

## Understanding 12 extremist groups of Bangladesh

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The Awami League (AL) government in Bangladesh on April 2009 blacklisted 12 militant organisations. The organisations are Harkat-ul Jihad Islami (HuJI) Bangladesh, Jamaat-ul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB), Shahadat-e-al Haqima (SAH), Hizbut Touhid, Islami Samaj, Ulema Anjuman al Baiyinaat, Hizb-ut Tahrir, Islamic Democratic Party, Touhid Trust, Tamir ud-Deen, Alla'r Dal. Of these 12 groups, four including HuJI, SAH, JMJB and JMB were banned during the regime of BNP-Jamaat coalition. This move comes as the Sheikh Hasina government gears up to fulfill its electoral promise of eradicating militancy from the country.

Besides, the present government is also introspecting on adopting a holistic approach to counter the influence of radical thoughts. As a step forward, it has decided to include the 'Kaumi Madrasa' education system within the purview of general curriculum to prevent its students from getting drawn towards extremism.

### **A brief overview of the 12 militant/terrorist groups is given below:**

**Harkat-ul Jihad al Islami Bangladesh (HuJI-B):** HuJI-B is the most known militant organisation. It was established in 1992 by the returnees of Afghan war, who went to Afghanistan to fight against Soviet forces. The organisation was inspired by the Osama Bin Laden's International Islamic Force (IIF). The leader of the organisation is Showkat Osman alias Sheikh Farid<sup>i</sup>.

HuJI-B aspires to establish Islamic *Hukumat* or rule of Islam in Bangladesh by launching *jihad*. It is against all those who support secularism--liberal intellectuals, leaders and festivals that uphold the secular image of the country like the Bengali New Year have been targeted by HuJI-B.

HuJI-B cadre is estimated to be around 15000<sup>ii</sup>, mostly *madrassa* educated. Some reports claim that HuJI received initial funding from Osama Bin Laden's International Islamic Front (IIF).

The group's area of operation is mainly in the coastal areas stretching from Chittagong through Cox's Bazaar to the Myanmar. It is alleged to have operational network in India and has been responsible for carrying out several acts of terror in India, including the bomb blast in Sankat Mochan temple in Varanasi in 2006 and in Hyderabad in May 2007.

HuJI-B has close links with Ronhingya Solidairty Organisation, the armed outfit of Rohingyas of Myanmar. The group has connections with many of the north eastern insurgent groups. United Liberation Front training camps in the Chittagong Hill Tracts claimed to be run by HuJI. It is alleged to have links with Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence and al Qaida. The group was a signatory to Bin Laden's declaration of war against the US.

In March 2008, the US listed HuJI as a terrorist organisation<sup>iii</sup>. It was banned in October 2005 during the BNP government. It's operational commander Mufti Hanan was arrested in 2007. Presently, Hanan is facing trial for carrying out terrorist acts during the regime of BNP-Jamaat coalition.

**Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB):** JMB came into existence in 1998. Though its exact date of origin remains disputed, the group came to limelight when eight of its cadres were arrested in May 2002. The organisation is suspected to be the youth wing of the Al Mujahideen, a group established in mid 1990s whose existence remains obscure till date. JMB was proscribed in February 2005.

JMB aims at establishing *Shariah* in Bangladesh through armed revolution. It is opposed to democracy and identifies it to be un-Islamic. The organisation is also

against cultural functions. JMB has been held responsible for attacking many cultural and theatrical events during the rule of BNP-Jamaat coalition. The groups also targets judiciary as it recognizes contrary to the Islamic law. Minorities are also target of this group.

The present leader of the group is Saidur Rahman former Amir of Jamaat-e-Islami in Hobiganj district<sup>iv</sup>. In March 2007 JMB's top leadership including its supreme commander Maulana Abdur Rahman and second in command Bangla Bhai and four other *Majlish- e Sura* members were executed as they were found guilty of killing two judges in Jhalakatti in November 2005. Prior to March 2007 the group had three leaders, the supreme commander Maulana Abdur Rahman, second in command Bangla Bhai and Dr. Asadullah Galib, leader of Ahle Hadith Andolon Bangladesh. Dr. Galib, a teacher of Arabic language in Rajshahi University was arrested in 2005. The group also had a seven member *Mujlish e shura*, which looked into the operational activities. However, there is no accurate information about its strength. But some reports claimed that it had 10,000 fulltime and 100,000 part-time cadres<sup>v</sup>. Its cadres are recruited from varied backgrounds including university teachers, madrasa students and ordinary people. Although, the activities of Bangla Bhai were mainly in southern Bangladesh but the group has networks across the country. It was able to carry out country wide bomb blasts in August 2005 where 500 bombs were planted in 64 districts.

The group receives funding from different sources like individual donors from countries like Kuwait, Saudi Arabia. Funding also comes via NGO's which under cover of establishing different welfare institutions like orphanage, madrasas and dispensaries facilitating the group to continue with its activities. Recently, security forces recovered large amount of arms and ammunitions from a madrasa run by an UK based charity organisation Green Crescent that is suspected to have links with JMB. The group is notorious for using bombs. Its cadres are trained in bomb making. In May 2009 its explosive expert Boma Mizan was arrested. The group has close links with the Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh, infact the two

organisations are same. It also has connection with Hizbut Touhib, Rohingya Solidarity force. The group is also known to have external links.

**Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB):** Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh and JMB are same organisation. The organisation came into limelight in 2004. It's leader Bangla Bhai was also the leader of JMB who was executed on March 2007. The organisation was active in North Western Bangladesh. JMJB was banned in 2004. Since then not much had been heard about this organisation.

**Shahadat-e al Haqima:** Shahadat-e al-Hikma (SAH) was launched in Rajshahi on February 8, 2003. The leader of SAH is Kawsar Hossain Siddique. The group was believed to be funded by the infamous mafia don Dawood Ibrahim. It was believed that SAH was working in Bangladesh for many years before it was formally launched in February 2003. The group in its initiation put forward 7 point demands and renounced the liberation war of 1971 and the constitution and spoke about its objective of attaining state power through violent means<sup>vi</sup>. The group was banned in February 2003 as the then BNP- Jamaat government found it to be a threat to the country's stability. Altaf Hossain Chowdhury Home Minister of Bangladesh at that time said "After observing activities of Al Hikma, it was found to be threat to peace and security of the country and that's why the decision has been taken to ban it..."<sup>vii</sup> Although there is no authenticity about the size of the strength of SAH, the group's leader Kawsar claimed that the outfit has 10 thousand commandos and 25 thousand fighters working in the country to bring Islamic revolution<sup>viii</sup>. The group also claimed to have links with Al Qaeda. However, nothing had been heard about this group's activity for last two years.

**Hizbut Touhid:** Hizbut Touhid was established in 1994 at Korotia village in Tangail district of Bangladesh<sup>ix</sup>. The organisation is led by Bayezid Khan Panni of Tangail alias Selim Panni who claims himself to be the '*Imam-Uz-Zaman*,' meaning someone just after the prophet of Islam.

Hizbut Touhid aspires to establish a world under the leadership of *Imam Uz Zaman*. It is against democracy and democratic institutions as it considers them to be the rules of evil. Also, the organization opposes leadership of women in politics and also working of women. It also feels that the Muslims who are not following the ideology of Hizbut Touhid are not real Muslim. The organisation believes that every men and women in Islam are armies of Allah and they should behave like armies in every walk of their lives. Hizbut Chief Panni has written many books like 'Dazzal' and 'This Islam is not at all Islam'. In the book 'Dazzal' Panni argues that Jews and Chirstian should be eliminated by the Muslims<sup>x</sup>. The groups promotes armed struggle for establishment of Islamic rule in the world. Books and leaflets written by it's Imam Panni are the main guiding force for the group. CDs, books and leaflets are widely distributed among people to attract cadres. Through these leaflets the group urges people to join them to establish Islamic rule, rejecting all 'manmade' laws.

The outfit has around 1,200 trained cadres<sup>xi</sup>. It also has a women's wing. Some media reports also claim that the organisation is recruiting and training people to establish a suicide squad<sup>xii</sup>.

The cadres are known to carry hammers chilly powers and gul with them. In September 2003 Hizbut Touhid cadres hammered a man to death in Pagla Bazaar in Narayanganj district. The group is active in several southwestern districts including Kushtia, Meherpur, Jhenidah, Magura and Chuadanga. The organisation also has it's presence in the capital Dhaka and it is operating from Uttara, an upper middle class neighbourhood of the city. 31 of its members were arrested in Kustia including the group's regional commander in April 2009. One of the major hurdle in booking this group is that it often carry out it's activities under cover of Tabliq Jamaat (proselytising group) The organisation is suspected to receive foreign funding. Investigations are on to identify the donors. The group also suspected to have foreign linkages because Panni, who left Bangladesh soon after the country's independence had connections with many fanatic religious groups of the world during his stay in abroad.

**Islami Samaj:** Islami Samaj is a break away faction of Jamaat-E-Islami. The organisation was established in May 6 1993 by Mufti Abdul Jabbar. The present Amir of the organisation is Syed Humayun Kabir a former member Islami Chhatra Shibir. The organisations objective is to establish Islamic rule in the country. It also opposes democracy as it feels that it is a man made system and contradictory to rule of Islam.

In a four-page leaflet recovered by security forces on August 7 2008 signed by Syed Humayun Kabir reads, *“the nation and the country is in grave danger and human rights in the country is severely violated as the country is being run by a man-made constitution that allows sovereignty and laws of the humans.*

*At such a dreadful state of the nation and the country, establishing the sovereignty of Allah and Islam, a comprehensive lifestyle guideline of Allah, in the country can only pull the country out of the crisis and protect rights of the people, the leaflet adds*

*Democracy and all other man-made laws are curse on humans and “if the man-made system remains in the society and the state, good governance and justice will not be established, discrimination will not be eradicated and people’s basic rights will not be ensured...”<sup>xiii</sup>*

The organisation urges people to revolt against people’s sovereignty and the man-made system and to establish sovereignty of Allah and Islamic rule in the country.

Islami Samaj is active in Bandarban. Samaj’s head quarter is located at Kushiara village in the district of Comilla. Eight Islami Samaj members were arrested on Aug 7 2008 from the premise of District and Sessions Judge’s

court in Bandarban and seven others in Jamalpur while they were distributing leaflets of the organisation<sup>xiv</sup>. Samaj has close connection with JMB. Ansar Ali one of its leaders arrested on August 7 2008 in Jamalpur was arrested twice earlier on charges of his linkages with JMB<sup>xv</sup>.

**Ulema Anjuman Al Baiyinaat:** Ulema Anjuman Al Baiyinaat Bangladesh (UAB) is formed by followers of Dhaka based religious organisation Razarbagh Dargah Sharif. The organisation operates from the Dargah situated in 5 Outer Circular Road, Dhaka. The present *Peer* of the Sharif is Syed Muhammad Mukhleshur Rahman. This group claims that it follows *Sufi*<sup>xvi</sup> cult of Islam.

Significance of this group is that it is against Jamaat –e-Islam and all other Islamic political parties. UAB believes that these parties are actually doing business in the name of religion. The group also feels that mainstream political parties like Awami League and Bangladesh Nationalist Party are not doing their job properly and such parties are there only for the sake of doing politics. Interestingly, UAB favours trial of the war criminals of the liberation war of 1971. A major demand of the people of Bangladesh banking on which AL rode to victory.

Although the group claims that it is against terrorism and militancy but in its publications the newspapers daily Al Ehsan and monthly Anjuman Al Baiyinaat has written in support of jihad. An article published in Daily Al- Ehsan in argues, *“Muslims are blamed falsely as terrorists, militants at many news papers of World. Is not it the matter of the humiliation of the Muslims? Because the glorious Allah Pak stated in the kalamullah Sharif, “Never mention Dead who sacrifices their life for the Jihad on the way of Allah Pak, even they are alive, Given Rizik”.... They must be mentioned Shahid or receivers of Shahadat in lieu of ‘Dead militants’.”*<sup>xvii</sup>

UAB is against establishment of any sculptures in the country. It holds the view that sculptures are against Islamic tradition. The cadres of UAB on November 29

2008 attacked a sculpture in Dhaka's business district Motijhil<sup>xviii</sup>. It also resists use of any Islamic religious terminologies and expressions in any secular form of literature, drama and feature films and regards this to be disrespect to the religion. The group demanded public apology from the Udichi Drama group, a well known theatre group of the country for the use of name Muhammad as a name of one of the characters in a theatre staged in Rahshahi University in November 2008. On Udichi's non compliance to UAB's demand, it pleaded for death penalty be given to the members of the theatre group. Al-ihsan wrote, *"After being repeatedly told, udichi apostates are not showing any sign of submission, nor any Tawbah or any apology in public. In such situation, it would be Fard-Wajib to implement the Islamic punishment, the death penalty to these apostates for the government of Bangladesh as well as the 2500 millions of Muslims of the world."*<sup>xix</sup>

UAB claims that it has thirty lakh followers.

**Hizb-ut Tehrir:** Hizbut Tehrir Bangladesh is part of the global sunni political party that aspires to establish Khilafat by uniting all Islamic countries. Like its counter parts world wide it wants to establish Shariah in Bangladesh. Hizb-ut Tehrir has three clear goals: to establish a community of like-minded Hizb-ut Tehrir members in host states, to sway public opinion in one or more host states to facilitate change of government, and, finally, to establishment a new government that will implement Islamic laws. Recently, Hizb-ut Tehrir has published "Islamic Manifesto" for Bangladesh demanding a Khilafat, implementation of Shariah law,—no foreign ownership of any of the country's resources and most important- no agreement can be signed with India other than ceasefire agreement.

Tehrir is also against participating in elections as it views elections are contrary to Shariah law. The Chief of Tehrir in Bangladesh is Mohiuddin Ahmed. Its cadres are mostly university students. Several of its student activists were arrested in March 2009 inflammatory leaflets<sup>xx</sup>. It uses the old excuses of

Palestine, Iraq and Western colonialism as the grounds for opportunistic recruiting – saying that its own policies will bring Bangladesh into a “Golden Age”. Tehrir is open in its rhetoric against India. It accused India to be involved in the conspiracy behind Bangladesh Rifles mutiny of February 2009.

In regards to linkages, it is reported to have established connection with Bangladesh Khilafat Andolon<sup>xxi</sup>.

**Islamic Democratic Party:** Islamic Democratic Party (IDP) was launched in May 2008 but it came to limelight in September only after it held functions all across the country during the month of Ramadan. The members of the party are mostly Afghan war veterans. The objective of the party is to establish *Shariah* law in Bangladesh. Sheikh Abdus Salam, who was also a leader of Huji, heads the party. Interestingly, IDP members deny their linkage with Huji or having any hand in the violent activities carried out by Huji in that country. They claim that the acts of violence are actually the handiwork of a splinter group headed by Mufti Hanan and Abdur Rouf. Although the group was permitted by the caretaker government to launch political party but it was debarred from participating in the Ninth Parliamentary election held in December 2008. Its leader Abdus Salam is presently behind bars.

**Touhid Trust:** Touhid Trust is an NGO established by Dr Galib of Ale Hadith Andolan in 2001. The NGO was active in the northern Bangladesh. It used to receive fund from Kuwait based NGO organisation Revival of Islamic Heritage Society (RIHS). However, RIHS stop its funding to the Trust in 2005 following dispute over its management. It is almost dead at the moment.

**Tamir Ud Deen:** Tamir ud Deen is founded by Huji leader Mufti Abdur Rauf, an Afghan war veteran. Mufti Abdur Rouf, alumni of DarulUlum Deobond Madrasa in India, established the outfit after he was expelled from Islami Dawati Kafela (IDK) in 1999. IDK was founded by a section of Huji activist in late 1990's. However, Tamir ud Deen was renamed as Hijbe Abu Omar after Mufti Rauf was

arrested in August 2006 for unhindered continuation of its activities. The organisation believes in armed revolution. Majority of its cadres are teachers and students of Kawmi Madrasa. In fact, Rauf himself was a teacher in a Kawmi Madrasa. Mazlis-e-Sura is the highest policy making body of the organisation. The organisation has a country wide network spread in places including Dhaka, Mymensingh, Sherpur, Barisal, Patuakhali, Madaripur, Panchagarh, Faridpur, Gopalganj, Chittagong, Sylhet and Dinajpur. The organisation is also believed to be working to send activists abroad to fight the 'enemies of Islam' in places across the globe<sup>xxii</sup>. For funding, the organisation often stage fake kidnaps involving fellow operatives and extort hefty ransoms from families. It also collects money from pious Muslims and *Zakat-al-Fitrah*<sup>xxiii</sup>.

*Source: The Daily Star (Sunday, April 8, 2007)*

**Alla'r Dal:** Very little is known about this organisation. Popular new magazine Probe claimed that the <sup>xxiv</sup>founders of the group are two educated cadres of Islami Chhatra Shibir, student wing of Jamaat-e-Islami. They are Matinul Islam Matin and Babul Ansari. The organisation has close links with the Ale Hadith Andolan and JMB. To be precise it is suspected to be an umbrella organisation of JMB. Dal's goal is to carryout Jihad to establish Islamic rule in the country. The organisation is active in Bangladesh's south-western region in Kushtia, Meherpur and Chadanga, bordering India's West Bengal. Some media reports claimed that the organisation was working for rejuvenating the JMB by holding meetings, raising funds and undertaking recruitment drive. The organisation distributed propaganda leaflets, CD's, books and handbill to motivate people to join Jihad and occasionally uses coercion to that end. It declares a person as kafir (Non believers) who declines to join the group. Its founder Babul Ansari was arrested on October 2005 and has been sentenced to death in February 28 2009 and Matin Mehadi is also in the jail now.

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<sup>i</sup> "Harkat-ul-Jihad-al Islami Bangladesh (HuJI-B):Terrorist Group, Bangladesh" downloaded from <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/bangladesh/terroristoutfits/Huj.htm> accessed on May 6 2009.

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<sup>ii</sup> Ibid

<sup>iii</sup> B. Raman, "US DESIGNATES HUJI (B) AS A FOREIGN TERRORIST ORGANISATION-INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM MONITOR", South Asia Analysis group, Paper Number-9-March-2008, Downloaded from <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/%5Cpapers27%5Cpaper2613.html> and accessed on May 7 2009.

<sup>iv</sup> Shafiq Rahman, "Black Listed", Probe News Magazine, May 1-7 2009, Dhaka, Vol.7 Issue 45 downloaded from <http://www.probenewsmagazine.com/index.php?index=2&contendId5123>.

<sup>v</sup> "Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh", downloaded from <http://74.125.153.132/search?q=cache:3DF6ih3MpiYJ:www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/bangladesh/terroristoutfits/JMB.htm+JMB+has+10,000+full+time+and+100,000+part-time+cadres&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=in> , accessed on May 8 2009.

<sup>vi</sup> "Bombblast in Dinajpur: Uncovering Clandestine Operations of Pro-Taliban Extremist Fundamentalist GRP", Awami League Newsletter, Sunday February 16 2003, downloaded from [http://www.albd.org/autoalbd/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=46&Itemid=37](http://www.albd.org/autoalbd/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=46&Itemid=37), accessed on May 8, 2009.

<sup>vii</sup> "Bangladesh bans Dawood-funded terrorist group Al-Hikma", The Hindustan Times, Monday 17th February 2003.

<sup>viii</sup> Ibid

<sup>ix</sup> Sunita Paul, "HuT planning offensives in September '09", www.modernghana.com, April 16 2009 downloaded from <http://www.modernghana.com/news/211300/1/hut-planning-offensives-in-september-09.html>, accessed on May 22, 2009.

<sup>x</sup> Ibid

<sup>xi</sup> "31 Hizb-ut Towhid men sent to jail", The Daily Star (Sunday, April 19, 2009)

<sup>xii</sup> Sunita Paul, " Silent rise of Hizb Ut Towhid", [www.modernghana.com](http://www.modernghana.com), April 14, 2009, downloaded from <http://www.modernghana.com/newsp/210898/1/pagenum2/silent-rise-of-hizb-ut-towhid.html>, accessed on May 14, 2009

<sup>xiii</sup> "New Militant group on the block", [www.bangladeshnews.com.bd](http://www.bangladeshnews.com.bd), Sunday. August 10th 2008, downloaded from <http://www.bangladeshnews.com.bd/2008/08/10/new-militant-group-on-the-block/> accessed on May 15, 2009.

<sup>xiv</sup> Ibid

<sup>xv</sup> Ibid

<sup>xvi</sup> "a Muslim following the teachings and traditions of an ancient form of Islamic mysticism" , downloaded from [www.yourdictionary.com/sufi](http://www.yourdictionary.com/sufi) accessed on May 16, 2009.

<sup>xvii</sup> "Murdered Muslims of India are not terrorists, but Shaheed. Allah Ta'aala says that they are alive." Al-ishan, 27 Nov, 2008, downloaded from <http://www.al-ihsan.net/protibad.asp?language=EN&id=292>, accessed on May 25th 2009.

<sup>xviii</sup> "Ebar Motijhil-e Boker Bhaskarjyer Opor Hamla", Prothom Alo, Sunday, November 30, 2008, available on [http://www.prothom-alo.com/archive/news\\_details\\_home.php?dt=2008-11-30&issue\\_id=1118&nid=MjAzNzE=](http://www.prothom-alo.com/archive/news_details_home.php?dt=2008-11-30&issue_id=1118&nid=MjAzNzE=)

<sup>xix</sup> Downloaded from, [http://www.al-ihsan.net/all\\_title.asp?language=EN&id=565](http://www.al-ihsan.net/all_title.asp?language=EN&id=565), November 22 2008.

<sup>xx</sup> "Hizb ut-Tahrir in Bangladesh condemns the arrest of two party activists and demands their release immediately", Hizb ut-Tahrir Bangladesh Press Release, 25 March, 2009.

<sup>xxi</sup> Salah Uddin Shoab Choudhury , "Bangladesh: Hub of international terror?", Global Politician, April 13 2008, Downloaded from

<http://74.125.153.132/search?q=cache:MUZ11L29S78J:www.globalpolitician.com/24493-bangladesh+Hizb+ut-Tahrir+bangladesh+linkages&cd=7&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=in>, accessed on May 16 2009

<sup>xxii</sup> Shariful Islam, "Suspected Islamist outfit active in different name", The Daily Star, Sunday April 8 2007.

<sup>xxiii</sup> "It is religious tax/alms (Zakat) paid on the day when Muslims break the fasting period at the end of the month of Ramadan. This alms is known as Zakat al-Fitrah", .downloaded from <http://www.ezsoftech.com/ramadan/ramadan53.asp> accessed on June 1 2009.

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<sup>xxiv</sup> Shafiq Rahman, “Black List”, Probe Magazine, Volume 7 Issue 47 May 1 2009.