

# *Sholay* writer scripts lead role for 'silent



Akhtar: Fighting for change

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**Bhopal, Sept. 25:** In *Sholay*, Javed Akhtar, with Salim Khan, had scripted the character of a Thakur standing up for the cowering villagers against *daku* Gabbar Singh. Now, Akhtar is giving shape to another script: it projects him as an activist representing the "silent majority" of the Muslims against the conservative and fundamentalist leadership of the community.

Under the aegis of Muslims for Secular Democracy, Akhtar has invited hundreds of NGOs and Muslim intellectuals for a brainstorming session in Mumbai on October 1 and 2. After formulating a broad-based declara-

tion, he plans to tour the country, hold interfaces with groups and individuals to strengthen what he described as the "social fabric of the country, rule of law and civil society".

Speaking in Bhopal today, the poet-lyricist claimed that Muslim society was craving change. He said issues ranging from the Ayodhya dispute to the uniform civil code, the growing cult of fundamentalism to terrorism could be tackled easily if the "silent majority" asserted itself.

"It has been too long that the voices of reason have not been heard," he said, adding that the likes of Shahi Imam Abdullah Bukhari, Syed Shahabuddin and other "hardliners" had no fol-

lowing within the community. Even religious bodies like the All India Muslim Personal Law Board were now sounding reasonable on Ayodhya as they had sensed the changing mood of Muslims, Akhtar said.

The poet said most political parties, including the Congress, treated Muslims as a "votebank", doling out "phony appeasement" instead of attending to "real issues" like education, employment and health which, he said, are no different from the needs of an average Hindu, Christian, backward or a tribal.

The blame for keeping Muslims away from the national mainstream should be equally shared by the liberal, secular society

and the media. "The fault is both ours and yours (media)," he said.

The average Muslim has been too caught up with everyday life to comment on matters of national importance, leaving the field to "fringe elements" like Imam Bukhari, whom he dubbed as a replica of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad. "You (media) gave them a ready platform and made them a sort of Muslim leader whereas they were mere voices," he said.

Akhtar claimed that his forum would represent "real Muslim voices and opinion". He said he had been getting feedback from across the country that there should be a forum where the "real Muslim voice" could be heard.

He admitted that during the Shah Bano controversy in 1986, the conservative Muslim leaders had gained an upper hand by forcing Rajiv Gandhi to supersede

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the Supreme Court order of maintenance for divorced Muslim women. "But that was an isolated incident. In 1992-93, there was nationwide frenzy over Ayod-

hya. Does that mean that all Hindus in the country are hardliners?" he asked, saying that in the life of a nation, these incidents are "aberrations".