

THE BLAME GAME

Syed Qasim Rasul Ilyas

[This article appeared in the 16th March, 2008 issue of the Urdu daily 'Rashtriya Sahara', under the title 'Musalmano Par Hi Dahshatgardi Ka Ilzam Kyon?'. The author, Dr Syed Qasim Rasul Ilyas, is an official spokesman of the All-India Muslim Personal Law Board and is actively involved with various Indian Muslim organisations. He also edits the Urdu monthly Afkar-e Milli, which focuses essentially on Indian Muslim issues and concerns. Abridged, and translated from Urdu by Yoginder Sikand.]

ADDRESSING A CONVENTION of ulema and Muslim intellectuals held in Delhi in late 2007, Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, disapproved the idea of associating terrorism with any particular community. Thereafter, the Chairperson of the UPA, Sonia Gandhi, made a similar remark. Despite all this, the tendency to link Islam, Muslims and madrasas with terrorism and to use such words as 'Islamic terrorism' and 'Jihadism' not only remains, but, in fact, has become even more pronounced. In all fairness the mass media adds spice to reports issued by intelligence agencies and projects them in such a way as to create the impression that Indian Muslim youth, especially those who are highly educated, are engaging in terrorism on a massive scale. Prior to this, the madrasas were targeted [for this by the media], but now the media's focus has shifted to well-educated Muslim youths, professionals, technical experts, engineers, doctors, etc. Influential newspapers in the country sensationalise materials supplied by the police in such a manner as to present, the image that these are their own investigative reports.

The following are certain issues [and claims] that emerge in [reporting about] terrorist incidents and activities in the country in recent years : Pakistan and Bangladesh-based terrorist organisations, such as the Lashkar-e Tayyeba, Jaish-e Muha-mmud, Hizb ul-Mujahidin and HUJI are said to be behind terrorist attacks. Youth associated with the banned Indian Muslim group, the Students' Islamic Movement of India (SIMI), Muslim professionals and madrasa graduates are [so it is claimed] becoming agents for these organi-sations.

The culprits behind terrorist attacks are [said to be] Muslims-be it in the case of the attack on the Indian Parliament or the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore or the Akshardham Temple, the disputed structure in Ayodhya or the Ajmer dargah, the bomb blasts in trains in Bombay or the [Muslim] graveyard in Malegaon, the Mecca Mosque in Hyderabad or the Ansal shopping complex in Delhi. These Muslims [who are claimed to be behind all these attacks] are either killed in [what are termed as] encounters and [it is said] leave behind with them proof of them being Muslims or Pakistanis. Those who are arrested by the police accept the charges of terrorism that the police slap on them while they are being interrogated by them. However, when they appear in court most of them deny these- [confessional] statements that they are forced to make under police torture.

The media considers the informa-tion about dangerous terrorists supplied by the police and intelligence agencies as divine revelation, and exaggerates this further on its own. The question arises as to why 'Muslim terrorists' would attack mosques, dargahs, [Muslim] graveyards and Muslim localities. In response to

this question, intelligence agencies claim that this is so in order that [they can] damage inter-community relations in the country and spread conflict, between Hindus and Muslims. However, whether the knife falls on the melon or the melon falls on the knife, either way it is the poor melon that suffers.

In this context, certain crucial questions arise which must be answered by the government, the police, the intelligence agencies and the media :

Without any investigation being conducted, immediately after a terrorist attack—sometimes just a few hours or even a few minutes after—the incident is attributed to an Indian or foreign Muslim organisation.

Why are judicial inquiries not ordered into major terrorist attacks? Why are they not given to the Central Bureau of Investigation to investigate? For instance, in December 2001 there was an attack on the Indian Parliament. The attackers were killed. It was announced that they were Pakistanis and that they hailed from certain places in Pakistan. Now, an attack on the country's Parliament is a very serious event, but, why was there no high-level investigation? How could it be possible that an Ambassador car, filled with weapons and explosives and terrorists, crosses all security barriers with ease and arrives at the door of the Parliament? [How could, it be that] terrorists emerge from the car and spray some bullets, killing several policemen and security officials and injuring several more and then they are shot dead by the police? Some questions related to this attack are still to be answered.

In some places, such as Nanded, Aurangabad and Jalna in Maha-rashtra and Tenkasi in Tamil Nadu, activists belonging to the RSS and other Hindu fascist organisations have been caught red-handed while being engaged in terrorist activities. Bomb-making factories were discovered in some of their houses. Muslim-Style clothes and beards and maps of mosques were also recovered from them. But, far from accusing them of terrorism, they were given the opportunity to get bail from the courts and be released.

After the serial bomb blasts in trains in Bombay, Muslim localities in the city were surrounded by the police. Scores of Muslim youth were arrested and tortured. After harassing several hundred persons, 13 innocent people were arrested under a draconian law, although till this day the actual perpetrators of these blasts and their motives remain unknown.

[...] The Students' Islamic Movement of India (SIMI), has been banned for the last six years. All its activities have been suspended. The Government has sealed its head-quarters and provincial offices. It is another matter that the court has not had the chance to examine the appeals, issued several years ago, against these restrictions [on the SIMI]. All of the SIMI's leaders, who were arrested on different charges, have been cleared of charges by the courts or are out on bail. [...] Is the SIMI being made into a scapegoat like al-Qaeda?

Various forms of terrorism afflict the country today. [...] But these are not associated with Hinduism or Christianity [although many of those engaged in these forms of terrorism belong to these religions]. So, why should [earlier mentioned] forms of terrorism be branded as 'Islamic terrorism' and 'Jihadism'? Is it the case that by seeking to link Islam and Muslims with terrorism attempts are being made to spread hatred against Muslims across the country and to

instigate conflict so that [Muslims] are suspected by the majority and are treated as Untouchables, and that anti-Islamic sentiments are fanned? □□□