

**FIGHTING
MILITANCY**

**IN QUEST OF A
BETTER
FIGHTER**



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A report by

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With the Gulshan attack, assassination of two foreign nationals, and the death of around fifty people who either had different view on Islam or were from different religion, claimed as an act of either Islamic State of Iraq and as-Shams (ISIS), Al Qaeda in Indian Subcontinent, JMB or Ansarullah Bangla Team militants the country has been heavily shocked. With wonder, the country has seen the evidence of the presence of Islamic State in Bangladesh and their wide range of network across the country.

In all the cases government denied any sort of militant involvement initially with these though the murders were claimed by the militants. They tried to put the blame on opposition all the time.

Moreover, taking in mind the role of Awami League in backing fundamentalists in past that includes allotting lands to militants, letting them to reorganize, helping them to flee and sheltering RSO militants, one can never rule out the possibility of a new drama staged by Awami League to frame BNP and other opposition parties to finish them off in the name of militancy.

One the other hand, BNP has always been a better fighter in the war against militancy. Though the surge of Islamic terrorism took place in 1999, no government but BNP took step to put a stop on it. BNP from 2005 started a nationwide drive, took steps to unite the nation against terrorism and rounded up hundreds and thousands of terrorists within a year. BNP also brought the criminals to book, hanging almost all the kingpins. BNP eventually broke the back of the militants.

But, Awami League after assuming office has consistently proven itself impotent to fight the terrorism. Though many try to give Awami League credit for being able to stop the militancy for a while, they forget to mention the fact that it takes time to mobilize for a group that has been totally dismantled.

The facts that have been revealed in recent days, in the first days of Awami League government, the militants mobilized themselves. They formulated plans, acquired bails through the criminal courts, snatched their leaders from the law enforcers with the help of Awami League men from 2009 to 2012, and then went to implement their new action plans from 2013 killing around 80 people so far.

In this circumstance, it is high time to analyse and understand who the better fighters against militancy in Bangladesh.

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CHAPTER 01

FRIENDS AT GUNPOINT

1.1) Bangladesh's Black Friday

Around 8:45pm on July 01, 7-8 gunmen, aged between 20 and 28, storm Holey Artisan Bakery in Dhaka's Gulshan diplomatic zone.

By 9:10pm, they opened fire and hold 30 to 32 people, mostly foreigners, hostage. The chef Diego with Argentine nationality and Belal with Bangladeshi escaped the situation and took shelter in a nearby house. They were later rescued by SWAT.



At 11:00pm, attackers are said to have turned off lights at the restaurant and started butchering foreign nationals and those who cannot recite verses from the Holy Quran.

On 12:43am of July 02, Islamic State through its Amaq News Agency claimed the responsibility of the attack and asserted that over 20 people of different nationalities have been killed. Subsequently they uploaded photographs of the corpses on Amaq News Agency website.

Being convinced that most of the hostages are killed, Bangladesh government decided to call the commandos from Sylhet to shoot the way through at the dead night of July 02.

A Military aircraft C130 flew with packed Commandos to Dhaka airport at 4:30am and landed subsequently. The commandos came to the spot and started planning for the field offensive.

At the early morning, the IS fighters let eight Bangladeshi nationals go including four men, three women and a child. They took three foreign nationals as hostage, two Sri Lankans and one Japanese.

At 7:40am, commandos begin “Operation Thunderbolt” and barge in the restaurant and met with heavy firing and explosions. By 8:30am, they ended up the operation killing six out of seven attackers.

By 8:55am, Commando forces take control of the building. A search operation began and found twenty corpses according to ISPR of Bangladesh Army.

Later, Islamic State published images of five attackers of Gulshan Attack.



The dead hostages consisted of nine Italians, seven Japanese and three Bangladeshis.

The Italian citizens identified are, Vincenzo D'Allestro, Nadia Benedetti, Cristian Rossi, Marco Tondat, Claudia Maria D'Antona, Maria Rivoli, Adele Puglisi, Claudio Cappelli, and Simona Monti.

Three Bangladeshis are, Faraaz Ayaaz Hossain, Abinta Kabir and Ishrat Akhond. Abinta Kabir was a US-Bangladeshi citizen.

The Indian citizen who died was identified as Tarishi Jain.

1.2) Cesare Tavella Murder, as it Happened



Cesare Tavella, who had been working as a project manager with ICCO Cooperation in Bangladesh, used to go for jogging every morning, would come back home, change and leave for work. He usually came back home again late at night. He never cooked and always bought his dinner on his way home. In the same way he went for jogging on September 28, but never returned.

The Italian citizen was shot dead in the high security diplomatic zone at Gulshan in the capital Dhaka. This was the first murder in Bangladesh that was claimed by Islamic State. The murder was done by three people who

were riding a motorbike. Two of them shot Cesare with a gun four times and fled the scene uninterrupted.

Italian citizen shot dead in Dhaka

Kamrul Hasan

An Italian national was shot dead in the capital's Gulshan neighbourhood yesterday evening.

The deceased, Cesare Tavella, 50, was a technical director working at Netherlands-based development organisation ICCO.

Acting Inspector General of Police Mokhlesur Rahman, speaking to journalists at United Hospital, said the killing appeared to be pre-meditated. He said preliminary investigation suggested Tavella was attacked by three armed assailants who escaped on a motorcycle.

Police sources said the victim was found with bullet wounds in jogging clothes around 6:15pm not far from the house of the governor of Bangladesh Bank near Road 90 in Gulshan 2.

Although the governor's house is equipped with CCTV cameras, police said those facing the crime scene were not operational.

DMP Police Commissioner Asaduzzaman Khan visited both the crime scene and the hospital.

Tavella was taken to United Hospital by a local resident, Mohammad Bilal, where doc-

tors declared him dead around 7pm. Bilal said Tavella had been shot first by one assailant and then twice by the other two attackers.

Witnesses said the injured man attempted to outrun his assailants, leaving behind a trail of blood, before collapsing.

Another eyewitness, who asked not to be identified, said the nearby street lights did not go on automatically at 6pm as they should have but came on ten or fifteen minutes after the shooting. The witness could not say whether there had been a power outage.

ICCO's manager for administration and human resources in Dhaka, Alo Rani Dhali, said Tavella was in the habit of jogging home from his office in Gulshan 1 to his home in Gulshan 2.

Police sources said the victim had sustained two bullet injuries to the abdomen and one bullet injury to the hand. They said there was no evidence he had been robbed, adding that his personal effects had been seized for further investigation.

Acting IGP Mokhlesur Rahman visited the crime scene as well as the hospital. He said the police were looking for clues and searching for possible CCTV footage of the incident. »

Though after the incident, a probe committee was formed but it remained clueless from the beginning of their investigation. One of the most significant reason the committee expressed for getting no headway till date is, there was no CCTV coverage in that area.¹

News report published on Dhaka Tribune suggests that, the victim was found with bullet wounds in jogging clothes around 6:15pm not far from

News report published on Dhaka Tribune

the house of the governor of Bangladesh Bank near Road 90 in Gulshan 2.

Although the governor's house is equipped with CCTV cameras, police said those facing the crime scene were not operational.²



The corpse of Cesare Tavella in the morgue

Moreover, the nearby street lights did not go on automatically at 6pm as they should have but came on ten or fifteen minutes after the shooting.

So, the questions are who were in the charge of the CCTV of the governor's house and who was controlling the lights.

On further investigation, it was found that the guy in charge of the lights is an Awami League workers' front leader. This can lead us to a possible Awami League-Islamic State link.

Moreover, even after two weeks of the murder, the ballistic tests were not done. The court, which is controlled by Awami League, is delaying in disbursing the order regarding the test.³

1.3) Death of a friend



Three masked gunmen killed Kunio Hoshi, a Japanese citizen in Bangladesh, the second foreign national to be killed there within a week, raising alarms among the country's foreign community. Kunio was shot dead by masked assailants riding motorcycles when he was going to his grass farm at Kaunia.

Police said they had detained four suspects in connection with the shooting of Kunio Hoshi, 65, in Rangpur district, 335km north of the capital, Dhaka, in an attack similar to the shooting of Italian national Cesare Tavella. Kunio Hoshi was shot three times beside his farm where he had invested in a grass cultivation project.

Hoshi was a researcher who came to Bangladesh to conduct research that would have been very costly in Japan. Hoshi first visited Bangladesh in 2011 for a week. He visited again for a week in 2013 before finally deciding to live in the country this year.

Since foreign citizens cannot remain in Bangladesh for more than three months at a stretch without a work permit, he left and re-entered the country to renew his visa status, visiting China and, most recently, India, according to a police source.

Most interestingly, Hoshi Kunio was converted to Islam three months ago. Munshiparha mosque's Imam Siddik Hossain told,

I converted him to Islam during the last Ramadan in presence of a group of local Muslims. He had offered Jumma prayers at this mosque several times since then.



Kunio Hoshi converted Muslim

Munshiparha resident Riazul Islam Rintu told that Kunio converted to Islam on the 27th day of Ramadan this year and took the name 'Golam Kibria'.⁴

Locals asked why Muslim militant would kill a Muslim who was a friend to all. Probably a bigger game is played behind the scene patronized by Awami League.



Bullet riddled body of Kunio Hoshi on the way to Hospital carried by a truck

An indication of such game is the arrest of two BNP leaders just after the murder. Both of those leaders were picked up by police from their home. The arrest of these two BNP leaders of Rangpur is very strategic. This was done in such a quick time that when the news of the killing gets out in the world media - the report also contains the crucial one liner "Two men - leaders of local branch of opposition BNP has been arrested in connection with the murder". Awami League is trying to frame BNP with the murder of foreign nationals in this way.

CHAPTER 02

A SILENT RIOT

01. Nitya Ranjan Pandey⁵



Religion : Hindu

Occupation : Monastery Worker

Description :

Nitya Ranjan Pandey, 60, worked at Sri Sri Thakur Anukul Chandra Satsangha Ashram at Hemayetpur in Pabna Sadar upazila. He hailed from Gopalganj.

Unidentified assailants hacked dead the Hindu monastery worker in Pabna on June 10, 2016.

Locals found the body of Nitya Ranjan lying on a field, a few yards off the Hemayetpur mental hospital, around 5:00am.

02. Ananda Gopal Ganguly⁶



Religion : Hindu

Occupation : Priest

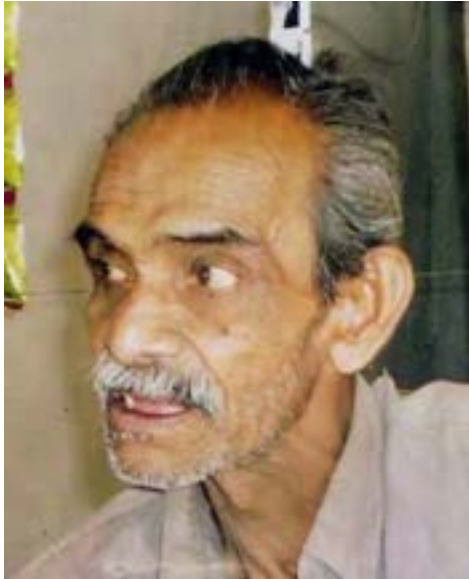
Description :

The body of Ananda Gopal Ganguly, 70, was found in a field near his temple in western Jhenaidah district. His head had been nearly severed from his neck.

He left his home on June 7 morning saying that he was going to a Hindu house to offer prayers and was found dead hours after that.

The Middle East-based Islamic State militant group says it carried out the killing.

03. Sunil Gomes⁷



Religion : Catholic Christian

Occupation : Grocer

Description :

Unidentified attackers murdered 65-year-old Sunil Gomes in the village of Bonpara, home to one of the oldest Christian communities in Muslim-majority Bangladesh.

Sunil Gomes was hacked to death at his grocery store just near a church at Bonpara village where he used to serve as a gardener.

International militant group Islamic State claimed responsibility for the murder of Sunil Gomez according to US-based jihadist monitoring website SITE Intelligence Group.

04. Sanwar Hossain⁸



Religion : Converted Christian

Occupation : Homeopath

Description :

On May 20 morning, Sanwar along with his friend Saifuzzaman were intercepted by some unidentified people near Bot-toil Shishir Math and hacked with machetes while going to a bungalow outside the town on a motorcycle where Sanwar used to run a free Friday clinic. They left Sanwar death.

International terrorist group Islamic State has claimed that its members killed homoeopathic doctor Sanwar Hossain “for calling to Christianity.”

05. Nikhil Chandra Joarder⁹



Religion : Hindu

Occupation : Tailor

Description :

Nikhil Joarder, who was in his early 50s, was attacked as he sat outside his shop in Tangail on April 30, 2016.

Three youths arrived at the shop of Nikhil. They took him to a nearby road saying they need to talk to him. Then they hacked him indiscriminately and fled after confirming his death.

Islamic State claimed the attack.

He had been arrested in 2012 and served three-month in jail in a case over slandering of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

06. Paramananda Roy¹⁰



Religion : Hindu

Occupation : Priest

Description :

Shadhu Paramananda Roy Hindu priest succumbed to injuries on April 23, a day after he was hacked by an Awami League cadre at his village in Tungipara of Gopalganj, the home of Sheikh Hasina.

A distant relative of Sheikh Hasina, and a pro-Islamist, Shariful Sheikh, son of Abdul Mannan Sheikh Mannu of Gimadanga, hacked the priest indiscriminately on April 24, 2016.

07. Shyamananda Das¹¹



Religion : Hindu

Occupation : Priest

Description :

Hindu priest Shyamananda Das was hacked to death at his temple in Bangladesh's southwestern district of Jhenaidah early July 01, 2016.

He was gathering flowers, likely to be offered in prayers at the Sri Sri Radha Madan Gopal Bigrohomot temple, when the attack took place. Three men rode up on one bicycle jumped off, attacked the priest, and then rushed away.

International militant group Islamic State claimed responsibility for the murder according to US-based jihadist monitoring website SITE Intelligence Group.

08. Tarun Dutta¹²



Religion : Hindu

Occupation : Trader

Description :

An unidentified gang swooped on local trader Tarun Dutta while he was taking a morning walk on the College Road in the Gobindaganj upazila of Gaibandha district on February 8.

The gang members killed him by slitting his throat and dumped the body under a culvert.

Islamic State in its official publication Dabiq claimed the death of Hindu trader Tarun in Gaibandha though the home ministry of Bangladesh denied.

09. Hossain Ali¹³



Religion : Converted Christian

Occupation : Retired government official

Description :

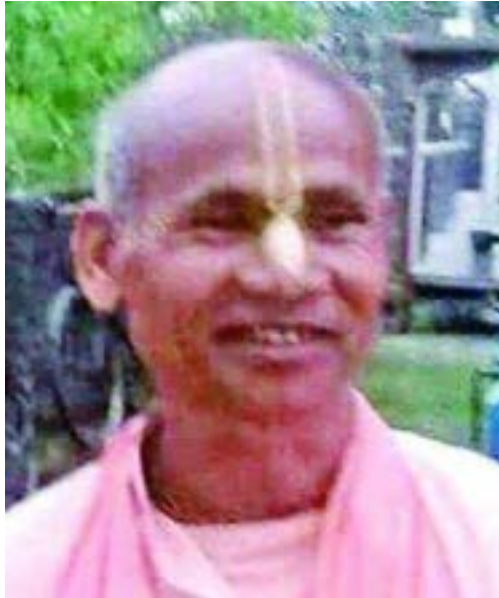
Hossain Ali, 68, a freedom fighter of Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971, and a retired government official in Bangladesh was hacked to death on March 22, 2016.

Three attackers on a motorbike stabbed the victim, Hossain Ali, in Kurigram, north of Dhaka, the capital.

Mr. Ali converted to Christianity from Islam in 1999

International militant outfit Islamic State claimed the responsibility of the death.

10. Jogeshwar Roy¹⁴



Religion : Hindu

Occupation : Priest

Description :

Hindu priest Jogeshwar Roy was hacked to death during an attack on a temple in Bangladesh's Panchgarh district on February 21, 2016.

Two people on motorbikes fired guns at Jogeshwar Roy as he left the temple, which attackers had been throwing stones at.

The men on bikes also set off explosives, injuring two other Hindu worshippers who were trying to help the

50-year-old priest after he was attacked with sharp weapons.

International militant organization Islamic State claimed the responsibility of the death of the Hindu priest.

11. Debesh Chandra Pramanik¹⁵



Religion : Hindu

Occupation : Businessman

Description :

Debesh Chandra Pramanik, 68, a shoe trader, was found murdered in his shop on May 25 in the northwestern rural district of Gaibandha.

The attackers slashed his throat with sharp weapons leaving him dead on the spot.

Islamic State had claimed the attack subsequently.

It was the second attacks claim by IS militants in Bangladesh in less than a week in May.

12. Maung Shue U Chak¹⁶



Religion : Buddhist

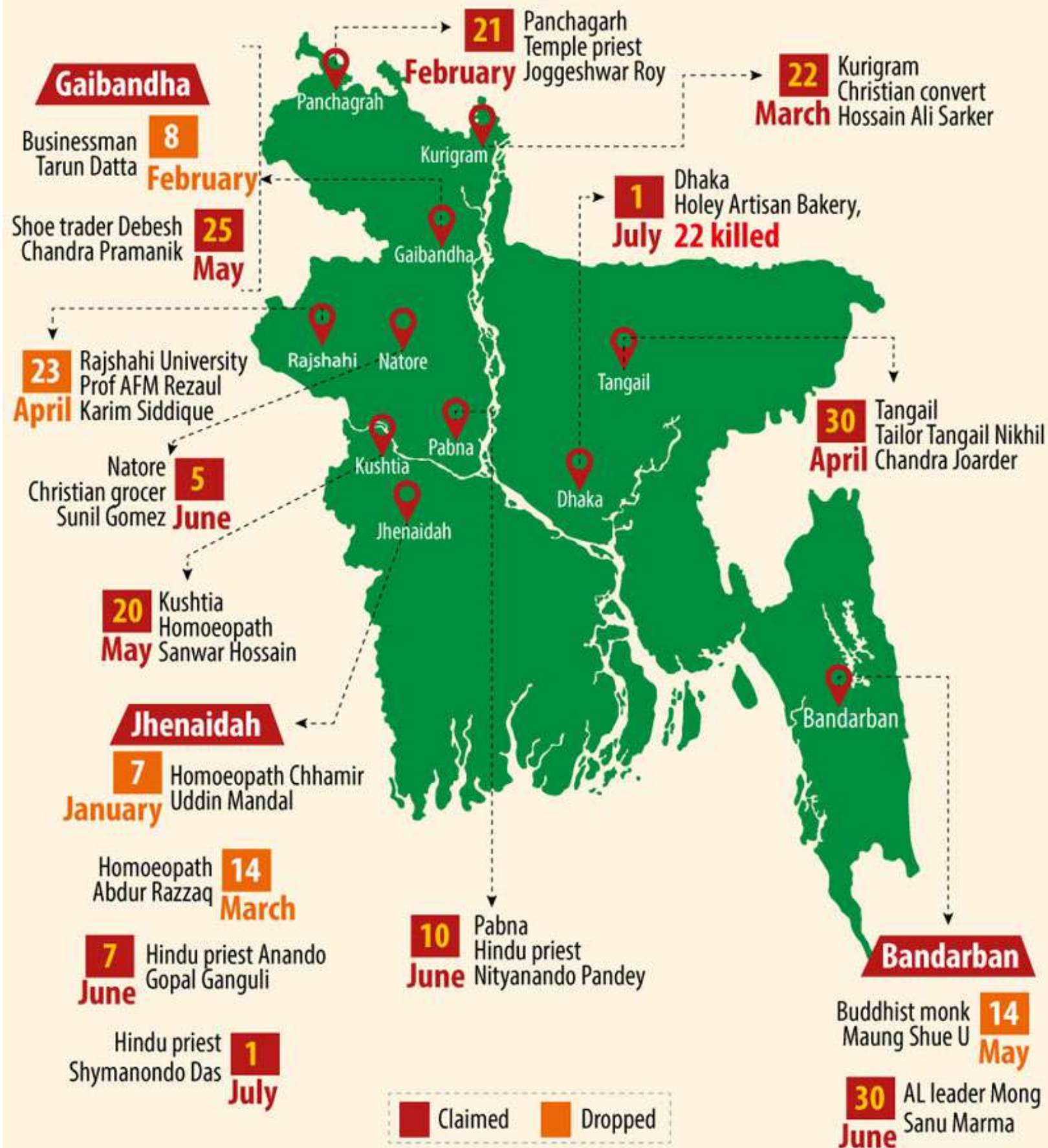
Occupation : Monk

Description :

Villagers found monk Maung Shue U Chak's dead body in a pool of blood inside the Buddhist temple.

The monk, 75, appeared to have been attacked by at least four people at the Buddhist temple in Baishari, some 220 miles (350km) southeast of Dhaka early on May 14.

ISLAMIC STATE ATTACKS IN 2016



13. Mong Shwe Lung Marma¹⁷



Religion : Buddhist

Occupation : Farmer

Description :

IS militants hacked a local Awami League leader to death in Baishari union of Naikkhangchhari upazila of Bandarban.

The deceased was identified as Mong Shwe Lung Marma, 55, a farmer by occupation.

14. Biplab Roy



Religion : Hindu

Occupation : Service Holder

Description :

Biplab was killed by Juba League leader Javed Shiraj's younger brother Jamsed Shiraj in Sylhet.

Biplab's family said, local Juba League leader Javed Shiraj's younger brother Jamsed Shiraj used to tease Biplab's wife.

When Biplab tried to protest it local Juba League men became anguished and attacked them with sharp weapons. They stabbed Biplab to death.

CHAPTER 03

DISSENTERS FACED THE SWORD

01) Mohammad Shahidullah¹⁸

An elderly follower of a Pir or Muslim preacher was slaughtered in a mango grove at Tanore upazila in Rajshahi.

The victim, Mohammad Shahidullah, 55, is the son of late Habibur Rahman of Mohanandakhali area of Nohata under Poba Upazila. He was a follower of Pir Imam Mahdi from Goalanda in Rajbari district.

He was found slit throat in a mango orchard owned by homoeopathic doctor Abul Hasan in Jhumarpara village of Tanore on Friday evening. Police recovered the body on information and sent it to Rajshahi Medical College for post-mortem examination.



Mohammad Shahidullah

He was hacked and slaughtered near his home on May 6 “for claiming himself a prophet,” a statement publicized by JMB said, giving credit to the members of JMB’s “Abdul Awal Brigade” for the murder.

02) Lutfar Rahman Faruq and five¹⁹

On 21 December 2013, six people, including pir Lutfar Rahman Faruq, his son and four others were killed by miscreants on RK Mission Road in Gopibagh. The pir were arrested twice several years back for his controversial preaching on religious beliefs.

According to a press release issues by JMB, it claims credit for slaughtering self-proclaimed Pir Lutfar Rahman, his son and four disciples at Gopibagh in Dhaka on December 21, 2013. Lutfar was killed by the “Imam Ibn Taimiah Brigade” for claiming himself Imam Mehdi and committing shirk.

03) Sheikh Nurul Islam Faruqi²⁰

JMB's "Ataur Rahman Sunny Brigade" slaughtered popular cleric Sheikh Nurul Islam Faruqi at



Sheikh Nurul Islam Faruqi

his home in Dhaka allegedly "for committing shirk and giving wrong explanation of Sharia."

On 25th August 2014, Farooqi was killed by 8-10 unknown assailants in his Rajabazar office. His family claimed that several youth had come to the house to talk over Hajj and killed him.

According to a local imam, two youths came to his house at around 8:30 PM, and 6-7 armed youths entered the house and demanded all the money he had.

When Farooqi said he had around 100,000 taka at home, they said this money would not do for so many of them. They tied his hands and legs with clothes in his bedroom and slaughtered him before leaving.

04) Khijir Khan



Mohammad Shahidullah

Former chairman of Power Development Board (PDB) Mohammad Khizir Khan was killed at his Madhya Badda residence in Dhaka on October 6, 2015 Khan, 65, retired from the top post of PDB in 2007.

A group of six unidentified people killed Khan after tying up his family members, his relatives alleged. The assailants, seeking house rent, entered the building around 7:45pm, they said.

He used to live on the second floor of the building and ran a Khanka Sharif on the first. Khan had another branch of his Khanka Sharif in his village home Kushtia, they said. JMB claimed this murder. Their "Hafez Mahmud Brigade" killed the self-styled Pir at his Khanka Sharif.

05) Rustom Hawlader

On April 25 this year, three members of “Khalid Saifullah Brigade” coming on a motorcycle shot dead retired sergeant instructor of Kashimpur jail Rustom Hawlader, 60, in front of the high security facility in Gazipur when he was buying medicine.

The JMB statement alleges that Rustom, who had been in charge of the cell where detained JMB chief Saidur Rahman is staying, was killed for siding with the government, torturing and discriminating the detained militants, and executing the sentences given to the militants.

06) Abdur Razzak²¹

Top Shia preacher was stabbed to death in southwestern Bangladesh in an attack claimed by the Islamic State group.

Abdur Razzak, 48, was hacked to death by unidentified men last night when he was returning home from his shop in Kaliganj town in Jhenaidah district. He was rushed to a hospital where doctors declared him dead.

Razzak’s wife Shahnaj Parvin said a few months back her husband received an anonymous extortion call for Tk 2 lakh (USD 2,550).

07) Moazzem Hossain²²

In a second attack on Shia Muslims in just over a month, armed assailants stormed a Shia mosque in Shibganj upazila and opened fire on praying people, killing one and injuring three others. The dead is Moazzem Hossain, 70, of Haripur. He was a farmer and also muezzin of the mosque.

Three gunmen stormed the mosque named Masjid Al Hussain at Haripur bus stop in Atmul union and started shooting randomly at 30 to 40 Shia Muslims, according to locals and police.

The attack happened around 5:45pm when they were saying their Esha prayers after Maghrib prayers. The Shia community offers these two prayers one after another without a break.

08) Sajjad Hossain Saju²³

Sajjad was killed and about 87 others were injured in homemade bomb explosions in front of Hossaini Dalan in old Dhaka early hours today.

The blasts happened around 1:30am when members of Shia community were gathering at the building, about half an hour before the traditional Tajia procession was to be brought out from there to mark the holy Ashura.

09) Jamal Uddin²⁴

Jamal Uddin, a 55-year-old man, injured in the Oct 24 bombings in Dhaka, has died after five days in the Dhaka Medical College and Hospital (DMCH).

Three homemade bombs were hurled around 2am on Oct 24 when Shia Muslims were preparing for the 'Tajia Processi

CHAPTER 04

THE UNHOLY NEXUS

Although Awami League takes all the credit of the anti-terror fights, it is high time to ask how much cleaner their hands really are.

As it was stated Awami League patronized the militant groups that resulted in the rise of those groups as dreaded criminals that eventually turned fatal for the Awami League itself.

In 1997, the state-run Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation (BSCIC) allotted a land to the elder brother of Gopalganj Chhatra League, Awami League's student front, leader Munsif Anisuzzaman to set up a soap factory namely, Shonar Bangla Chemical Factory. The Awami League leader Anis was a close aide to the Religious Secretary of Awami League Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah.

The owner of this soap factory was none other than the notorious terrorist Mufti Abdul Hannan who was then the chief of Harkat-ul Jihad al Islam Bangladesh (HUJI-B). The political patronization of terror had begun from that day that is being continued till date.²⁵

If they had the guts, they should have asked why Mufti Hannan was allowed to conduct conferences throughout the late 90s²⁶ and how he made it possible to gather explosives and plant bombs in the main stronghold of Awami League.²⁷

However, Mufti Hannan gave a clue that can lead us to the answers to these questions. On his way to jail on May 13 of 2010, Mufti Hannan claimed that Awami League's religious affairs secretary Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah and many other leaders from Gopalganj Awami League knew it all.^{28,29}

Mufti Hannan was arrested by the BNP government of Begum Khaleda Zia in 2005.³⁰ He was sentenced to life imprisonment in 2003 in absentia and was remanded for 150 days in a row.

And this was not a scattered incident that took place 'mistakenly' due to the 'ignorance' of the Awami League government which was in power and responsible for allocating the land. Moreover, the then Awami League helped several other terror groups to reorganize who later tried their best to destabilize the country during the BNP regime of 2001-2006.

A similar terror group was the Jamaatul Mujahidin Bangladesh (JMB). JMB was formed by the brother-in-law of Awami League youth front leader Mirza Azam in the constituency from where he was elected from- Jamalpur.

Jamalpur is a bordering district of Bangladesh with India lying on the north. JMB was established in 1998 with the patronization of the then Awami League backed Member of Parliament Mirza Azam who is now the state minister of Jute and Textiles.

Soon after the formation the JMB leader Shaikh Abdur Rahman, who married the sister of Mirza Azam, decided to establish a back office in the West Bengal of India. This branch in West Bengal was the source of grenades which were used during a series of bomb attacks during 2004-

2006, with a view to destabilizing Bangladesh and make the Awami League's agenda to label Bangladesh as a militancy prone country a success.

These stories were later discovered by both Bangladeshi and Indian intelligence officials with substantial evidence which was published in the prominent dailies of Bangladesh and India.³¹

Although the Awami League boasts that they are fighting terrorism with utmost zeal, terrorists were often seen to be getting assistance by the government agencies. After three JMB top militants were snatched spectacularly en route from jail, an investigation report confirmed that the JMB leaders are allowed to use cell phones in the high security jails of the country.³² Moreover, the operation to hijack the militants was led by an Awami League youth front leader of Mymensingh from a place near to the constituency of Awami League leader MirzaAzam.³³ All but one reached West Bengal with the help of local Awami League of whom Zahidul Islam is a potentially important figure of JMB as a bomb expert.³⁴ In addition, only four months after the escape of the bomb expert Zahidul, the Murshidabad blast took place.

The above stated examples are enough to draw a conclusion of how the Awami League governments without proper mandate failed consistently from 1998 till date to tackle terrorism in Bangladesh, while BNP during its regime successfully united the people of the country against militancy and tried them.

After the recent murders of two foreign nationals by Islamic State in Bangladesh, it is important to know the facts in order to draw a proper conclusion regarding the rise militancy here through an unbiased analysis.

These were the initial days of these two militant outfits. Though the formation process of these duos may seem different, the political patronization was evident in both cases. To find the answer to the question why this was done one should go back to 2000 when US President Bill Clinton came to Bangladesh and made a visit, which was later shortened due to security reason.

The Awami League government of 1996-2001 was one of the worst governments the country had ever seen. That government critically failed to save the economic system of the country after the stock market scam which was done by its members. This government saw the rise of terrorism and militancy. More than one million people were killed either by the terrorists of Awami League or by the militants backed by the government. This kleptocracy had made the people of the country and the international development partners to think for an alternative to Awami League.

Awami League was much aware of this. And prior to the visit of President Clinton they had decided to utilize it in some other ways. When the government agencies and Awami League leaders were patronizing militant outfits and were assisting to spread its tentacles, the foreign ministry of the government was preparing a booklet as a 'gift' to President Clinton. The booklet consisted of the 'evidence' regarding the presence of militants in Bangladesh.

The questions to be raised are, though in 2000 there were a limited activism within the militants in the country and the government did not even admitted the presence of any militant group publicly. Even when the first ever militant attack was staged at the conference of Udichi at Jessore, the government accused the BNP for the attack and filed cases against senior BNP leader Toriqul Islam. Then, how the government was so confident and got so many evidences to publish and distribute a booklet on the rise of militants in Bangladesh.

This was because the Awami League was linked with these groups and they had created them to use them in future as the safeguard of the government.

These militant groups particularly the one led by the brother-in-law of MirzaAzam tried their best of destabilize Bangladesh and trouble the BNP led government during 2001-2006 with several bomb attacks. Particularly, the JMB, who gained some popularity by preventing some communist terrorists in north-west Bengal among the villagers who were troubled by these elements for decades, had put the BNP government in a mess.

This JMB had not made a single bomb attack during the Awami League government though it was formed during the regime of Awami League. Moreover, when the BNP cracked down on it, the members of JMB fled to India where they were sheltered by the exiled Awami League leaders, Jahangir Kabir Nanak and MirzaAzam.

This study will try to explain this complex web of militancy in Bangladesh in a different perspective. A perspective that is quite unfamiliar, different from the ‘fables’ that were widely propagated for more than a decade. These are the facts that were ignored by the Awami League supported media houses and journalists of Bangladesh.

4.1) Awami League leaders knew it all

On May 13 of 2010, Mufti Hannan was produced to the Magistrate court in Gopalganj district.

Mufti Hannan in his statement revealed that Awami League's Religious Affairs Secretary Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah and Gopalganj District unit's Joint General Secretary Mahbub Ali Khan were directly involved in the murder attempt of Sheikh Hasina at Kotalipara.³⁵³⁶

Amid such allegations, Sheikh Hasina made Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah her representative in her constituency in Gopalganj on February 3, 2014.

This is quite interesting and endorses the arguments presented on the previous chapter of the study because Sheikh Hasina has always blamed her political opponents for carrying attacks on her. But with this statement of Mufti Abdul Hannan, a newer version of story came to light.

Mufti Hannan was a simple Madrasa teacher who returned from the Afghan War of nineties to Bangladesh in 1988 and formed a Islamic group in 1992 to preach Islam. But this notorious criminal had his own intention to establish Islamic law in Bangladesh. This intention was later watered by Awami League government when it came to power in 1996.

Mufti Hannan's younger brother was a local Awami League leader and had close relation with Sheikh Hasina's close aide Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah who was then the religious affairs secretary of Awami League.

Sheikh Abdullah was searching for a person to stage an assassination drama prior to the visit of Bill Clinton in favour of Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina in order to gain some

2 AL leaders involved

Hannan tells court about Kotalipara plot to kill Hasina

A CORRESPONDENT, Gopalganj

Mufti Abdul Hannan, the prime accused in the attempted murder of Sheikh Hasina in Kotalipara, Gopalganj, yesterday named two AL leaders for their alleged involvement in the plot.

The two leaders are AL's Religious Affairs Secretary Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah and Gopalganj District unit's Joint General Secretary Mahbub Ali Khan.

"Quiz the two leaders for truth. They know everything," Hannan was shouting at journalists who were waiting outside



SEE PAGE 7 COL 4

public sympathy and international support for her leader, in addition harass the opposition leaders using this. He found Hannan the best fit for the job.

On the other hand, Hannan, a madrasa teacher with a symbolic salary was searching for some support to establish his “Islamic Republic of Bangladesh” by uprooting the prevailing democracy that kept two ladies in power since 90s.

Mufti Hannan was picked up and allotted with a 500 square feet government land to set up a soap factory that can be used as his den. Mufti Hannan established the Shonar Bangla Chemical Factory in 1998. The soap factory was used as a bomb factory as it was decided. The first ever product of the factory was found in Jessore, one year of the allotment of the land.

On the March 7 of 1999, a bomb was exploded at the cultural conference of UdichiShilpiGoshthi that claimed twelve lives and injured more than 150.

After the bomb attack, Jessore Kotwali sub-inspector Abdul Aziz lodged a case without naming any culprits. Later the Awami League government, who were governing since 1996, blamed their rival Bangladesh Nationalist Party for the attack. Twenty-four people, including former minister Tariqul Islam, also standing committee member of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, were named in the charge sheet prepared by the Criminal Investigation Department on December 14, 1999.

This is how Mufti Hannan was exempted by the government from the charge of this attack.

Later on, Mufti Hannan bombed a church, NarayanganjAwami League office, cultural function of Ramna, political rally of CPB and many other places killing at least 80 people.

All these took place under the nose of the government from the stronghold of Awami League- Gopalganj. Moreover, two senior Awami League leaders- Sheikh Abdullah and Mahbub Ali Khan- knew every single detail of these attacks but let these happen so that they can depict Bangladesh as a militancy prone country to US President during the visit.

4.2) Birds of same feather

Awami League has always tried to approach the Islamic groups other than Jamaat after their 'divorce' in 1998, to create an alternative to Jamaat in case of political Islam. Jamaat-ul Mujahidin Bangladesh (JMB) was an example of such approaches. It was nothing but an anti-Jamaat force that made Awami League to form an unholy secret alliance with it.

JMB was established by the brother-in-law of the deputy minister of Jute and Textiles nowadays, MirzaAzam. This JMB, as it was said earlier, had never tried to explode a single bomb during the Awami League regime which indicates their inclination towards a certain party.

Though HUJI-B targeted a number of Awami League leaders, JMB did not even tried to harm any of them. Rather it plotted twice to kill Begum Khaleda Zia at any cost in 2009 and in 2014.

The story of JMB is less complicated than it was in case of HUJI-B of Mufti Hannan. JMB was funded and assisted by the 'influential relatives' of Shaikh Abdur Rahman to spread its tentacle after being formed in 1998 in the AbdurRahman's brother-in-law Awami League MP Mirza Azam's constituency at Jamalpur.



Mirza Azam of AL



Shaikh Abdur Rahman



Siddiqur Rahman Bangla Bhai

Soon after the formation, it opened a branch at West Bengal in the same year. After the landslide victory of BNP in 2001, JMB became more active with a view to creating turmoil in Bangladesh for which it was created.

In early 2002, the first conference of the JMB commanders was held at Khetlal in Joypurhat. At that time, local police arrested 17 terrorists, including Rahman's younger brother Ataur Rahman, in connection with terrorist activities. Following this incident the JMB commanders went underground and extended their terrorist activities around the country.

Discussing on this point, one might know that there was clearly evident dissent among the leaders of JMB and Jamaat-e-Islami, an ally of BNP. This dissent was clearly evident in an interview of JMB leaders which was published in a national daily.

One of the most notorious terrorists and the right hand of Shaikh Abdur Rahman, Siddiquir Rahman alias Bangla Bhai said,

I supported Bangladesh Chhatra League (Awami League backed student front) when I was in school. As a college student, I joined IslamiChhatraShibir. When I finished my study in 1995, I quit Shibir because Jamaat accepted female leadership although it said it considered female leadership sacrilege³⁷.

The statement of Siddiquir Rahman clearly indicates that he supported Awami League in his first life and left Jamaat-e-Islami, where he joined for a short time, because of ideological disputes with the party.

Moreover, in an interview with a private channel, he affirmed that none of the BNP ministers of members of parliament ever contacted them.³⁸



JMB and its political wing JMJB at first came to light with the bomb attacks in 63 districts of the country on August 17 of 2005. This bomb attack put the BNP government in wrong foot and enabled the critics of BNP government. BNP government was frequently criticized

by the international groups after this attack.

Soon after the attack BNP government came down hard handedly and arrested all the kingpins of JMB and JMJB. They were tried and later met their fate.

The crackdown was so severe that the US ambassador in Bangladesh claimed that the “backbone of JMB seems apparently broken”.

But after 10 years of the 17 August blasts, Indian spies at NIA unearthed that the JMB established its West Bengal branch in 1999 with Awami League at power. A point to be noted is that, West Bengal has been a favorite place for troubled Awami League leaders for getting shelter.³⁹

Moreover, it was found that the bombs used in the 17 August attack was supplied from West Bengal and the branch of JMB here served as the back office. Even, when the government cracked down on the JMB and JMJB, Bangla Bhai took shelter in West Bengal in 2005.

Bangla Bhai entered India through Dhulian in Murshidabad and settled in the district. An NIA officer told that,

*In 2005, JMB leaders sent Bangla Bhai to Murshidabad as it served a two-fold purpose of preparing the ground for setting up a base for the organisation as well as providing him shelter from the security forces of Bangladesh who were hot on his heels.*⁴⁰

This discovery came after a blast in Burdwan of India. This blast took place after the snatching of militants in Bangladesh and their trespassing to India in 2014.

After three JMB top militants were snatched spectacularly en route from jail, an investigation report confirmed that the JMB leaders are allowed to use cell phones in the high security jails of the country.⁴¹ Moreover, the operation to hijack the militants was led by an Awami League youth front leader of Mymensing from a place near to the constituency of Awami League leader MirzaAzam.⁴²

All but one reached West Bengal with the help of local Awami League of whom Zahidul Islam is a potentially important figure of JMB as a bomb expert.⁴³ In addition, only four months after the escape of the bomb expert Zahidul, the Murshidabad blast took place.

Moreover, according to a recent development a JMB leader was killed by law enforcers in Chittagong. According to sources he was killed because of the possibility of debunking the involvement of Awami League leaders with JMB in front of the foreign investigators who are working in Bangladesh since the death of two foreign nationals.⁴⁴

This shows that the JMB and JMJB were nothing but a B-Team of Awami League which was established to destabilize the BNP government and still getting the backing of Awami League for future.

4.3) JMB took part in Kansat

In a sensational revelation on June 21, 2009 it came into light that the Awami League and Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), now working as the local unit of Islamic State in Bangladesh shared close links during the BNP regime of 2001-2006.

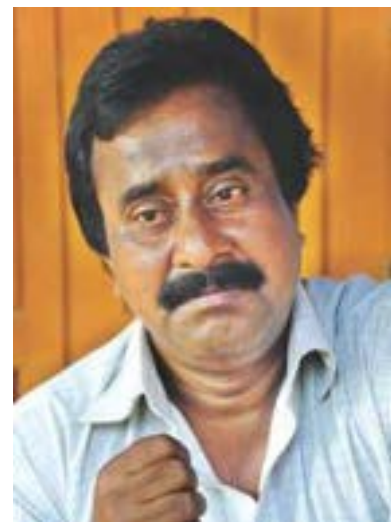
A member of Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) told The Daily Star that the militant group took part in the Kansat movement in April 2006 to unsettle the BNP government.⁴⁵

JMB became involved in the second round of the four-point Kansat movement in Shibganj upazila of Chapainawabganj on April 21, 2006.

Golam Rabbani who is currently serving as an Awami League MP from Chapainawabganj was leading the movement then. He had prior contacts with the militant group and to create havoc, he used 500 local JMB full-time and part-time members to destroy government property and set alight several government cars.



The Daily Star report on June 21, 2009



Golam Rabbani

4.4) The missing son of an Awami League leader

Awami League's metropolitan leader Babul Imtiaz Khan, who served as the Youth and Sports Secretary of the Awami League's Dhaka City Unit, is the father of Rohan Imtiaz.

Rohan is among the five attackers whose photographs have been published by Islamic States as the attackers of Gulshan's Holey Artisan Bakery that claimed the lives of 22 people including Italian, Japanese, Indian and Bangladeshi citizens.



Rohan Imtiaz with a gun and in Islamic State attire in the left, and on the right with his father Awami League leader Babul Imtiaz Khan

According to the family Rohan Imtiaz was 'missing' for a couple of months.

4.5) Awami League leader arrested in connection with Eid Day attack⁴⁶

The police arrested four people including an Awami League leader following the Sholakia bomb attack and exchange of gunfire that killed four people including two cops and left some others injured near the Eidgah on Eid day.

The police surrounded the house of local Awami League leader and Karimganj's Gunadhar union AL chairman candidate Abdul Hannan Bhuiyan Babul on suspicion that the leader might have been given shelter to the attackers after the bomb blast and exchange of fire with the police.

The police arrested three persons including Babul from that house. Besides, another person was arrested as a suspected attacker.

The house under police siege is near the Azimuddin Pilot School beside the Sholakia Eidgah. The law-enforcers think the attackers might have taken shelter in the house soon after the attack.

When asked about the siege of the house, Kishoreganj Additional Superintendent of Police (ASP) Md Abu Sayem told an online news portal that they suspected that the attackers might have taken shelter in that house after the attack.

The owner of the house, an Awami League leader, was also arrested.

4.6) Jubo League man arranged it⁴⁷

An upazila-level Jubo League leader allegedly arranged safe passage for a death row JMB leader, Rakib Hasan Russell, after his escape from a prison van along with two other top leaders of the banned militant outfit in Mymensingh in February.

Kamal Hossain Sabuj, an arrestee in the sensational case, made the claim at a media briefing at the RAB headquarters in Uttara.

According to him, Ataur Rahman Kamal, joint secretary of Bhaluka upazila Jubo League, formed a team of six to seven people to pick up Rakib from Bhoradoba and drop him at Fulbaria of Mymensingh.

Sabuj, 38, who claimed to be involved with the Awami League politics, said he took part in the ambush to snatch away Rakib. Two other groups helped flee the two other militants -- Salauddin Ahmed alias Salehin and Zahidul Islam alias "Boma" Mizan.

On February 23, an armed gang of 10-15, all masked, ambushed a prison van in Trishal and snatched away three convicted JMB militants -- two of them on death rows. A policeman was killed in the ambush.

4.7) Minister's militant nephew fears none

**শায়খপুত্র নাবিলসহ চার জঙ্গির
বিচার হয়নি দশ বছরেও**

আবুল কাশেম জুয়ে

কুমিল্লায় রায়ের সাথে জামাআতুল মুজাহিদ্দীন বাংলাদেশ জেএমবি'র শীর্ষ জঙ্গিদের যুদ্ধের পর গ্রেফতার জেএমবি প্রধান ফাঁসির দণ্ড ভোগ করা শায়খ আবদুর রহমানের ছেলে নাবিলপুর রহমান নাবিলসহ শীর্ষ ৪ জঙ্গির বিচার ১০ বছরেও শেষ হয়নি। রায়ের সাথে জেএমবি'র ঐ যুদ্ধে জেএমবি'র সামরিক প্রধান ও বোমা বিশেষজ্ঞ শাকিল আহমেদ সোহেল ওরফে মোস্তা ওমরসহ ৪ জন নিহত হয়েছিল। দিনভর রায়ের ওশ'র বেশি সদস্য ঐ যুদ্ধে অংশ নিয়েছিলেন। দেশ ও বিশ্বব্যাপি বহুল

দেশ কাঁপানো যুদ্ধ

কুমিল্লায় রায়ের সাথে
জেএমবি'র শীর্ষ জঙ্গিদের
যুদ্ধের ঘটনায় দায়ের
করা ৫টি মামলায়
১০ বছরে অর্ধেক সাক্ষীর
সাক্ষ্যগ্রহণও সম্ভব হয়নি



শায়খপুত্র নাবিল রহমান

আলোচিত ঐ ঘটনার দায়ের করা ৫টি মামলা ১০ বছর পর এসে অর্ধেক সাক্ষীর সাক্ষ্যগ্রহণ করাও সম্ভব হয়নি। উপরন্তু ঐ সব মামলার বিচার করা হওয়ার প্রথম বছরেই শীর্ষ ঐ চার জঙ্গি কুমিল্লা কেন্দ্রীয় কারাগার থেকে পালিয়ে বের হওয়ার পর আহত অবস্থায় পুনরায় গ্রেফতার হয়েছিল। ১০ বছর ধরে আলোচিত ৫টি মামলাসহ ৯ বছর ধরে ২টি, ৬ বছর ধরে ৪টি মামলাসহ ১৪টি মামলা কুমিল্লার বিভিন্ন আদালতে বিচারাধীন আছে। সোমবার জেল পালানো মামলায় কুমিল্লার অতিরিক্ত জেলা -এরপর ৫ এর পাতায়

During the last days of BNP led government in 2006, elite force RAB raided a militant hideout in Comilla town after having a fierce battle for hours and claiming four lives. They arrested JMB supremo Abdur Rahman's son Nabil Rahman and JMB cadre Alamgir alias Bijoy alias Shaikat 22, from the scene.

Nabil Rahman, is the nephew of current governments deputy Jute Minister Mirza Azam who is the brother of Nabil's mother and brother-in-law of former JMB boss Shaykh Abdul Rahman.

This identity has kept him safe for a decade. Though arrested, Nabil Rahman did not face any trial so far. Cases filed against him have been stuck because various judicial issues due to the presence of ‘invisible forces’ around him.

4.8) Militant wins Awami League nomination⁴⁸



A militant leader once served as an accomplice to JMB leader Bangla Bhai won Awami League’s nomination from Bagmara of Rajshahi in the Union Council election.

The candidate identified as Md. Abdus Salam, backed by Awami League MP Enamul Haque started campaigning with Awami League’s “Boat” symbol for the chairman post of the union council election.

However, after widespread fear of violence and the tension mounted after the local Awami League leaders went on to support the JMB member despite the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina ordered for cancelling his

membership; the election of the union was stopped

4.9) AL MP had ‘Secret meeting’ with militant⁴⁹

The “secret meeting” involving a Saudi national and a leader of the banned separatist movement of Rohingyas at an Awami League leader and house in Teknaf of Cox's Bazar raised a lot of questions about the controversial Awami League MP Abdur Rahman Bodi.

On 30th July, Saturday, joint forces detained four people - Saudi national Ahmad Al Saleh Al Badi; Moulvi Ibrahim, a Bangladeshi from Tangail who accompanied Ahmad; Hafiz Salaul Islam, former military commander of Myanmar's separatist outfit Rohingya Solidarity

Organisation (RSO); and Syed Karim, Baharchara Union AL vice-president, said Lt Col Abujar Al Jahid, commander of BGB battalion-2 in Teknaf.



Salaul Islam



Ahmad Al Saleh



Bodi

The BGB official had added that the four had been holding the meeting for distributing funds among residents of an unregistered Rohingya shelter centre in Teknaf without approval from the local administration.

The meeting was held at Karim's house at Nayapara village, but the size of the fund and its purpose are yet to be ascertained, sources said.

The four were under the custody of the Border Guard Bangladesh at the BGB-2 Battalion Headquarters in Teknaf where they were being quizzed by the BGB, police and intelligence personnel, a police source said.

Law enforcers declined to comment on the outcome of the interrogation. But, BGB-2 Battalion Deputy Commander Major Abu Russel Siddique told some local media outlets on Saturday that local lawmaker Bodi and Teknaf Upazila Chairman and AL leader Zafar Ahmed were also present at the “secret meeting”.

WHO IS BODI?

Abdur Rahman Bodi, lawmaker from Cox's Bazar-4 constituency, hogged newspaper headlines several times for assaulting school teachers, forest and bank officials, engineers, a freedom fighter and a lawyer, just to name a few.

Dhaka Special Judges Court in September last year framed charges against him in a graft case filed by the Anti-Corruption Commission over amassing illegal wealth.

He had at least 23 cases filed against him at different times and some of them were withdrawn by the home ministry, considering them “politically motivated”. He faces numerous allegations of land grabbing, smuggling and extortion.

HAFIZ SALAUL'S PAST RECORD

According to locals, Hafiz infiltrated Bangladesh in the 1980s and secured Bangladeshi citizenship by illegal means.

Police said they had arrested him over the violent attack on a Buddhist temple in Ramu on September 29, 2012.

He was again arrested on February 15, 2013, over his alleged involvement in the unrest created by the Jamaat-Shibir men under the banner of (Delwar Hossain) Sayedee Mukti Council in Cox's Bazar.

Then on March 21 the same year, police arrested him from a “secret meeting” at a madrasa in Teknaf, sources said.

He built a mosque and madrasa complex named Imam Muslim Islamic Centre allegedly by grabbing land of the Forest Department behind Cox's Bazar College.

A school teacher of Shamlapur in Teknaf said Hafiz of RSO, Syed Karim, Shamlapur UP Chairman and Union AL President Maulana Aziz Uddin and his brother and upazila Vice-chairman Maulana Rafiq Uddin went to Saudi Arabia before the Ramadan this year.

CHAPTER 05

MISSING LINKS

5.1) Ghosts of IS in Government

Sheikh Hasina has been a sympathizer to Islamic State with a narrow mind. For example when a movement was taking place in BUET, the most famous university of the country, where boys and girls were participating equally, SheikhHasina's outburst were notice. She said,

*What a disgusting kind of agitation! A boy collected blood from a girl's body and poured it on the floor*⁵⁰.

In 2014 in a statement, she said that the women policy will not be anti-Islam,

There will be no law against the Holy Quran and Sunnah here ever. The government stated clearly in the women policy that if any international law has anything against the Quran and Sunnah, it will not apply in Bangladesh

Sheikh Hasina herself declared to establish a state that will follow the Medina Charter, a charter that leads to an Islamic State,⁵¹ while the Inspector General of Police asked freethinkers not to cross the limit.⁵²

Inspector General of Police AKM Shahidul Haque said: "No one should cross the limit. And for hurting someone's religious sentiment, the person will be punished by the law. Maximum punishment under the Penal Code and the ICT Act is 14 years of jail sentence."⁵³

With the leaders of the state echoing the voice of fanatics, the prominent educationist Professor Ajay Roy claimed the government actually supports the rise of fanatics and the death of the freethinkers.⁵⁴

These consecutive inactivity regarding the rise of militancy has helped the Islamic State to spread its tentacles in Bangladesh, and with the learning of the history of Awami League's past to back militants to show Bangladesh as a militancy prone country that turned into a blunder in some cases, the possibility of certain link of Awami League with IS cannot be ruled out.

For example, it is not unknown that the Awami League is supporting Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO) in bordering areas. Especially in Bandarban, the Awami League units are now being run by RSO trained Rohingyas.⁵⁵

And according to the latest and exclusive development, Gulshan attacker Rohan Imtiaz is the son of Awami League metropolitan leader Imtiaz Khan Babul.⁵⁶

These examples however indicate that how fertile the land of Bangladesh was made by Awami League that led the rise of Islamic State in Bangladesh which was evident by the Gulshan Attack.

5.2) One 'crossfire' death, too many questions

He might have had a vital clue to the mystery over secret killings that have been roiling the country for the last couple of years. Fleeing after hacking a Hindu college teacher in Madaripur, he was caught by locals and handed over to police.⁵⁷



Yet, Golam Faizullah Fahim, 18, was killed in a “shootout” on June 18, sparking widespread questions, condemnation and criticism, four days into his capture. Faizullah was on a 10-day remand when police took him to Miarchar area under Madaripur Sadar upazila to arrest his cohorts around 7:00am.

Like after any other “shootout”, police claimed miscreants sensing their presence opened fire. Police fired back, triggering a gunfight. A Madaripur correspondent reports that Faizullah lying dead on the spot was still in handcuffs, according to locals and journalists who saw the body.⁵⁸

After the news broke, many in social media termed the death a cold-blooded murder and the police statement one of those “fairytales” law enforcers have been telling people for years. Social media users suspect that Faizullah was killed either to hide some truths or destroy proofs regarding the ongoing attacks and killings by suspected Islamist militants.

Readers' comments in the websites of leading media outlets also came down heavily on police and the government. Many questioned why Faizullah was not in bullet-proof jacket and helmet during the drive unlike when he was taken to court.

Addressing an iftar programme yesterday evening, BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia said, “Though a very few are being arrested in connection with the secret killings, they too are being killed in the name of crossfire as the government fears if they remain alive, it will be exposed that the government is behind those attacks.”

A police official, who retired recently, said, “He [Faizullah] could have provided police with a lead to track down militant dens and the persons behind the series of killings.” He, however, added it is also possible that police had nothing more to glean from Faizullah.

Nur Khan Liton, acting executive director of Ain o Salish Kendra, said, “We hoped that investigators, through interrogating him following due procedures, would reveal information [about recent killings]. But the hope was shattered with his death in crossfire.” He added, “His death gave rise to a question in the public mind whether he was killed to cover up something or to avoid something.”⁵⁹

5.3) Raid aimed at erasing evidences

During a routine search operation in the early hours of August 26, police came under attack while trying to enter a building in Kalyanpur of the capital.

After a night-long stand-off, a SWAT team stormed the apartment on the building’s fifth floor, killing nine suspected militants.

Police said the militants had emerged from the apartment, firing their way out in an attempt to escape. Firearms and explosives were found in the apartment.

However, the forensic department of the Dhaka Medical College Hospital who were doing autopsy of the militants claimed

Most of the Kalyanpur militants were killed being hit by bullets on their back and the bullet injuries caused their death.

Each of them was hit by seven to eight bullets, said Sohel Mahmud, assistant professor of Dhaka Medical College’s forensic department. The coroners took out seven bullets from four bodies and the remaining bodies had bullet wounds but there was no bullet inside the bodies which means they were shot from a close distance, probably from point blank range.⁶⁰

Only one surviving suspected militant who received bullet injuries claimed himself as a cook of the militants and was shot while coming down of the stairs.

The way the militants were killed indicates that they were killed to erase the evidences and witnesses linked with something else.

5.4) ‘Bogra Shia mosque attacker’ killed in ‘crossfire’⁶¹

The main accused in Bogra Shia mosque attack case was killed in a “gunfight” with police in Shibganj upazila of Bogra.

Deceased Kawsar Ali, 25, was an alleged member of banned militant outfit Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB).

On November 26 last year, armed assailants stormed a Shia mosque during prayers and opened fire on people, killing muezzin of the mosque and injuring three others.

5.5) 3 militants dead in shootouts⁶²

Three alleged militants of police claimed JMB outfit were killed in the same day in the capital Dhaka and northern Rajshahi.

They were identified, Tareque Hasan Milu alias Ilias, Sultan Mahmud Rana alias Kamal, aged between 25 and 40, and Jamal Uddin, 25.

In Dhaka, Police claimed Tareque was directly involved in the killing of Rajshahi University Professor AFM Rezaul Karim Siddiquee and the bomb attack at Kantaji temple, while Rana had links with the Bogra Shia mosque attack.

In a covert pre-dawn raid, the two JMB men were injured in the shooting and taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital where doctors declared them dead.

On the other hand, Police in Rajshahi claimed that deceased Jamal Uddin, 25, who died in another extra-judicial shootout, was one of the three youths who were involved in last year's suicide bombing of Chokpara Ahmadiyya mosque in Bagmara of Rajshahi.

Although Godagari Police Station's Officer-in-Charge SM Abu Forhad said Jamal was a JMB suicide squad member, Rajshahi Superintendent of Police Nisharul Arif in a press conference later claimed that they were yet to ascertain whether Jamal belonged to the JMB.

3 'militants' killed in 'shootouts'

Another criminal die in similar incident

STAR REPORT

Four people, three of whom suspected militants, were killed in three separate "gun-fights" between "their cohorts" and law enforcers in Dhaka, Rajshahi and Brahmanbaria yesterday.

Police said the two killed in the capital were Tareque Hasan Milu alias Ilias and

Sultan Mahmud Rana alias Kamal, aged between 25 and 40. They were operatives of banned militant outfit Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), law enforcers claimed.

Tareque was directly involved in the killing of Rajshahi University Professor AFM Rezaul Karim Siddiquee and the bomb

SEE PAGE 2 COL 4

5.5) Blaming opposition to protect militants

After the death of two foreign nationals, Sheikh Hasina who was in New York at that time claimed that the BNP is linked with the murder. She threatened that she would take actions against BNP once she returns Bangladesh.

This statement of Sheikh Hasina was followed by the arrest of two local BNP leaders of Rangpur one of whom is the brother of BNP's central committee member Habib-un-Nabi Khan Shohel. This signifies the same old nature of Awami League to put the blame on the political rival and let the perpetrators flee.

After the March 7 bomb attack at Udichi program, Jessore Kotwali Police Station sub-inspector Abdul Aziz lodged a case without naming any culprits. Later the Awami League government, who were governing since 1996, blamed their rival Bangladesh Nationalist Party for the attack. Twenty-four people, including former minister Tariqul Islam, also standing committee member of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, were named in the charge sheet prepared by the Criminal Investigation Department on December 14, 1999 that helped the HUJI-B to rise further and operate some more operations.

The shifted focus of Awami League leaders while threatening BNP, due to political rivalry between the political parties, let the Islamic State cadres to spread its tentacles.

Moreover, analyzing the series of attacks, starting from Avijit Roy to Gulshan attack, Police had been playing the role of statue in every cases and the government is backing this force.

Addressing the nation after the latest attack, the prime minister on July 02 refused to acknowledge the possibility of involvement of any international terrorist groups, rather the prime minister blamed the attack on certain groups which “embraced terrorism having failed to win the people’s hearts in a democratic manner”.

“They want to portray the country as a failed state by holding the people hostage at gunpoint. They are exploiting religion to lead the impressionable youths astray and have people killed,” she said with a view to implicate BNP with the Gulshan Attack.

Another question to be raised is that, why government ‘ignored’ or ‘pretended to ignore’ the information shared by USA that the foreign nationals can be attacked from the last week of September.

Was it just a mistake, or a willfully done act to show the country as a militancy prone one and crack down on the opposition forces with this issue after framing them with the incidents to protect the militants?

CHAPTER 06

DUBIOUS ROLE OF LAW ENFORCERS

6.1) Trial of 156 cases of ‘militants’ halted⁶³

The trial process of 156 cases in relation to ‘militant activities’ remains halted as plaintiffs, investigating officers and witnesses of the cases from members of the police are not turning up in the courts.

The law courts are not being able to begin the proceedings of 138 cases filed under the anti-terrorism act for lack of government approval. The proceedings of four more cases remained suspended due to the stay order by the High Court.

Arrest warrants were issued against 333 members of the police, who are also witnesses in 62 out of 156 cases. Even after that, the police witnesses are not appearing in the court to give their depositions.

The home minister, Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal said, legal action would be taken against the members of the police who are not appearing in the court to give depositions. But, no action is taken against anyone yet.

It was found in a scrutiny of documents that Gulshan, Khilkhet, Sutrapur and Paltan police stations filed five cases against 35 ‘members of JamaatulMujahideen Bangladesh (JMB)’- two in 2005 and one in 2009. After framing charge sheets, the court began the trial but none of the plaintiffs, investigating officers and witnesses-all members of the police -appeared in court to take part in the legal proceedings.



The screenshot shows the top of a news article on the Prothom Alo Bangladesh website. The header includes the site's logo in Bengali and English, and a navigation bar with links to Home, Bangladesh, International, Sports, Opinion, Economy, Entertainment, and Science & T. The main headline is 'Trial of 156 cases of ‘militants’ halted'. Below the headline, it says 'Mohammad Asaduzzaman | Update: 20:18, Oct 11, 2015'. There are social media sharing icons (Facebook, Twitter, Print, etc.) and a brief summary of the article: 'The trial process of 156 cases in relation to ‘militant activities’ remains halted as plaintiffs, investigating officers and witnesses of the cases from members of the police are not turning up in the courts.'

The additional metropolitan session judge court framed charge sheet against seven ‘JMB members’ on 11 August in 2009 in a case of Paltan police station. Four of the accused are now in jail, one is freed on bail and the remaining two are absconding. The four accused, who are now behind bars, were produced before the court 67 times, but the plaintiff of the case and Paltan police station’s assistant sub-inspector, Maznu Mia, and case’s investigating officer and then a DB inspector AbdurRazzak did not turn up in the court to submit their depositions.

The court finally issued warrant of arrest against these two police officials and 23 others for not appearing in the court.

Gulshan police station’s sub-inspector Mir ZahedulHaque filed a case with the police station against five ‘JMB men’ in 2005 and the charge sheet was framed in the case on 14 May 2009. The case is now under trial in the court of Dhaka’s second additional metropolitan sessions judge.

The accused in the case were produced in the court 37 times in the last six years, but none of the 37 witnesses, the plaintiff and four investigating officers of the case turned up in the court. The arrest warrant was also issued against these police officials.

156 cases undergoing trial at Dhaka Metropolitan and 23 districts’ courts are also facing the same fate.

It is entirely police responsibility to produce witnesses before the court. In most of the cases in connection with militancy, even the police are not submitting their depositions before the court. Other witnesses are also not being produced; therefore, the cases are being delayed for long time.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP)’s deputy commissioner for prosecution AHM Qamaruzzaman said, “We follow all the warrants of the courts and instructions are sent to concerned offices.”

138 cases waiting for approval

Approval is required from the home ministry for taking anti-terrorism cases into cognizance. So far, charge sheets were submitted before the courts in connection of 138 militancy cases, but none was approved by the ministry as yet.

Home minister Asaduzzaman Khan that they were giving approval in cases under the anti-terrorism act, approval would be given quickly after scrutinising necessary documents.

The High Court’s stay order

The accused in eight such cases have submitted writ petition before the High Court saying that the cases did not obtain approval from the home ministry. The High Court has put stay order and asked to halt judicial proceedings. Prosecution, however, did not take any action to lift the stay orders.

6.2) 3 militant leaders' trial awaits government nod⁶⁴

The trial of three top militant leaders awaits government approval.



3 militant leaders' trial awaits government nod

Asaduzzaman | Update: 19:44, Jul 14, 2016

The trial of three top militant leaders awaits government approval.

The three leaders are Ansarullah Bangla Team chief Jasimuddin Rahmani, JMB (Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh) chief Maulana Saidur Rahman and chief coordinator of Hizb ut-Tahrir Mohiuddin Ahmed.

Three separate cases were filed under the Anti-Terrorism Act 2009 against them.



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Three separate cases were filed under the Anti-Terrorism Act 2009 against them.

Jasimuddin Rahmani and Maulana Saidur Rahman are in prison but Mohiuddin Ahmed is out on bail.

As per the anti-terrorism act, the court cannot take any complaints into cognizance without government's permission.

Chief public prosecutor of Dhaka metropolitan session judge court, Abdullah Abu has said that letters have been sent several times to the law ministry seeking approval to start the trial. However, they have not heard from them in over two years, he added.

Another public prosecutor of the court, Tapash Kumar Pal, told Prothom Alo that a letter has been sent to the law secretary from the court. The law ministry has to forward the letter to the home ministry as per rules, he added.

Law minister Anisul Haque told he will contact the home ministry in this regard.

Home minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal told that his ministry has not received any letter as yet.

Maulana Saidur Rahman's case

Maulana Saidur Rahman, prime leader of JMB, arrested on 25 May 2010. The charge sheet against him was issued on 7 August 2010, and the relevant letter issued twice for approval.

Charges were filed at Kadamtali police station in the capital against Maulana Saidur Rahman with two other JMB men for terrorism on 25 May 2010.

The charge sheet was submitted to the Dhaka metropolitan sessions judge court on 7 August 2010 and the court took the complaint into cognizance.

The trial started at the Dhaka special judge court-6 on 16 January 2011.

However, on 8 September 2015, the court passed an order saying the documents of this case have to be returned to Dhaka metropolitan court for government approval.

The trial has been stuck since then.

Sources at the court said Dhaka metropolitan sessions judge court sent a letter on 28 March, 2016 to the law ministry for government approval.

Jasimuddin Rahmani case

Jasimuddin Rahmani was arrested on 12 August 2013 in connection with the murder of blogger Rajib Haider and is in jail since then. He has already been sentenced to five years of jail by the court.

According to police documents, a case was filed with Mohammadpur police station against banned Islamic militant group Ansarullah Bangla Team's chief Jasimuddin Rahmani along with 10 others back on 24 August 2013. After completing investigations, inspector of the police's detective branch (DB) Mohammad Abdul Latif Sheikh submitted his charge sheet to the chief metropolitan magistrate's court on 8 September 2014. The case was sent to the Dhaka

metropolitan session judge court on 26 October the same year, but remains unaddressed. The court issued its first letter to the government for approval on 23 November 2014. Two more letters have been issued, the last one on 28 March 2016. The government is yet to respond. The court has set 11 dates till now for the hearing.

The accused only came to the court and went back. Four of the accused, Junnun Sikdar, Kazi Rezwan, Naimul Hasan, and Zahidur Rahman got bail and are now fugitives.

Mohiuddin Ahmed case

Mohiuddin Ahmed, the chief coordinator of Hizbut Tahrir, another banned Islamic militant group, was arrested on 10 April 2010. A case was filed against him under the anti-terrorism act in 2010. He got bail on 3 May 2011. Next year he was freed from jail. Police submitted the investigation report on 9 February 2013 against Mohiuddin Ahmed and six others. The case file was sent to Dhaka metropolitan session judge on 21 April in the same year. The court issued its first to the government at that time, and issued the third letter on 28 March.

Mohiuddin Ahmed is a former professor at Dhaka University, and in on leave now. He is living in an apartment allotted for university teachers.

6.3) 11 years on, case still under trial⁶⁵

Eleven years on, the trial in a case for murdering two people in a suicide bomb attack by alleged JMB operatives on the Chittagong Court Building premises is yet to be completed, partly because of police negligence.

MILITANT ATTACK ON CTG COURT 11 years on, case still under trial

ABIR BIKASH DEY and PRANABESH CHAKRABORTY, Ctg

Eleven years on, the trial in a case for murdering two people in a suicide bomb attack by alleged JMB operatives on the Chittagong Court Building premises is yet to be completed, partly because of police negligence.

In the last two years, police "failed" to produce a single witness before the court for deposition, court sources said.

Police constable Rajib Barua and one Shahabuddin from Sitakunda upazila of Chittagong were killed and 16 others, mostly police, were injured in the attack on November 29, 2005.

Two cases -- one for murder and another for possession of explosives -- were filed with Kotwali Police Station.

In June 2008, a Chittagong court sentenced two members of the banned militant outfit Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) to life in the explosives case.

The convicts are JMB Chittagong divisional commander Javed Iqbal alias Mohammad and Jahidul Islam Sumon alias Boma Mizan.

The murder case is now under trial at the court of Chittagong Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge-1.

Of the 77 witnesses, 28 have so far given depositions in the case.

The court last took deposition of witnesses on September 30, 2014. Since then, it fixed 16 dates for hearings but they did not happen as police could not produce any witnesses, according to court sources.

On July 21 this year, the court fixed September 5 for the next hearing and summoned 19 witnesses, including Rab and police officials, to appear before it on that day.

Hla Ching Pru, the then inspector of Detective Branch (DB) of Chittagong Metropolitan Police, submitted the charge sheet on May 18, 2006, accusing five JMB members.



After the attack in 2005.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

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6.4) The Avijit Roy case

Avijit Roy, the founder of Mukto Mona blog and an US citizen, was hacked to death near the Milon Square on the Dhaka University campus, on the footpath adjacent to SuhrawardyUddyan. His wife Rafida Ahmed Banna was seriously injured in the incident.

The site of murder is just yards away from the TSC. The police put up a barrier at TSC intersection and guard the area throughout the month of February. The Shahbagh police station is not also far away from the spot. There is round the clock police surveillance in the area, at the Shahbagh intersection, the book fair, Doel Square, Fuller Road corner, Nilkhet and all the entrances of the campus.



Moreover, the TSC intersection was crowded and more so due to the book fair, EkusheyBoiMela. There were police all around, providing tight security. Despite such security, the assailants killed Avijit Roy and easily fled the scene.

Many witnesses said armed police personnel were there, but just watched on in silence. They didn't even chase the attackers.

Avijit's father, Ajay Kumar Roy, a retired professor of physics at Dhaka University, said angrily, "Perhaps the police couldn't have prevented my son's killing, but they could have caught the killers instead of standing there like statues."

This has given rise to serious questions about sincerity of the law enforcers to provide security to life or is actually linked with these groups instead.

Moreover, after the Police let the killers of Avijit Roy flee and the government decided not to come forward with support for bloggers; even refrained themselves from making any comment because according to the son of Sheikh Hasina the government did not want to be seen as anti-Islam.

The charade did not end there. In a bid to save the killers of Avijit Roy, on July 7 Police stated that the killers of Avijit Roy were identified and his wife Rafida Ahmed Bonya confirmed the presence of the two of the suspects as being at the scene of the murder.⁶⁶ Later, on the same day, a post by the Editor of Mukto-Mona blog which was once ran by Avijit Roy claimed that recent news reports run by local media outlets, quoting detectives, that Bonya had identified two of the seven suspected killers are "baseless". None of the intelligence officials have contacted Rafida Ahmed on this regard, according to the post.⁶⁷

Moreover, the RAB, elite law enforcers, in August arrested three men, including a British citizen, in connection with the killing of Avijit Roy. However, on detailed investigation, it came

out that the three were picked up three months ago and one of them who is a British citizen was diagnosed with schizophrenia.⁶⁸

These repeated attempts by Police to save the killers made Ajay Roy, prominent educationist and the father of Avijit Roy to comment that the government patronizes these terrorist outfits.⁶⁹

6.5) Police denied saving Niloy

40-year-old Niloy, who used to write blog posts criticizing religious fundamentalism, is the third blogger to have been killed this year involved with Mukto-Mona, a community blog site for freethinkers that received a DW 2015 Bobs Award.

Niloy was murdered in his apartment in Bangladesh's capital, Dhaka, on August 7. Four assailants forcefully entered his home in the afternoon and stabbed the blogger, said ShammiHaque, a fellow activist who visited Niloy's house immediately after the attack. The blogger's wife and sister were in the apartment at the time of the attack, but the assailants locked them up in another room, Haque told DW.



Farid Ahmed, a moderator of the Mukto-Mona site, told DW that after being followed by two suspicious persons on May 15, Niloy went to the police station to lodge a general diary. But, according to Ahmed, the police refused to take his complaint and failed to provide security.⁷⁰

Blogger Farid Ahmed condemned the murders and blamed the Bangladeshi government for its failure to protect bloggers in danger. "The government has failed miserably to provide safety and security to secular bloggers in the country," he said.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has failed to condemn any of this year's murders. Activist Haque thinks the government wants to secure voters' support by not speaking out against the murder of bloggers, known in Bangladeshi society as atheists or freethinkers.

Like all these unsolved cases, Investigators are still in the dark about the motives of the murders of two foreign nationals, but they are claiming to have made a lot of progress in solving the crimes.⁷¹

CHAPTER 07

OPINIONS THAT COUNT

WHERE THE BUCK STOPS⁷²

AKM Wahiduzzaman

It is the government's responsibility to find the killers of all victims, including atheist bloggers.



Nazimuddin Samad, a law student at Jagannath University who was active on social media in support of atheism, was hacked to death on April 6.

"If anyone writes filthy words against our religion, why should we tolerate that? Everyone should maintain decency. Otherwise, in case of any uncivilised attitude, the government wouldn't take the responsibility."

- Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina

Besides his anti-religion commentary, Nazim's Facebook posts also showed that he was fairly vocal against the government's inability to control crime, corruption, nepotism, and its continuous failure at protecting the lives of bloggers.

After the murder, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal said: "The write-ups of the slain secular activist need to be scrutinised to see whether he wrote anything objectionable about religion."

This was not the first example of a responsible person from a law-enforcing authority issuing an irresponsible statement.

Last year, when four atheist bloggers were assassinated in a row, Inspector General of

Police (IGP) AKM Shahidul Haque said: "According to laws, if anyone hurts one's feelings, he will be punished by the law -- none should cross the limit."

And finally, on the eve of the Bengali New Year, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said: "We perform our religious rituals."

But, if anyone writes filthy words against our religion, why should we tolerate that? Everyone should maintain decency. Otherwise, in case of any uncivilised attitude, the government wouldn't take the responsibility."

As a practising Muslim, I like to differ with the first statement of our honourable PM. "Islam" is derived from "salaam," a word that means "peace."

"It is the government's responsibility to seek out the killers and ensure exemplary punishment so that no one can get the courage to kill anybody in the name of anything, either religion or politics."

The head of the government simply cannot afford to say: "The government will not take the responsibility."

It also refers to a person submitting to the will of Allah in order to seek eternal peace and tranquillity. Teachings of the Qur'an and Prophet Muhammad incline Islam towards peace and tolerance.

Yet, Islam has faced filthy and false criticisms since its beginning. The prophet faced much difficulty and opposition in his own birthplace, the city of Mecca. He was eventually forced to migrate to Medina.

But, in spite of all the opposition and even physical torture that his followers suffered in Mecca, Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) always approached the non-believers of Mecca with tolerance.

Arabia has been under Muslim influence for 1,400 years. Yet, there are about 12 million Christians in that region. If the Muslims were intolerant and used the sword for the propagation of Islam, the situation would have been very different.

This is the Qur'anic point of view, this is what Allah says: "Invite (all) to the way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious." (16:125)

The Holy Qur'an warns that some people who have darkness in their souls will use the Holy Qur'an for their own monstrous gains.

That is, no matter how much we teach them (or argue with them), their darkness and ignorance will not allow them to understand the Holy Qur'an.

Just because we grew up in a Muslim family or in a Muslim country does not mean that we are Muslim, or that we understand the Holy Qur'an or Islam.

Intolerant folk who harm others and hide behind the Holy Qur'an will be encouraged by the recent statement made by our prime minister.

As a practicing Muslim, Sheikh Hasina might be hurt by the filthy words against

Islam, but she cannot say, “why should we tolerate it?”

Rather, she must keep patience and act with tolerance. That’s what Allah says in the Qur’an: “And if you punish them, punish them no worse than they punished you -- but if you show patience, that is indeed the best (course) for those who are patient.” (16:126)

Our PM must remember that she is not the prime minister of Muslims or believers exclusively, she is the prime minister of all the people of Bangladesh, including atheists.

The responsibility of improving our country’s deteriorating law and order situation falls on her shoulders.

It is the government’s responsibility to seek out the killers and ensure exemplary punishment so that no one can get the courage to kill anybody in the name of anything, either religion or politics.

The head of the government simply cannot afford to say: “The government will not take the responsibility.”

It is the government’s responsibility, and it has to take it. It is our administration’s task to find the killers of all victims, including atheist bloggers, and ensure safety for all citizens, instead of pointing fingers at them.

A K M Wahiduzzaman is a professor of National University of Bangladesh

HORROR AND SORROWS IN DHAKA⁷³

TAHMIMA ANAM



When I was last in Dhaka, I used to take my son out in the car every afternoon. “Let’s go to Holey!” He would cry out from the back seat.

The Holey Artisan Bakery, just two years old, had become our firm favorite. The cakes were delicious, and it was the only place near home that had an open lawn. We took his mini-sized soccer ball with us, staying until dusk when the mosquitoes from the nearby lake drove us inside.

When the bakery first opened, it was just a counter with pastries and cakes. My husband and I sometimes joked we’d have to take out a mortgage to pay for the croissants — they were expensive — but the sunshine, the field, and the view of Gulshan Lake always lured us back.

As Holey became a popular family hangout, the owners built a pizza oven in the front, hired someone to make gelato and started serving tapas in the evenings.

On Friday, it was perhaps the tapas, or the pizza, or the open sky above the lawn that drew the dinner crowd, a mixture of Bangladeshis and foreigners. At about 8:45 in the evening, a group of heavily-armed men stormed and seized more than a score of diners as hostages.

The police arrived quickly, but when they attempted to enter the restaurant, they were met with heavy gunfire and grenades. Two officers were killed and many others were injured.

“Given what just happened, last month’s police drive, which saw the arrests of more than 11,000 people supposedly in a crackdown on terrorism, merely exposes the government’s impotence in the face of these murderous militants.”

Over the course of the night, as the families of those inside held vigil on the street outside the restaurant, occasional gunshots could be heard. The militants singled out the foreigners for execution.

After nearly 12 hours of standoff, as dawn broke over the city, the army special forces finally succeeded in breaking the siege. Inside, they found the bodies of 20 victims and rescued at least 13 hostages. Among the dead, according to the police, were nine Italians, seven Japanese, an American, an Indian and two Bangladeshis.

Reports are still emerging about what exactly transpired. By some accounts, the gunmen assured the Bangladeshi hostages that they would be spared. Hostages were told to recite verses from the Quran in order to save themselves. According to an Indian newspaper, an Italian businessman who had stepped into the garden to make a phone call managed to hide in bushes and then escape — not knowing until later that his wife, trapped inside, had been murdered.

One victim’s story that stands out because of his courage was that of Faraaz Ayaaz Hossain, a 20-year-old Bangladeshi who had gone out to dinner with two friends, Tarishi Jain and Abinta Kabir. Mr. Hossain and Ms. Kabir, an American citizen, were both students at Emory University, in Atlanta, on vacation; Ms. Jain, who was from India, was studying at Berkeley.

According to witnesses, when the militants heard that Mr. Hossain was Bangladeshi, they offered to release him, but he refused to leave his two friends behind. When the army broke through the terrorists’ barricade, they found the body of all three, with Mr. Hossain’s bearing marks of an intense struggle.

On Saturday morning, after the siege had ended and after many frantic calls and text messages exchanged with my family, we began to take stock of the carnage that had come to our capital. For those who lost loved ones, the loss is unimaginable and irreparable.

For the rest of us, the accounting means adjusting to a new and broken world. We

know that our country and our city will never be the same again.

We know that the assurances of the authorities mean little. Given what just happened, last month's police drive, which saw the arrests of more than 11,000 people supposedly in a crackdown on terrorism, merely exposes the government's impotence in the face of these murderous militants. We may hope that the government will make peace with the opposition in order to tackle this darker threat, but we fear that this outrage in Dhaka will lead to more surveillance and exacerbate authoritarianism.

Further reports suggest that the assailants were not, as many expected to hear, from disenfranchised backgrounds. They were privately educated and from wealthy families — young men who easily might have been friends with some of the victims. Where does that leave us, knowing that these killers had every privilege in life and yet chose the path of nihilism?

It leaves us with this conclusion: We must accept that the story we have long told ourselves about our country may no longer be true. For months, I and many of my

fellow Bangladeshis have wanted to believe that the targeted assassinations of writers, bloggers, publishers, gay rights activists, Hindu priests and foreign workers did not mean that Bangladesh was necessarily on a road to destabilization by violent extremists.

We felt sure that things must eventually go back to normal — normal being a Muslim-majority country with a secular Constitution and a robust tradition of social justice, diversity and pluralism. We did not believe Bangladesh could become one of those places where the wealthy barricade themselves behind high gates and private security, where embassies issue travel warnings and evacuate their staff, and where — God forbid — America sends its drones to target the militants.

Right now, all I care about is my city, about the innocent people who died in the café where my son learned to play soccer, about the three kids from my high school who met violent deaths beside the lake that was an oasis of calm in this bustling city.

Tomorrow, I may recover my sense of those truths about my country that I know to be fundamental. Today, I can only mourn what we have lost.

Tahmima Anam is a Commonwealth Writer's Prize winning author with Bangladeshi origin

TERROR ATTACK IN BANGLADESH'S CAPITAL SHOULD SURPRISE NO ONE

ISHAN THAROOR



The details remain murky. On Friday night, assailants assaulted a restaurant in an upscale neighborhood in Dhaka, Bangladesh's teeming capital. They fired weapons and hurled grenades. Initial reports suggest that there are six to eight gunmen inside the establishment, detaining about 20 hostages. At least one police officer has been slain during the standoff with the militants.

Officers of the Rapid Action Battalion, an elite paramilitary police unit, filled the streets of Gulshan, a leafy district that's home to diplomats as well as the country's

well-heeled elite. The restaurant under siege is a bakery in the daytime and a Spanish eatery at night.

Speculation has fallen immediately on extremist groups believed to be operating in Bangladesh, including outfits affiliated both with al-Qaida's South Asian wing and the Islamic State. The past two years have seen a horrific spate of attacks by self-declared Islamists on Hindus, intellectuals, secularist writers and bloggers.

According to one count, the Islamic State has claimed responsibility for more attacks

in Bangladesh through its media organs than in Pakistan or Afghanistan. The extremist organization had called on its fighters and proxies to launch such strikes on soft targets during the holy month of Ramadan.

The government, led by venerable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, has struggled to come to grips with the issue. It has rebuffed any suggestion that the Islamic State has a foothold in the country. And it has sought to deflect blame for its perceived mishandling of the security crisis.

Last month, a senior minister chose to pin the escalation in violence on a vague Israeli conspiracy rather than domestic problems. In police crackdowns, authorities have rounded up some 12,000 people, but most of those detained have been petty criminals and supporters of opposition parties, reports the Associated Press.

Counter-terror experts say the Hasina government has expended more energies consolidating its position and suppressing its opponents than tackling the spread of Islamist violence in the country. A recent report from the International Crisis Group argued that a skewed judicial system and the heavy-handed rule of Hasina's ruling Awami League party, which is traditionally secular and center-left, was laying the foundation for further militant violence and unrest.

"There is no time to lose," the report concluded. "If mainstream dissent remains closed, more and more government opponents may come to view violence and violent groups as their only recourse."

The prime minister "has blamed much of the country's extremist violence on the political opposition, namely the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) and the Bangladesh National Party," writes Michael Kugelman, South Asia expert at the Woodrow Wilson Center. "This accusation may not be altogether false. ... Still, to seemingly rule out that groups other than Dhaka's chief political foes are perpetrating Bangladesh's intensifying extremist violence is naive at best, and dangerous at worst."

In the shadow of creeping extremism, the ruling government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has been criticized for its growing authoritarian style. The political environment has left Bangladesh deeply susceptible to such havoc.

"By merely shrugging off Bangladesh's alarming levels of extremist violence, Dhaka puts the country in greater peril," writes Kugelman. "And it strengthens the forces that wish to undermine Bangladesh's founding identity as a pluralistic, secular state."

Bangladesh, as a nation, exists on the periphery of the American imagination. Few in the U.S. would likely know it has one of the world's largest Muslim populations, larger than any country in the Middle East. But in the wake of the Istanbul terror attack, attention has fallen on the chosen tactics of the Islamic State and its proxies. A coordinated strike on Gulshan, the epicenter of wealth and elite power in Dhaka, has all the hallmarks of the terrorist organization's strategy

BANGLA SIEGE: BLAME DEEP DYSFUNCTION IN POLITICS AND STATE INSTITUTIONS⁷⁴



Bangladesh endured its own Mumbai-like suicide attack over the weekend when heavily armed terrorists targeted a bakery frequented by foreigners and took them hostage before being gunned down by security forces. The Islamic State has claimed responsibility; whether or not the group that has ravaged Syria and Iraq was involved in the Dhaka attack will be established in the days to come but this conscious targeting of foreigners appears

geared to exacerbate the conflict between the State establishment and extremist forces that have long waged a bitter and bloody battle.

The Sheikh Hasina government's counterterrorism policies will be under a lot more international pressure following this attack. That sort of scrutiny does occasionally help as with the case of the Lashkar-e-Toiba after the Mumbai attacks,

when the Pakistani establishment was forced to rein in the violence of the group if not its infrastructure. Ms Hasina's government unfortunately has nowhere that kind of leverage as a range of Islamist groups has been relentlessly challenging the authority of her government, and has, over the last year, launched several brutal, often unspeakably violent attacks on bloggers, atheist activists, publishers, Hindus, Shias and foreigners.

Extremism and terrorism have proved almost impossible to tackle in Bangladesh as they themselves are a product of the deep dysfunction in the country's politics and State institutions. Ms Hasina's Awami League party and government is both a product and a driver of that dysfunction. Created via a bloody civil war in 1971, Bangladesh has a very violent political culture and a gridlocked politics dominated by two warring parties and, as pointed by the International Crisis Group (ICG), it has extremely partisan State structures whereby institutions like the civil service, police and

judiciary are manned or manipulated by party faithful. Hasina's government is opposed to violent Islamists but it has also presided over widespread repression of opposition parties like Bangladesh Nationalist Party and the Jamaat-e-Islami. This and the partisan nature of the criminal justice system has bred alienation and enhanced the appeal of extremist organisations and terror groups. Furthermore, as a politically-freighted bureaucracy is too invested in the continuation of a regime and prone to overreach, the Hasina government has also cracked down on the media and sections of the civil society, further undermining its legitimacy.

Bangladesh is experiencing a crisis of public institutions of which terrorism is one manifestation. The focus now will be on finding the conspirators but the country desperately needs a new form of politics and a sequence of steps that will manage social tensions. Right now that sounds like wishful thinking.

THE HORROR IN DHAKA⁷⁵

The attack in an upmarket café in Dhaka has left 28 people dead, including six gunmen, and Bangladesh is clearly shaken. Over the past three years, the country has seen at least 40 targeted killings by militants, with each new attack raising fears about the growing clout of radicalised groups. The latest represents a marked escalation. The Islamic State has claimed responsibility for the nearly 11-hour siege. Till now the Bangladesh government has never accepted that the IS has been operating in the country. Even so, it is clear that IS-style rhetoric against minorities and foreigners and the use of horrifying violence are influencing Bangladeshi militants. Of late, gay rights activists, Hindu priests, secular bloggers and Shia mosques have all come under attack. In the latest, assailants separated foreigners from locals and hacked them to death one by one. The timing of the attack, at the start of the Ramzan holidays, may also be significant. The IS has called upon its supporters to attack “crusaders” and “apostates” during the holy month of Ramzan.

The Dhaka attack takes the fight to the government of Sheikh Hasina. For months,

the government tried to play down the threats from jihadists, saying those were the acts of local groups. Its focus was on weakening the political opposition, including the Jamaat-e-Islami, Bangladesh’s largest Islamist party. When liberal and secular activists were attacked, the government partly blamed them for “insulting religious sensibilities”. When the IS and al-Qaeda claimed responsibility for the murders, the authorities said no foreign terrorist group was involved. It is only recently that the government launched a major crackdown on radicalised groups, but over this period the extremists have grown in strength to carry out mass attacks. The IS and al-Qaeda see Bangladesh as an arena of potential expansion.

When liberal and secular activists were attacked, the government partly blamed them for “insulting religious sensibilities”.

The IS had released audio propaganda in Bangla. The simmering tensions between the

government and the Islamist organisations have lent radicalised groups an opportunity to drive their agenda and find recruits. To address this, the government needs both short- and long-term strategies. The immediate task is of course to address the worsening security situation. The targeted killings started three years ago, but the government has appeared to hold itself back on pursuing the murderers and their

handlers. The long-term challenge is to check growing radicalisation. In this context, the ruling Awami League, perceived to be at the liberal end of the political spectrum, must step back and reconsider its high-handedness in dealing with opposition and dissent. If Bangladesh's democracy is hollowed out, only the extremists will benefit.

AT CRISIS POINT⁷⁶

Friday night's attack in Dhaka was part of a global challenge. Government response must be firm but considered.

“Glory”, wrote Abdullah Azzam, the charismatic patriarch of the global jihadist movement, “does not build its lofty edifice except with skulls; honour and respect cannot be established except on a foundation of cripples and corpses”. The carnage in Dhaka this weekend, like so many of the obscenities that the Islamic State has inflicted on the world, marks the practice of his thoughts.

In Bangladesh, as elsewhere, Azzam's words remind us, violence must not be mistaken only for a kind of nihilism. Killing is, among other things, a form of politics. Bangladesh is a society fractured, with intensity unrivaled since 1971, between secularism and Islamism. The murders of secularist bloggers, religious minorities and political opponents of the religious right-wing are part of a bitter campaign of resistance by Islamists to a tide of Bangladeshi nationalism, as well as profound changes in the status of women.

It is not a trivial resistance: 2015 Pew opinion polls show that progressive changes

are colliding with a society split down the middle on attitudes to religious law, with substantial numbers backing the death penalty for apostasy, and medieval-era punishments for theft and adultery.

There's little doubt the crisis is being fuelled by the authoritarian responses of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's government — including mass arrests, torture, and extra-judicial executions. The West's reflexive desire to bring the right-wing Jama'at-e-Islami back into the political fray, though, is part of the problem, not solution. Ever since its top leadership was indicted for the 1971 war crimes, the party has been pushed underground. The opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party, long beholden to the Jamaat, wants it back on board. In 2014, it boycotted the general elections, demanding an interim government to oversee elections, which it hopes will allow its ally an opportunity to re-enter politics.

Western governments believe giving the religious right political space will still the tensions in Bangladesh politics, forgetting

that the BNP-Jama'at alliance legitimised jihadist groups through their time in office. Bangladesh's Islamic State — in reality, the remnants of the Jama'at-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh network, which has re-branded itself with help from British diasporic IS cadre — has interjected itself into this political crisis. Islamists hope that the killings will create enough chaos to replace the government with a more benign political order.

New Delhi can play a meaningful role in avoiding that outcome. The Bangladesh government's authoritarian functioning is, increasingly, contributing to the chaos its enemies seek to precipitate. But Friday night's attack was, as events from Paris to Istanbul show us, part of a global challenge — not evidence of Bangladesh's imminent disintegration. The response must be firm — but restrained.

The Dhaka siege

THE NEW TERRORISM IN BANGLADESH⁷⁷

A jihadist attack on a restaurant popular with foreigners may force the government to change its strategy



The Holey Artisan Bakery, an upscale café and restaurant overlooking a placid lake in Dhaka, was a foodie's labour of love in a verdant corner of the chaotic capital. It offered French croissants and Manhattan-style brunches. But on the evening of July 1st, at the start of the Eid holiday week that marks the end of Ramadan, it turned into a place of terror. After Bangladeshi commandos recaptured the restaurant the following day, the scene might have been drawn from the Vietnam war—with shredded tropical greenery, armoured

vehicles and 28 dead bodies, many of them expatriates.

The gang of about seven attackers, armed with semi-automatic rifles and improvised grenades, stormed past the flimsily guarded gates and fought off an initial attempt by security forces to storm the restaurant. In the course of a 12-hour siege they slit the throats of anyone who could not recite verses from the Koran. At one table were eight Japanese customers, some of who were consultants for the Japanese overseas aid organisation. Only one is thought to have made it out

alive. At another table Italian garment entrepreneurs suffered a similar fate. The Islamic State (IS) claimed responsibility and posted horrifying images of the dead during the siege.

It was the most shocking attack in a wave of Islamist violence that before this weekend had claimed the lives of around 50 people since 2013: non-Muslims, local bloggers and assorted non-conformists. The Bangladeshi authorities rounded up 14,000 people in a week last month, but the mass arrests did not prevent the latest atrocity.

It is still unclear which local organisation was involved. All eyes will turn to the Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB). Formed by veterans of the Afghan war against the Soviet Union in the 1980s, it made a name for itself as a thuggish militia in northwest Bangladesh that terrorised leftists and bullied women into wearing the veil. It carried out a spate of ineffectual, but

widespread bombings in 2005 and appears more recently to have allied itself with IS.

In public the Bangladeshi government refuses to accept that IS has taken root in the country. According to diplomatic sources, though, the government had privately conceded that IS had some form of presence in the country. In the days before the assault on Holey Bakery security had been heightened around parts of Dhaka; churches were warned to be vigilant.

Opponents of the government blame the drift to authoritarianism by Bangladesh's ruling party, the Awami League for provoking the Islamist backlash. It has overseen the blanket repression of opposition parties and other dissenters. The government prefers to blame the opposition—hence its reluctance to admit to the presence of IS. The carnage at the Holey Bakery should force a rethink of strategy.

HOW THE BANGLADESH GOVERNMENT HELPED CREATE THE WOLF IT WARNED AGAINST⁷⁸

RUMI AHMED

When five young men stormed upscale Holey Artisan Bakery in Dhaka, massacred 20 guests and took the rest of the dinner time crowd hostage at gunpoint, the attackers had a very clear mission. They aimed at inflicting maximal fear among foreigners, among the non-Muslims and among the women who were not wearing traditional Islamic garb. The message was clear: Bangladesh cannot conduct business with the international community, foreign aid workers will be discouraged from operating in the country, women's and religious freedom will not be tolerated. That night at Holey Artisan Bakery, war was announced on the devout but peace-and tolerant people of Bangladesh. The seeds, though, were sown a while ago.

“The Islamist organizations earlier participated in mainstream politics of street movements and elections which kept its activists, supporters and sympathizers away from extremist activities.”

Since its bloody inception in 1971, Bangladesh for the majority of its existence maintained a status quo political power

structure of two centrist parties (the centre-right-leaning Bangladesh Nationalist Party or BNP and the current ruling Bangladesh Awami League, which veers to the centre left), a bunch of religious elements on the far right and an assortment of fragmented leftist outlets.

Although an overwhelming majority of Bangladesh is conservative and religious, for over the last half a century, Bangladeshis have traditionally shunned religion-based political entities during elections. However, they have always accepted outfits preaching nonviolent political Islam. Analysis of election data will show that political Islam commanded a static 5-8% popular support. The prevailing political structures which allowed open politics for religious entities helped keep this population busy with mainstream politics and away from underground extremism. Each time such a space was eliminated, the nation faced political crisis. Deviation from the status quo in January 1975, when democracy and press freedom were killed by an overnight decree and the country turned into a communist-style one-party state, Bangladesh fell into a bloody political turmoil. Finally a new political order, which reset the country back to the status quo, brought Bangladesh back from near disintegration, and the BNP and Awami League dominated the political

theatre. The fractured left continued to exist as minor contenders. The Islamic parties -- with one dominant player slowly emerging in the form of the Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh -- maintained its traditional 5-8% support base among the population in Bangladesh's electoral politics.

However, a few years ago, Bangladesh again saw a major turn away from the political status quo. Since the current ruling party Awami League came to power through an election conducted under a military-sponsored caretaker government in 2007, it has steadily restricted the space for democracy, free speech and freedom of congregation. A time-tested system of conducting national elections under a technocrat-led caretaker government was abolished, forcing the major opposition party to boycott the national election. Even the local government elections were blatant shows of the state's clampdown on democracy, where even the police forces were seen stuffing ballot boxes. The government of Prime Minister Hasina returned to power in a boycotted national election. More than 50% of the MPS were elected unopposed in this election. Since returning to power, Ms. Hasina seemed hell-bent on removing the last shred of democracy in Bangladesh. The demise of democracy at the hands of Ms. Hasina echoed what happened in Bangladesh in January of 1975 when a bloody coup killed the whole family of the current PM. With the return of an Awami league autocracy, many observers saw history repeating itself and feared an August 1975-like Military takeover.

But now it seems that history is repeating itself in a unique and strange way. It would not be unreasonable to assume that the recent spate of Islamist violence is a direct result of the elimination of the political status quo that Bangladesh traditionally is based on. Bangladesh is used to a centre right government alternating with a centre left rule and did well in preventing rise of Islamic extremism during the four decades of its existence. The Islamist organizations participated in mainstream politics of street movements and elections which kept its activists, supporters and sympathizers away from extremist activities.

"One tool the current ruling party used to achieve its goal of an absolute oligarchy was its decade-long campaign for the elimination of anti-independence forces from Bangladesh..."

The change in the political landscape over the last several years has made it impossible for the main centre right political party (BNP) to function; Islamist political organizations are similarly restricted. As these political activists fell victim to relentless state repression and pushed out of every open political space in Bangladesh, hundreds of thousands of young activists and students became vulnerable to be manipulated by extremists. Also, a formal ban of an Islamist organization known as Hijbut Tahrir, which also envisioned a pan-

Islamic caliphate, resulted in resentment. Its existing and potential members were further drawn to violent Islamist ideas, making them ripe for recruitment by organizations such as ISIS. The profiles of the perpetrators in some recent extremist attacks in Bangladesh support this claim.

One tool the current ruling party used to achieve its goal of an absolute oligarchy was its decade-long campaign for the elimination of anti-independence forces from Bangladesh. During Bangladesh's bloody struggle of independence in 1971, a fringe element of society, mostly composed of Islamic parties like the Jamaat-e Islami and Muslim league, who opted to support a united Pakistan, colluded with the Pakistani army in many war crimes. Since returning to power for the second time, current Prime Minister Ms. Hasina made it a priority to hang a number of her political opponents on charges of taking a stand against the creation of Bangladesh and committing war crimes during the 1971 war of independence. So far, about a dozen death sentences have been handed down and five politicians already executed. International observers have characterized the trial to be deeply flawed. Any political party deemed to be in the way of the ruling party's dream oligarchy was dubbed as anti-liberation, war crime suspect and hence deserving of immediate banishment. The characters and reputations of any person (whether a political leader, an intellectual or a war hero) was deemed to be a threat to the ruling coterie were accused, tried, convicted and executed by the strong government-supporting media. Meanwhile, extremely powerful and unaccountable pro-government law enforcement bodies and the

activist judiciary took care of the physical executions of opposition leaders with Islamist leanings.

“For the last few decades, the whole nation was tilting at the windmills of anti-liberation forces. Fear mongering reached new heights.”

This highly successful campaign to physically eliminate perceived anti-independence forces had the support of the vocal urban class. This educated folks saw this as a victory in the class war. The witch hunt in the name of sorting out so-called anti-independence entities and the coordinated media trial became so rampant and powerful that even the most powerful opposition voices and most outspoken social activists kept quiet about for fear of being vilified as anti-liberation themselves. As a result of this witch hunt, major religion-based political forces of Bangladesh, which should have been kept busy in the open democratic and electoral process, were pushed underground. It's not a leap to assume that some activists found succor in following the path of extremism.

For the last few decades, the whole nation was tilting at the windmills of anti-liberation forces. Fear mongering reached new heights. For its petty interests, the ruling party cried wolf -- with accusations of anti-independence proclivities -- again and again.

And the wolf is finally here. My Hindu friend says that for the first time in his life, he is afraid of going to the temple. My blogger friend now is afraid of blogging. My atheist friend no longer publicly expresses his views on religion. He is scared to death. Rural people, who loved to congregate on fields to celebrate Eid, are afraid to do so. My female friends are painfully careful about how they dress. Too Western a look and they may be risking death. Dhaka residents, who loved their KFC or Pizza Hut outings, now fear going to restaurants and cafes.

All these things -- freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom to congregate for leisurely pursuits – have all been suddenly taken away in one stroke by a handful of brainwashed assailants.

For a long time, the emotions of the general population were exploited to benefit a political oligarchy. The urban folks collectively cried wolf regarding the anti-liberation forces coming to attack them. And finally, the anti-liberation forces are here. Our freedom is under serious threat, but not at the hands of the usual vilified suspects.

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BANGLADESH'S HOMEGROWN PROBLEM⁷⁹

Dhaka and the Terrorist Threat

SUMIT GANGULY AND ALI RIAZ

In the past 18 months, a series of attacks on secular bloggers, public intellectuals, Hindu and Buddhist priests, and a few foreigners has shaken Bangladesh. The Islamic State (ISIS) has claimed responsibility for much of the bloodshed. The group's formal claim aside, it is not entirely clear whether it masterminded the attacks. What is clear, however, is that the government of Sheikh Hasina Wajed has continued to deny that the terrorist group has a presence in her country at all.

For the first time, ISIS claimed responsibility for taking hostages and for targeting a large group of foreigners.

After a strike on the Holey Artisan Bakery in Dhaka's tony Gulshan neighborhood that led to 20 deaths last week, Hasina publicly condemned the "heinous attack" and promised to stamp out terrorism in the country. However, in her 12-minute speech, she still failed to acknowledge the presence of ISIS in Bangladesh. She did at least seem to grudgingly accept that the Gulshan attack represented an escalation from what she referred to as prior "stray killings."

Hasina's reticence is somewhat surprising. As the leader of the largest secular party in the country, she should have few qualms about taking an unequivocal stance against rising religious zealotry. (Since 2013, extremists have killed over 30 individuals; few, if any, of the perpetrators have been brought to justice.) Instead, Hasina has passed the blame onto the principal opposition party, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and one of its allies, the Islamist Jamaat-i-Islami. "The BNP-Jamaat nexus has been engaged in such secret and heinous murders in various forms to destabilize the country," she asserted. Even foreign countries aren't free of suspicion: "The British government should take more steps on the ground. Jamaat has a strong influence in East London."

Such statements are part of a strategy that has successfully marginalized Jamaat-i-Islami and the BNP. Dhaka has relied on dubious legal measures as well. According to a Bangladeshi human rights organization, Odhikar, there have been as many as 202 disappearances of dissidents and opposition politicians since 2009. The Rapid Action Battalion, a government paramilitary force, critics claim, is responsible. The normally feisty press in Bangladesh is also under siege. As of earlier this year, the government had lodged as many as 79 cases against the

editor of the prominent newspaper, The Daily Star. Its sister Bengali-language newspaper, ProthomAlo, faced as many as 25 defamation cases. Meanwhile, a widely criticized International Criminal Tribunal has sentenced as many as nine key Jamaat leaders for death penalty.

At the same time, Hasina and her party, the Awami League, do not want to be seen as entirely hostile to Islamist sentiment for electoral reasons. (In 2008 parliamentary elections, the Jamaat-e-Islami secured 4.48 percent of votes. Other Islamist parties

blasphemy law in 2013. In the end, the law did not pass. However, the ostensibly secular Awami League relegated itself to a passive spectator when the Hefazat-e-Islam promised bloodshed in April of this year after the Bangladesh Supreme Court considered a legal challenge to the role of Islam as the state religion of Bangladesh. (The court, in the end, dismissed the petition on a technicality.)

In the Awami League's view, this fence-sitting has little to do with the ISIS-related violence of the past year and a half, which



A man carries a wreath during a memorial ceremony for those who were killed in the attack on the Holey Artisan Bakery and the O'Kitchen Restaurant, in Dhaka, Bangladesh, July 4, 2016

secured additional 1.79 percent.) And so, the ruling party has reportedly developed a warm relationship with the Hefazat-e-Islam, an obscurantist religious group that demanded the introduction of an anti-

was in itself inconsequential. In fact, Hasina even partially exculpated a terrorist who attacked a blogger who had written about the prevalence of superstitions in the country. She argued that while freedom of

expression was valuable, it should not amount to a license for hurting “religious sentiments.”

In the absence of a strong government response, however, terrorists have become bolder. ISIS, for example, initially targeted secular activists. Then, in October of last year, it moved on to attacking religious minorities including Bangladesh’s small Shia community. The move was an attempt to sow sectarian discord in a country that has long avoided denominational disharmony.

“Hasina even partially exculpated a terrorist who attacked a blogger who had written about the prevalence of superstitions in the country.”

The most recent attack was yet another escalation. For the first time, ISIS claimed responsibility for taking hostages and for targeting a large group of foreigners. More to the point, the group carried out its brazen strike in a diplomatic enclave of Dhaka that is known as a high-security area. To launch such a successful attack there, the terrorists would have had to make it through the multiple rings of security that envelop the capital city and particularly a posh neighborhood.

What is also striking is that, although ISIS promptly assumed responsibility for the killings, it did not make any demands on the government even as it detained over 30 people. Most likely, the militant group just

wanted to demonstrate that it had the ability to strike with impunity.

It is not yet clear if the latest bloodshed will be a wake-up call for Dhaka. Despite Hasina’s apparent resolve to crack down on terrorism, her aversion to acknowledging ISIS’ presence in the country was telling. The prior killings, no doubt, were atrocious. However, this attack leaves no doubt that ISIS’ reach is expanding. The terrorists involved in last week’s attack and in previous ones were upper middle class, urbanites. And with such pockets of support, ISIS is sure to be readying itself for the next plot.

The rest of the world should recognize the seriousness of the problem and work with Dhaka and civil society groups to counter the conditions that have spawned these terrorist groups. This may also be an opportune time to broaden intelligence cooperation with Bangladesh, to work with the regime to bolster the capabilities of its security forces, and to enable it to secure its very porous borders. Indeed, if anything, the attack highlighted the failure of the country’s intelligence and security services. The problem may have stemmed from those services’ politicization under this regime as well as earlier ones. Human rights and civil society organizations have repeatedly claimed that these entities have increasingly come under the thumb of the Awami League.

Perhaps this tragedy will convince the regime to refrain from further diminishing the autonomy of these bodies, improve their training, and enhance their professionalism. Even though the hostage crisis ended

swiftly, the various units involved could not prevent the brutal murder of 20 people before the matter was brought to a close.

Finally, although it will be no easy task, Bangladesh will need to devote greater resources to making its borders stronger. The terrorists responsible for this incident were all from within Bangladesh. However, they have obvious links with transnational terror groups. In this context it is important

to recall that one of the domestic groups, the Harkat-ul-Jihad-Islami was an original signatories of Osama bin Laden's 1998 fatwa against the West.

The government and the international community's continued cynicism could not only further destabilize this hitherto moderate Muslim nation, but also allow ISIS to expand its domain into the wider South Asian region.

Dhaka terror attack

COMMONALITIES BETWEEN BANGLADESH AND TURKEY

RUDRONEEL GHOSH

The recent terror attack in the Bangladeshi capital city of Dhaka and the Istanbul airport attack in Turkey earlier last week have a common thread. Both countries seem to share a muddled approach to tackling terrorism.

As I wrote in my blog on the Istanbul attack, the current Turkish government's antipathy towards the Kurds coupled with the increasing autocratic ways of the Recep Tayyip Erdogan administration has ensured that Ankara is unable to focus all its resources on fighting Islamic State terrorism. This despite the fact that there's evidence to suggest that IS fighters have used Turkey as one of their main transit points into Syria and Iraq.

Yet, Turkish authorities are as suspicious of the Kurds as they are of IS. In fact, their determination to almost equate the two groups despite the obvious differences – the Kurdish movement has a long-established political dimension that has thrown up many moderate leaders who want to work within the mainstream; plus the Kurds are at the forefront of fighting IS – has worked to the advantage of the radical Islamists.

Bangladesh today finds itself in a similar predicament. The Awami League government in Dhaka is so obsessed with its political enemy, the BNP and its allies, that

it has failed to see something bigger and darker taking shape. Hitherto the Awami has refused to accept the presence of IS or any other transnational terror group in Bangladesh, choosing instead to blame home-grown extremists.

“Not only that, it has tried to link these extremists with the opposition BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami. But this approach comes undone by the fact that one of the Dhaka attackers was actually the son of an Awami leader.”

Not only that, it has tried to link these extremists with the opposition BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami. But this approach comes undone by the fact that one of the Dhaka attackers was actually the son of an Awami leader. Hence, we are looking at a problem that cuts across party lines and various segments of society.

In light of such evidence, for Awami to pretend that it is the bastion of liberalism and secular forces is ridiculous. True, the top leadership of the party still adheres to the spirit of 1971 and the values embodied by Bangladesh's Liberation Struggle. But

the rank and file of the party has been infiltrated by extremist elements. In fact, after the banning of Jamaat, many low-level workers of the Islamist party have joined Awami in many districts. This was bound to happen in a society where radical forces have progressively gained strength, thanks to the appeasement policies of successive governments.

The only solution lies in all sensible, democratic and modern-thinking political and social stakeholders in Bangladesh

coming together and wholeheartedly fighting terrorism in all its forms. They must realise that the very body politic of Bangladesh has been afflicted by the extremist virus, requiring the administration of strong medicine. There cannot be any partial treatment. There cannot be political blame-game. And most importantly, there cannot be any compromise with terrorism wherever it is found. That's the only way to regain the Bangladesh of 1971 and ensure a Sonar Bangla for decades to come.

ISIS ATTACK IN BANGLADESH SHOWS BROAD REACH AS 'CALIPHATE' FEELS PRESSURE⁸⁰

TIM LISTER

Over the weekend ISIS dispelled any doubts that it was behind the terror attack in Dhaka, Bangladesh. In doing so, the group provided another example of its growing footprint in Asia -- and opened up another theater in its contest with al Qaeda.

Both groups have been trying to raise their profile in Bangladesh by taking advantage of growing Islamist militancy there. They have co-opted or affiliated with home-grown jihadist groups. Al Qaeda has formed a branch -- al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent - which includes Bangladesh. And elsewhere in Asia, ISIS is trying to establish a growing presence as it comes under pressure in its heartland.

Late Saturday, ISIS released photographs of the alleged attackers and of the scene inside the café before Bangladeshi forces moved in. Photographs posted by ISIS-affiliated media outlet Amaq include gruesome scenes that appear to be from inside the café. The decor matches that of the Holey Artisan Bakery; the victims appear to have died

from neck wounds -- which is consistent with what Bangladeshi authorities have reported about the scene.

The photographs of the attackers, smiling and holding their guns, were clearly taken before the assault -- suggesting at least coordination with ISIS in Iraq or Syria even if not proving direct operational control.

The assault was of a different nature and scale to anything claimed by ISIS in Bangladesh before. In the space of a few hours as many people were killed as had died in terror incidents in Bangladesh in the previous 18 months.

Al Qaeda responds

As if in answer to the ISIS statement, al Qaeda shot back Sunday with its own call to action. A message from the leader of al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), Asim Umar, was released on Sunday inciting Muslims to kill Hindu police and officials in India.

"Even if you come out carrying merely knives and swords then -- history bears witness -- Hindus cannot withstand you," he said in the Urdu-language audio.

AQIS has also begun publishing an online magazine called Resurgence that has called for attacks in Bangladesh, while al Qaeda leader Ayman al Zawahiri has called on Bangladeshi clerics to lead protests and encourage martyrdom.

Political divide fuels militancy

Bangladesh has seen growing Islamist militancy since 2013, in reaction to a crackdown by the secular government against the main Islamist party -- the Jamaat e Islami. Four of its leading figures have been executed for crimes allegedly committed during Bangladesh's war of independence from Pakistan in 1971.

That militancy has led to the murders of secular bloggers and gay rights activists, as well as Hindu priests, over the past two years. Many of those attacks have been claimed by a group called Ansar al Islam, the Bangladesh part of AQIS.

By comparison, attacks attributed to ISIS sympathizers have targeted foreigners. In late 2015, ISIS claimed that its gunmen -- "Soldiers of the Caliphate in Bangladesh" --

were behind the murders of an Italian aid worker and Japanese citizen in Bangladesh.

Like those killings, the Dhaka attack appears to have been carried out by Bangladeshis. But it was far more ambitious and ISIS -- at some level - appears to have had foreknowledge of the plan. The sole surviving attacker may provide greater detail about that relationship, but equally the assailants may have been foot soldiers, with communication carried out at a higher level.

Government denies ISIS

The evidence of ISIS involvement runs counter to repeated claims by the government that there is no ISIS presence in Bangladesh. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wajed said in February: "No (ISIS) exists in Bangladesh, but a few home-grown outfits in the name of Islam are conducting terrorist activities."

Analyst Animesh Roul says, "The threat picture is darkening, especially because Bangladesh's government has not acknowledged the presence of transnational groups."

Roul, who is director of the Society for the Study of Peace and Conflict in Delhi, says ISIS may be exploiting the presence in its

ranks of dozens of Bengalis, including some from Britain.

In a report for Sentinel, the journal of West Point's Combating Terrorism Center, Roul says there's been a blitz of ISIS propaganda targeted at Bangladesh, including a eulogy in the most recent edition of its online magazine Dabiq for a fighter called Abu Jundal al-Banghali.

Focus turns to Asia

Additionally, eight Bangladeshi men were arrested in Singapore this year, allegedly for planning attacks in the name of the "Islamic State in Bangladesh." Investigators said they had already identified specific targets in their homeland. The eight were issued with two-year detention orders.

Roul concludes that "efforts by al Qaeda and the Islamic State to make Bangladesh the newest front of global jihad are creating a resonant jihadist wave that is energizing local groups to act."

ISIS has already shown signs of expanding its presence and operations in Asia. It has a 'province' in Afghanistan (though has struggled to supplant al Qaeda and the Taliban), and has claimed attacks in the Philippines and Indonesia.

Just two weeks ago the 'Islamic State in the Philippines' released its first official video. It included statements from Filipino, Indonesian and Malaysian fighters in Syria inciting people in their home countries to carry out attacks.

A recent survey by the Institute for the Study of War suggested that "competition between militant elements vying to lead the Southeast Asian pro-ISIS movement will likely encourage increased jihadist attacks in the short term, threatening urban areas and Western interests in the region."

ISIS feeling the heat

As ISIS feels the pressure in its heartland, it may expand an already determined campaign to export its "brand" further afield, resorting to a more classic form of terrorism in a wide range of countries -- from Iraq, where weekend bombings claimed 126 lives, to Indonesia -- as the "caliphate" itself shrinks. The attack last week at Istanbul airport is evidence of this pattern.

ISIS' chief spokesman and ideologue, Mohammed al Adnani, has tried to reframe how ISIS defines victory. In an audio message at the end of May -- his first in seven months -- Adnani asked of the

"crusaders": "Will we be defeated and you victorious if you took Mosul or Sirte or Raqqa or all the cities -- and we returned as we were in the beginning? No, defeat is losing the will and the desire to fight."

In the words of one Western counterterrorism official, "We can expect a metastasis of terror as it becomes increasingly difficult for ISIL [another acronym for ISIS] to hold on to core territories."

DIVISIVE POLITICS SET THE STAGE FOR DHAKA ATTACK⁸¹

Persecution of the opposition and denial of the international links of Bangladeshi militants has made way for ISIL.

TOM HUSSAIN



In a world of cause and effect, the nightmare that unfolded in Dhaka on Friday night was entirely predictable. Since the opposition-boycotted 2014 elections, the most violent in its history, Bangladesh has steadily descended into a cycle of polarising politics, pitting the avowedly secular nationalist government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wazed against the country's religious

establishment, key allies of opposition leader Khaleda Zia.

With gusto, Sheikh Hasina has pursued the prosecution of leaders of the Jamaat-e-Islami, the country's biggest religious party, for their alleged involvement in massacres of at least 300,000 civilians during the 1971 war of independence with Pakistan, won after India intervened militarily.

Despite widely voiced concerns about the fairness of the trials conducted by the Bangladesh International Crimes Tribunal, established by Sheikh Hasina in 2009, four Jamaat-e-Islami leaders have been executed since December 2013 for war crimes.

Murderous attacks

Parallel to the war crimes trials, there has been a steady stream of murderous attacks by terrorists on prominent secular activists, foreign NGO workers and members of religious minorities. Some were claimed by militants claiming to be part of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, also known as ISIS), while the responsibility for others has been assumed by the Ansarullah Bangla Team and Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh, affiliates of al-Qaeda.

On each occasion, however, the Bangladesh government has refused to accept that either of the global jihadi conglomerates were involved. Instead, the attacks have been dismissed by officials as the handiwork of local militants, painted as allies of the opposition amid plans to outlaw the Jamaat-e-Islami altogether.

On both counts, the Awami League administration has been playing with fire, with scant consideration for the

consequences. The war crimes trials are a highly emotive subject. By prosecuting Jamaat-e-Islami leadership figures, Sheikh Hasina has fulfilled longstanding demands that justice be brought to bear against the perpetrators of the 1971 genocide.

“Bangladesh's government has been creating a political vacuum at the same time as ISIL has reached out to struggling jihadi factions across South and Southeast Asia.”

The counterview is that the Awami League, by criminalising the Jamaat-e-Islami, is working towards the establishment of the one-party state envisioned by the founder of Bangladesh, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the late father of Sheikh Hasina.

Political vacuum

Apparently, she is seeking to exclude political parties which have governed the country as often as the Awami League has from the democratic process. Either way, Bangladesh's government has been creating a political vacuum at the same time as ISIL has reached out to struggling jihadi factions across South and Southeast Asia. The ISIL

outreach has sparked competition among sidelined and wannabe jihadis to prove themselves worthy of governorate status - and the money and power that comes with it - by staging outrageous attacks.

Some have been carried out by novices - such as the botched attack in Jakarta in January - while others have involved mature terrorist organisations such as Abu Sayyaf, responsible for an ongoing string of kidnappings in the southern Philippines. The tactics employed by terrorists in Dhaka strongly suggest the involvement, at least in leadership roles, of hardened terrorists with significant overseas combat experience.

Seven men were involved, a common number for suicide-attack squads in Afghanistan and Pakistan where they are usually split into a few two-man teams supervised by an experienced commander. It would be safe to assume that the attack involved one or more Bangladeshi terrorists from the several hundred who trained and fought alongside al-Qaeda and its affiliates in the Af-Pak arena between the late 1990s and the mid-2000s.

Switched loyalty to ISIL

Undoubtedly, some would have worked with al-Qaeda militants who have since switched

loyalty to ISIL for the sake of empowerment and to feed the addiction to bloodshed that all terrorists acquire over a period of time. Forced to lie low and impoverished by a lack of funding, such veteran killers are always plugged in to jihadi networks, hoping for an encrypted phone call to resurrect their careers.

Thus the government's argument that ISIL does not have a network in Bangladesh is irrelevant. In choosing to view the rising terrorism campaign through a domestic political prism, Sheikh Hasina is repeating the mistakes of the Pakistani counterparts she loathes.

When sectarian terrorism, similar to that ongoing in Bangladesh, first broke out in Pakistan in the late 1990s, the government narrative framed it as a proxy war fought on behalf of rival Middle Eastern actors. That state of denial confused public opinion and gave militants time and space to build the networks with which to launch a nationwide insurgency in 2007 that has since cost Pakistan dearly.

Sheikh Hasina is going to the other extreme by equating the opposition with the terrorists for political ends. Soon enough, she will discover that it does not take many militants to cause significant harm to Bangladesh's

economy and her government. They started with targeted murders, graduated to mass killings over the weekend, and will be looking to raise their profile further by attacking ruling party politicians and security forces personnel with improvised explosive devices.

The militants will also aim to use Bangladeshi territory to recruit disenfranchised Muslims in neighbouring countries, such as the Rohingya of

Myanmar, and to launch cross-border terrorist attacks, most likely into India - as they did when Khaleda Zia and the Jamaat-e-Islami were last in power.

As the situation evolves, the government will find that terrorism cannot be fought by a one-party state. It requires a clear, honest narrative and unity among elected political forces. With the opposition absent from parliament and its leaders on trial, however, the signs are ominous.

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CHAPTER 08

MEANS TO AN END

As fallout from global rise in terrorism and extremist violence over the last couple of decades, Bangladesh has also seen the potential of this menace finding its way into the country. This threat has given an added dimension to the security challenges facing Bangladesh.

In the first two decades of its existence as a nation state, the principal challenges for Bangladesh from extremism were in the form of left wing ideological groups and on ethnic insurgency in the South-East of the country. However, as the war in Afghanistan against Soviet occupation drew to a close, the problem of religion- political militancy emerged as a new threat in the region, with possible implications for Bangladesh. It escalated during the later part of the nineteen nineties when Awami League was in power in Bangladesh. It was around that time that Bangladesh witnessed the presence of new terrorist groups, attacks on cultural events like the attack on Udichi in Jessore in 2000 and the attack on the Pahela Baishak celebrations in Dhaka in April 2001. Government installations and political parties were also targeted during this period. Suspected terrorists attacked a public meeting of the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) in Dhaka in January 2001. Unfortunately, the then Awami League led government did little to counter the Matter either operationally or through use of strategic treasures.

Counter terrorism was never a part of the security agenda of that government.

Because of what has been stated above, the BNP led coalition government that assumed office in October 2001 had inherited a situation where the threat from terrorism and extremism had already assumed significant proportions. The period also coincided with the time when the whole world was faced with the fast growing threat of terrorism in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in the New York and Washington in September 2001. Thus, from the very outset, the threat of terrorism was to become a key security challenge for the BNP led government.

Taking the threat posed by terrorism with due degree of importance, the BNP led government joined the International Coalition in the war against terrorism and took the following specific initiatives to comprehensively counter this threat:

- Sign Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) of Intent for the Terrorist Interdiction Program with the United States in March 2004.
- Join all UN Conventions and Agreements on Counter Terrorism.
- Took initiative to update the SAARC Agreement on Counter Terrorism to include the issue of financing of terrorism that led to signing the Additional Protocol to the SAARC Convention in 2002.
- Initiating a cooperation mechanism with United Kingdom, Australia and others.
- Creation of specialized counterterrorism intelligence capacity within the main intelligence agencies.
- Creation of the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) in March 2004. The aim was to make this organization the vanguard of all counter terrorist operation.

- Proscription of several major terrorist organization, most importantly, the Jamatul Mujahideen Bangladesh(JMB) and Harkatul Jihad al Islami.
- Ban a number of NGOs involved in financing of terrorism.
- Creation of counter terrorism capacity within the law enforcement agencies.
- Arrest and trial of a total of 1,177 terrorists and extremists.
- Expeditious trial and awarding of the highest punishment under the law to top JMB and other such terrorist leaders.
- Enactment of relevant anti-terrorism legislation.
- Formulation of a counter terrorism action plan.
- Formulation of an action plan for rehabilitating arrested militants through advocacy and information campaign.
- Laying the groundwork for reviewing the curriculum of madrasas and proper training of clerics.
- Using clerics and religious leaders in the campaign for correct interpretation of religious doctrines.
- Highlight the importance of ensuring inter-faith harmony in the society.

The above policy moves and concrete measures clearly highlight that, contrary to the motivated campaign of the current government, the BNP, as a matter of policy and principle, has worked consistently to counter the threat and the challenge presented by terrorism and extremism. During its term of office, the BNP led government was able to achieve some important milestones in this area and diminish the operational threats from terrorist groups to a very large extent. In the aftermath of the serial bomb blasts in August 2005 it was the BNP government that apprehended the major perpetrators and brought them to justice, all the time following the due process of law. Such decisive actions were pivotal in breaking the back of terrorist organizations. In tandem with operational measures, the BNP government had also placed due emphasis on adopting a strategic approach towards countering terrorism.

BNP's strong position on combating terrorism was unequivocally spelt out by Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia at the Extraordinary Summit Session of the Organization of Islamic Countries in Mecca in December 2005 when she stated:

“Mr. Chairman

The fourth crucial area of our common concern is combating terrorism. At this critical juncture of history, we are all experiencing unprecedented incidents of terrorism affecting our daily lives. In the war on terrorism, Muslim individuals and states have today become unfortunate targets. Efforts are being made to stigmatize Muslims and Muslim countries.

Attempts are being made to equate our great religion Islam directly or indirectly with terrorism. Muslims, in general, all over the world, are victimized because of acts of terrorism by a handful of terrorists claiming to be Muslims or acting in the name of Islam. Let me state here

categorically - a terrorist must be identified as a terrorist only, irrespective of his or her colour, creed or religion. We urge the OIC to clearly condemn all acts of terrorism in the name of Islam and to take concrete measures in this regard. We must send strong signals to perpetrators of such despicable acts that they will find no shelter in any Muslim country.”

This position also found manifestation in action and was recognized globally. For the first time in the country's history, a major event on Inter-Faith Harmony was organized in Dhaka where Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia highlighted the pluralistic and non-communal character of Bangladesh. Foreign governments described Bangladesh as a “*role model of communal harmony*”.

Importantly, then US President George W Bush in a letter to Prime Minister Khaleda Zia in January 2006 said “*You have responded resolutely to the recent attacks in your country and I encourage you to continue to act decisively. The United States wants to help you succeed in your ongoing efforts*”.

BNP Chairperson has in clear terms declared, then and now, that the territory of Bangladesh will not be allowed to be used for terrorist attacks against any country.

Recognizing that countering the threat posed by terrorism and extremism has to be a continuous effort and taking into consideration recent developments, the BNP now seeks to draw up a comprehensive Strategic Action Plan for the future, encompassing short, medium and long-term measures.

A Strategic Action Plan

As a matter of principle, BNP condemns terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. Accordingly, the Party, as a matter of policy, will continue and strengthen all national efforts to combat this threat and formulate necessary strategies in this regard. Our efforts to reinforce actions at home will be complemented by regional and international cooperation to deny terrorists, including trans-boundary terrorists and insurgents, any space. Concrete and effective steps will be taken to strengthen regional counter terrorism mechanisms under SAARC and other similar institutions.

- In order to operationalize this strategic approach, the following measures will be undertaken:
- In order to effectively counter the threat of terrorism, it is critical to counter fundamentalism, extremism and radicalism in the society. It will therefore be important to institute a comprehensive counter radicalization programme with the involvement of all stakeholders.

- A key element in any counter terrorism effort is targeting the source of terrorist funding. Existing legal and other mechanisms under the Bangladesh Bank will be strengthened and effective monitoring systems will be put in place. In addition to checking traditional channels of financing, steps will be taken to counter non-traditional methods of financing.
- A review of counter terrorism legislation will be carried out and loopholes, if any, will be rectified. Enabling measures will be put in place for effective implementation.
- The nexus between organized crime and terrorism is a matter of serious concern. All steps will be taken to closely monitor this, including the activities of organized crime and their possible links to terrorist outfits.
- Bilateral, regional and international cooperation, based on the principle of mutual benefit, will be a major feature of all counter terrorism exercises. Existing partnerships will be continued and strengthened and, where beneficial, new ones will be forged. All efforts will be made to fully use the counter terrorism framework provided by SAARC. Multilateral counter terrorism agreements under the United Nations will be properly implemented.
- Capacity building of law enforcement personnel involved on counter terrorism at all levels will be given special focus. Proper training centers will be created, if necessary with international assistance. The training curriculum in such a center will include operational, research and legal aspects of counter terrorism work as well as human rights issues.
- It is not sufficient to apprehend terrorists, rehabilitating them will also be a critical task. Efforts will therefore be undertaken to draw up a terrorist rehabilitation program.
- In the current cyber age, terrorists are in a position to communicate and spread their message without much difficulty. An effective counter propaganda communication strategy with focus on advocacy will be put in place.
- Actions will be undertaken to understand the extent of vulnerability to cyber-crime and effective institutional mechanisms will be established to respond to the threat that may emanate from this source.
- Recognizing the importance of the assistance of our friends in the international community in counter terrorism capacity building, the existing mechanisms will be continued and strengthened.
- Experience has shown that a society in which women are empowered acts as an inherent deterrent against religious extremism and terrorism. That's why; steps will be taken to empower women each level of the structure of the state and society.

Institutional and Operational Plans

To ensure policy formulation and proper coordination among relevant and related agencies of the government on counter terrorism matters, a National Counter Terrorism Coordination Council (NCTCC) will be created in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO). A person at an appropriate political level who will report to and brief the Prime Minister will head the NCTCC.

The Ministry of Home Affairs will be the principal focal point in the government on all operational matters relating to counter terrorism work. This will include the administrative, budgetary, personnel, planning, training aspect of counter terrorism.

To respond to the threat of cyber-crime, a Cyber Security cell will be set up under the NCTCC.

In addition to threats from and, Bangladesh also faces potential threat in the maritime domain. Comprehensive efforts will be undertaken to address issues of maritime piracy and terrorism. International cooperation in this area will be institutionalized. Appropriate institutional steps will be set up, including a Maritime Security Cell, for effective implementation and operation.

To foster a CT regime in South Asia, the mechanisms provided under SAARC and other regional and international architectures will be used and strengthened.

The comprehensive review of the madrasa curriculum that was undertaken by the Ministry of Education to ensure that it is in line with the overall education policy of the government will be continued.

Religious leaders and clerics of all faith will be involved institutionally through the NCTCC to help the advocacy programmes. This forum will be involved in promoting inter-faith harmony and to counter any misinterpretation of religious teachings by extremist elements.

Recognizing that resilience is key to sustained counter terrorism efforts, actions will be undertaken at all levels to strengthen social resilience against terrorism and extremist thoughts.

Conclusion

A future BNP led government will demonstrate utmost sincerity and commitment to act decisively against terrorism, extremism and religious militancy in Bangladesh. The Party's policy against religious fundamentalism will be reinforced in its policies and programmes.

The tolerant, moderate, pluralistic and non-communal face of the country will be upheld with the involvement of all stakeholders in the society. Like in other countries of the world, we in Bangladesh also recognize that government alone cannot fight the scourge of terrorism.

Hence we will institute a societal approach to face any real or perceived threat to our nation from terrorism and extremism. As part of this broad based approach, a BNP led government will work loosely with our regional and international partners to deny space to terrorists and extremists in our societies.

In line with our past commitments, the BNP will endeavor to create a Bangladesh that does not become afflicted by the scourge of terrorism in any form or manifestation.

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