TERRORISM IN SOUTH ASIA: RAMIFICATIONS IN THE INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL SECURITY OF STATES: A BANGLADESH PERSPECTIVE

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INTRODUCTION

Terrorism, as a concept, has taken a centre-stage not only in a country’s internal politics in today’s world but has also changed the method of combating “international terrorism” militarily, particularly since 9/11. Although the focus of the world, including international bodies, has been on the methodology to combat terrorism that seems to have plagued a vast span of the world, there is still no agreed definition of terrorism. The term is open to interpretation and has been abused by some nations to justify military adventurism to subdue struggles for national emancipation despite the fact that these struggles have historical roots. The other danger brought in by 9/11 is the religious connotation of global terrorism. Terrorism, in the West and in the non-Muslim world, is seen as the aggressive face of the great religion of Islam. This is a fallacious assumption. It is not Islam but the hypocritical dispensation of judgement in resolving historical disputes which has been the major source of unsettling peace in the world. Disputes like Palestine gave birth to unprecedented violence that graduated into to-day’s violent
methods adopted by non-state actors like al-Qaida. We need to rethink where the world has gone wrong in resolving disputes, most of which are unfortunately associated with the Islamic world. Be that as it may, before going further let us try to fathom an understanding of terrorism.

**BACKGROUND**

It was from the 1950s to the 1970s that successive US administrations from Dwight Eisenhower to Jimmy Carter, supported by the liberal democracies of the rest of the West, defended the US and their allies' interests in the Middle East and South Asia. The West's geo-strategic and geopolitical interests in the Middle East, whose abundant natural resources are considered vital for the economies and prosperity of the industrialised nations, were either protected physically or by proxy powers recruited or created locally. The creation, strengthening and security of the state of Israel became critical to policymakers and geo-strategic thinkers of the West. They did not predict the end product of that tangled web.

The West was afraid of the Soviet drive for the spread of secular socialism. The Middle East became one of the testing grounds for two divergent ideologies, Socialism and Capitalism. The religion of Islam, purportedly anti-socialist and anti-communist, was a handy tool. Two of the biggest and most powerful Muslim countries played a vital role, with many others joining in, to counter Soviet Communism and home grown 'sub-species' like the 'Arab Socialism' espoused by Gemal Abdul Nasser of Egypt. Thus began what many analysts now term the 'flirtation' between the USA, its allies and Islam. It remained covert in support of the rise of political Islam, whatever form it took. 'Islamic Brotherhood' spread all over the Middle East in order to thwart Soviet ideological expansion through Arab socialism. And ultra-conservatives were encouraged from Saudi Arabia to Pakistan in South Asia. Pakistan's Islamic conservatism saw the rise of dictatorship,
alarmed secular India and killed the concept of Pakistan in the shape of independent Bangladesh.

However, the real exposure of the extent of political Islam's prowess was demonstrated with the invasion by the Soviet Union of yet another ultra-conservative Muslim country — Afghanistan — a linchpin between Central and South Asia. The events of 1979 became the test case for the US honeymoon with Islam. Jihad — the largest covert operation in US history — was launched against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. It was conceived in Langley, VA, USA, nurtured in the Middle East and rest of the Islamic world, delivered in Pakistan and matured in Afghanistan till the Soviets were compelled to leave in 1989. 'Holy Warriors' — Mujahideen as they were called — came from all over the world — from Bali to Morocco, from Mauritania to Xingjian, from Akora Khatak, Pakistan, Deoband, India to Bangladesh. All came back to their respective regions imbued with the spirit of Jihad as interpreted to suit anti-Islamic forces, i.e., Soviet Communism. The eventual rise of the Taliban, augmented by South Asian Islamic zealots ably led by front-line states like Pakistan and supported by oil-rich Arab countries and encouraged by the USA, was enough to initiate the surge of extremists turning their guns against their mentors as also against those liberal Muslim societies condemned as the practitioners of western democracy. The US's abandonment of the Mujahideens in Afghanistan, Israel's perpetual atrocities against Palestinians, Soviet/Russian brutality in Chechnya and India's occupation of Kashmir enraged the 'Holy Warriors,' now known as 'Islamic Extremists,' to find a way to avenge the betrayal of the West and their allies. This resulted in 9/11 and the counter-action thereafter. Whatever the outcome of US's hobnobbing with Islam at least for the last decade, it was and is South Asia that bore the brunt. South Asia today is paying dearly for events not created by them. Bangladesh — a moderate Muslim majority South Asian country — is not an exception.
It was indicated earlier that the rise of Islamic extremism was due to a microscopic section out of almost two billion followers of Islam, one of the great monotheist religions with roots to House of Abraham (Ibrahim AH). Unfortunately, all Muslims are painted as ‘terrorists’, which is at all not the case; as such, the sane majority of them need to be recognised by the western world.

Be that as it may, it is not only religious ideological-based terrorism, which has besieged South Asia, it is also confronted with various forces of ‘terror’ based on different ideologies and goals. These forces are not only threatening the social order and internal stability but proving detrimental to interstate relations and regional security. Bangladesh — notwithstanding the rise of Islamic militancy within — is surrounded by more than 140 ‘such dark forces,’ called either ‘separatists’ or ‘terrorists’ as suits the commentator or analyst. Today, regional cooperation and interstate relations have become hostage to such ‘dark forces’, particularly when it comes to relations with the core country — India.

The objective of this paper is to discuss the internal and regional ramifications of the recent terrorism in Bangladesh and its influence on its society. The paper discusses ideology-inspired terrorism in South Asia. It then discusses the state of terrorism in the region, highlighting its impact on interstate relations. The paper moves on to focus on the rise of Islamic militancy in Bangladesh, with reference to the recent incidents there. While it argues as to why terror tactics in Bangladesh have not achieved success, it also suggests some remedial measures for the future.

The analysis in this paper is based on information available from a variety of published documents and the intelligence analyses of several foreign institutions. No official or semi-official documents or statistics were made available to the researcher. The opinions expressed in this paper are personal.
UNDERSTANDING OF TERRORISM

Before we proceed further, we need to clarify our understanding of terrorism. There is no universally accepted definition of terrorism. The perception differs from country to country and situation to situation. What has come about in the last six decades is a general expression of the phenomenon that is associated with any violent act directed mainly against unarmed civilians or the government to create a fear psychosis, with the aim to further the group's defined or not-so-defined aim. The aim of such a group could be political, ethnical or ideological.

Terror acts could be organised by groups or individual with different aims. The aims could be to bring about political, economic or social changes or could simply be a criminal act. In fact, the connotations are wide-ranging. However, what we consider here are not criminal acts but acts that aim to render the government's authority irrelevant in order to create chaos in society for furthering politico-religious or simply political ideology in the long-run or to help capture state power by ideologically akin groups.

Terrorism now is a dominant factor in international relations and military applications. It makes no distinction between political ideological struggles or freedom fights. Iraqi resistance, Chechnya, Kashmir, Palestinian struggle are often equated with al-Qaida's politico-religious confrontation with the West. Apart from that, we come across several expressions related to terrorism such as insurgency, freedom struggle, separatists and underground or even guerrilla group, although partisan warfare is no more in discussion. If one makes a list of all these expressions, which in simple terms are currently synonymous with terrorism, one would be perplexed with the complexity of the subject.

As it is now, because of the global fallout of the politico-religious struggle as viewed by the West especially USA,
'international terrorism' means a religious ideological conflict. It is true that most Muslim countries are now besieged with anti-western politico-religious terrorism or near-terrorism. One significant feature that ideological terrorism has is its identifiable signature. This signature makes it easy to identify the organisation and the causes. Unless and until these signatures are evident it becomes difficult to fathom the cause and leaves it open to various interpretations.

TERRORISM AND FUNDAMENTALISM

As stated earlier, since 9/11 there has been a plethora of literature coming out on terrorism and for the most part it has become synonymous with the religion of Islam. South Asia is no exception. In most cases the phenomenon is identified as 'Fundamentalism.' People can rarely differentiate between the two. Whereas we have a known definition of terrorism, we should distinguish it from fundamentalism as stated "activist affirmation of a particular faith that defines that faith in absolutist and literalist manner"[1] As Karen Armstrong puts it, "Fundamentalism is global fact and has surfaced in every major faith in response to the problems of our modernity".[2] However, a follower of the religion of Islam is required to adopt the fundamentals of the faith, and there can be no deviation from the five basic principles or pillars of Islam. Those are the fundamental tenets of religion. Be that as it may, the difference between the two was well-explained by Paul Wilkinson in his book Terrorism Versus Democracy: The Liberal State Response (page 59).[3] For our discussion, therefore, wherever applicable we shall either refer to 'Islamic Extremists' or 'Islamists,' rather than 'Fundamentalists.'

TERRORISM IN SOUTH ASIA

Terrorism is not a new experience for the sub-continent and the rest of South Asia. The people of this region have seen the use of terrorism as a weapon since the sub-continent was
partitioned in 1947. These were mainly separatist elements fighting for independence. The oldest are the Naga rebels of the Indian Northeast who are still fighting to realise their political aims.

Since 1983 Sri-Lanka has been going through the worst violence that the 20th century has seen. The LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam) rose with the support of external forces mainly from India under Indira Gandhi’s backing and continues to fight and resorts to acts of terror with devastating effects. The group is regarded as the most deadly and best organised irregular forces in the world, like an insurgent group but classified as terrorist. It was the LTTE that introduced suicide attacks in South Asia. Nepal has gone through ten years of Maoist movement and terrorism was their weapon. Nepal Maoists are now being integrated into the political process.

Bangladesh suffered for over two decade an insurgency in the confines of the Southeastern region of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Bangladesh has since settled the issue peacefully. However, the country has seen the rise of home-grown Islamist extremism, which was quickly dealt with but yet much needed to be done.

A brief sectoral resume is appended for better understanding of the linkages.

Kashmir: North West India Islamic Jihadist

The people of Kashmir, a predominantly Muslim state, have seen sporadic uprisings. If the Nagaland rebels were the harbinger of India’s Northeastern woes, the Kashmir issue has been the most unsettling factor in South Asia. The current violence in Kashmir — termed by India as ‘Islamic Terrorism’ and by Pakistan as ‘freedom struggle’ — has been initiated by Kashmiris across the divide. However, it has been attributed by successive Indian governments to ‘Islamic Jihadists’ aided by Pakistan.
The fact is that most of the organisations, which had initiated the Kashmir uprising in 1989, were composed of Afghanistan veterans recruited by various outfits most which have been listed as terrorist after 9/11 irrespective of whether they were connected with international terrorism or not. The semi-government Indian think tank ‘Institute for Conflict Management’ lists 36 major Islam-based groups identified as Islamic extremists or commonly ‘jihadi’ bodies actively supported by Pakistan.[4] According to Indian law enforcement and intelligence agencies, these are allegedly supported mainly by Pakistani intelligence and some are claimed to have international connections — namely Harkat-Ul-Jihad-Islami (HuJI), Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT), Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), Mujahideen E-Tanzeem and many others. (Please refer to Annexure-A). The Indian propaganda machinery, particularly some dedicated intelligence-sponsored think tanks, has been linking Bangladesh with several of these Jihadi organisations, particularly with HuJI (B) Bangladesh. More recently’ the other name that appears is that of LeT. These issues are discussed later.

We have discussed in brief the so-called Islamic extremists operating in India, borne out of the Kashmir dispute. One may suggest that these groups are not ideologically-based in that they aim to turn India into a Muslim state. Such an objective could best be termed absurd. An Indian analyst concludes that the aim of the so-called Islamic Jihadists based in Kashmir is at best to create division between Indian Hindus and Muslims to gain the sympathy of the approximately 160 million Muslim minority of India. There has been no proof yet that these groups are connected with al-Qaida, although they could adopt al-Qaida’s terror tactics. Yet many Indian security experts would like to link them with the Osama bin Laden-led IIF (International Islamic Front), identified through a declaration made in 1998 to wage ‘Holy War’ against the so-called ‘Crusaders’, their allies and
Jews. India or Hindus have not been singled out as they are not perceived as a threat. But for international consumption Indian policymakers and government-sponsored think tanks as well as a portion of the media justify Indian action in Kashmir through venomous propaganda alleging that its two Muslim neighbours, Pakistan and Bangladesh, are harbouring Islamist *Jihadists* in collaboration to undermine Indian security. One may point out that so far, apart from Kashmiri Muslims and locals, no other citizens including Bangladeshis have been found involved in any of the attacks within India by so-called *Jihadist* groups nor does the targeting pattern suggest the international linkage that the Indian media and intelligence endeavour to make us all believe.

**Punjab: Sikh Terrorism**

Apart from Kashmir, Indian Punjab saw a spate of violent terrorism in the eighties of the last century. The Indian army had to resort to its infamous Operation 'Blue Star'. India blamed Pakistan for the rise of Sikh separatism in Indian Punjab. Subsequently, Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh body guards, following which the worst ethnic violence between Sikhs and Hindus took place all over India. However, the Punjab, till date accounts for as many as twelve terrorist groups either active or in the form of a sleeping cell.[5] (See Annexure-B)

**Leftist Terrorism in Central, Southeast and Eastern India and in Bangladesh**

Terrorism experts and security analysts of South Asia — a large section of them being Indian — suggest that the threat to the nation is not Islamic extremism that merely aims to stir up communal riots, but the underground leftist armed movement resorting to extreme terrorism in the form of Maoism and the revival of the Naxalites. In the Maoist Assessment Paper Year 2006, the Institute for Conflict Management states, "The
Maoist ideology constitutes the gravest danger to democratic governance in geographically the widest area threatened by insurgent and terrorist violence in South Asia”. The assessment further states, “The Maoist threat appears to have overtaken all other insurgencies in the country from the point of geographical spread. At least 165 districts in 14 States, out of a total of 602 districts in the country, were affected by various levels of Maoist mobilisation and violence by the end of year 2005”.[6] The Indian state of West Bengal — affected by Maoists and Naxalites — has a common border with Bangladesh along the western and part of the northern areas. Bangladesh’s law enforcement agencies have been fighting these outlawed terrorists over two decades.

These terrorists have established a regional forum connecting Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka. Regions contiguous to Bangladesh are infested with left ideologically motivated terrorists. The leftist underground movement is already taking toll within Bangladesh especially in the rural areas. These are the groups with definite links across the border.

Although Indian think tanks and researchers identify five[7] (see Annexure-C) large terrorist groups in the region, unregistered splinter groups are also in operation. Of these, the largest are the People’s War Group and the Communist Party (Red Flag), which are reported to be trans-national. For better coordination Maoist groups of the region have established MC (Maoist Communist Centre in Bihar, India).

It is worth noting that in July 2001 ten extreme left wing parties (Maoist) in South Asia (including Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka) established a group for better coordination to advance the communist movement within the region. To establish better cooperation, a ‘Coordination Committee of Maoist Parties and Organisations of South Asia’ (CCOMPOSA) was set up in which the Nepalese PWG, MCC, Purba Banglar Communist Party (PCP or BCP: Bangladesh
Communist Party) of Bangladesh, Communist Party of Ceylon (Sri-Lanka) and communist parties of India became members.

**Underground Left Groups Linkages**

As discussed in the preceding paragraphs, the left movement that started in Naxalbari in 1967 is one of the oldest terror groups within the proximity of Bangladesh’s western border and that transgressed in the then East Pakistan. And one of the oldest groups in Bangladesh — continued post liberation — that are engaged in terrorist acts are those in the south-western and northern parts of Bangladesh, such as the *Purba Bangla Communist Party-Janajuddha* (PBCP) and the *Sharbahara Party* (SHP). These two rank as left extremist groups involved primarily in extortion, whereas the JMJB (*Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh — now banned Islami extremist group*) is thought to have existed and strengthened to counter these leftist elements, allegedly by a section of law makers that seems to have backfired and given impetus to the growth of home grown Jihadists.

As mentioned earlier, ten extreme left wing parties (Maoist) in South Asia established CCOMPOSA in the presence of a BCP (Bangladesh Communist Party) leader, Monoranjan Goshai alias Mrinal, who was then murdered as a result of in-fighting in Nadia, West Bengal. This substantiates the nexus of the underworld communist movement within the immediate regions around Bangladesh. The movement, originally started with a leftist ideology, is now fully devoted to extortion and terrorism. This may not have been taken into account by the Indian Agencies trying to link them with ideological Maoist movements elsewhere. The leftist ideological movements (much in line with Naxal Movement) emerging in about 13/14 Indian States are a cause of serious concern for the Indian authorities. Perhaps they considered that the possible link-up amongst left ideology groups in India
and Bangladesh would complete the bridge for terrorist movement from Kashmir to North East.

What one apprehends is that the steady growth of leftist underground movements would give rise to a counter-force, as has been seen in the case of the rise of Islamic militancy in Bangladesh. However, like the neighbouring country, Bangladesh has been more focused on countering religious militancy than in dealing with the rising tide of brutal terrorism which had taken more toll then any form of terrorism since the country’s independence. The underground leftist terrorism could go unnoticed because of its so-called secular approach, but it would remain a greater potential threat to the stability of South Asia.

**Insurgency-Terrorist Groups in North East India**

As stated earlier, the oldest insurgency in independent India started soon after 1947 in Nagaland by NSCN (National Socialist Council of Nagaland). This movement is now considered to be the mother of all insurgency/terrorism in India’s 7 North Eastern states, commonly known as the “seven sisters”. Naga insurgency was followed by Mizo insurgents and then Tripura. Although, at the end of the last century, the Indian government had partial success in negotiating with these three regional major insurgency groups, that did not stop growth of similar insurgents now termed as terrorists. Most of North Eastern India’s states have common borders with China and Myanmar in the east and southeast but the most vital border on the west and northwest is common with Bangladesh. In pre-1971 Bangladesh — as part of Pakistan — the Chittagong Hill Tracts in South East of the then East Pakistan provided sanctuary to Naga and Mizo rebels in training camps run by Pakistan. One of the reasons that India was eager to help the creation of Bangladesh was to deny North East India’s separatists’ safe haven given by the then hostile Pakistan government. [8]
Interestingly, India now — in similar language — accuses Bangladesh of providing safe haven to insurgents operating in Assam, Tripura, and Nagaland. India further alleges that all Bangladesh governments have lent a deaf ear to their complaints. Indian security analysts also claim that the government of Bangladesh, with the support of Bangladeshi Islamic parties and in collusion with Pakistan’s ISI (Inter Services Intelligence), is supporting Asom’s (Assam) Muslim insurgents as well as the ethnically-based separatist organisations. Particular reference is made to Asom’s largest separatist organisation ULFA. This is one of the most contested issues between the two countries.

North East Indian insurgents/terrorists number more then 120 groups, but a tally of 103 is listed in Annexure – D. Cut of the seven North Eastern states, Asom (Assam) has 37, Tripura 29, Manipur has 37 and Meghalaya has 4 groups who are active in terrorism and continue to engage government forces. These four states have a common border with Bangladesh. And of Tripura state’s 29 groups, the most prominent are ATTF (All Tripura Tiger Force) and NLFT (National Liberation Front of Tripura). This state is adjacent to Bangladesh’s two eastern administrative divisions, namely Sylhet and Chittagong.

**Muslim Insurgents/ terrorists in Asom (Assam) – Linkage with Bangladesh**

Apart from ethnic based separatist organisations operating in the state of Asom in North East India, such as ULFA (United Liberation Front of Asom) and the Bodo National Democratic Front, there are reports of more then one Islamic insurgent group — in places termed as militants. Indian intelligence reports and widely circulated publications including well received books provide vivid descriptions of Islamic insurgents/terrorists. According to these reports, Muslims have more then one organisation; mainly MULTA
(Muslim United Liberation Tiger of Asom), MULFA (Muslim United Liberation Front of Asom) and ULFBV (United Liberation Front of Barak Valley) are worth mentioning. The other widely circulated books list 13 Muslim militant organisations active within Asom and Manipur, including Harkatul-Mujahideen and Jamat-i-Islami (Asom) units. [9]

In his propagandist book, Terror Sans Frontiers: Islamist Militancy in North East, Jaideep Saikia suggests that these organisations, though local, aim to uphold the interests of illegal Bangladeshi settlers in 5-7 districts of Asom who have changed its demographic profile. He claims that these linkages are firmly established with external help aimed at annexing these contiguous districts to form a greater Bangladesh or a separate Islamic state dependent on Bangladesh. It is not only Jaideep Saikia but a large number of analysts connected with governments' clandestine organisations who opine that Bangladesh and its leaders — irrespective of ideology — would like to annex at least five districts of Asom with Muslim majorities. The census shows Asom to be the state with the second largest Muslim population after Jammu & Kashmir. [10]

Most Indian analysts attribute this demographic change to Bangladeshi illegal immigrants in Asom. According to the census, the population growth in Assam was at 53.26% in 1971-1991 and it declined to 18.85% in 1991-2001. The Muslim majority districts are Dhubri 70.45%, Barpeta 56.07%, Halikandi 54.79%, Goalpara 50.18% and Karimganj 49.17%. Other districts, which have significantly large Muslim populations, are Nagaon 47.19%, Morigaon 45.31%, Cachar 34.49% and Bongaigaon 32.74%. However, no Indian analysts have ever mentioned that these districts had Muslim majorities in pre-partition India.

Nevertheless, most analysts suggest that religion-based political parties and Islamist extremists, allegedly operating
from Bangladesh, are not only providing an ideological umbrella but also training and funds to Assam’s militant Islamist organisations. By the same token, Bangladesh’s alleged support for ULFA seems to be contradictory. In the recent past ULFA had a noxious hate campaign against the Bengali-speaking Assamese Muslim population. Therefore, one may doubt the very tendentious Indian claim that Bangladeshi government organisations and religion-based political parties could or would support two antagonistic organisations. The Indian think tanks also presume that the growth of ‘militant Islam’ has been due to the support of Bangladeshi religious parties aiming at destabilising India rather than supporting Islamist extremists the world over.

These contradictory claims and analyses appear to be confusing the originators as well. ULFA has been accusing Indians of migrating to Assam on such a large scale that soon Assam’s distinct culture would be diluted. ULFA has in this context supported the settlers of East Bengal origin who not only adopted the local culture but contributed to the economic growth of the state. [11] At no stage has ULFA ever supported Indian claims about the ten million mostly Muslim Bangladeshis who have illegally migrated to Assam and elsewhere and who could provide cannon fodder for the larger extremist movement that Bangladesh is allegedly masterminding. Mr. Saikia has been critical of ULFA’s ‘volte face’ on the issue of illegal immigrants. He makes this critical observation: “...an examination of the mechanism by which outside forces from Bangladesh and Pakistan are attempting to promote Islamist militancy in Assam must take into consideration the abdication of ideology by one the most important ethnically based militant organisations in the region, the ULFA, an organisation — as has been seen — which came into existence as a foil to the illegal migration from Bangladesh”.[12] But ULFA has denied his assertion of Bangladeshi illegal immigrants entering in the numbers that
the Indian authorities and their supporters would make the rest of the world believe.

I have discussed the allegations of illegal Bangladeshi Muslim immigrants promoting the rise of militant Islam and of sheltering North East Indian separatists, which Bangladesh has been denying and indeed taking action whenever deliberate intrusions are made — and lastly the attempts to link the so-called rise of militant Muslims in Assam with active help by religious extremists from Bangladesh. What I would like to suggest at this stage is that it seems that these are deliberate attempts to prove perceived connections, and that Delhi-based North East Indian intellectuals would like the rest of the world to believe that North East India is a remote but strategically very important piece of land which, if it fell into the hands of 'Islamic Extremists', would become a more formidable Islamic terrorist sanctuary than Afghanistan. This area then would make easy connections with the South East Asian Islamic terrorists that the USA in particular is at war with. In that analysis, Bangladesh is moving towards converting its secular minded moderate Muslim society into a Taliban-like state. These analysts connect Bangladesh with HuJI (B) and LeT who allegedly operate under the ideological umbrella of al-Qaida. Whereas in the event it was not HuJI (B) nor LeT, which are banned internationally including in Bangladesh, that struck the common people of Bangladesh to establish a distorted Islamic ideology, but home-grown Islamic extremists under the name of JMB and JMJB. Their efforts failed mainly due to the rejection of extremism by the masses. We shall examine this later.

The question is why a section of Indian politicians and intellectuals has taken recourse to connecting Bangladesh with the perceived rise of Islamism in the North East and elsewhere. The answer could be exhaustive but there are four main reasons — one, to address India’s geo-strategic
constraints due to the geographic location of Bangladesh; two, to downplay Delhi’s failure to quell the insurgency and separatist movements in the last six decades; three, to subdue Bangladesh’s independent policy, its standing within the Muslim world as a voice of moderation and to malign Bangladesh’s Muslim character; and four, to project the geo-strategic importance of North East India in view of the global changes since 9/11, particularly within the USA.

To substantiate two of the latter reasons, let me quote from Saikia’s book that was launched in the presence of eminent US scholar Professor Stephen P. Cohen, financed by the Ford Foundation and published in 2003 as part of the ACDIS (Arms Control, Disarmament, and International Security) project well - circulated within the USA and elsewhere. On the issue of the North East under the grip of Bangladeshi Islamists becoming the next Afghanistan, Saikia explains that “the Pakistani ISI having closed the ‘Afghan Bureau’ chose Bangladesh to launch anti-Indian operations to create ‘several Afghans in India’. North East India, with its large illegal immigrant population and proximity to Bangladesh, makes it an ideal staging ground for the subterfuge”. [13] On the question of the importance of the North East, Saikia continues by stating that hardly any credible personality, be it an academic, a security expert or a member of a think tank, had heard of the perceived Islamic threat in North East India via Bangladesh. What he tried to point out to the western security practitioner and theoretician was that North East India is too dangerous to neglect and Bangladesh must be watched. Saikia concludes his book stating, “Is the game plan, therefore, to steadily expand the Islamist fundamentalist confederacy into North East India, and thereby take the crucial step in creation of a greater Bangladesh? After all, the situation is ripe for such picking” [14]
Islam in Bangladesh

It is true that Bangladesh was not liberated in the name of religion, but religion dominates the individual and collective life of Bangladeshis. Islam remains the religion of the majority. Since the ethos of Islamic practice in the region was blended with the culture of the soil, extremism was never accepted by the Muslims of the region in general and Bengal in particular. As a noted Indian scholar, grandson of Mahatma Gandhi, Rajmohan Gandhi, puts it, "if Islam rode across India with sword and spoke from the throne, it also walked with the Sufi and spoke gentler cadences from the hut. The Sufis, Muslim mystics, talked of the love of god and the brotherhood of the man, of the shortness of life and the length of the eternity .... Numerous Hindu admirers and disciples were drawn to them and, after their death, to their tombs.... Together Sufis and Bhakti poets brought Hindus and Muslims closer at the grassroots". [15]

It was those Sufis and Arab Muslim traders who brought Islam into this softer region of Bengal that is now Bangladesh. The religion of Islam came long before the arrival of the conqueror Bakhtyar Khilji in the twelfth century. "Sufism not only helped the spread of Islam in Bengal, but it also influenced the indigenous religions. The ideal of Sufism, attaining the love of God through love of His creation, has greatly influenced the devotional doctrines of vaisnavism as well as the mysticism of the Bauls. At times Sufism in Bengal has been transformed into a folk religion with many of the Sufis being regarded as saints or folk deities. During a maritime journey, for example, especially if a storm arises, sailors pray to Pir Badar, repeating his name, 'Badar Badar'. The names of different Sufi saints are inscribed on the bodies of buses, trucks, launches, and steamers to ensure safe journeys. Sufism has also influenced the literary and cultural life of the land. Innumerable songs and stories, for example, have been written on the miraculous stories of the Sufi saints.
Murshidi and Marfati songs, Gazir Gan, the poem of Gazi Kalu-Champavati, the songs of Madar Pir, Sona Pir, etc. are based on the lives of these Sufis or developed from the Sufi ideals of their teaching". [16]

As stated in the opening paragraph, the liberation war of Bangladesh was not fought on a religious divide but on a secular slogan. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the Islamic character of the country remained intact. The Constitution did not accept any law that was contradictory to Islamic practice. This was recognised first by the founding father of the country, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, when within two years of liberation he took Bangladesh to the OIC (Organization of the Islamic Conference). OIC is not a secular organisation. The late JN Dixit, a revered diplomat and analyst of India who served in Dhaka as his country’s envoy soon after Bangladesh’s liberation, writes, ".... With the passage of time Bangladesh became an Islamic republic. It must not be forgotten that the first step in that direction was taken by Mujib himself who attended OIC (Organisation of the Islamic Conference) summit in 1974. Whosoever came into power in Bangladesh had to fulfil two stipulations for surviving in power: first that he or she maintain a certain amount of distance from India and second, the person should confirm the Islamic identity of Bangladesh". [17]

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was a visionary leader who recognised the historical fact that the people of this part of India were partitioned twice on the basis of religion in 1905 and 1947. Where the culture blended with the religion of Islam, that became part of life of the majority. It is fallacious to presume that being religious amounts to ‘supporting extremism’ or that a country identifying with a particular religion would turn into an extremist state. These presumptions are an attempt to simplify the complex problems that the world is facing. Bangladeshis have proved that their society rejects extremism as far as religion is
concerned. In our traumatic experience not one religious leader supported the actions of a handful of extremists. Bangladeshis are religious minded, love their religion as part of their culture — and may be followers of any religion — but they are not extremist and Islam as the religion of the majority will always influence politics.

What has to be remembered is that, Islamic or not, current complex world events are viewed by Muslims, moderate or not, as a historical contest between three monotheist religions — where Palestinians are targets of state terrorism, denied a decent nationhood, Muslim land is occupied and there is systematic persecution of the population on the pretext of terrorism on top of it. Unless these complexities are understood and resolved, they will continue to encourage extreme acts in the name of religion as witnessed in a country like Britain which is a strongly secular country and the extremism was home-grown.

Rise of Militant Islam in Bangladesh

If any single event in recent history could be specified as the cause of today’s unstable world and the rise of militancy in the Islamic world in particular, it was the proxy war that the US and its allies initiated in Afghanistan. Legitimised as a ‘Holy War’— Jihad as stated earlier — by the House of Saud, caretaker of Islam’s Holiest Sites responded to the call of jihad from the ‘legitimate’ authority. Many religious zealots found it to be the opportunity to perform the duty of a life time — to fight the infidel aggressor of a Muslim land, Afghanistan.

Volunteer Jihadists of all descriptions joined the cause — from Bali to Casablanca, from Bangladeshi Madrasas to members of Islamic Brotherhood, from Muslims of Mindanao to the USA and Britain. It was difficult for governments to keep count. After the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, many of them returned to normal life but many did not. Many stayed on to
fight Afghanistan's civil war then transformed into being a member of the Taliban, encouraging more recruits. Many of these Afghan veterans were inspired to convert their own countries into truly corruption-free Islamic states and oppose western concepts of governance. Al-Qaida developed in the face of western betrayal of Afghan Mujahedeen soon after the Soviet withdrawal. The West started paying for the biggest mistake they had committed in leaving Afghanistan at the hands of the extremists. The betrayal of the West gave birth to the Taliban concept.

Like almost all Muslim countries, Bangladesh became part of that proxy war within the knowledge of both the local and US government machines. Though the exact figure is difficult to ascertain, it is estimated that around 3,400 Bangladeshis participated in the Afghan war and around 500 never came back, believed to have settled in the Middle East and elsewhere. No semi-official arrangement was ever made to join the Taliban forces but there were reports that people may have joined of their own accord. [18] Many of these Bangladeshi Taliban members fought till the last when the US assault was made on Kunduz. There is an unconfirmed report that 3 prisoners believed to be Bangladeshi have been interned in Guantanamo prison camp but their nationality remains doubtful. No Bangladeshi, however, has ever been found or apprehended as a member of a global terror network.

Some of the Afghan returnees joined the group known as HuJI, which was simultaneously raised in Pakistan to assist fighting in Kashmir. HuJI (B) was formed in the open on 30 April 1992 — when Afghanistan was in the midst of civil war and the Taliban government yet to form. HuJI (B) declared their desire to be in open politics. Little notice was taken of them by the then government or the succeeding government until it was accused of plotting twice to assassinate the then Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in July 2000 and the key suspect in the plot was one Mufti Abdul Hannan whose name as a
leading HuJI (B) leader had never appeared before. Following that incident and the revelation of a number of alleged terror attempts, most of the members left the organisation since they did not support the terror tactics that HuJI (B) was alleged to have adopted. The little known Mufti Hannan was charged and tried in absentia and condemned to death in connection with the 2000 incident but remained at large till he was arrested on 1 October 2005. HuJI (B) was proscribed by the government as a 'self-confessed terrorist group,' along with the home-grown JMB (Jamaitul Mujahideen Bangladesh), perpetrator of terrorist acts including two suicide bombings to disrupt the judicial system, and the JMJB (Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh) which we will discuss in detail later on. HuJI was banned as a terrorist organisation following 9/11 and remains as such.

Having seen the formation of the only extremist Islamist organisation, the question remains as to why its existence was allowed in Bangladesh and how it could survive three democratically elected governments, including Sheikh Hasina's (1996-2001). The full answer lies with the two different sets of parties that governed Bangladesh in that period and thereafter. It appears to be due to the political consternation arising in the two largest parties dominating Bangladesh politics. Home-grown terrorism not only took birth but has flourished within the space created by the confrontational politics in Bangladesh. However, whatever the cost Bangladeshis have to pay for such confrontational politics, the fact remains that Bangladeshis love democracy and are one of the few Muslim countries which continues to have democracy in a true sense.

Rise of JMB as militant Islam in Bangladesh

We have in the foregoing discussion dealt in detail with the propagandist version of the perceived threat of extremism that the rest of the world is being made to believe exists within and emanates from Bangladesh. The strong anti-government
stance taken by rival political aspirants perhaps made government in power nervous of taking action. JMB and JMJB grew unnoticed between 1998-2005 until they made an audacious pronouncement of their existence with 500 country-wide, simultaneous bombings on 17 August 2005 and I termed them the 'Last wake-up Call'. In the following paragraphs I have tried to analyse the crux of the problem that we face and may endure in the future unless we have as a nation taken lessons from the rise of such a 'dark force'.

**Ideological Factor:** As stated earlier, the 'rise of Militant Islam in Bangladesh' is due to the political space created by the confrontational politics that has existed since democracy was reintroduced in Bangladesh, but one cannot deny that, like elsewhere in the world, the Afghan Jihad and Taliban movement has had a calamitous effect on a section of Muslims in this country, however small a minority that might be. In both events, so close to home and openly patronised by the most powerful states, some students from Islamic Seminaries of Bangladesh, like their counterparts in many other Muslim countries, joined the Holy war. Many returned with the ideal of pan-Islamism. These returnees were not dormant but actively spread pan-Islamism. Many of them linked up with previous contacts and found fellowship with followers of 'political Islam', espousing similar ideologies and views on the art of statecraft. It was HuJI (B) (Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami, Bangladesh) now banned, that first surfaced as regular political force. Subsequently, they went underground. Many were Afghan veterans including one Mufti Hannan who has been sentenced to death for masterminding the plot to kill the then Prime Minister in 2000. As we discussed in the foregoing paragraph, Hannan was charge-sheeted and arrested, then released on bail, but his organisations remained intact. HuJI (B) with that attempt launched a silent Jihad against what it described as an 'un-Islamic' regime headed by a woman. As late as in December 2005, Mufti Hannan under intensive
investigation confirmed that the now identified JMB leader, Shykh Abdur Rahman, along with another Islamist leader, Siddiqul Islam Aka ‘Banglabhai’ were co-planners in the abortive plot. He further confessed that HuJI (B) had worked out a ten-year plan to capture state power and launch a bigger campaign by 2005. JMB, which was once part of HuJI (B), proclaimed Jihad against, as they put it, a ‘corrupted regime’ headed by yet another female leader. They called for people to end their support for the corrupt western system of judiciary and democracy. [19]

It was the first time in the thousand years of Bengal and Sufi Islam that Bangladeshis witnessed aghast the rise of a militant Islam that did not fit into Bangladesh’s social and cultural life. Bangladeshis were dumbfounded to discover that their children had turned into human bombs, executing suicide missions against judges and announcing their demand to establish Sharia law. A total of 33 people died in three suicide bombings carried out on the outskirts of the capital.

However, the rise of this group would not have surprised the government if they had heeded the media and intelligence reports regarding the rise of so-called Banglabhai in Baghmara, Rajshahi, much in the manner of Mullah Omar of Afghanistan. It was politicians in northern Bangladesh and their short-sighted attempt to use so-called Banglabhai (Siddiqul Islam) to their own advantage that allowed him (Banglabhai) and his spurious group to grow into a formidable organisation JMJB, which by then became affiliated with JMB under Shykh Abdur Rahman. The unabated growth of these Islamists taking the advantage of the political space opened up by the major feuding parties gathered enough strength and resources and created an organisation that threatens the very fabric of a progressive democratic Muslim country.

JMB tried to instil a fear psychosis and force society to accept a corrupted version of Islamic ideology that they
themselves were not sure of. They hardly realised that their ideology was flawed and did not fit in a land that practises a unique blend of religio-cultural rituals in day-to-day life. What they lacked was popular support for their ideology similar to that enjoyed by religious based political parties. These parties had about 6.1% voters support in the five elections in which the participation came from Jamaat-i-Islami (JI) (Annexure-E).

**Political Factor:** Since the fall of Ershad’s regime in 1990 Bangladesh has seen three democratically elected parliamentary governments. Two parties, *i.e.*, Awami League (AL) and Bangladesh Nationalist party (BNP) emerged as the major parties, with Jatiya Party (JP) and Jamaat-i-Islami (JI) as smaller players. Since the installation of parliamentary democracy and the emergence of two dominant parties, the AL as the leading left of centre party suffered an identity crisis with the eighth amendment of the constitution dealing with state religion and changing a cardinal principle ‘secularism’ to a more sedate religiosity. The political division was accentuated by the establishment of the “ghatak dalal nirmul committee” (killers-collaborators elimination committee), when AL came to power in 1996, that was directed against those political elements who supported the Pakistan army in 1971 — mostly members of JI. The BNP took the religious parties into its fold to increase its voting percentage, giving them an absolute majority in the parliament formed in 2001. BNP’s strategic alliance with religious political parties or ‘political Islam’ *per se* upset the AL’s polling arithmetic, as is evident from the last two elections. In the 1996 election the AL had 37.44% of the votes and secured 146 seats to form the government, whereas the BNP secured 33.60% with 116 seats and the Islamic parties including JI polled 10.50% with 4 seats. The 2001 election that brought the BNP-JI alliance to power significantly added Islamic parties’ supporters across the country. The BNP polled 40.86% securing 193 seats and Islamic parties polled 8.06% (JI’s 7.26 % with 17 seats) securing
19 seats. It should also be noted that JI secured 18 seats with 12.13% of the votes in the 1991 election and was united with the opposition against the Ershad regime. It is now evident from the statistics that AL's political strategy is simply that the BNP, minus the Islamic parties especially JI, can easily be defeated. Their political calculations are based on this assumption. The recent rise of radical Islam and the BNP's past association with JI has given AL the tools it needs to put JI in the dock. Noticeably, the political conflict that emerged centred on the calculations for the formation of the next government. And here lies the biggest impediment for a successful use of a combined 'political resolve' to galvanise forces against the 'radicalism' that the majority of Bangladeshi Muslims shun (See annexure-F).

Taking advantage of the political confusion, Mr. Siddquil Islam, a self-styled moral chief, and his party (JMJB) eliminated the so-called underground leftist extremists, who were thought to be aiding smaller left political parties. The JMJB established its own court and resorted to the public execution of the so-called underground leftist party members who were, according to left ideology, waging a class struggle to clean the society of petty bourgeois. When a large section of the local and international media printed first-hand reports of the rise of this militancy, the ruling BNP-JI coalition chose to deny its existence simply because it might prematurely disturb the larger vote bank. It created further ripples within the ruling coalition when the media alleged JI's surreptitious link with such forces. No government investigation has ever taken place at any stage.

A burst of media attention and public outrage forced the government to announce measures to tackle this extremist terrorist and at one point the Prime Minister herself ordered Siddiquil Islam's arrest. Surprisingly, even a week after this directive from the highest authority, he (the so-called Banglabhai), allegedly sheltered by a section of the law
enforcing agency, remained at large, presumably with the blessing of a powerful section of politicians as alleged by the leading national dailies and electronic media. However, he was at last arrested on 6 March 2006 and eventually sentenced to death by a speedy trial court for masterminding the killing of judges. The court verdict has been executed in early 2007. Mr. Shykh Abdur Rahman, the JMB head and mastermind of 'Islamic terrorism' in Bangladesh who was arrested on 2 March 2006, has also been tried in court and later executed.

With clear direction and a firm political will, government agencies were able to dismantle the Islamic extremist movement by arresting and annihilating its entire Majlish-e-Shura (highest policy making body). Since these Islamists lack popular support the government seems to have controlled the violence that had both internal and external ramifications through a crackdown by the law enforcement agencies and the recovery every day of explosives and arms, raids on safe havens and arrests. JMB and HuJI (B) are banned organisations and government is contemplating banning other organisations which are not regular political parties.

It was political considerations that prevented the ruling party from taking serious note of the media reports and international news reports, though it should be recognised that most of these were also contradicted by critics like Jaideep Saikia. The ruling party shied away purely on political grounds or did not believe that there could be home-grown terrorists who would target their own coreligionists. This was candidly admitted by the then Prime Minister in her televised address to the nation.

Socio-Economic Factor: It is a hard fact that, although Bangladesh has made significant economic strides since the 1980s, raising the growth rate to nearly 7%, the distribution of wealth is restricted within the urban section of people. One of the reasons is that maximum economic growth has been
effected by private entrepreneurs concentrated within the two big cities of Bangladesh. Government has less control over the distribution. The government sector not only lacks concern but is also ridden with endemic corruption that deprives the rural masses of the benefits of growth.

The government education system remains poor, leaving space for the uncontrolled growth of Makhtabs and Madrassas. NGOs play a dominant role but within a chosen sector, i.e., women, leaving a large section of male youth outside their activities. Thus terror recruitment becomes easier. A case study of two suicide bombers mostly pointed towards that socio-economic imbalance that no government did give adequate attention to.

Be that as it may, we must address our socio-economic ills that have alienated millions from the mainstream, making them a vulnerable group readily susceptible to ideological indoctrination to change the society 'with equitable social justice' that religious teaching presumably offers.

**Ideological indoctrination:** Having made a close study of the profile of three suicide bombers one was certain that few main causes worked as motivational factors apart from distorted religious indoctrination, though one similarity was found with other suicide bombers seen elsewhere. Suicide bombers were in their teens and were uncertain of their future in countries like Bangladesh where opportunities for income generation are limited. The inequality that persists in Bangladesh society and the wide gap between an emerging elitist society with a majority rural populace and the youth–inequality in terms of the education system has produced class differences that are commonly exploited both by the left and religious rightists. One needs to look deeper into these grey areas. It is not madrassa education that drove these fanatics to take their lives but social and personal trauma that worked as strong
motivating factor. One of the three was a madrassa student, while the rest two were from regular schools. The point to note here is that Siddiqui Islam was a university graduate in Bengali and lecturer of Bengali literature. Therefore, it is fallacious to suggest that madrasas in Bangladesh produced these extremists. Madrasas existed for hundreds of years in this part of the world. The problem lies elsewhere.

The question is: how do you fight an ideology? The answer is yet to be found, particularly when classical terrorism is increasingly added to the more devastating threat of ‘suicide bombing’ translated as ‘martyrdom’ for the cause that forms the basic motivating factor. What Bangladesh has experienced was not a nationalist ideological conflict but a conflict based on ‘religious interpretation’. It would need deeper study, patience, prudence and political wisdom. One has to counter this kind of terrorism with sensitivity and deeper understanding. We are not dealing with ‘psychopaths’ but with strongly indoctrinated youth, 68% of whom are within the age range of 18-21 and the rest less than 30, who have severed their emotional ties with worldly things, and are ready to sacrifice for the cause they were made to believe in. These were a different breed from Middle Eastern or other ‘suicide bombers’. The sparse available profile suggests that whereas they do have similar characteristics of universal suicide bombers but with difference of social background where recruits are from the most socio-economically backward regions and the youth are suffering from social neglect because of their educational level. These aspects need further study to develop long term measures. The important point that one needs to note is that the motivators, teachers, masterminds or ideological gurus are no ordinary people. They are high caliber individuals with iconic personalities for their pupils. We need reflection at national level and if need be we should be open enough to take counseling from friends and well-wishers.
Possible External Factor: Of late, the counter-terrorism measures adopted by the government and the developments so far have been commendable. In spite of politicking, law enforcement agencies, within their limitations, have met with enormous success on a number of counts. One: disrupting the terror command chain, i.e., JMB command structure, a banned terror organisation. Two: unearthing huge stores of dangerous quantities of explosives, manufacturing materials and detonating chemicals. Three, arresting all the Shura members and most of the field commanders. These simultaneous actions have resulted in netting important JMB commanders, especially Ataur Rahman Sani — brother of Abdur Rahman and known to be a mastermind — and, more importantly, Javed Iqbal alias Mohammad, who was in charge of the ‘terror area of Chittagong,’ as well as the top two leaders that we had earlier discussed. These raids and arrests have unearthed unbelievable amount of smuggled explosives and explosive manufacturing raw materials that surprised law enforcement agencies. One is truly astounded witnessing the daily tally of explosive cache. The amount recovered so far is enough to destroy a large part of cities like Chittagong or Khulna. What could be the source of these materials and what external dimensions does it reveal?

Whereas it has been proved beyond any doubt that the explosives and raw materials for manufacturing IED (Improvised Explosive Devices) are of Indian origin, yet apparently there is no hard evidence that these were deliberately delivered to the militants. India, being one of the biggest producers of commercial explosives manufacturers in the world, has legitimate export houses and material can easily be smuggled. So far hardly any explosives recovered are military in nature except for three or four types of chemicals like Lead Styphnate, Mercury Fulminate and Lead Azide. As
with recommendations and suggested remedies to remove the causes. These studies have to be non-partisan. Two, for short term and long term measures, government should consider calling for unconditional surrender by misguided youth who may not have any criminal record. Having instrumented a methodology to surrender, these misguided youth should then be given chance to be rehabilitated. If these faceless elements are not given chance to redeem themselves they would then continue to remain a potential threat to the society as well as the state. There are instances — as reported — of a couple of cases of voluntary surrender which indicate that given a chance we could see better results. This is not any new method to defuse such a situation; it has been tested in the past while dealing with underground leftist elements. In fact, the call for surrender is applicable for those elements who have lost their way to the ideologies which seem to have lost ground or appeal.

This brief study and suggestions may not be conclusive but it could be a thought-provoking undertaking for further analysis of the socio-political disturbances we witnessed which will have far reaching consequences if sensitivity of the problem is not understood and addressed. Every society has its problems however short-lived they may appear to be; those are to be addressed in full. Temporary or half-hearted or single method adopted may not provide long-term solution. Rise of extremism in our country has already been rejected by the people who refused to be intimidated and, therefore, we need to address the issue from various angles and from the social and national perspective. Bengali society is distinctly different from that of Afghans. It is preposterous to suggest that Bengali society would accept Talibanisation, as it happened elsewhere, unless that kind of vacuum is created. One does not predict such thing happening in the foreseeable future. It is outlandish to even suggest that Bangladesh would be the next Afghanistan, as Hiranmay Karlekar envisions. One has to be more rational than that. [31]
insulated chamber when the world is gripped with irrational action and counter-action which are thought to be a by-product of uni-polar world. However, one may add that it is not only the so-called Islamic extremism that is the root cause of the problem now faced by the Islamic world but the continuous provocation from the extremists out of Western liberal democracies, equally responsible for accentuating the counteractions.

Although one would believe that liberal society like ours could never allow itself to be consumed by the handful of irrational people like Abdur Rahman and Siddiquil Islam, question remains as to the way of getting out of such traumatic experience relating to the rise of militant Islam. What we essentially need to remember is that, however microscopic one may think this force could be, there is a small section of misguided members of extremist group — mostly in their teens — who need to be brought back into the fold of the society. How do we do it? These are very delicate but significant questions. These questions have to be answered by both government and civil society together. There could be many a suggestion. What I feel we need to do at this juncture is the involvement of civil society to be willing to play a significant part in initiating unconventional measures to counter the rise of such forces in the future. Government must provide space for civil society to play its part. In fact, government should mobilise civil society to endeavour to suggest ways and means to face this home-grown menace.

However, in the context of the foregoing discussion, one is tempted to put forward a couple of suggestions that government and civil society may consider and, if deemed to be plausible, could then be immediately undertaken. One, a committee comprising members purely drawn from civil society to study the social factor behind the rise of extremism in a society that has the history of having been a tolerant society could be constituted. The study must be conclusive
'Pukhtunistan' movement. The possibility of the revival of Pukhtunistan, an old movement patronised by India and rulers in Kabul since partition, seems to have been the motivating factor for Pakistan's patronisation of the rise of Mollah Omar and his Taliban. Many Pakistani analysts now admit that the idea of containing such movement by imposing religious fanatical Pustun group from outside rather backfired, resulting in the continued destabilisation of the region. The Taliban phenomenon could take birth within the space that was open due to the total collapse of small but vibrant Afghan civil society that once was the prime mover of politics and the society. Twenty years of war in Afghanistan not only ruined the fabric of the society and destroyed the civil society but it denuded the social spectra of leaders who could steer the country out of the devastation that followed the civil war. But it was not to be. Instead, Afghan resistance against Soviet occupation was left to be led by theocratic zealots, not liberal leaders who chose to remain away. Such surrender emboldened Afghanistan's neighbours to be the deciding powers to shape the future of the Afghan people. In that ambit one has to look at the Taliban leadership to understand the phenomenon which only could grow, survive and thrive in that society that a country like Afghanistan had. It still is not out of that morass. Today Afghanistan is under occupation.

Having discussed the Taliban phenomenon in brief, one could easily conclude that a country like Bangladesh could never go in Afghanistan's way; yet one would admit that extremism could lead the country to near chaos, as JMB was poised to create. While the rise of JMB could be considered a black chapter in the country's history, the people's rejection of such a brand of religion does demonstrate their resolve that Talibanised brand of Islam could never take roots in Bangladesh society. But one cannot be complacent. Be it as it may, the question remains: what do we do from here to make safe this country from the madness? Can we remain in
Bangladesh never bore the socio-political similarity that Afghanistan had in any given time in the past or present as many would like to think, including those in the JMB. Therefore, the question that was very effectively propagated is: Is Bangladesh heading for a Taliban (plural of Talib meaning: student of Islamic seminary) style Islamic uprising? No doubt this question gained more credence due to the absence of government intervention earlier in the rise of JMJB when the excruciating media evidence was made to the public. However, the fact is that Bangladesh society would never subsume Talibanism into a culture which is so secular in nature. The larger section of the population is devoutly Muslim but not supportive of extremism. The rise of the Taliban force in Afghanistan was linked to geopolitical setting of neighbouring Pakistan and also the result of the geo-strategic shift that occurred soon after the Soviet Union’s last soldier crossed the ‘Friendship Bridge’ on the ‘Amu Daria’. Taliban was the product of the Western betrayal of the Afghan Mujahideen who were left to the mercy of the feuding Afghans, to the immediate and not-so-immediate neighbours who squabbled to establish spheres of influence. It was a new ‘great game’ played by lesser powers like Iran, India and Pakistan.

The Taliban rose from the ashes of raging civil war between Pushtun Islamist warlord Gulbadin Hekmatyar and Tajik theocrat Borhanuddin Rabbani, then President holding the reign in Kabul. Rabbani, a theology professor of Kabul University and a diehard anti-socialist-turned Tajik war lord who had earlier played a most significant role in Afghan Jihad, became the victim of feuding neighbours who were eager to fill up the vacuum created with the withdrawal of both of the Soviets and the indifference of the West towards a dying nation.

Such an ambience saw the rise of the Taliban, assisted by Pakistan that lacked in strategic depth and wanted to settle the
synonymous with that state as cocoon of international terrorism — Islamic terrorism. As I have discussed, many articles and books aiming to taint Bangladesh have been hitting the stand for the last few years. It has become fashionable for some writers within the country whose sole aim is to aggrandise themselves as neo-liberals. These propagandistic views are based on scanty resources and myopia. One such frequently referenced by many at home and abroad is, as I mentioned earlier, Hiranmay Karlekar’s *Bangladesh: Next Afghanistan.* [30] As I have very briefly mentioned elsewhere, his work makes many assumptions derived from the venomous attitude the writer has against Bangladesh.

Bangladesh is not Afghanistan, nor are its social conditions similar to pre-Taliban Afghanistan’s. It would rather be helpful if Indian analysts concentrated more on the genuine grievances the people of North East India have been voicing since India’s partition, the events that happened in a major state of Gujarat in secular India in 2002 and the near anarchic situation in Eastern states like Bihar and Jharkhand and in Chattisgarh.

However, JMB’s discovery might not be out of the blue but for many years now that the media has been hinting at its existence. Why they were tolerated or remained undetected remains speculative. These Islamists and their cohorts — large numbers of whom will remain elusive unless multilateral action is taken — have provided those who believe Bangladesh may well be turned into another Afghanistan, with powerful tools to justify the notion. But looking at the backdrop of Afghanistan’s traumatic history of the last century one would doubt the motive of such abhorrence against a society which has been rejecting extremism of any form for centuries. I would like to draw attention of the readers with a very brief history of the *Taliban* phenomenon that our part of the world witnessed with aghast at the end of the last century.
Teknaf in 1984. I have sources in the area, and I have more trust in them than in western diplomats in Dhaka who live isolated lives in Gulshan, Banani and other ‘diplomatic enclaves’ in the capital. ‘Capsules’ would be a better way to describe those enclaves.”[28]

Saika then confronts Lintner with Alex Perry’s follow-up report and the US diplomat’s remark of “circularity of reporting.” In reply Lintner said, “United States needs a new, more professional ambassador in Bangladesh. I have never met Alex Perry and do not know him at all. Mary Ann Peters’ (the then ambassador in Bangladesh) uninformed utterances are irresponsible and solely aimed at pleasing one of the few Muslim allies US has, or at least thinks it has”. [29] The point to note is that Alex Perry then wrote another article entitled “Rebuilding of Bangladesh”, with the Prime Minister on the cover page in the same Time Asia magazine. He eulogised the Prime Minister for her courageous steps against ‘Islamic Terrorism’ perhaps to obviate the last report’s incongruity. Nevertheless, these reports seem to be engineered or customised for Indian researchers to quote with a view to substantiating their thesis.

These are a few examples that I could place for my readers to judge the tenacious propaganda mounted against Bangladesh, a small, weak country but the only other democratic neighbour India has. However, I am sure that writers like Saikia or Hiranmay Karlekar, who wrote Bangladesh: Next Afghanistan based once again on secondary source like a specific newspaper without questioning why Bangladesh would either become Afghanistan or Talibanised.

Talibanism and Bangladesh Society

The use of the term ‘Talibanism’ is being made liberally to colour any society with the kind of religious extremism even co-religionists dreaded is being attached to Bangladesh. Similarly, the use of the name of Afghanistan has become
coming days would witness a more intense sort of Islamist terror, the likes of which South Asia has not yet witnessed. This is so despite the cosmetic actions that Dhaka has taken against the JMJB and JMB, much of which seems to have been motivated by the criticism which Bangladesh has received from the European Union and some Western donors". [26] The remarks of Saikia are aimed at disrespecting the popular upsurge of Bangladeshis against terrorism. What the writer is not aware of is that it is not the government alone that brought down the terror network but popular rejection that made government’s action easier than expected.

Interestingly, most of these books and articles are based on secondary sources or uncorroborated facts, mostly single sources either from one newspaper or a designated contact. One has to read the inhibition of Saikia in accepting at their face value the reports of Bertil Lintner filed for the Far Eastern Economic Review under the title of 'A Cocoon of Terror' on 4 April 2002 and Alex Perry’s article entitled 'Deadly Cargo' as it appeared in the Asia Times almost following each other on 21 October 2002. He questions these reports, stating, “...indeed, the controversy that surrounded the reports published by Lintner and Perry has been disquieting, with even unbiased observers terming the write-ups as ‘hatchet jobs’. Even US diplomats stationed in Bangladesh have reportedly stated that the reports were not true, and one senior diplomat stationed in India told this author that the similarity of the reports by Lintner and Perry can be attributed to a circularity of reporting — one writer simply borrowed another’s sources”. [27] Saikia then prods Lintner further on the question of the reliability of his (Lintner) source of information. Lintner retorted, “I first visited Bangladesh in 1978, and I have been back to the country many times since then. My main point of interest has always been the Burmese Border, or the area South of Chittagong, and I have observed the changes that have taken place there since my first visit to Chittagong, Cox’s Bazaar and
Flurry of Unabated Propaganda

One cannot find a rationale for the unabated propaganda that India has unleashed, since 9/11 in particular, on a democratically elected government unless analysed at length. There seem to be scores of Indian writers and think tanks dedicated to Bangladesh-bashing which does not suit the stature that India is expected to reach, i.e., regional big power status. A number of writers have penned books which are aimed at a hate campaign. Perhaps not so many books have even been dedicated to Pakistan. I am within my right to say that the purpose of this propaganda is to subdue Bangladesh to further India's aims. Such attitudes make India virtually a hegemonic power. On the other hand, these writers have been projecting Bangladesh as a spoiler state to Delhi's aspiration to be a permanent member of the Security Council.

To substantiate my assertion, let me quote from a recent book edited by Jaideep Saika where in an editorial statement he said that Bangladesh is in the habit of berating India for "almost every single problem". He continues, "it [Bangladesh] seeks to link assistance to India — by way of permitting transit facility for the Myanmar-Bangladesh-India gas pipe line — with impossible conditions. Incidentally, the lukewarm policy exhibited by New Delhi towards the virtual blackmail by Bangladesh also needs to be called in questioning. Aspirations of regional superiority and doctrines about 'big brother' magnanimity aside, most Indians have questioned New Delhi's inaction when a neighbour holds their country to ransom". [25] The Indian writer's contention contains a veiled threat as well as it amplifies India's hegemonic attitude towards smaller neighbours.

Saikia in his book even tries to put doubt in the minds of the donor countries about Bangladesh's sincere handling of the Islamic terrorist issue. He writes, "...fundamentalism, therefore is, on the rise in Bangladesh, and it is feared that
PG Raja Mohan, alleges that Bangladeshis are recruited by Pakistanis trained in Baluchistan and sent back to Bangladesh with the aim to carry out terrorist acts within India. [25] In that case the question remains why these elements targeted Bangladesh itself instead of their intended target at a time when a more pro-Islamic government was in power and the Bangladesh constitution is not contradictory to any Islamic Law? The answer is not easy to come by nor is this space intended to deal with the subject.

Apart from the new rise of militancy within Bangladesh, the Indian government is pursuant of their claim that Bangladesh along with Pakistani intelligence is not only helping in training and supplying arms and ammunition to the North Eastern separatists but is also providing training camps. Delhi insists on a list, according to them, of 192 camps within Bangladesh. GOB, past and present, have consistently not only denied these reports but even offered to investigate on the ground. What Delhi demands is a Bhutan like joint operation within Bangladesh. That perhaps no government could or would concede. The issue remains ultra-sensitive.

Looking at developments within Bangladesh and the Indian accusations, one may go to the extent of finding links between Indian elements and JMB activities, but the JMB did not figure so far in the perceived Islamist movement within India or in Pakistani efforts to link-up with Bangladesh.

No doubt the India factor plays a significant role in Bangladesh politics. Delhi’s ambivalent attitude towards Bangladesh not only creates diplomatic ripples but also separates the two main streams of political thoughts now dividing the Bangladeshi nation. In any event the India factor will play a dominant role in the coming election, especially in the context of the unprecedented rise in militancy. Perceived or not, the India factor plays a big role within the psyche of Bangladeshi voters.
Terrorism in South Asia: A Bangladesh Perspective

Bengal episode and the loss of explosives. Have we shown our concern? We presume that the same type of industrial explosives may be found stockpiled by the JMB operators. It is worth looking into. I presume GOB should verify the report and seek further details to help its own investigation into recovered explosives.

The India Factor: accusation and counter-accusation: What is baffling is that Indian analysts and media have for the last few years, particularly after 9/11 and the installation of the present coalition government, been accusing Bangladesh of nursing militancy in collusion with Pakistan's ISI to destabilise India. These analysts attribute the recent attacks in Bangalore, Hyderabad, Delhi and Varanasi to be the work of HuJI (B) in collusion with Pakistan-based LeT trained somewhere in Baluchistan, [22] Pakistan, under the patronage of ISI (Inter Services Intelligence). For the last few years Indian analysts have been blaming the Bangladesh government for patronising the militants, which, according to them, aimed to separate the Muslim majority districts of Asom. [23] They now blame militants from both Bangladesh and Pakistan working in tandem to disrupt the Indian IT (Information Technology) industry that is regarded as the prime industry for Indian growth. Interestingly, although the name of HuJI appears prominently, the analysts do not mention the JMB that claimed responsibility for the recent violence.

According to many Indian analysts, HuJI (B), Bangladesh is overseeing the militants' operations from Tamil Nadu to Southern Thailand in the East, and LET headquarters in Muridke, Lahore, under the patronage of JI Pakistan, is conducting operations in Jammu & Kashmir and in much of northern India. [24] One has to take note of a discussion held on 6 January 2006 in the 'Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, Delhi under the title of 'Recent Developments in Bangladesh: Implications for Security'. The keynote speaker,
in the Bay of Bengal and with a suspicious cargo strayed in the Bay for weeks without being located. The vessel did eventually report at Kolkata port and was cleared. The same cargo ship was involved in another scandal. [21] On 29 December 2005 the same news daily reported that the same ship carrying six containers of industrial explosives for Bahrain and Afghanistan via Bandar Abbas of Iran was escorted back by the Indian Navy after it had sailed from Mumbai and thrown its cargo somewhere into the ocean en-route to Persian Gulf on the pretext of rough seas. The point to note is that BRO (Border Road Organisation), a defence ministry agency of India, is engaged in constructing roads in the eastern provinces of Afghanistan, close to the Pak-Baluchistan border. Explosives less than 100 tons were exported to Bahrain, the rest were destined for BRO. The point also should be noted that since there is no direct access through Pakistan, India has established an alternate route through Iran and reportedly there is a huge Indian presence in Bandar Abbas.

However, the Indian Express report further suggests that though the ship involved reported the loss of only one container to the Indian Navy, the Mumbai dock confirmed loss of six such containers. "Eugenia reported the loss of one container on 23 December 2005, but on 26 December 2005 after it had been escorted to Mumbai port by naval ships, it apprised the authorities of the loss of an additional five containers", writes Indian Express on 30 December 2005. On being asked the Union Home Secretary said, "I have sought an explanation on the delay in reporting the additional losses", reports the same paper. The Home Secretary further added that 'experts are probing whether the mooring of the containers had come undone or had been cut'. Be that as it may, the report should worry the Government of Bangladesh (GOB), especially in the light of the ship’s Bay of
far as is known, these chemicals are raw materials for detonators, not commercially produced in the sub-continent.

No doubt those above—mentioned items are smuggled out of India either through the ‘Indian Mafia’ or ‘Indian Islamists’ helping their Bangladesh counterparts. Though both non-state actors remain speculative, the theory of the involvement of ‘Indian mafia’ ring remains as a prime suspect as corroborated by arrested JMB Chittagong commander Mohammad. [20]

Bangladesh government needs to look more seriously into the supply line of these explosives. One may wonder whether the government of Bangladesh has brought the facts to the notice of the Government of India. One is not privy to such information but once, in a private conversation, the Indian High Commission’s Political Counselor in Dhaka told the writer that no such protest has been received by the High Commission. However, while discussing the source of explosives, it is common knowledge that explosives like Water Gel detonator and other chemicals are produced and exported by India within South Asia and elsewhere including Middle East. The Water Gel explosives recovered so far have the distinctive marking ‘XORICA 25gm POWER GEL EXPLOSIVE 801, manufacturer is Indian Explosives Limited Gomia 829211. Gomia is a leading explosives manufacturer in the state of Bihar. It is likely that Bangladeshi importers have brought them in a regular or irregular manner and this needs close scrutiny.

Such unauthorised transfers of huge quantities of explosives from the Indian explosive export market should worry the New Delhi government. On 30 December 2005 the Indian Express, a reputed Indian daily, reported that in July 2005 a cargo ship belonging to ORNO Shipping Company of Latin American origin, the Greek vessel EUGINIA, lost its way
Status of Women in Bangladesh

Apart from what I have already said in the preceding discussion, one of the strongest factors of Bangladesh’s predominantly Muslim society is increasing women emancipation. Though we still need to do a lot more, achievements so far outweigh any other sub-continental countries in proportion. One needs to remember that Bangladesh is one major country in the region where girl child is not cursed and over the years women emancipation has been astounding. A society that has women workforce as large as 34.5 million as against male work force 44.3, and only in garment sector 18 million out of 20 million-strong workforce, female literacy rate 40.83 percent as against 49.56 percent it is rather impossible to convert that society into medieval society. Girls’ education has had a tremendous boost since the education for girls has been made free up to class XII and food incentive is provided for attending primary school, which has been made compulsory (Annexure-G).

Bangladesh is the only democratic Muslim country where female leadership has been firmly placed without any reservation in all fields including the Armed Forces, paramilitary forces and the police. At the political level, the third largest Muslim country in the world had in the recent past had two women chief executives of the country. Could such a country go on the Taliban Trail or become next Afghanistan? Nothing could be more absurd and preposterous suggestions than these.

Why Islamists did not or would not succeed?

Let us examine why the movement of JMB failed to arouse sympathy or mobilise supporters. The following would indicate that Bangladesh would never give way to extremism of any form.

It is not only that the government actions or law enforcing agencies deserve credit for effective check of the menace,
uneartthing huge explosives, arrests of key operatives and smashing the entire head of the serpent but people at large deserve appreciation for their fearless stand. It is essentially the rejection from people at large of the ideas espoused by the so called Islamists. Since time immemorial Bangladeshi or Bengali society has been rejecting extremism of one form or other. It was the combination of these and other factors that has defeated the 'dark forces' maligning the name of Islam. Some of these factors played significant role in denying the space for ultra-religious extremism:

- Positive role played by the Bangladesh media during the crises in forming the public opinion against the menace. Not a single news media, print or electronic, did provide any credence to the Islamists' demand and ultimatum, rather these continued to condemn the perpetrators.

- Huge public awareness of the evil effect that could have been caused to the society.

- Positive role played by religious leaders/Imams (Clerics) in condemning extremism and terrorism in the name of religion. More then 20,000 Imams of the major mosques continuously made devotees aware of the misinterpretation of Islam in a country which is predominantly devout Muslim but not the follower of extremism.

- Rejection of extremist version of Islam by all political parties, including Islamic political parties.

- Social apathy displayed towards operatives, including the so-called suicide bombers, by general public as well as the members of their families. They were not declared martyrs, rather the extremist self-killing was termed by edicts as plain suicide not permitted in Islam.

- Targeting ordinary people aimlessly.
- Bangladesh’s tremendous record of women emancipation, both economically and socially, played and would play significant role.

Conclusion

As an emerging democracy, Bangladesh is faced with a number of problems. Continuous political confrontation on ideological grounds over the last many years has divided the nation, having created enough space for ultra-religious forces to rise. This unfortunate division allowed politics to be criminalised, introduced muscle and money as also endemic corruption. With all these drawbacks, the people of Bangladesh still did not lose faith in pluralism and democracy. They rejected militancy. This resulted in the quick arrest of the situation. We hope that the resilience of Bangladeshis would eventually take care of the internal problem, provided external state powers do not, directly or indirectly, influence internal politics.

As far as terrorism is concerned, be it of any form, it seems to be intertwined within South Asian countries. Instead of playing the blame game it would be fruitful to initiate multi-lateral dialogue to workout a common strategy to face the challenge the terrorists have thrown. South Asian civil society can help in reducing the psychological barrier that the governments may have. Let us not blame others for our own failure. It is collective effort and dialogue that can reduce the gap of misunderstanding. Unfounded propaganda instead of extending a helping hand would not make any country worthy of becoming a world actor. Bangladeshis have no desire to unsettle the Indian North East nor do we have the luxury of doing that. South Asia in general and the sub-continent in particular is a mosaic bonded by commonality of history, culture and even religious ethos. Therefore, cooperation on the basis of commonality would go a long way
to stand united against the ‘dark shadow of terrorism’ — be it ideological or otherwise.

Bangladesh is a nation of 140 million resolute people capable of managing their own affairs. Bangladeshis are capable of adapting to brave any calamitous situation be it devastating flood, cyclone or other disasters. They are resilient and great swimmers against the current. They are accustomed to be happy with the little they can get. Therefore, they need to be viewed through their own prism not through the prism of any third country. If we can shed the blood of millions to achieve independence we are brave enough to do more to preserve our freedom and liberty.
References


4. South Asia Terror Portal, Institute for Conflict Management, New Delhi, India

5. ibid.

6. Institute of Conflict Management, Maoist Assessment: Year 2006, New Delhi, India.


10. Saikia, op. cit.

11. ibid, p. 158

12. ibid., p. 160


15. Dixit, op. cit.


17. ibid. p. 16.


23. Ibid
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid. p.113.
Annexure- A: Kashmiri Terrorist Group

Lashkar-e-Omar (LeO)
Hizb-ul-Mujahideen (HM)
Harkat-ul-Ansar (HuA, presently known as Harkat-ul Mujahideen)
Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT)
Jaish-e-Mohammad Mujahideen E-Tanzeem (JeM)
Harkat-ul Mujahideen (HuM, previously known as Harkat-ul-Ansar)
Al Badr
Jamait-ul-Mujahideen (JuM)
Lashkar-e-Jabbar (LeJ)
Harkat-ul-Jehad-i-Islami
Al Barq
Tehrik-ul-Mujahideen
Al Jehad
Jammu & Kashmir National Liberation Army
People’s League
Muslim Janbaz Force
Kashmir Jehad Force
Al Jehad Force (combines Muslim Janbaz Force and Kashmir Jehad Force)
Al Umar Mujahideen
Mahaz-e-Azadi
Islami Jamaat-e-Tulba
Jammu & Kashmir Students Liberation Front
Ikhwan-ul-Mujahideen
Islamic Students League
Tehrik-e-Hurriat-e-Kashmir
Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Fiqar Jafaria
Al Mustafa Liberation Fighters
Tehrik-e-Jehad-e-Islami
Muslim Mujahideen
Al Mujahid Force
Tehrik-e-Jehad
Islami Inquilabi Mahaz

Other Extremist and Secessionist Groups

Mutahida Jehad Council (MJC) — A Pakistan based coordination body of terrorist outfits active in Jammu & Kashmir.
Jammu & Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) – the dominant faction of this outfit declared a ceasefire in 1994 which still holds and the outfit restricts itself to a political struggle.

All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) – an alliance engineered by Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) of 26 diverse political and socio-religious outfits amalgamated to provide a political face for the terrorists in the State.

Dukhtaran-e-Millat (DeM) – an outfit run by women which uses community pressure to further the social norms dictated by Islamic fundamental groups.

**Annexure – B: Punjab Terrorist Groups**

1. Babbar Khalsa International (BKI)
2. Khalistan Zindabad Force (KZF)
3. International Sikh Youth Federation (ISYF)
4. Khalistan Commando Force (KCF)
5. All-India Sikh Students Federation (AISSF)
6. Bhindrawala Tigers Force of Khalistan (BTFK)
7. Khalistan Liberation Army (KLA)
8. Khalistan Liberation Front (KLF)
9. Khalistan Armed Force (KAF)
10. Dashmesh Regiment
11. Khalistan Liberation Organisation (KLO)
12. Khalistan National Army (KNA)

**Annexure – C: Underground Terrorist Groups**

1. People’s Guerrilla Army
2. People’s War Group
3. Maoist Communist Centre
4. Communist Party of India-Maoist (CPI-Maoist)
5. Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Janashakti

**Annexure D: Terrorist Groups in North East India & Bangladesh**

**Assam**

1. United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA)
2. National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB)
3. United People’s Democratic Solidarity (UPDS)
4. Kamtapur Liberation Organisation (KLO)
5. Bodo Liberation Tiger Force (BLTF)
6. Dima Halim Daogah (DHD)
7. Karbi National Volunteers (KNV)
8. Rabha National Security Force (RNSF)
10. Hmar People's Convention-Democracy (HPC-D)
11. Karbi People's Front (KPF)
12. Tiwa National Revolutionary Force (TNRF)
13. Bircha Commando Force (BCF)
14. Bangali Tiger Force (BTF)
15. Adivasi Security Force (ASF)
16. All Assam Adivasi Suraksha Samiti (AAASS)
17. Gorkha Tiger Force (GTF)
18. Barak Valley Youth Liberation Front (BVYLF)
19. Muslim United Liberation Tigers of Assam (MULTA)
20. United Liberation Front of Barak Valley
21. Muslim United Liberation Front of Assam (MULFA)
22. Muslim Security Council of Assam
23. United Liberation Militia of Assam (ULMA)
24. Islamic Liberation Army of Assam (ILAA)
25. Muslim Volunteer Force (MVF)
26. Muslim Liberation Army (MLA)
27. Muslim Security Force (MSF)
28. Islamic Sevak Sangh (ISS)
29. Islamic United Reformation Protest of India (IURPI)
30. United Muslim Liberation Front of Assam (UMLFA)
31. Revolutionary Muslim Commandos (RMC)
32. Muslim Tiger Force (MTF)
33. People's United Liberation Front (PULF)
34. Adam Sena (AS)
35. Harkat-ul-Mujahideen
36. Harkat-ul-Jehad

**Manipur**
1. United National Liberation Front (UNLF)
2. People's Liberation Army (PLA)
3. People’s Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK)
The above mentioned three groups now operate from a unified platform, the Manipur People’s Liberation Front (MPLF)
4. Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP)
5. Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lup (KYKL)
6. Manipur Liberation Tiger Army (MLTA)
7. Iripak Kanba Lup (IKL)
8. People’s Republican Army (PRA)
9. Kangleipak Kanba Kanglup (KKK)
10. Kangleipak Liberation Organisation (KLO)
11. Revolutionary Joint Committee (RJC)
12. Kuki National Front (KNF)
13. Kuki National Army (KNA)
14. Kuki Revolutionary Army (KRA)
15. Kuki National Organisation (KNO)
16. Kuki Independent Army (KIA)
17. Kuki Defence Force (KDF)
18. Kuki International Force (KIF)
19. Kuki National Volunteers (KNV)
20. Kuki Liberation Front (KLF)
22. Kuki Liberation Army (KLA)
23. Kuki Revolutionary Front (KRF)
24. United Kuki Liberation Front (UKLF)
25. Hmar People’s Convention (HPC)
26. Hmar People’s Convention- Democracy (HPC-D)
27. Hmar Revolutionary Front (HRF)
28. Zomi Revolutionary Army (ZRA)
29. Zomi Revolutionary Volunteers (ZRV)
30. Indigenous People’s Revolutionary Alliance (IRPA)
31. Kom Rem People’s Convention (KRPC)
32. North East Minority Front (NEMF)
33. Islamic National Front (INF)
34. Islamic Revolutionary Front (IRF)
35. United Islamic Liberation Army (UILA)
36. Chin Kuki Revolutionary Front (CKRF)
37. United Islamic Revolutionary Army (UIRA)
Nagaland
1. National Socialist Council of Nagaland — Isak-Muivah (NSCN-IM)
2. National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Khaplang) — NSCN (K)
3. Naga National Council (Adino) — NNC (Adino)

Tripura
1. National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT)
2. All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF)
3. Tripura Liberation Organisation Front (TLOF)
4. United Bengali Liberation Front (UBLF)
5. Tripura Tribal Volunteer Force (TTVF)
6. Tripura Armed Tribal Commando Force (TATCF)
7. Tripura Tribal Democratic Force (TTDF)
8. Tripura Tribal Youth Force (TTYF)
9. Tripura Liberation Force (TLF)
10. Tripura Defence Force (TDF)
11. All Tripura Volunteer Force (ATVF)
12. Tribal Commando Force (TCF)
13. Tripura Tribal Youth Force (TTYF)
14. All Tripura Bharat Suraksha Force (ATBSF)
15. Socialist Democratic Front of Tripura (SDFT)
16. All Tripura National Force (ATNF)
17. Tripura Tribal Sengkrak Force (TTSF)
18. Tiger Commando Force (TCF)
19. Tripura Mukti Police (TMP)
20. Tripura Rajya Raksha Bahini (TRRB)
21. Tripura State Volunteers (TSV)
22. Tripura National Democratic Tribal Force (TNDTF)
23. National Militia of Tripura (NMT)
24. All Tripura Bengali Regiment (ATBR)
25. Bangla Mukti Sena (BMS)
26. All Tripura Liberation Organisation (ATLO)
27. Tripura National Army (TNA)
28. Tripura State Volunteers (TSV)
29. Borak National Council of Tripura (BNCT)
Meghalaya
1. Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council (HNLC)
2. Achik National Volunteer Council (ANVC)
3. People’s Liberation Front of Meghalaya (PLF-M)
4. Hajong United Liberation Army (HULA)

Terrorist Outfits - Bangladesh
1. Harkat-ul-Jehad-al-Islami (HuJI)
2. Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB)
3. Jama’atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB)
4. Purba Bangla Communist Party (PBCP)
5. Sharabahara (Siraj Sikdar)
6. Jamajuddha (Red Flag)

ANNEXURE - E

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<th>Party</th>
<th>1st</th>
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<th>4th</th>
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<td>7</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>45</td>
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<td>Other parties</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>459</td>
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<td>691</td>
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Annexure - F


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<th>Elections</th>
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<th>Jamaat-i-Islami Seats</th>
<th>% Seats obtained</th>
<th>Vote received in %</th>
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<td>1986</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>4.61</td>
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<td>1988</td>
<td>Did not participate with mainstream opposition i.e BNP and AL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>12.13</td>
</tr>
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<td>1996</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.00</td>
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<td>31</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5.67</td>
<td>4.29</td>
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</table>


Annexure - G

Women in Bangladesh (Statistics are based on year 1999-2002)

1. Total population: 12,38,51,120
   - Male: 6,38,9,4740
   - Female: 5,99,56,380

2. Civilian Labour Force (million), 2002-2003
   - Male: 36.0
   - Female: 10.3
   Garment Industry: 2 million work force: 80% women employees.

3. Literacy Rate – 2001 (%)
   - Total: 45.32
   - Male: 49.56
   - Female: 40.83


17 Public Universities-Students (in Nos)
   - Male: 68,929
   - Female: 23,223
There are 57 private Universities - Male/Female student ratio - 54/46 percent.

**General Colleges (Govt) 2634 - Students (in Nos)**
- Male: 9,55,242
- Female: 6,13,429

**Secondary School Students (Govt) (in 000) Y 1999**
- Boys: 3,661
- Girls: 3,659

**Primary School – 2002 (Govt/Semi Govt) Students (in 000)**
- No of Schools: 63,395
- Boys: 8,605
- Girls: 8,410

**Source:** Statistical Yearbook of Bangladesh-2004 — Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics

**Annexure- H**

Author’s article as appeared in daily The Statesman, India

**Open Forum: Battling Islamists** by Sakhawat Hussain

(The following are extracts from a paper presented by Brigadier-General Hussain at a “Regional Seminar on Political Violence and Terrorism in South Asia”, held at Islamabad, Pakistan. It was organised by the Islamabad Policy Research Institute and the Hanns Seidel Foundation)

The rise of militant Islam in Bangladesh is due to the political space arising from the confrontational situation that existed since democracy was reintroduced in Bangladesh,
though it might (also) have had a calamitous effect on world events, especially that of the Afghan jihad and the Taliban movement. In both, as in other Muslim countries, students from the Islamic seminaries of Bangladesh joined the "holy war". Many of them returned with the idea of pan-Islamism. These returnees were not totally dormant but actively spread pan-Islamism through their channel. Many of them linked up with previous contacts and found fellowship with "political Islam" espousing similar ideology and views on the art of statecraft.

It was the HuJI (B) [Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami, Bangladesh], now banned, which first surfaced as a regular political force. Many of them were Afghan veterans, including one Mufti Hannan who has been sentenced to death for masterminding the plot to kill the then Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in 2000... He further confessed that HuJI (B) had worked out a 10-year perspective to capture state power and prepared to launch a bigger campaign by 2005.

It was for the first time in thousand years of Bengal and Sufi Islam that one witnessed aghast the rise of militant Islam which did not fit into Bangladeshi social and cultural life. Bangladeshis were dumbfounded when they discovered that their children turned into human bombs, executing suicidal missions against judges, announcing their demand for the establishment of Sharia law.

In that process, thirty-three people died in three such suicide bombings. Even the parents of those boys refused to accept their bodies, they were so angry and opposed to what had been done; they could not get a burial in their own village. There was a total rejection of their actions. I do not know how well known this is.

The rise of this group should not have surprised the government, had it heeded the media and Intelligence reports on the rise of "Banglabhai" in Baghmara, Rajshahi, much in
the fashion of Mullah Omar in Afghanistan. ... politicians belonging to the ruling party of northern Bangladesh used "Banglabhai" (Siddiquil Islam) to their advantage and allowed him and his secretive group to grow into a formidable organisation, the JMJB (Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh), which then became affiliated with JMB (Jamaitul Mujahideen Bangladesh) under Sheikh Abdur Rahman.

The unabated growth of these Islamists taking advantage of the political space created by the major feuding parties gathered enough strength, resources and created an organisation that threatened the very fabric of a progressive democratic Muslim country.

When large sections of local and international media printed first-hand reports on the rise of militancy, the ruling party chose to deny their existence simply for the fact that it might prematurely disturb the larger vote bank. It further created ripples within the ruling coalition when the media alleged JI's (Jamaat-i-Islami) surreptitious link with such forces. No government investigation ever took place at any stage of initial reporting. A burst of media attention and public outrage forced the government to announce measures to tackle this extreme terrorist and at one point the Prime Minister ordered Siddiquil Islam’s arrest ... he still remains at large with the blessings of some powerful politicians as alleged by leading dailies and the electronic media. But, since these Islamists lack popular support, a crackdown by the law enforcement agencies and the government of Khaleda Zia seems to have controlled the spate of violence that has both internal and external ramifications.

The JMB and HuJI are banned organisations and the government is contemplating banning other organisations which are not regular political parties. ... What is baffling is that Indian analysts and the media for the last few years have been accusing Bangladesh of nursing militancy in collusion
with Pakistan's ISI to destabilise India. These analysts attribute recent attacks in Bangalore, Hyderabad and Delhi to the HuJI (B) in collusion with the Pakistan-based LeT (Lashkar-e-Toiba) trained somewhere in Baluchistan, under the ISI's patronage. Indian analysts had been blaming Khaleda Zia and her coalition partner for patronising the militancy, which according to them, aimed to separate the Muslim majority districts of Assam.

They now allege that militants from both Bangladesh and Pakistan are working in tandem to disrupt the Indian IT industry. Interestingly, though the name of the HuJI appears prominently, analysts do not mention the JMB that claimed responsibility for the recent spate of violence. On 17 August, five hundred small bombs exploded in 63 of the country's 64 districts. For the first time, one Islamic group, the JMB, claimed responsibility. It followed with more devastating terrorism — the introduction of suicide bombings, mainly targeting judges and the court as the JMB's main demand is to establish Sharia court and introduction of Koranic laws. It came as a huge embarrassment for the ruling coalition as members of the JMB are now frequently caught with weapons and explosives, their identity being ex-members of the JI. Indian government also says pursuant of its claim that Bangladesh with Pakistani Intelligence not only helps to train and supply arms and ammunition to north-eastern separatist elements but also provides training camps. Delhi insists on a list (of) 192 camps in Bangladesh.

The Bangladesh government, past and present, have consistently not only denied the allegation but even offered to investigate the change. What Delhi wants is a Bhutan-like joint operation in Bangladesh. It will be completely unacceptable. As an emerging democracy after 15 years of pseudo democracy, Bangladesh has been facing a number of problems ... yet the people have not lost their faith in pluralism and
democracy. When people at large reject militancy, this results in controlling the situation quickly.

We hope the resilience of Bangladeshis will eventually take care of the internal problem, provided external state power does not, directly or indirectly, influence internal politics.