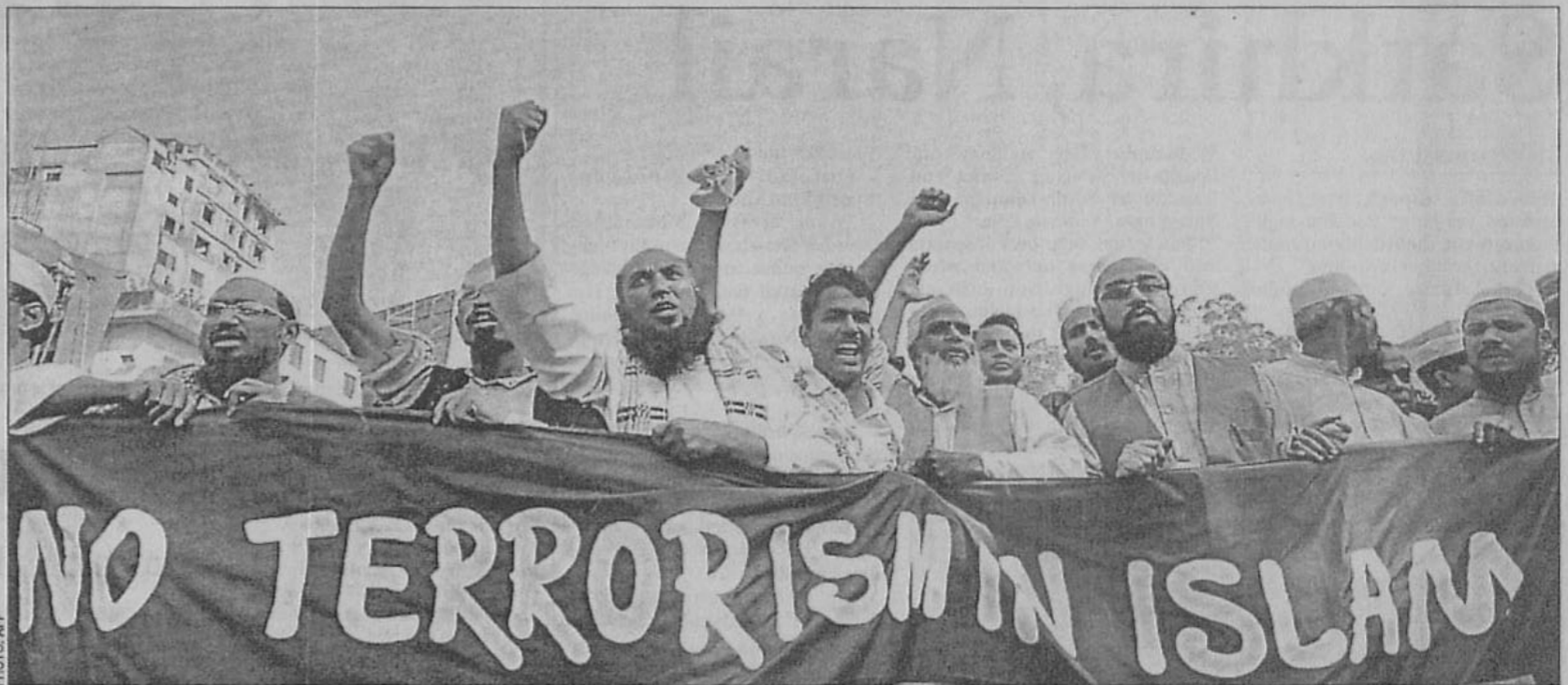


Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

How to stop religious extremism...

1. Influence and encourage the young people not to be religious extremists.
2. Offer good prospects like education, practical training and jobs to the young people.
3. The government must pay monthly extra salary to the Imams of mosques and Priests of churches and mandirs just like schoolteachers.
4. The Imams of all mosques, priests of all churches and mandirs must speak every week against all sorts of extremism.
5. In madrassahs and schools the teachers must teach the children tolerance and speak against religious extremism. To implement this make a law.
6. No political activities in schools/madrassahs (any student/teacher who does politics should be expelled from the school).
7. Offer amnesty to the people who are involved in such acts and give them security and practical training and jobs to survive.
8. Make a deal with our neighbouring countries so that they do not interfere in our internal affairs. They should not support/shelter/hide any terrorist/extremist/culprits from any neighbouring country. If any neighbouring country does this, file a case in the International Court of Justice, The Hague, Netherlands (<http://www.icj-cij.org/>) and bring it to the international attention. We should also follow the same principle.
9. Take the example of Europe; they never interfere in the internal affairs of their neighbours and they live peacefully side-by-side.
10. Make a law with death penalty and confiscation of property for the people who shelter /provide help to the extremists.
11. Make a law with death penalty and confiscation of property for the people who produce/ deposit/supply bomb making explosives materials.
12. Hold regional seminars and training programmes for the Imams and priests on democracy, international affairs, religious tolerance, humanity, human rights and social problems in the family and community.
13. Reward the people who help to catch religious extremists. Make massive advertisement in TV, radio and all newspapers regarding this.



Rising extremism and Jamaat

The Jamaat-e-Islami's method of establishing Islam is wrong, as it is contradictory to our Prophet's (Pbuh) teachings. The Jamaat men are not clear about their vision and mission. They want to establish an Islamic state but they are not Islamic when it comes to establishing it. Every Islamic teaching has its own method. For establishing Islam it has only one method and that is our Prophet's (Pbuh) method. Briefly, this method is non-violent and it doesn't accept anything non-religious. As Jamaat has no well defined principles, it changes its policy with the changing situation.

Taslim Hasan Sabu
University of Dhaka

The latest serial bombing in Gazipur has certainly put a new dimension to the already critical condition in Bangladesh. Recently, Bangladesh has seen these kinds of terrorism. These incidents pop up a question in mind.

The concept of JMB is not unknown to us. The existence of these people in Bangladesh was an open secret. Now the

question is, as they were gaining strength and developing a network of united people, how come our law enforcers were unaware of that? The Police/ CID in Bangladesh are not up to the standards that we need in a modern state. It is really shocking and surprising to see that some people are convincing those kids in madrassahs to do something as crazy and scary as suicide bombing? Give a break, what are they possibly telling them to pursue them into such a horrible thing?

The recent incidents are a wake up call for us all. We need to get united and do everything to protest and stop such acts. We cannot rely on the police.

We need our Islamic scholars to come up and express their views on such acts. We need to broadcast their views and thoughts. Come on, we need to make the zealots understand that doing such things cannot give them a ticket to heaven after death, but stopping people from doing that might.

Mahmudur Rahman Erash
Lalbagh Road, Azimpur-Dhaka



Bangladesh: next Iran?

Today Bangladesh faces the real possibility of becoming another Iran. If firm actions are not taken immediately, our generation will see Bangladesh transform from a developing and democratic country into an Islamic state, going back 1,500 years or more. We may blame the 'corrupt politicians' and a lack of support from the opposition parties, but the real blame will fall on both the present administration and on us as citizens.

Although a proposal of dialogue with the Awami League is well intended and, yes, the AL should have responded with an equally cooperative spirit, dialogues are useless. They do not and cannot prevent the current form of terrorism in the name of religion-- the form that is currently debasing both our democratic system and our religion. The government currently has the resources to launch anti-terrorist drives against these militant groups, if only it acts without the concern of the upcoming election and with a genuine concern for the future. For once, the administration must act without regard for political support for a better future because, frankly, there will be no future if nothing is done at present. If actions are not taken, the BNP will only disgrace its founder President Ziaur Rahman's vision of the country.

I hope that Rab and all other law enforcers will succeed in arresting and punishing the "religious extremists" for offending justice, democracy, and religion. They insult our institutions and all true believers of Islam.

The government should first blame itself for allowing such development under its nose and for ignoring reports from local and international organisations. Second, it should do everything to rectify its mistake by putting a stop to this threat with tough and, if necessary, ruthless measures. This is not a time for mercy toward those who act with no respect for innocent Bangladeshi citizens. They do not differentiate among children, government officials, policemen, or future scholars studying in a small library. They think neither of the present, nor the future. They do not deserve mercy, nor even the benefit of doubt.

Furthermore, it is important for true religious leaders to start a mass campaign on the true teachings of Islam to prevent the youths from acting on religious lies. I believe in our democratic system and I have faith that our leaders will act in the best interest of Bangladesh. I hope the government will act to prevent Bangladesh from becoming another Iran or Afghanistan.

Tishan Mahfuz
One-mail

Ruling party's lapse

There is no sense in trying to make an imaginary enemy when the culprit is in you. It is quite clear now that if the BNP led government took proper steps much earlier to arrest and prosecute Bangla Bhai and similar other militants, the escalation of violence wouldn't have happened. It is a pity that BNP leaders are acting childishly in the midst of this severe insecurity in the country by comparing the situation to the AL era. As a matter of fact, in this respect, the AL should get the credit since it didn't have the crack Rab to help them out in containing the terrorist activities. In contrast, the inadequacy of the BNP led coalition government becomes more evident when we can still read news about criminals getting killed in crossfire, but at the

same time the perpetrators and the warlords behind the bombings (they are prominent figures) are still there. Not only that, these so called militants continue to throw grenades and train misdirected religious zealots (under the nose of Rab) to blow themselves up and take the lives of innocent people.

May be it would be the right decision for the BNP government to resign now as they have slowly and deliberately taken the country to a state of chaos and corruption where the enemies of the people of Bangladesh are thriving. Or, we should accept the demands of the militants and get rid of all courts and judicial system!

Imran Khan
San Diego, CA, US

Government's failure

Reference to the letter "Inefficient government" by Mr. Naushad, Mohammadpur, Dhaka, published on Friday Dec 02, 2005, the majority will agree that the current government has proved itself to be totally inefficient.

There must be a constitutional provision for handling any political crisis like the one we are passing through.

The fundamentalists very well realise that they cannot come to power through a democratic process so they are looking for extra constitutional opportunities. The nation should be on guard against creation of such opportunities.

Emran Mahmud
On-email

Dhaka-Agartala road

With the introduction of double entry visa, Agartala-Dhaka Kolkata bus service has become more attractive and significant. The number of passengers has increased considerably and services by BRTC and TRIC have earned reputation by this time.

Unfortunately, the road of around 15 Km between Gobra and Sonardi in B. Baria district is in deplorable condition. The road is so narrow and congested that one bus and a three-wheeler cannot cross each other conveniently. On both sides of the road, there are small unauthorised houses and shops that an air-conditioned bus is interrupted almost every minute. The experience of travelling through this route is alarming and any time there could be a fatal accident.

This scenario of this international route gives a very bad impression about Bangladesh while we are proud of our road transport system for its superiority.

Our earnest request to the Ministry of Communications and Brahmanbaria district administration is: evict the unauthorised occupants, improve road condition with reconstruction and make this international route danger free and more attractive.

Kumar Prithwiraj Nath
One-mail

Prospects of a dialogue

I am writing you this letter in response to the editorial entitled "Have the events of the past week changed nothing?" (dated: 4.12.05) Yes, we do believe that the opposition is not doing any good to the nation by rejecting the offer of dialogue. But the news items and their analyses published in national dailies including The Daily Star (e.g. the one by Zayadul Ahsan entitled "Party leaders' stance contradicts PM's talks call" dated 1.12.05) over the last couple of months raise a big question in the minds of many: who the parties

are to be in the so called dialogue? If your son is killed and you know who the killer is, would you feel comfortable if you are asked to sit in a dialogue with the killer? Or should you go to the court? Wouldn't it hurt you much more if you are asked to sit in a compromise deal? You have identified many negative attitudes in the opposition parties especially in the AL but you did not see any of those in the ruling party. You should have urged the government to take immediate action against those who fed and promoted the emergence of JMB.

Some ruling party stalwarts are alleged to have a nexus with the JMB cadres. Don't you think the government should have taken action (e.g. put them under enquiry) against these elements once such a serious allegation came in the media? Do you believe that a dialogue with those who made the JMB for their own interests would be of any use to identify the real culprits? Do you think a dialogue where the Jamaat is present would yield any result at all? Don't you think that their expulsion from the government mechanism and putting them under fair trial would not call for such a dialogue at all; or at least could ease the environment for such a dialogue?

At this moment what is most important is to put those responsible, in one way or another for the rise of JMB and killing of innocent people, to immediate trial. Has any of the prosecution against the JMB been really finished yet? How many of the cadres are now on bail? You know

better than anyone else so please, for the nation's sake, don't say that the dialogue would rescue the nation.

For your information, there will be no power vacuum if the ruling party quits. The BNP was trying to play some monkey game before surrendering power to the caretaker government before the 1996 election. People will give the solution if they do not want to see the ruling party any longer in power. But that is not really the issue. The issue is to take proper action against the culprits and the men providing them shelter under the canopy of power.

Is there any guarantee that a new government will really put JMB and their proponents on trail? There is a possibility of course, only if the new government does not have to share power with Jamaat or JMB proponents.

Tulaknanda Hoomayara
Sydney

BCS question leakage

A friend of mine, who was a good student, sat for the 27th BCS preliminary test. Before the exam, he went to washroom, where he overheard a candidate asking another to answer to several questions. In the exam hall, he found his chagrin that those questions he overheard were all in the question paper. He, and tens of thousands of applicants felt cheated on their life-long aspiration that day.

The PSC has steadfastly refused to admit the leak. They claimed there is no conclusive evidence. They have reason to be confident.

The leaked questions, later I learned, were handled very carefully this time. Those few holding the questions released them at a high price at the university halls only the night before the exam. Fearing detective watch, no photocopy was made; only pens and carbon papers were used. They were communicated to distant places over mobile phone. In the exam halls, those who got the

questions stopped after answering about 90 questions, in case scores become too good. All these apparently left little evidence.

But it will be naïve to expect that culprits will leave smoking guns behind. A thorough and honest investigation will find finer clues, and Both the PSC and the government in their own interest need to identify and punish the culprits. After repeated leak allegations, PSCs credibility is at an all time low. This time the government's credibility took a serious blow with allegations that student leaders from their political parties were involved in it.

PSC need to do another thing: cancel the exam and arrange a new one. Honest examinees have paid for the exam, now they are not asking for a second chance; they are asking for the first chance that was not really given to them.

If PSC fails to do so, any aggrieved examinee can file a writ petition asking for it. Mobile companies keep record of all conversations. One Phone Company's particular package, which is very popular among students for low cost, was massively used that night. All it takes is to have a court serve a subpoena for the call records of that night, and the case is made.

Ashish Ahsan
Utara, Dhaka

Spirit of Hajj

Notwithstanding my unflinching conviction in the morale of Hajj, being one of the tenets of Islam, I would contend that the spirit of Hajj, it had once been imbued with, does not reflect in its present day fashionable performance. It is a tragedy for the Muslims across the world that they are unable to use the largest congregation like Hajj to the benefit of the ummah. One may argue, why, are not people going to the pilgrimage and performing the duty made obligatory upon them? Such observations are one-sided and lose sight of the objective of Hajj, i.e. the unity and solidarity of the faithful to fight against the enemies of humanity. It is not an individual devotee's personal relation with God. It creates a unique scope for the world Muslims to talk, to know, to understand, to feel, to sympathise with each other and take a common programme and strategy for the benefit of all. If these programmes are not in the agenda, Hajj would be nothing short of a enjoyable trip in a fashionable way by the rich and moneyed men. The greatness of Hajj lies in its creating scope for the Muslims to congregate at a place on a particular period of the year, so that besides religious rituals, they may discuss matters concerning the interest of the people of the world, in general and Muslims in particular. The message of the Prophet (Pbuh) in his farewell address on the eve of Hajj may be recalled in reference. He made it clear to the audience that in Islam; there is no discrimination of men or women on the basis of race, colour, language, religion or tribe. Everyone is equal to the Almighty. There is no provision for master or servant, landlord or landless, ruler or ruled, privileged or under privileged.

These superbly humanistic calls are now spectacularly absent from the message of Hajj. Instead, Hajj has now become a criteria for social etiquette and affluence. There is no denying the fact that a good number of Hajjis now come from highly affluent society, whose income source is suspiciously controversial. Many of these happy go lucky people performed Hajj more than ten times, as regular and irregular (umra) Hajjis. Considering the financial involve-

ment an optional (non obligatory) Hajj means a further drain on the foreign exchange being spent every year on account of Hajj. Half the amount of foreign exchange could be saved by imposing restriction on performing Hajj not more than once. I don't think such promulgation on the part the government will be taken as an infringement on the religious rights of a citizen.

To the contrary, it should be hailed as a right decision, in view of the miserable economic situation the nation is passing through. Islam and for that matter, all religions of the world are essentially meant for a better, happier human life.

Siddiqui Islam
Middle Haliahahar Bandar
Chittagong

It's time to act

I appreciated the editorial on Dec 02, 05 which appealed for a national dialogue. Having seen the recent spate of violence and especially suicide bombing, it is high time that we all act in concert to safeguard the interest of our country on top of everything. The question is are we doing that?

I read the prime minister inviting the opposition and all others to discuss the ways to combat religious terrorism. I was hoping against hope that the opposition would pay heed to the call. The BNP fervently requested not to put up any precondition for a dialogue. Alas! The call went in vein. Is it the right time to think about the issue of reforming the caretaker government as a precondition for dialogue when the country is in dire straits? Is it time to think about political goals, leaving aside the country itself? Let us join hands and fight these religious extremists. It is not the time to put a condition that places political interest above the country. Fighting extremism deserves higher priority over the caretaker issue, always and every time.

I fully acknowledge that the onus of responsibility is on the government. Let us not forget, had the government been little cautious, this would not have happened. After all, they vehemently ignored the threat that every one saw much before. Having said so, my request to the opposition would be to give country a chance. Join the dialogue. You have nothing to lose. The country will acknowledge your intention in due time. This is not the time to talk politics. It is time to act. Should we delay, we may well recover from this vicious cycle but it would be too late by then. Let us not give scope to the world to think we are going down the path of violence. Let us show the world, we are different. The name of that difference is Bangladesh.

It is high time for the government to act. Act fast. In dealing with religious extremists, speed is crucially important. Let's not forget, our reputation as a peace loving country is at stake. We must mete out fast and exemplary punishment. It has to be tough and will require bold action beyond normal law. If that is the case, we may contemplate amending the law.

To all political parties, remember you are at a crossroads when the whole world is watching.

Rimon Mahmud
Toronto, Canada

Blame game

Now the situation of the country is critical. Different parties are trying to blame their rivals for it. But this will not help us achieve our goal neutralising the terrorist threat.

Kashem
One-mail