

Hindu right blames Muslims for Bombay bombings

By Nirmal Mitra

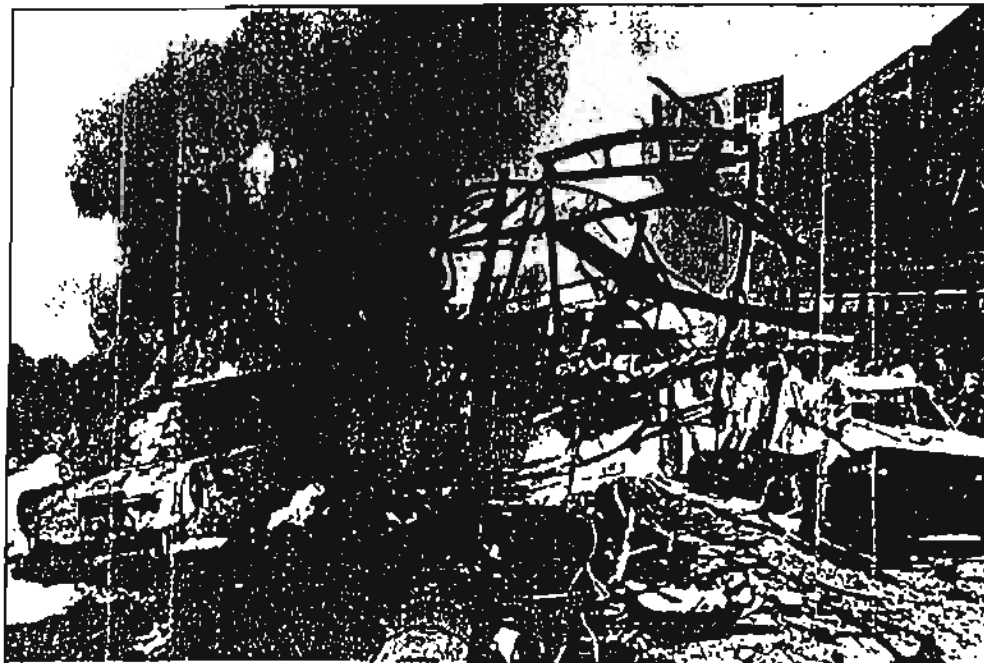
JUST who was responsible for the March 12 bombings in Bombay that killed 250 and injured over 1200 is still unknown. But there is no mystery as to who will gain the most from them — divisive forces out to destroy India's tradition of religious tolerance and brotherhood.

With leads now pointing to a Muslim gangster operating out of the Middle East and Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), more and more voices are pointing the finger of blame at a Muslim backlash. An Indian Cabinet minister who otherwise criticizes the government for being too soft on the pro-Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) believes that the blasts were set off to avenge the recent destruction of the Babri mosque in Ayodhya and the wave of rioting it set off.

"Anyone who followed those developments and understood the implications of the BJP's hate campaign could see this coming," the minister said in confidence. The saboteurs chose Bombay because that was the city where Muslims had suffered the most during the riots, he added.

The BJP has taken the stand that the blasts were an "act of war" by Pakistani agents that call for a harsh response. BJP leader L.P. Advani has been touring Bombay to console blast victims. Some BJP leaders suggest that the culprits were Muslim fundamentalists working with Middle Eastern and Pakistani help. Newspapers otherwise known for their secular stance are filled with reports on the role of the ISI and Muslim groups based in the Middle East.

The fact that Indian Muslims have denied any link to the blasts has failed to make a dent on the growing consensus. "Irrespective of whether Hindus or Muslims planted the bombs, the whole country is saddened," commented Aslam Sher Khan, a Muslim Congress Party Member of Parliament. "But the way



Vehicles burn outside south central Bombay on March 12, after a series of bomb blasts.

the BJP is coloring it is ominous."

Ironically, this was precisely the bloody assault on a people and a nation that members of four Hindu communal organizations — the Shiv Sena, Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Bajrang Dal and Rashtriya Swyamasevak Sangh — along with their political arm, the BJP, were hoping for.

By demolishing the Babri mosque in Ayodhya, they wanted to force Muslims to come out of their

homes and retaliate. When they did, police opened fire on them in Bombay, Ahmedabad, Calcutta, Bhopal and Delhi. The government responded by banning the Hindu organizations and preventing the BJP from holding a public rally that could arouse communal passions. But the violence against Muslims recurred in Bombay.

To paranoid Hindus, the Bombay blasts are said to signify the revolt of Muslims against Indian na-

tionhood.

THE Sikha had their revenge on Indira Gandhi for ordering Indian troops into their Golden Temple in Amritsar, and the Tamils killed her son, Rajiv, for turning against them in Sri Lanka. The Muslims, on the other hand, have natural benefactors in Pakistan and Iran. Hindu sympathizers believe.

The truth is that India's Muslims are too scared and defensive to go to war with their own homeland. They would hardly conceive of being drawn into a battle of attrition because they are poor, vulnerable and widely dispersed. Although they form 12 percent of the population, they have only a two percent share in the police service, less than three percent in the civil service, and a meager two to four percent of jobs in the professions, banks and private companies.

And while Muslim men are described as habitual polygamists, the incidence of polygamy among them is less than that among Hindus. Yet Hindu propagandists have tried to paint them as a pampered minority.

As for their offensive capability, in most communal riots since independence, it is largely Muslims who have lost their lives and property, rather than Hindus. In fact, a "communal riot" has come to mean an attack on Muslims by bigoted Hindus.

But by equating an impoverished minority with saboteurs and extremists, Hindu propagandists are seeking to perpetuate the myth of the Muslim as a cancer in the Indian body politic. Whether they are allowed to succeed or not will depend on the ability of the government, and secularists, to convince India's mass of poor that hunger and unemployment are more important considerations than religion.

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