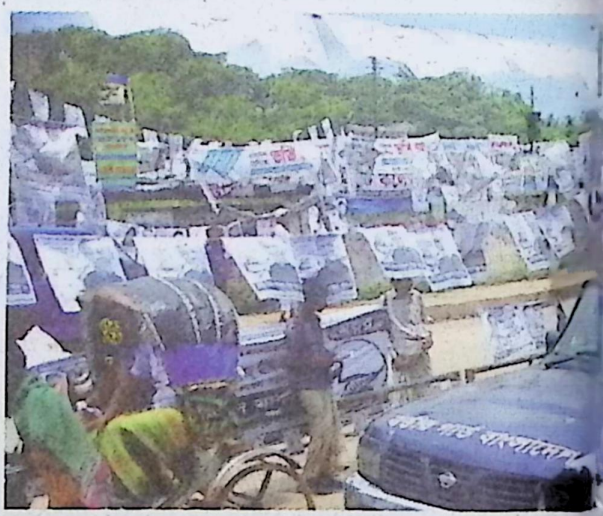
MIXING RELIGION WITH POLITICS

An otherwise little known group Hefazat-e-Islam has become instrumental in winning election, especially at a time when everyone has thought that secularism in Bangladesh taking a strong foothold. Political use of religion–especially Islam–is back, and it seems to have all the ingredients to turn the nation's politics upside down. Both the major parties are using Islam indiscriminately, setting a dangerous trend for Bangladesh's future polity.



ANANTA YUSUF

The sun is high up in the sky and Nasir Uddin an octogenarian, in all white, slowly comes down the stairs of Gazipur Hawker Market. As he reaches the footpath, he gets closer to see a journalist interview some ordinary citizens. He joins the conversation a little while later and expresses his anger about the political situation of the country. He says that though the city is new, its politicians are nothing but the same old faces, diligently producing the garbage that they do everywhere else in the country.

Asked about what he feels about the political use of religion in the country, he says: "What I have learnt in all these years is that these politicians have little to do with Islam and everything to do with political power. Just before each and every election they use Islam; they abuse Islam and all of a sudden every politician has become a pious man only to get the throne. I saw a group of Jamaate-e-Islam men with Hefazat leaders campaigning on the road for Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) supported aspirant MA Mannan. They clasped a copy of holy Quran to their chest and pledged to defend their religion. They asked people not to vote for the atheists and to opt for believers, which is completely a violation of Quranic doctrine. Quran never permits people to use the holy book in dirty politics."

As soon as he finishes his words, a distant shout starts to float in the air from all directions, Gazipur roundabout is about to be flooded with Alem, Olama (scholars) and Bangladesh Islamic Foundation members. The group of Olama gathered in Dhaka-Mymensingh road is about to begin an election campaign for Awami-league supported candidate Azmat Ullah Khan. We move into the