

terrorism

Osama's war and Indian M

By Aijaz Zaka Syed

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WHEN US President Bush visited India in 2006, a proud Prime Minister Manmohan Singh informed the Leader of the Free World that unlike in Pakistan and the rest of the world, there were no Indian Muslims in Al Qaeda ranks.

And a mighty pleased Bush had attributed this satisfactory state of affairs to the fruits of "democracy and human liberty". Although one never counted oneself among Bush's fans, as an Indian Muslim, one allowed oneself a brief pat on the back. And I am sure I wasn't alone in doing so. The Indian Muslims were somehow different — more progressive and more reasonable, all thanks to the great Indian democracy.

But I am not so sure now. The series of terror attacks in recent times, from Hyderabad to Bangalore to Ahmedabad, have not only shaken the Indian state but it has shaken the Muslim community as well.

Even though there has been no credible evidence to link these shameful acts targeting innocent people to the community, responsibility for the outrage has already

been laid at its doorstep. And the ever humble Indian Muslim has persuaded himself, with the rest of the country, that fellow Muslims are to blame for the attacks. The community has begun some intense soul-searching and is looking for answers — and the black sheep behind the terror strikes.

Some Muslim leaders have tended to reject these attacks and the lit-

even the CIA, which once trained and worked with it, painting the Pak agency as the fount of global terror.

Even my hero, the inimitable MJ Akbar, who always walks apart from the crowd, has joined the chorus against the Pak agencies accusing them and global terror patent holder Al Qaeda of aiding outfits like the Indian Mujahideen.

Whatever the truth, this is a dis-

If Al Qaeda has indeed crossed India's borders to prey on young and impressionable Muslims, why does it come as a huge surprise to the Indian authorities? Injustice always begets injustice. From Northern Ireland to Palestine and from the Balkans to present day Iraq and Afghanistan, there are myriad instances to prove extremism is always born out of and feeds on injustice

tle known outfit Indian Mujahideen that has claimed responsibility for them as a huge conspiracy by Hindu extremists to malign the Muslim community.

Others including the government circles and the media have of course find it more convenient to blame Pakistan and its infamous ISI. It's in any case the ISI-bashing season with

turbing state of affairs. These attacks must come as a wake-up call to the Muslim leadership as well as the Indian government. Because if the Indian Muslims are joining the ranks of Al Qaeda, this could have far-reaching consequences not only for India but rest of the world too. At 200 million, it is the largest Muslim community in the world, even bigger

than the biggest Muslim country Indonesia in terms of population. This is why India's Muslims cannot afford to dismiss the issue as a figment of Hindutva imagination.

Unfortunately, there is a real dearth of honest and informed leadership in the community. Those who have a public voice and are taken seriously in the establishment rarely look beyond their own narrow partisan agenda to provide leadership to the community.

And those who really care for the community are too isolated from the mainstream to carry their voice to the larger Indian society. Many of them see these serious issues facing the community as not their cup of the tea.

Few of them seem to realise that these frequent attacks, no matter who is orchestrating them, make the entire Muslim community 'suspect' in the eyes of the rest of the country.

On the other hand, the Indian leadership seems to have no clue how to respond to the challenge. The government looks at these attacks as little more than a security and law-and-order issue, other than occasionally blaming the neighbours.

We have no idea if the Indian government knows who is really behind these blasts. If it knows the culprits' identity, it is yet to share it with the public. If it suspects some black sheep among the Muslims are to blame, it is yet to enlighten us. Conversely, if it thinks Muslims have nothing to do with these attacks, it

has not made that clear either.

So we are all up a blind alley, beating in the dark. But there is always a method in the madness, if you really care to look. If this government is indeed serious in getting down to the bottom of this whole business, it wouldn't take it much time or effort to do so.

On a different note, if Al Qaeda has indeed crossed India's borders to

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Injustice always begets injustice. From Northern Ireland to Palestine and from the Balkans to present day Iraq and Afghanistan, there are myriad instances to prove extremism is always born out of and feeds on injustice. And extremist elements

Muslims

like Al Qaeda exploit this collective injustice and play on people's sense of victimhood. This is how the ranks of extremists are filled and multiplied every day.

But if God forbid India's Muslims are indeed joining Al Qaeda, responsibility for this rests with the successive Congress governments as well as Hindutva fanatics.

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Congress and other so-called secular parties have repeatedly exploited Muslims as a mere vote bank cow to be milked at the time of election, they have been the original *causis belli* for the militant Hindu organisations like RSS and BJP and their numerous avatars. Both sides have

da, often walking their way to power over dead Muslims.

And the ever trusting, simpleton that average Indian Muslim is, he has blindly played along, always hoping to be recognised as part of the so-called national mainstream for the price of his vote.

Countless anti-Muslim riots after the Partition failed to shake his belief in Indian democracy. But the demolition of the historical Babri Masjid at Ayodhya in December 1992 and the subsequent riots across the country, especially in Bombay or Mumbai, changed all that. Nearly 3,000 people, majority of them Muslims, were killed in Mumbai alone.

Ten years down the line, in 2002, Muslims were raped, butchered and burnt for two months in Mahatma Gandhi's Gujarat as the world watched in morbid fascination. And in the days and months after the Gujarat genocide that killed more than 2,000 people, thousands of Muslims were thrown into Modi's jails for visiting this misery on themselves.

Hundreds of Muslims, many of them innocents randomly picked up from distant cities like Hyderabad, are still languishing in Gujarat's jails for crimes they did not commit. And the gentleman who brought this shame to the land of the Mahatma remains at large and in power, mocking the world's biggest democracy and rule of law. Is it any surprise then Indian