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# 'We are here to call the bluff of the imams and mullahs'

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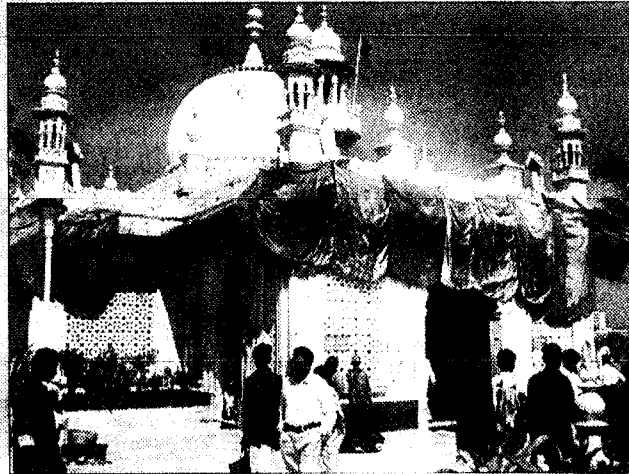
**Mumbai:** In an attempt to challenge the hardline strain in their community, a group of Muslim intellectuals on Thursday came together to form a national alliance called Muslims for a Secular Democracy (MSD).

The alliance is an attempt to represent the liberal face of the Muslim community and challenge its domination by mullahs. The new body, spearheaded by such prominent citizens as lyricist Javed Akhtar and social activist Javed Anand, is aimed at countering the hate agenda of both the Sangh Parivar and Islamic extremists.

"For years we have heard allegations that there are no secular Muslims," said Mr Akhtar. "We are here to call the bluff of the fundamentalist Shahi Imams and mullahs." He said that the alliance could not have chosen a more auspicious occasion than Gandhi Jayanti to announce its launch.

"Do not mistake us to be another elite organisation simply waxing eloquence," said Javed Anand, co-editor of *Communalism Combat* magazine. "We are an apolitical organisation which represents the voice of the Muslim community."

The alliance plans to consider core issues like population control, discouraging the use of loudspeakers for azaans, namaaz being held on the streets and the slaughter of goats during Bakri-Id in housing colonies in which members of other communities also live. "Our local level study groups will hold meetings with people and provide the right information to them," Mr Anand said. "After that they are free to make an informed choice."



**Hasan Kamal, lyricist and columnist:** It is imperative for us to ensure that secularism and democracy continue to flourish in this country. They form the very basis of our existence or else our entire Muslim community is in danger. We are here to shatter the misconception that all Muslims are anti-national.

**Zafar Agha, journalist:** MSD believes that all personal laws in the country, including the Hindu Code Bill, are unfair to women and urgently need reform. The issue of a uniform civil code has been raked up by the Sangh Parivar and Muslim fundamentalists as a political gimmick. We urge the government to frame a draft for the uniform civil code.



**Ali Asghar, social activist:** Even though the Indian Constitution guarantees equality before law, we have witnessed increasing communalisation of government institutions and personnel. MSD believes that contentious issues like Ayodhya and Gujarat riots must be resolved by the rule of law.

**Salim Dawawala, architect:** MSD is opposed to all the so-called minority appeasement policies for any religious activity, including the Haj subsidy. In reality, the Haj subsidy is in fact an Air-India subsidy. If the government were to disband the Haj Committee, Indian Muslims would pay less for Haj tours organised by other travel agencies.

