

1975 Bangladesh coup illegal: court

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Haroon Habib

DHAKA: In a historic judgment, the High Court of Bangladesh has declared the tenures of three unconstitutional rulers — Khondoker Moshtaque Ahmed, Justice Abu Sadat M. Sayem and Major General Ziaur Rahman — illegal and void.

The Court also declared the Fifth Amendment to the Constitution, which ratified all martial law ordinances and orders, including the legalisation of the assassination of the country's founding father Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1975, illegal. The High Court Bench comprising Justices ABM Khairul Haq and ATM Fazle Kabir, however, noted that although all government activities between August 1975 and 1979 had been declared illegal, history could not be altered.

It said Khandker Mushtaque Ahmed's assumption of power on August 15, 1975 after the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, placing the country under martial law, and taking the office of President by the Proclamation of August 20, 1975 were "in clear violation of the constitution and was done without lawful authority."

"Consequently, all his subsequent actions as President of Bangladesh were illegitimate and void," it observed. "Being beyond the ambit of the constitution, the handing over of the Martial Law Authority's office to Maj. Gen. Ziaur Rahman, by Abu Sadaat Mohammad Sayem by the Third Proclamation on November 29, 1976, enabling the latter to exercise the powers of Chief Martial Law Administrator, was illegal and done without lawful authority," it added. The judges also referred to the assumption of power by Gen. Zia, husband of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and foun-

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• Judgment stayed by a chamber judge of the Appellate Division; will be heard by the full Bench of Appellate Division

der of the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), on April 21, 1977, and observed that it was also "beyond the ambit of the Constitution and as such illegal."

About the Referendum of 1977 on Gen. Zia's Presidency during the Martial Law, the High Court termed it was "unknown to the Constitution." The court, however, observed that due to the necessity of the state, "such a legal wrong can be condoned in certain circumstances" invoking the Doctrine of Necessity.

The landmark judgment was over a writ filed by Muksudul Alam, managing director of Moon Cinema of old Dhaka, who wanted the cinema hall back. It was declared "abandoned property" in 1973, following independence in 1971. However, various constitutional experts said the judgment has "come too late." Eminent jurist M. Zahir has termed the judgment "admirable." The former Law Minister, Abdul Matin Khasru, said, "Though too late, it's a bold judgment. We hope the Appellate Division will uphold it, for they are bound by oath to protect the Constitution." The judgment was, however, stayed by a chamber judge of the Appellate Division on Monday night. It will now be heard by the full bench of the Appellate Division.

AM: 1977
THE

বাংলাদেশ আক্রান্ত

চুপ থাকা ঠিক নয়

এটি কোনও বাহানা নয়। আত্মপক্ষ সমর্থনের যুক্তিও নয়। বিনীতভাবেই বলছি,

বাহারউদ্দিন

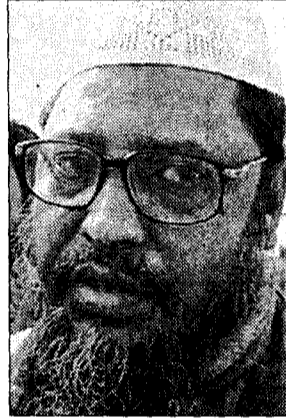
দিয়েছিলেন জামাত-এ-ইসলামির প্রতিষ্ঠাতা আবুল আলা মওদুদী। তাঁরও লক্ষ্য ছিল

বাংলাদেশের ঘরোয়া মামলা, রাজনৈতিক পছন্দ-অপছন্দ নিয়ে আমরা বিলকুল মাথা ঘামাতে চাই না। কেউ কেউ মনে করেন, অহরহ বলেও থাকেন, বাঙালির জাতিরাষ্ট্র সম্পূর্ণ বিচ্যুত, ধর্মীয় ও পরনির্ভর হয়ে উঠছে। আমরা তা বলি না। বিশ্বাসও করি না। বরং দৃঢ়তার সঙ্গে মনে করি, এই ভুখণ্ড পুরোপুরি স্বাধীন, সার্বভৌম ও গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী এবং আমাদেরই জাতিসত্তার অবিচ্ছেদ্য অংশ। সে ধর্মরাষ্ট্রের পথে আদৌ পা বাড়াইনি। তার বিচারব্যবস্থা, প্রশাসনিক কাঠামো, রাজনৈতিক আশা-আকাঙ্ক্ষা ভেতর-বাইরের নানা চাপের মধ্যে থেকেও ধর্মনিরপেক্ষতার সুন্দরকে ছেড়ে দেয়নি। যতদিন বাংলা ভাষা বেঁচে থাকবে, অটুট থাকবে একুশের ভাবাদর্শ, যতদিন তাকে উৎসাহ জোগাবে মুক্তিযুদ্ধের প্রেরণা, ততদিনই সে ধর্মীয় উগ্রতা ও মৌলবাদের কুৎসিতের বিরুদ্ধে লড়াই করবে। হ্যাঁ, তার লড়াই ক্রমশ বাড়ছে, প্রবল হচ্ছে। লড়াই বলেই হুকুমত-এ-এলাহি (খোদার শাসনব্যবস্থা) কয়েম করার দাবিদারদের বর্বরোচিত হামলায় বারবার আক্রান্ত হচ্ছে। বাংলাদেশের মানুষই এর বিরুদ্ধে লড়াই করবে। তাঁরাই প্রধানত লড়াই করবে। এই লড়াই সংশয়হীন এবং লক্ষ্যময়। তাঁদের লক্ষ্য জাতিসত্তার পূর্ণাঙ্গ বিকাশ, লক্ষ্য ধর্মনিরপেক্ষতা ও স্বনির্ভরতার চূড়ান্ত প্রতিষ্ঠা। এ-সব

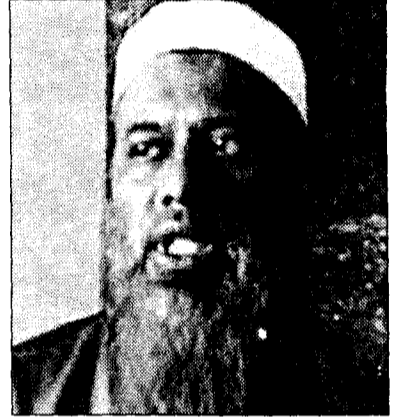
হুকুমত-এ-এলাহির (ঈশ্বরের শাসনব্যবস্থা) পূর্ণাঙ্গ প্রতিষ্ঠা। সশস্ত্র বিপ্লবের ডাক দিয়েছিলেন তিনিও। গামাল আবদুল নাসেরের মিশর কিংবা নেহরু-জিয়ার ভারত সৈয়দ কুতুবের ইখওয়ানুল মুসলিমিন অথবা মওদুদীর জামাতকে আমল দেয়নি। কিন্তু তাঁদের ভাবাদর্শের মৃত্যুও ঘটেনি। আফগানিস্তানের তালিবানদের সংহত করে লাদেন-পুত্র উসামাও ওয়াহাবি বিপ্লবীদের ভাব ও আদর্শকে বিশ্বময় করে তুলতে চেয়েছেন। তাঁর সশস্ত্র কৌশল আজ সভ্যতার অন্যতম সফট। কাশ্মীরের হিজবুল মুজাহিদিন, জৈশ-এ-মুহম্মদি, কিংবা লক্ষর-এ-তৈবার সঙ্গেও আমরা নিশ্চিত, হুকুমত-এ-এলাহি প্রতিষ্ঠার অছিলায় বাংলাদেশের বহু কলঙ্কিত এই 'বাংলা ভাইয়ে'র সরাসরি যোগাযোগ গড়ে উঠেছে। সন্দেহ নয়, এটি আমাদের সপ্রমাণ বিশ্বাস। বিশ্বাসের কারণ, তাত্ত্বিক একাত্মতা। কারণ, সশস্ত্র বিপ্লবের হুমকি ও সন্ত্রাস। কারণ, বাংলা ভাইয়ের আন্তর্জাতিক ও অভ্যন্তরীণ যোগাযোগ। কারণ, তালিবান শিবিরে তার প্রশিক্ষণ। কারণ, মোল্লা ওমর-শাসিত আফগানিস্তানে তার ঘনিষ্ঠ সহযোগীদের প্রবেশ ও অস্ত্রশিক্ষা। কারণ, কাবুল থেকে ঘুরে এসেই তাদের 'জাগ্রত বাংলা' গঠন ও প্রকাশ্য স্লোগান— 'বাংলা হবে আফগান, আমরা হব তালিবান'। আমাদের সংশয়হীন বিশ্বাসের



বাংলাভাই



ড. গালিব



আবদুর রহমান

উদ্দেশ্য মহৎ ও মানবিক বলেই একুশে ফেব্রুয়ারির, ষাটের দশকের গণ-আন্দোলনের এবং স্বাধীনতা যুদ্ধের পরাজিত, অমানবিক শক্তিজোট একই দিনে, বিশ মিনিটের মধ্যে ওদেশের ৬৪ জেলার ৬৩টিতে ৫১০ বিস্ফোরণ ঘটিয়ে পেশি প্রদর্শন করছে। তারা বলতে চেয়েছে, তারা জাগ্রত, সশ্লিষ্ট, তারা শক্তিমান এবং ধর্মনিরপেক্ষতা ও মুক্তিযুদ্ধের চেতনার একচ্ছত্র বিরুদ্ধ শক্তি। তাদের এই হামলা ও চ্যালেঞ্জ কেবল বাংলাদেশের মানুষের বিরুদ্ধে নয়, বাঙালির অখণ্ড জাতিসত্তা এবং উপমহাদেশের লোকায়ত ভাবাদর্শেরও বিরুদ্ধে। আমরা মনে করি না, উত্তরবঙ্গের একটি কাঠ মোল্লা ও কুৎসিত সন্ত্রাসী সিদ্দিকুল ইসলাম ওরফে বাংলা ভাইয়ের 'ধর্মযোদ্ধার দল'ই (জামাত-উল-মুজাহিদিন) এই হামলার একমাত্র কারিগর। সে আর তার গোষ্ঠী অবশ্যই এখন সামনে, কিন্তু আড়ালে আছে আরও অনেক বড় বড় মাথা আর দেশি-বিদেশি সংগঠন। এই যেমন, লাদেন-পুত্র উসামার (উসামা বিন লাদেন) আল কায়দা, লক্ষর-এ-তৈবা, জৈশ-এ-মুহম্মদি ও আফগান তালিবানদের সুগঠিত মিলিত শক্তিও তাকে সরাসরি সাহস ও সশস্ত্র কৌশল জোগাচ্ছে। ৬৩ জেলার বিভিন্ন বিস্ফোরণস্থলে ছড়ানো ইস্তাহার ও প্রচারপত্র এর সবচেয়ে বড় প্রমাণ। ইস্তাহারে বলা হয়েছে, 'মুসলিম ভূখণ্ডে খোদার বিধান ছাড়া অন্য কোনও আইন চলতে পারে না। নিম্ন কিংবা উচ্চ আদালতে মানুষের তৈরি অনুশাসন বরদাস্ত করা উচিত নয়। মানুষ হিসেবে আমাদের কাজ আল্লার দাসত্ব এবং তাঁরই বিধানের প্রতি প্রস্তুত হওয়া। এ-সব যাঁরা মানেন না, যারা মনুষ্য তৈরির বিধানকে সামনে রেখে শাসন চালায়, তারা খোদার শত্রু, ইসলামের শত্রু। এদের ক্ষমতা থেকে ছুঁড়ে ফেলতে হবে। জামাত-এ-মুজাহিদিন আল্লাহরই ফৌজি বাহিনী। তাদের আহ্বান, ইসলামি অনুশাসনকে (নিজাম-এ-মোস্তাফা) সামনে রেখে গড়তে হবে তওহীদের (এক ঈশ্বরের) রাজত্ব। সুপরিচালিত এই ইস্তাহার তাত্ত্বিক দিক থেকে অত্যন্ত সুগঠিত এবং আল কায়দারই ভাবাদর্শে লিখিত। বলা দরকার, মিশরে একসময় হাসান আল বান্নার ভাবশিষ্য সৈয়দ কুতুবের ইখওয়ানুল মুসলিমিন (মুসলিম আত্মসম্ম) এই আদর্শই প্রচার করত। তিরিশ ও চল্লিশের দশকে ভারতের স্বাধীনতা যুদ্ধ ও গণতন্ত্রের আকাঙ্ক্ষাকে এই 'আদর্শের' ভিত্তিতেই কুফরি (ঈশ্বর-বিরোধী বলে উড়িয়ে

আর-এক ভিত্তি, প্রধান ভিত্তি হচ্ছে এই যে, মোল্লা ওমর আর উসামার মস্তিষ্ক থেকে নিজের মস্তিষ্কে, উসামার ভাবাবেগ থেকে নিজের ভাবাবেগকে, আল কায়দার কৌশল থেকে নিজের কৌশলকে, তালিবানদের সন্ত্রাস থেকে নিজের আত্মসী সন্ত্রাসকে বাংলাভাই কখনও আলাদা করেনি। ওমর-উসামার লড়াইকে বরাবর তারই লড়াই ভেবেছে। আজও ভাবেছে। আজও সে তাদের সৈনিক, তাদেরই সহোদর, তাদেরই বাংলাদেশি প্রবক্তা। এ-সব কারণেই আমরা মনে করি, উসামা যেমন যে-কোনও জাতিরাষ্ট্রের, যে-কোনও জাতিসত্তার এবং সভ্যতা ও মানবতার শত্রু, যেরকম এ-সবের পয়লা নম্বর দুশমন জর্জ বুশ, যেরকম জৈশ-এ-মুহম্মদির মাসুদ আজহার, যেরকম মহারাষ্ট্রের বাল ঠাকরে কিংবা গুজরাটের প্রবীণভাই তোগাডিয়া, ঠিক তেমন বর্বরতার ওজনে বাঙালির শুভ্রতা, স্বপ্ন, ঐক্য ও ঐতিহ্যের জঘন্যতম শত্রুর নাম নাজির-পুত্র সিদ্দিক। বাংলাদেশের সত্তার ওপর তার যে-কোনও হামলা আমাদের ওপরেও হামলা, তার যে-কোনও হুমকি আমাদের বিরুদ্ধেও হুমকি। তার যে-কোনও বর্বরতা ঘায়েল করে আমাদেরও চোখকে, শ্রুতিকে, স্বপ্ন ও আকাঙ্ক্ষাকে, গোটা জাতিসত্তাকে। বাংলাদেশ যেমন আক্রান্ত ও আহত, আমরাও তেমনই। বাংলাদেশের রক্ত ঝরেছে সরাসরি। আমাদের 'রক্তক্ষরণ হৃদয়ে' ভাবাবেগে এবং গভীর উদ্বেগে। অতএব, আমরা আর চুপ থাকতে পারি না, চুপ থাকা উচিত নয়। উদ্বেগ ও ভাবাবেগকে ভাষায়, প্রতিবাদে, মিছিলে, সশ্লিষ্ট প্রতিজ্ঞায়, প্রতিরক্ষায় খাড়া করা দরকার। দরকার প্রবল প্রস্তুতি ও লড়াইয়ের। কেন না স্বাস্থ্যময় ও স্থিতিশীল বাংলাদেশ আমাদেরও স্বপ্ন, যে-কোনও বাঙালিরই আকাঙ্ক্ষা। বাংলাদেশ লড়াই। আমরা কেন লড়াই না? আক্রান্ত পূর্বখণ্ড ধুকছে, আমরাও পাশে দাঁড়িয়ে ধুকছি, নীরবে, নিঃশব্দে। কেন এই নিঃশব্দ? কেন নয় সহস্র প্রতিবাদ, ধিক্কার ও তর্জনীর গর্জন? হ্যাঁ, মেনে নিচ্ছি, রাষ্ট্রবিধাতার নিষ্ঠুর ইচ্ছায় বাংলাদেশ আমাদের প্রতিবেশী। কিন্তু প্রতিদ্বন্দ্বী নয়। মন ও মননে, কথা ও কথকতায়, চিরায়ত ঐতিহ্যের উত্তরাধিকারে আমরা অবিচ্ছেদ্য ও অভিন্ন। অতএব, বাংলাদেশে দুর্বৃত্তের হামলা আমাদেরই জমিন ও দেহের ওপর হামলা। একে রুখতে হবে। লড়াইতে হবে। বলতে হবে, বর্বর বাংলাভাই সাবধান, আর-এক পা বাড়ালেই খান খান।

DANGER SIGNALS

¹⁹⁷⁸ ¹⁹⁷⁸ ⁸⁹
The violence in Bangladesh raises serious questions about the future of freedom in that country. Unprecedented though it was, spread across 63 of the 64 districts, it is not just the scale of the violence that is the most worrying aspect of it. Its impact on the government of Ms Khaleda Zia is also of minor consequence. What is far more disturbing is the threat that the perpetrators of the violence pose to civilized values in Bangladesh. The ominous signals came from the choice of their targets. Institutions that represent civil liberties and democratic values — such as government offices, courts, universities and press clubs — were the prime targets. The message was that Islamic law must be founded in Bangladesh on the ruins of all secular and democratic institutions. And terror must be the key to the setting up of the new dispensation. *Ben W...*

The Zia regime must take the blame for the country's dangerous drift. Many countries and civil liberties organizations had warned Dhaka of the danger of Islamic fundamentalism in Bangladesh. Murderous attacks on secular politicians, journalists, writers and women activists of non-government organizations had become routine and were aimed at destroying all challenges to Islamic regimentation. Yet, the government seemed to have ignored the threats; worse, elements within the establishment were suspected to have connived at sectarian violence and threats for narrow political gains. The presence of two Islamic parties in Ms Zia's coalition government may have influenced her strategy on the fundamentalist groups. Even when the government banned some of them under international pressure, the step was seen as both insincere and inadequate.

The disturbing developments in Bangladesh cannot but add to New Delhi's worries. With a porous border between the countries running to some 4,000 kilometres, religious fanatics in Bangladesh can threaten India's security. The influx of illegal migrants from Bangladesh into India has long been a major irritant in bilateral relations between the two neighbours. Dhaka's refusal to accept the fact is justifiably seen in New Delhi as an act of connivance. The other issue of the Northeastern militants using Bangladeshi territory for arms training and shelters has caused even greater tensions. Wednesday's bomb blasts would not help matters between the two countries. After a long spell of stand-offs, New Delhi had decided to break the ice. The recent visit of the external affairs minister, Mr K. Natwar Singh, to Dhaka signalled the change. And the new engagement is to culminate in Mr Manmohan Singh's visit to Dhaka for the summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation in November. But Dhaka must clean up its act in order to earn India's — and the world's — trust.

Inquiry committees set up in each district in hunt for bombers

River talks under cloud

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Aug. 18: Yesterday's serial blasts in Bangladesh may have claimed a diplomatic victim: this month's Delhi-Dhaka Joint River Commission meeting.

Although no decision has yet been taken, a cloud hangs over water resources minister Priya Ranjan Das Munshi's trip to Dhaka for the August 30-31 talks.

"We are watching the developments in Bangladesh very closely," a senior South Block official said.

India is cagey about formally calling off the meeting, for such a move will be seen in Dhaka as "pre-judging" the issue.

The Indian leadership had cried off the Saarc summit in Dhaka earlier this year, citing the worsened law-and-order situation, following several bomb attacks on the Opposition Awami League's leaders.

The decision had strained Delhi's relations with Dhaka. India does not want a repeat.

Observers feel the blasts have sounded a wake-up call for the Bangladesh government, but are not sure how serious Dhaka is about taking on the Islamists.

ACORRESPONDENT

Dhaka, Aug. 18: Scores of suspects were rounded up in Bangladesh today for yesterday's serial blasts, but the government said it isn't sure which outfit is to blame.

A private TV channel showed confusion by a local leader of the Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen — suspected by most Bangladeshis to have carried out the bombings — and then dropping the report without an apology.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia — condemning the bombings as a "heinous, cowardly, conspiratorial and well-planned act of terrorism" — said she would cut short her five-day China trip and return tomorrow.

Her government has set up a central inquiry committee, with 63 other panels in the districts hit by the bombings, which killed two persons and injured 150. Luftuzzaman Babar, minister of state for home affairs, said: "We can't say at this stage who are responsible for the blasts."

The private NTV said Nasiruddin, a resident of the southern district of Satkhira, had told police that he had planted a bomb at Dhaka's Judge's Court. The bomb, he said, was supplied by Jamaat leader

Dhaka gropes in the dark

from Chapai Nawabganj and two suspects from the northern Panchagarh district.

Islamic parties spoke of a conspiracy to malign Jamaat. "They are not capable of doing such a thing nationwide," said Maulana Abdur Rab Yusufi, a factional leader in the Islami Olkya Jote.

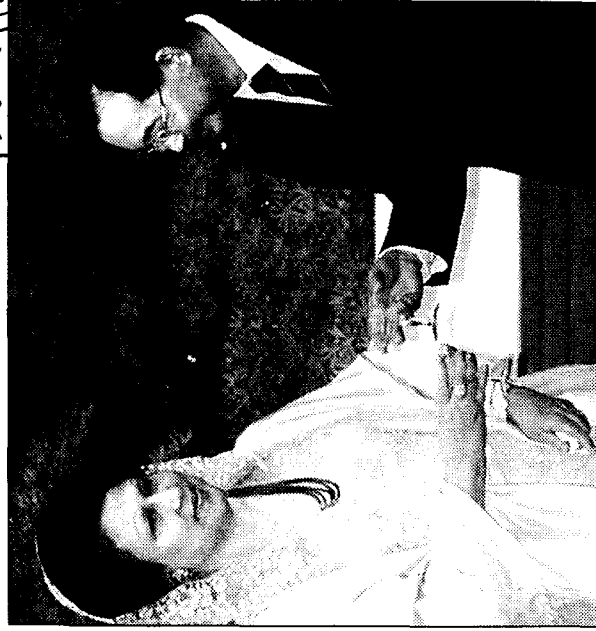
The ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party and the Opposition Awami League accused each other of being involved in the bombings.

The ruling party's secretary-general, Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, said: "The Awami League wants to destabilise the country so that we can't hold the Saarc summit in November."

"Such an organised act is not possible without the help of the government," countered Awami chief and former Prime Minister Hasina Wajed. "The government must quit."

Bengal chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee said the border alert sounded yesterday continues to be in force. The state has informed the Centre about the measures and Delhi has expressed satisfaction, state home secretary Prasad Ranjan Roy said.

David C. Mulford, US Ambassador to India, told reporters: "The United States has condemned yesterday's serial blasts in Bangladesh."



NO TIME FOR CHEER: Khaleda Zia raises a toast with Chinese counterpart Wen Jiabao in Beijing as her country struggles to come to grips with the blasts. (Reuters)

der Muniruzzaman Munna. Munna, who was arrested, also confessed, NTV said. It added that the police were looking for Jamaat leader Nayeemuddin. Officers in Satkhira and Dhaka would not confirm any of it.

In Dhaka, six suspects, one of them injured in a blast, were taken into custody. Ruhul Amin Bachchu claimed he had found a packet in a flower pot

and did not know it was a bomb till it went off. Officers aren't buying the story.

The police launched a special drive in the northern districts of Rajshahi, Natore, Chapai Nawabganj, Pabna and Sirajganj — the stronghold of another banned extremist outfit, the Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh. They arrested two local Jagrata leaders from Sirajganj, 10 people

Serial explosions rock Bangladesh

Press Trust of India

DHAKA, Aug. 17. — Over 400 small bombs, suspected to have been planted by a banned Islamic militant outfit, exploded near Bangladesh today, killing two people, including a child, and injuring at least 140.

Police said that 63 of Bangladesh's 64 districts were hit by the bombings, which occurred between 11 a.m. and 11.30 a.m. (local time), targeting government offices, courts and Press clubs in the first such attack in this politically volatile South Asian

country, prompting Dhaka to sound a security alert.

Private NTV television channel said at least 140 people were injured in more than 400 explosions of crude bombs. A rickshaw puller died of his injuries in western Chapainawabganj, while a boy died in a hospital in nearby Savar area, police said.

At least 46 suspects have been arrested from different parts of the country, sources said. Police suspected the involvement of the outlawed militant outfit Jamiat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh after recovering leaflets under its name from the blast sites which demanded implementation of

Islamic law in the country. The outfit is led by "Bangla Bhai", who has been on the run since his outfit was banned last year.

"We are not ruling out the claim (by Mujahideen)... they could have carried out the attacks or there could be something else... I can't comment on this right now," minister of state for home affairs Mr Lutfuzzaman Baber told reporters. "But these incidents were quiet unexpected."

A home ministry statement said that the attacks were an attempt to create chaos and unrest in the country and all possible steps have been taken to ensure security of the people.

Alert in border dists

KOLKATA, Aug. 17. — A red alert has been sounded in all districts of the state, bordering Bangladesh, in the wake of this morning's blasts in that country. Security has been strengthened at NSC Bose Airport too and the red alert sounded earlier has been extended.

Also today, the state home secretary, Mr Prasad Ray, said the government was on alert about possible attacks from terror outfits, including the Al-Qaida. The home secretary, however, clarified that though other terror outfits were active in the state, the government had no information about Al-Qaida activities. — SNS

U.S. will not interfere in Bangladesh affairs: Burns

Haroon Habib

DHAKA: United States Under Secretary for Political Affairs Nicholas Burns has said that his country would not interfere in the internal affairs of Bangladesh.

Mr. Burns, who made a brief visit here, said in an interview with the *Voice Of America*, "The U.S. wants continuation of liberal democracy in Bangladesh. But we've nothing to say about the internal problems of this country." He, however, endorsed the outgoing U.S. ambassador Harry K. Thomas' recent controversial remarks that major parties in the country must work together on national interests, failing which people would look for alternatives. The remarks faced strong criticism from political parties and the civil society.

Appreciating democracy in Bangladesh, Mr. Burns said major political parties need to have tolerance for minority political groups. Likewise, different religious groups too should have tolerance for one another. On extra-judicial killings which have been widely condemned at home and abroad, he said acts of violence, intimidation and extra-judicial killings must be stopped. The events that have taken place here in the past two years were "sad".

About his meetings with Government and Opposition leaders, Mr. Burns said he had discussed with them the various challenges that Bangladesh faced.

29 JUN 2005 THE HINDU

Bangladesh Matters

US urges Khaleda government
to be tolerant

WHILE the Indian government has been caught up with events in Pakistan and Nepal, the situation across our eastern border has been steadily worsening. Political and religious violence over the past few months has seriously undermined rule of law in Bangladesh. Now the US has woken up to the gravity of the situation. Assistant secretary of state Christina Rocca's call, during her recent Dhaka visit, for religious and political tolerance in Bangladesh is welcome. It draws attention to one of the world's few functioning, Muslim democracies. Bangladesh, the world's eighth largest in population, is the second-largest Muslim democracy after Indonesia. Since 1991, the country has had democratically elected governments. Despite this, Bangladesh rarely figures in discussions on Islam and democracy. Rocca's remarks must be seen in light of the troubles that have plagued Bangladesh in recent times. Several people have been killed in acts of political violence and human rights groups have accused the government of rights violations and religious intolerance.

Earlier this year, a senior opposition leader was killed and in another incident there were blasts at offices of two aid agencies, Grameen and Brac. Last year, former prime minister and leader of the opposition Awami League, Sheikh Hasina, survived an assassination attempt. The Awami League has accused two Islamic parties that are members of ruling coalition, Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Oikya Jote, of triggering unrest. A worrying trend is the increase in the number of registered madrassas from 1,500 in 1971 to around 8,000 now. Many see multiplying madrassas and rising militancy as signs of the huge influx of foreign, mainly Saudi, money. If Bangladesh is to remain a functioning democracy, militants must be marginalised and democratic institutions strengthened. The Khaleda Zia government has done the right thing by banning two Muslim extremist groups. The international community must nudge her to take more such steps to establish rule of law in the country. A stable and democratic Bangladesh is vital not only for the region but for the world.

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18 MAY 2005 THE TIMES OF INDIA

Bangladesh asks USA for help

AGENCIES

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DHAKA, Jan. 29. — Bangladesh has sought the help of the USA to track down the perpetrators of the grenade attack on an Awami League rally here, which killed a former finance minister and four others on Thursday.

"I talked to the US ambassador (Harry K Thomas) and asked for his country's help from start to end in the investigation to find those behind the attack in Habiganj," state minister for home affairs Mr Lutfuzzaman Babar told reporters here today.

He said the US envoy would get

CF *11* back to him by Monday on the request.

Meanwhile, schools and shops were shut down and much traffic halted across Bangladesh today during an Opposition-called general strike to condemn the killing of five of its members, including former finance minister Shah Mohammad Kibria.

In Dhaka, riot police used batons to disperse slogan-shouting protesters, leaving at least 20 people injured, witnesses said.

Several Opposition activists were detained.

Pro-strike activists damaged two public buses that defied the strike, while seven three-wheel taxis were

20/11 set alight in nearby Tangail district, the private NTV television network reported.

Mobs blocked trains in several places, leaving many passengers stranded, United News of Bangladesh reported. No violence was reported.

Hundreds of mourners attended Kibria's funeral today in Dhaka.

The nationwide strike shut down schools, stores, private offices and disrupted public transportation across the country, Opposition sources said.

Dhaka streets were nearly deserted. Only tricycle rickshaws and a few state-run buses operated.

30 JAN 2005

THE STATESMAN

Bangla's 30-year war

A CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka, Aug. 17: The demand and choice of target of those behind today's blasts reflect the deepest divide in Bangladesh's rift-ridden society: that between the liberal section of the civil society and Islamic fundamentalists.

The government had cracked down on Islamic terrorists in February, banning the Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen — suspected masterminds of today's blasts — and the Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh. It arrested many militants, including a university teacher who leads a religious organisation, earning applause from the media and social organisations.

Today, the bombs targeted the symbols of civil society — government offices, courts, universities and press clubs. Leaflets found at the sites said: "It is time to implement Islamic law in Bangladesh. There is no future with man-made law." They warned NGOs to stop "anti-Islamic activities" or else be "uprooted".

Bangladesh had banned religious politics and introduced secularism and socialism after it achieved independence from Pakistan in 1971. With the 1975 assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the nation's founding father, the ban was lifted and the principles of secularism and socialism were dropped.

Religious groups staged a comeback to the mainstream politics. Hardline outfits — Jamaat-i-Islami, Islami Oikya Jote, Islamic Shashantantra Andolon and Bangladesh Khilafat Andolon — mushroomed. Most of them campaigned for Bangladesh to be

governed by Islamic laws.

The early part of this year saw a spate in political violence, generally targeting the liberals. The Opposition Awami League lawmaker and former finance minister, Shah A.M.S. Kibria, and four others were killed in a grenade blast on January 27.

Awami League chief and former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who is also the leader of Opposition, escaped with her life as scores of grenades were thrown at a party rally in Dhaka. The blasts left the president of the Mahila Awami League and 22 others dead.

The bombers attacked film and theatre audiences. Several died in explosions at cinemas in western Mymensingh and southern Satkhira. At least three persons were killed in separate blasts as they watched plays in northern Bogra and Natore districts.

The Bangladesh-born British high commissioner, Anwar Chowdhury, was seriously wounded and two persons were killed when a grenade was thrown at him at the shrine of Hazrat Shahjalal in northeastern Sylhet.

Secular journalists, teachers and intellectuals were targeted. Poet Shamsur Rahman was attacked by Harkatul militants a few years ago. Humayun Azad, a Dhaka University teacher and writer, was attacked by a group of Islamists.

Death threats have been issued to Dhaka University teachers Muntasir Mamun and Arefin Siddiqui, columnist and former editor of *Bhorer Kagoj* Abed Khan and journalist Shahriar Kabir.

THE TELEGRAPH

Khaleda, please note!

Addressing Indo-US security concerns

Never before has a civilian or military dignitary abroad indulged in such plain speaking on the "strong presence" of international terrorist groups in Bangladesh as Admiral William Fallon, head of the US military's pacific command visiting Dhaka on Sunday. Not only did he say that the US military had enough evidence to justify its contention that Bangladesh was home to numerous terrorist groups, but it was also a base for terrorist attacks abroad. Without mincing words, the American admiral held terrorist groups like Al Qaeda and Harkatul Jihad, responsible for large-scale smuggling of arms into Bangladesh for the purpose of spreading terror in neighbouring countries. He referred to the recent chance detection of a huge cache of arms at Chittagong and elsewhere along the Bangladesh coastline, said his government was "seriously concerned" about the ominous developments, and wanted to help Dhaka with expertise. "Current loose governance and political turmoil" in Bangladesh, has, he said, encouraged these groups to choose the country as launching pads just as Afghanistan, Indonesia and Philippines had been.

This is the first time that a top American military official has endorsed what a section of the responsible media has described as Bangladesh's "cocoon of terror." Ever since Begum Zia came to power with the help of fundamentalist Jamat-e-Islam in 2001, she as a policy, has tried to turn Bangladesh into a safe haven for Islamic terrorists. Members of Al Qaeda on the run from Afghanistan are provided refuge as are terrorists like, for instance, from Al Harmine. They are allowed to slip in and out of the country at will. Some terrorists work under the garb of Islamic NGOs whose number is rising steeply. Significantly, Admiral Fallon's statement came a day after the chief ministers of West Bengal and Assam at conference on national security in Delhi, had iterated the threat that the camps run in Bangladesh by ULFA, KLO and Bodo insurgents pose for their states' security. Khaleda Zia's government is not only helping in the running of these camps but is sending insurgents and Islamic militants across. In fact her government has unleashed a religious propaganda war in the bordering Indian districts by dumping thousands of CDs and cassettes containing highly communal preachings of a Jamat MP, Delwar Hossain Saidi, who has declared a "jihad" against "Indian secularism". It is no coincidence that expressions of concern by Fallon and the Indian chief ministers are identical. They have put Begum Zia's government under a scanner and know exactly what they are talking about.

22 APR 2005

THE STATESMAN

British warning

Bongiorno
Khaleda should take note *5/8*
4/1

A visiting British minister for foreign relations, in a communication to Khaleda's Zia's government, publicly expressed "Her Majesty's government's grave concern and dismay" over the BNP-Jamat-i-Islami-led government's failure to apprehend the culprits of the grenade attacks on the Bangladesh Opposition leader Sheikh Hasina, the British High Commissioner in Dhaka Anwar Choudhury and the Sylhet mayor Badruddin Kamran of the Awami League.

Douglas Alexander, without caring for diplomatic niceties, conveyed to Begum Zia London's grave displeasure over her government's inability to get any clue whatsoever about the dastardly attacks although foreign sleuths, including those of Scotland Yard, Interpol and FBI, who investigated all the cases, provided very important leads.

What he said subsequently was a severe reprimand of Begum Zia's government since without mincing words, he held the government investigation as being not credible, they had taken no steps to take the findings to their logical conclusion. No civilised and democratic country, he said, could follow Dhaka's path of giving indulgence to terrorists.

Even harsher words were used for the Khaleda government's inability to stop the persecution of minorities and killing of journalists. That her government's human rights record has been dismal is borne out by the record. In the last 45 days, as many as 150 people were killed in "encounters" with her "elite" Rapid Action Battalion. Alexander warned that foreign investment in Bangladesh was now linked to her government's human rights record.

The British minister meant to say that the Khaleda government's behaviour had immeasurably harmed Bangladesh's image. What must have incensed the British is that the life of its own high commissioner in Dhaka is under serious threat as Khaleda, knowing well the involvement of radical Islamic groups to kill him, has done nothing about it.

In fact, encouraged by her indulgence, they have killed a senior professor of Rajshahi University noted for his strong secular and nationalist views. The police have so far arrested no one in Sylhet although in the last seven months there have been six bomb and grenade attacks on Opposition supporters killing over a dozen people. Professors of Dhaka university and editors of leading dailies have received written death threats from Jamat i Islami groups just as in 1971 when leading intellectuals were slaughtered.

The reason for Khaleda Zia's inaction against Jamat is that she does not want to upset her coalition partner ahead of the 2006 parliamentary election. Muslim fundamentalist groups are her safe bet for retaining power. In the circumstances, she is ready to overlook whatever they say or do. Sadly, she does not realise that all this may one day prove to be her undoing.