said to be 'the language of the Hindus', but we fought for our identity, we are still proud of fighting the communal forces out of our beloved country. So why now are we taking a step in the wrong direction? Why now should we let ourselves be led away from our beliefs by a group of people who use religion to advance their political ambitions?

In the 1991 elections Jamaat won 18 seats in Parliament (BNP won), in the 1996 elections they won 3 seats in Parliament (AL won) and in 2001 they again won 17 seats (BNP-led four-party coalition won the elections). So when my friend calls me up and says we should be happy if Jamaat wins 15 seats at this year's election it makes me think how



this party has such a stronghold over the country's politics. It's still a mystery as to why other political parties have so little faith in their own strength that they need to form coalitions with religious groups. Even Awami League, which wins the most votes from minority groups, had a brief romance with a religious political outfit Khelafat-e-Majlish just before emergency was declared, terming it a "tactical electoral ploy".

But religious political groups are not the only threat to secular values. There are the three terrorist groups -- Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), Harkatul Jihad Al Islami (HUJI) which recently floated Islamic Democratic Party (IDP) but were thankfully denied registration by the EC and the 'non-violent' Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT) Bangladesh.

In 2005 JMB carried out a near-simultaneous series of blasts in 63 of 64 districts across Bangladesh, planting 458 locally made bombs, and handed out leaflets which said, "We are the soldiers of Allah. We've taken up arms for the implementation of Allah's law the way the Prophet, Sahabis [companions of the Prophet] and heroic Mujahideen have done for centuries.... It is time to implement Islamic law in Bangladesh". The group was also responsible for unleashing a reign of terror all over Bangladesh that year by blowing up court houses, press clubs and schools, summary executions of innocent villagers and sending out letters with bomb threats. Harkat-ul-Jihad gained notoriety for terrorising the nation since the early nineties. It had attempted to kill Awami League President Sheikh Hasina, and stands accused of carrying out the August 21 grenade attack on an AL rally in 2004. The JMB/HUJI threats seem to be looming large once again before the election only three days away. The Special Security Forces (SSF) has stated that both Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia are targets for terrorist attacks. The activities of the HT are a little less easier to follow. With headquarters in Britain and operating in more than 100 countries its members are teachers in universities some of whom were arrested this year for distributing leaflets asking for everyone to join in their campaign to "take oath for establishing the rule of Khilafat by dethroning the present ruler" (the caretaker government) and to "unite Muslims and revive their lost glory".

Jugnu Mohsin Managing Editor and Publisher of The Friday Times, Lahore writes the story of 21-year-old Ajmal 'Qasai', the sole surviving terrorist of the Mumbai attacks (dubbed India's 9/11). Ajmal's story is not unique. It is a story of many poor Pakistanis who have taken to jihad and radical Islam as a way of claiming an identity and a livelihood in a state that has failed to provide both. Amir Qasai, Ajmal's father, like many other fathers was poor and could not educate his sons or marry off his daughter. A similar story no doubt to the many young men in the poverty-stricken villages all over Bangladesh, recruited by these groups for their 'cause'.

In India and in Pakistan, as well as in Bangladesh the ever-widening gap between the rich and the poor has been a major cause for disillusionment and frustration amongst the burgeoning majority (i.e. the poor). Any government that comes to power must address this issue. I think about Dhaka 15 years ago when Eid shopping meant going to New Market and Gawsia. There were all kinds of people shopping at the same place; no one felt out of place and no one had to dress a certain way to shop there. Now there are guards in front of the fancy malls, there is an unspoken understanding of who can enter them and who should be shopping at their rightful place in New Market. The buzzword is that we are trying to become 'Singapore'. Singapore is a great place, hardly any poverty. Unfortunately Bangladesh is only pining to become one percent Singapore. And the rest?

While a rise in the number of people joining extremist groups shows a clear sign of the disillusionment faced by the poor and the governments' failure to address the issues, successive governments have also failed to address violence and prejudicial attitude towards religious minorities. It's