oil sector.

The meeting urged the Asian countries to work towards mutual cross investments in various upstream and downstream projects to reinforce trade in oil and gas.

It was emphasised that environment-friendly investment in upstream and downstream projects should be encouraged, that the investment climate should be improved to augment investment in the Asian oil and gas sector, a summary of the meetings said.

Asian countries, it added, may consider joining hands to undertake joint ventures towards developing modern oil and gas facilities with latest technology in upstream and downstream sectors of the oil and gas economy of the region.

In this context, emphasis was given to the importance of transparency in access to all relevant data relating to gas and oil reserves, demand, supply and investment.

India initiated the talks to extend the proposed Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan gas pipeline to include other

Asian countries including India, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan and Russia, Aiyar said.

He also spoke about the possibilities of extending the proposed Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline to include China and Myanmar.

"We could consider stretching the intended gas pipeline from Iran across the Gangetic plains and the Brahmaputra valley to Ledo, networking into Myanmar and carrying on to Kunming in China," Aiyar said.

In January this year, India had hosted a similar meeting of major Asian oil consumers and producers, seeking a common position to tackle Asian oil premium.

Despite Asia's growing influence in global energy markets, Asian importers pay about two dollars per barrel more to buy crude oil from the Middle East than their counterparts in Europe or the United States. About 70 per cent of Asia's oil comes from the Middle East.

Chinese Ambassador to India Sun Yuxi told the meeting that his country, the fastest-growing energy market, is set to build strategic reserves to avoid supply disruptions and is considering rapid scaling up investments in energy sector.

Up till now, Chinese oil companies have signed more than 200 agreements with foreign counterparts covering 1.05 million sq km and attracting foreign capital of nearly 9.3 billion dollars, he said.