

Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh: A Nexus of Terror

I. Background

Jamaat-e-Islami (Jel) Bangladesh is an offshoot of the Jamaat organization that was founded in undivided India in 1941 by Maulana Abul Ala Maaddudi. Jamaat drew its inspiration from the Deobandi school of Islam, known for promoting religious extremism in several countries in the region, and modeled itself after the Muslim Brotherhood.¹ Separate branches were subsequently established in both Pakistan and Bangladesh (then East Pakistan), also known as Jamaat-e-Islami, following India's partition. Jel Bangladesh and its student wing, Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS), continue to primarily draw their members from Deobandi seminaries in the country.²

Jel and ICS have a long history of radicalism and violence, and both strive to create a Taliban style regime in Bangladesh. Jel is the most powerful Islamist group in the country and has been the ideological center and recruiting base for several terrorist groups, including Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami Bangladesh (HuJI-B), a State Department designated Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO), and Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB).³ HuJI-B's parent organization Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami has also been banned by the United Nations,⁴ the United Kingdom,⁵ and India,⁶ while the British and Bangladeshi governments have further outlawed HuJI-B and JMB.⁷ Jel and ICS also enjoy extensive links with the wider Islamist militant network in South Asia and reportedly receive funding and support from Pakistan's ISI spy agency and from Saudi Arabia.⁸ Moreover, Jel and ICS members and supporters have been implicated in several of the recent incidents of violence against minorities, and for planting

¹ Bertil Lintner, "Bangladesh Extremist Islamist Consolidation," South Asia Terrorism Portal, <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/publication/faultlines/volume14/Article1.htm>.

² *Id.*

³ Terrorist and Extremist Groups – Bangladesh, South Asia Terrorism Portal, <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/bangladesh/terroristoutfits/index.html>; "Foreign Terrorist Organizations," (September 28, 2012), U.S. Department of State, <http://www.state.gov/jct/rls/other/des/123085.htm>.

⁴ "US, UN declare Harkat-ul Jihad al-Islami a Terrorist Group," (August 7, 2010), AFP, http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5jxMUvbXPQTz6nO4sm5K_Qs7GEAMg.

⁵ Proscribed Terrorist Organizations, Home Office, Government of the United Kingdom, https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/266038/List_of_Proscribed_organisations.pdf.

⁶ Banned Terrorist Organizations, National Investigative Agency, Ministry of Home Affairs Government of India, http://www.nia.gov.in/banned_org.aspx.

⁷ Proscribed Terrorist Organizations, Home Office, Government of the United Kingdom, https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/266038/List_of_Proscribed_organisations.pdf; Raman, B., "The Harkat-Ul-Jihad-Al-Islami of Bangladesh (HuJI-B)," (September 4, 2007), Outlook India, <http://www.outlookindia.com/article.aspx?235478>

⁸ Bertil Lintner, "Bangladesh Extremist Islamist Consolidation," South Asia Terrorism Portal, <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/publication/faultlines/volume14/Article1.htm>; "Jamaat-e-Islami Led Forces' Violent Impact Worrying for Bangladesh as well as India," (January 8, 2014), Economic Times, http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2014-01-08/news/45991280_1_qader-mollah-jamaat-supporters-war-crimes; Kumar, Anand, "Return from the Precipice: Bangladesh's Fight Against Terrorism," p. 2, (2012) Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, http://www.idsa.in/system/files/book_BangFightTerrorism.pdf; Roy, Swadesh, "Broken Goddess and the War Crime Verdict of Bangladesh," Sri Lanka Guardian, (March 13, 2013), <http://www.srilankaguardian.org/2013/03/broken--goddess--and--war--crime--verdict--of.html>.

bombs during protests and opposition strikes.⁹

In August 2013, a High Court imposed a partial ban on Jel (upon the petition of a Sufi Muslim group) declaring that the Islamist party's charter violated the constitution. The ruling, however, only prohibits Jel from participating in national elections and has failed to limit its other activities.¹⁰

II. Objectives and Activities

As noted above, both Jel and ICS are intent on creating an Islamic theocratic state in Bangladesh, and have consistently utilized violent tactics to achieve their religio-political goals, including bombings, political assassinations and targeted killings, and attacks on security personnel. Moreover, Jel and ICS supporters have carried out large-scale orchestrated attacks on the homes, businesses, and places of worship of minorities, as well as engaging in the abductions and forced conversions of Hindu girls.

In addition, police raids on Jel and ICS members have uncovered large caches of weapons, ammunition, bombs, bomb-making material, and literature promoting jihad.¹¹ In 2013 alone, Jel-ICS activists set off hundreds of bombs across the country and engaged in wanton attacks on civilians, particularly those from the Hindu minority.¹² Much of the violence last year was precipitated by convictions of high-level Jamaat and Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) leaders by the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT), tasked with investigating war crimes committed during the 1971 War of Independence. Similarly, attempts by Jamaat (in conjunction with the BNP) to force the Awami League to transfer power to a caretaker government and disrupt the recent elections resulted in widespread riots and large-scale violence.

Collectively, Jel and ICS activities since 1971 have been focused on creating chaos and instability in order to undermine Bangladesh's democracy, silence secular activists, and cleanse the country of its minorities.

Bombings/Attacks on Civilians

Jel-ICS members have frequently carried out indiscriminate bombings and attacks on civilians at public places in order to create fear and panic amongst the general population and to disrupt normal life. For example, in February 2010, ICS activists were arrested in connection with a bomb explosion at a dormitory at the Brahmanbaria Residential School and College.¹³ Similarly, in 2005, a businessman was

⁹ Bangladesh Terrorist Outfits: Islami Chhatra Shibir, SATP, <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/bangladesh/terroristoutfits/ics.htm>.

¹⁰ "Bangladesh HC Cancels Registration of Right-Wing Party Jamaat-e-Islami," Times of India (August 1, 2013), http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2013-08-01/south-asia/40960522_1_bangladesh-hc-jamaat-e-islami-1971-liberation-war; "Bangladesh Court Declares Jamaat-e-Islami Illegal," The Express Tribune with the International New York Times (August 1, 2013), <http://tribune.com.pk/story/585048/bangladesh-court-declares-jamaat-e-islami-illegal/>.

¹¹ Bangladesh Terrorist Outfits: Islami Chhatra Shibir, SATP, <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/bangladesh/terroristoutfits/ics.htm>.

¹² *Id.*

¹³ *Id.*

killed when ICS members threw a number of bombs at a shopping centre in Kotwali area of Chittagong,¹⁴ while bombings by Jamaat and ICS supporters killed eight people at a cultural event in the city of Jessore in 2001.¹⁵ Moreover, in two separate bomb attacks in Dhaka in 2001, six civilians were killed and over 50 injured.¹⁶

Journalists and bloggers have also been targeted, including the murder of an “atheist” blogger for blasphemous posts in early 2013,¹⁷ and the abduction and assault of a news correspondent and joint secretary of the Satkhira Press Club towards the end of the year.¹⁸

There were several other incidents in 2013, a few of which have been highlighted below:¹⁹

- On December 13, ICS supporters opened fire and set off at least 10 homemade bombs at a rally held by university teachers and students in Sylhet district, leaving at least five students injured.
- In November, Jel-ICS members exploded 50 bombs and attacked 20 cars during a rampage in Dhaka after a court announced a political ban on Jel.
- During riots in February demanding the execution of bloggers for blasphemous posts, Jel-ICS activists set off 20 bombs at different locations in the town of Brahmanbaria.
- On January 20, Jamaat and Shibir members set off 20 explosions and torched 15 cars in Dhaka in demanding the release of war criminals being tried by the ICT.

Anti-Minority Violence

Jamaat and Shibir have engaged in anti-minority violence since the 1971 War, when their members joined paramilitary militias and collaborated with the Pakistani army in committing mass human rights violations against the Hindu minority.²⁰ Subsequently, they carried out large-scale attacks on minorities in 2001, which led to the exodus of an estimated 500,000 Hindus from the country.²¹ And from 2012 until the present, Jel-ICS activists have once again escalated their attacks on minorities, including the following incidents:

- In pre and post-election violence, mobs of Jel, ICS, and BNP activists systematically attacked

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ Ahmed Rajib Haider - Committee to Protect Journalists, (February 15, 2013), <http://www.cpj.org/killed/2013/ahmed-rajib-haider-1.php>.

¹⁸ Bangladesh Terrorist Outfits: Islami Chhatra Shibir, SATP, <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/bangladesh/terroristoutfits/ics.htm>.

¹⁹ *Id.*

²⁰ Rabindranath Trivedi. "The Legacy of the Plight of Hindus in Bangladesh," (July 24, 2007), The Asian Tribune, <http://www.asiantribune.com/index.php?q=node/6663>; Akram, Tanweer, "A Critical Evaluation of the International Commission of Jurists' Report on the Bangladesh Genocide," (April 14, 2007), Social Studies Research Network, http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=981254.

²¹ Nazrul Islam, "10,000 incidents of minority repression in Bangladesh since 2001," (October 12, 2005), NewKerala.com, <http://www.newkerala.com/newsdaily.php?action=fullnews&id=34363>; "Over 10,000 Communal Tortures in Govt's 4yr," (October 11, 2007), The Daily Star, <http://www.thedailystar.net/2005/10/11/d51011011310.htm>

Hindu homes, businesses, and temples. According to the Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council, 495 Hindu homes were damaged, 585 shops were attacked or looted, and 169 temples were vandalised since November 2013.²²

- At the beginning of 2013, following convictions by the ICT, Hindu villages were attacked by rampaging mobs of Jamaat and BNP supporters, with more than 50 temples destroyed and approximately 1,500 homes vandalized or destroyed. Buddhists were also reportedly attacked.²³
- Similarly, in 2012 there were several large-scale attacks on minorities by Jamaat-Shibir members.²⁴ For instance, 22 Buddhist temples and two Hindu temples were attacked in southern Bangladesh after a picture of a burnt Koran was posted on the Facebook profile of a local Buddhist.²⁵

Political Assassinations/Targeted Killings

Jamaat and Shibir supporters have engaged in a number of assassination attempts and targeted killings of political opponents, including Awami League (AL) leaders and activists, as well as members of its student front, Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL). The following are a few examples from the past several years:

- Last December, two AL activists were killed in separate incidents by ICS members in the sub-district of Satkhira Sadar in Satkhira district. In one attack, the victim, Sirajul Islam was shot dead at his home.²⁶ Similarly, on June 27, 2013, 15-20 homemade bombs were thrown at the home of a local AL leader, Nazrul Islam, in Satkhira district by Jel-ICS members. Nazrul Islam's sister and brother-in-law had their hand and legs blown off, respectively.²⁷
- On November 14, 2011, Jamaat's publicity secretary in Rajshahi district, Mohammed Obaidullah, was arrested for threats to kill Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.²⁸
- In March 2005, an ICS activist was arrested for planning to bomb a BCL meeting in the city of

²² "Bangladesh HC Asks Govt to give Adequate Protection to Hindus," Zee News, (January 15, 2014), http://zeenews.india.com/news/south-asia/bangladesh-hc-asks-govt-to-give-adequate-protection-to-hindus_904339.html.

²³ Ethirajan, Anbarasan, "Bangladeshi Minorities 'Terrorised' After Mob Violence," (March 8, 2012), BBC News, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-21712655>.

²⁴ "HC Summons SP, OC Over Torching Temples in Ctg" February 26, 2012, New Age Bangladesh, http://newagebd.com/newspaper1/archive_details.php?date=2012--02--26&nid=51668; "800 Sued for Hathazari Incidents," The New Nation, <http://thenewnationbd.com/newsdetails.aspx?newsid=30876>; Bangladesh Quarterly Report, January -- March 2012, Global Human Rights Defence, <http://www.ghrd.org/>; Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council (BHBCUC) February Email Newsletter; "Bangladesh

²⁴ Report 2012," GHRD, http://ghrd.org/FilesPage/4158/bangladesh_report_2012.pdf; BDMW Email Report (August 13, 2012); "Bangladesh Report 2012," GHRD, http://ghrd.org/FilesPage/4158/bangladesh_report_2012.pdf.

²⁵ "Muslims Attack Buddhist, Hindu Temples," (September 30, 2012), UPI, http://www.upi.com/Top_News/World--News/2012/09/30/Muslims--attack--Buddhist--Hindu--temples/UPI--98301349010670/; Karmakar, Rahul, "24 Buddhist, Hindu Temples Burnt in Bangladesh: Rights Body," (October 1, 2012), Hindustan Times, <http://www.hindustantimes.com/India--news/Guwahati/24--Buddhist--Hindu--temples--burnt--in--Bangladesh--rights--body/Article1--938261.aspx>.

²⁶ Bangladesh Terrorist Outfits: Islami Chhatra Shibir, SATP, <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/bangladesh/terroristoutfits/ics.htm>.

²⁷ *Id.*

²⁸ *Id.*

- Raiganj hosting former Home Minister, Mohammed Nasim.²⁹
- Gopal Krishna Muhuri, the former principal of Nazirhat College in Chittagong and a leading secular activist was murdered in his home in 2001 in a high-profile attack by Jel hired hitmen.³⁰
 - 8 people were gunned down on July 12, 2000 when ICS activists opened fire on a bus carrying BCL members in the city of Chittagong.³¹
 - On April 7, 2001, two AL youth leaders were killed by ICS members,³² while on June 15 2001, 21 people were killed and more than 100 injured when an AL office was bombed in the town of Narayanganj. An ICS member was arrested for his involvement in the bombing.³³

Attacks on Security Forces

Security personnel have frequently come under attack from Jel-ICS activists in gun-battles, bomb attacks, and with small weapons during violent riots. The following are a few examples of recent attacks:

- Earlier this year, 22 policemen were injured when they were ambushed by Jel-ICS members in Gaibandha district.³⁴
- On March 19, 2013, nearly 50 bombs were set off in attacks on police in Rajshahi and Dhaka.³⁵
- In two separate incidents in February 2013, Jel and ICS supporters engaged in a gun battle with police in Cox's Bazar district, while they used bombs in a clash with police in Rajshahi district.³⁶
- On April 13, 2010, 1,500 - 2,000 Jel-ICS leaders and members, including former Jel politician Mohammed Shahjahan Chowdhury, were accused of attacking police at the Anderkill intersection in Chittagong.³⁷

III. Links to Terrorist/Militant Groups

Jamaat and Shibir have extensive links to various terrorist groups operating in South Asia, such as Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), the Taliban, and al-Qaeda. For example, during the Taliban's reign in Afghanistan, a large number of ICS students were sent to fight under Osama bin Laden's leadership.³⁸

²⁹ *Id.*

³⁰ Bertil Lintner, "Bangladesh Extremist Islamist Consolidation," South Asia Terrorism Portal, <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/publication/faultlines/volume14/Article1.htm>

³¹ Islami Chhatra Shibir, South Asia Terrorism Portal, <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/bangladesh/terroristoutfits/ics.htm>.

³² Bertil Lintner, "Bangladesh Extremist Islamist Consolidation," SATP, <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/publication/faultlines/volume14/Article1.htm>.

³³ Bertil Lintner, "Bangladesh Extremist Islamist Consolidation," SATP, <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/publication/faultlines/volume14/Article1.htm>; Islami Chhatra Shibir, SATP, <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/bangladesh/terroristoutfits/ics.htm>.

³⁴ Islami Chhatra Shibir, SATP, <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/bangladesh/terroristoutfits/ics.htm>.

³⁵ *Id.*

³⁶ *Id.*

³⁷ *Id.*

³⁸ Kumar, Anand, "Return from the Precipice: Bangladesh's Fight Against Terrorism," p. 45, (2012) Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, http://www.idsa.in/system/files/book_BangFightTerrorism.pdf; Islami Chhatra Shibir, South Asia Terrorism Portal, <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/bangladesh/terroristoutfits/ics.htm>.

Jamaat and Shibir have also served as significant recruiting bases for domestic militant organizations, including Hizb-ur-Tahrir, HuJI-B, and JMB. In fact, arrests made in high-profile JMB bombings reveal close connections with Jamaat³⁹ Similarly, the former head of JMB, Maulana Saidur Rahman, who was arrested in 2010, was a former Jamaat member.⁴⁰

Additionally, many terrorist groups in the region carry out their activities in Bangladesh with the assistance of Jel and ICS, which are part of a vast network in Bangladesh including HuJI-B, JMB, and Islami Oikyo Jote (IOJ).⁴¹ Jamaat, for instance, has been involved in laundering money for a group associated with al-Qaeda and the International Islamic Front, and has funneled funds to other Islamic militant groups through its control of Islami Bank Bangladesh.⁴²

Jel and ICS have provided other forms of logistical and material support to militant groups, including the provision of infrastructure, bases and safe-havens, and weapons.⁴³ In February 2008, for instance, police discovered that ICS students and Jamaat and HuJI-B affiliated teachers were harboring militants in three dormitories at Dhaka Polytechnic Institute.⁴⁴ Moreover, in December 2009, an ICS sub-district president from Haimchar Upazila was arrested for recruiting madrassa students on behalf of JMB.⁴⁵

Jel-ICS and HuJI-B strongholds in the southeast of the country have also served as transit points for smuggling weapons, especially through the Cox's Bazaar fishing port in Chittagong.⁴⁶ In January 2005, an ICS activist was arrested for the possession and smuggling of illegal firearms in Chittagong.⁴⁷ Similarly, ICS members in the cities of Dhaka and Gazipur were arrested in August 2010 for stockpiling arms and explosives collected from banned militant Islamist groups to utilize in attacks.⁴⁸

Jamaat and Shibir have also been intimately involved in facilitating terrorist activities outside of Bangladesh:

- A special court recently found Jel Chief Motiur Rehman Nizami (and others) guilty of importing 10 truck loads of arms, ammunitions, and explosives (4,930 sophisticated firearms, 840 rocket launchers, 300 rockets, 27,020 grenades, 2,000 grenade launching tubes, 6,392 magazines and

³⁹ *Id.*

⁴⁰ Roul, Animesh, "Jamaatul Mujahidin Bangladesh: Weakened, but not Destroyed," (November 30, 2011), Combatting Terrorism Center at West Point, <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/jamaatul-mujahidin-bangladesh-weakened-but-not-destroyed>.

⁴¹ Islami Chhatra Shibir, South Asia Terrorism Portal, <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/bangladesh/terroristoutfits/ics.htm>.

⁴² Blackburn, Chris, "Jamaat-i-islami: A Threat to Bangladesh," <http://mygoldenbengal.wordpress.com/2013/02/22/jamaat-i-islami-a-threat-to-bangladesh-2/>; "Bangladesh Elections and Rise of Radical Forces," (November 27, 2013), Economic Times, http://articles.economicstimes.indiatimes.com/2013-11-27/news/44520210_1_awami-league-bnp-bangladesh-nationalist-party.

⁴³ Islami Chhatra Shibir, South Asia Terrorism Portal, <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/bangladesh/terroristoutfits/ics.htm>.

⁴⁴ *Id.*

⁴⁵ *Id.*

⁴⁶ Bertil Lintner, "Bangladesh Extremist Islamist Consolidation," SATP, <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/publication/faultlines/volume14/Article1.htm>.

⁴⁷ Islami Chhatra Shibir, South Asia Terrorism Portal, <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/bangladesh/terroristoutfits/ics.htm>.

⁴⁸ *Id.*

- 11.41 million rounds of bullets) to supply to terrorist groups operating in India in 2004.⁴⁹
- Indian authorities alleged that two ICS members were involved in the Delhi High Court blast on September 7, 2011.⁵⁰
 - An arrested LeT operative revealed that he worked closely with ICS to send LeT militants to India to set up terrorist cells there.⁵¹

IV. Policy Recommendations

- The U.S. should strongly encourage the Government of Bangladesh to declare Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Chhatra Shibir illegal organizations, based on their long-standing involvement in terrorist activities and violence against religious minorities, and impose complete bans on their activities.
- Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh should be designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) under Section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act, as amended, and as Specially Designated Global Terrorists under section 1(b) of Executive Order 13224.⁵²
 - Specifically, Jamaat (and Shibir) have engaged in terrorist activities, including indiscriminate bombings and attacks on civilians, political assassinations and targeted killings, attacks on minorities and security personnel, and illegal arms smuggling to terrorist groups.
 - These activities threaten American national security interests in Bangladesh and the wider region, considering that Jel is part of an extensive network that facilitates recruits, ideological and material support, and bases to terrorist groups operating in South Asia. Moreover, Jamaat's activities threaten U.S. foreign policy and economic interests in maintaining a stable and secular Bangladesh.
- Under section 212(a)(2)(G) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, the U.S. should deny entry to any officials from Jamaat-e-Islami that have engaged in particularly severe violations of religious freedom as defined by section 3 of the International Religious Freedom Act.⁵³

⁴⁹ South Asia Analysis Group, "Bangladesh Court Establishes BNP-Jamaat Fountainhead of Terrorism -- Analysis," Eurasia Review (February 3, 2014), <http://www.eurasiareview.com/03022014-bangladesh-court-establishes-bnp-jamaat-fountainhead-terrorism-analysis/>

⁵⁰ Islami Chhatra Shibir, South Asia Terrorism Portal, <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/bangladesh/terroristoutfits/ics.htm>.

⁵¹ *Id.*

⁵² Terrorism Designations FAQs, U.S. Department of State, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2014/01/219520.htm>.

⁵³ Ineligibilities and Waivers: Laws, Bureau of Consular Affairs -- U.S. Department of State, <http://travel.state.gov/content/visas/english/general/ineligibilities.html>.