

## RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM AND TERRORIST ACTIVITIES IN BANGLADESH

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### ABSTRACT

The author aims to shed light on the relationship between terrorism and religious extremism in Bangladesh. He looks at the characteristics of different Islamist militant groups and the scope of their terrorist operations in Bangladesh. The author looks into terrorist organizations' tactics and methods, the root reasons for militancy, and the sources of finance for militant organizations. Islamist terrorist outfits and groups, both domestic and international since 1992, have persisted in their emergence in Bangladesh. In addition to endangering law and order, national, regional, and worldwide security, and impeding economic progress, Islamist militants and terrorism have also destroyed lives. The underlying causes of terrorism and militancy in Bangladesh are eradicated. For a sustainable democracy and socioeconomic development, it is imperative that risk factors be addressed and a comprehensive and integrated strategy for preventing terrorism be taught.

**Keywords:** Religious Extremism, Terrorism, Islamist Militancy, Political Instability.

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Terrorism and Islamist militancy in Bangladesh are prevalent and bring a lot of harm to the country. They deal with national and political stability, human and security, socioeconomic advancement, and international relations. Religious extremism threatens Bangladesh's political plurality and human lives. National and social instability results from religious violence. The religious party enforces its beliefs with force. Consequently, harmful acts are found to occur. Religious extremism is always promoted to cause terrorism in any country of the world. For this purpose, the author compares religious extremism and terrorism in Bangladesh. He tries to explore the causes, patterns, and effects of religious extremism in Bangladeshi Islamist militancy and terrorism. Terrorist organizations' finances, strategy, and methods are examined in this paper.

### 2.0 BACKGROUND

Fundamentalism and extremism in Islam are nothing new in Bangladesh. Even though Bangladesh was founded in 1971 due to linguistic nationalism rather than religious nationalism, Islamist forces have become more powerful as a result of official support. The secular Sheikh Mujibur Rehman, the country's founding father, was assassinated in 1975, which led to a dramatic rise in the power of fundamentalist movements over both military and democratic governments.

General Ziaur Rehman reestablished Jamaat-e-Islami in the late 1970s after it was disgraced in 1971 for cooperating with the Pakistan Army during the Bangladesh liberation struggle. Ziaur Rahman welcomed Jamaat leaders who fled to Pakistan after the 1971 war back to Bangladesh. Following it, Jamaat gained power swiftly. In the 1980s, General Hussain Mohammad Ershad used Jamaat against the secular Awami League.

After Prime Minister Khaleda Zia took the power in the early 1990s, Jamaat and other extremist parties had free access. Jamaat has founded thousands of madrassas in Bangladesh, many of which recruit and train jihadis. Extremist Islamist recruiters targeted destitute and unemployed madrassa students. By the late 1990s, extremist groups established themselves in Bangladesh, including Harkatul Jihad Al-Islami (HUJI) and Jamiatul Mujahedin Bangladesh (JMB). The militants attacked temples, churches, political gatherings, cultural events, movie theatres, etc. between 1999 and 2005.

The opposition and the administration persisted in assigning blame to one another for the assaults. Even when the government accused the opposition of being responsible for the August 21, 2004, grenade attack that killed 21 people and injured AL Chairperson Sheikh Hasina at an Awami League event in Dhaka. The bombings on August 17, 2005, forced the government to confront the terrorist danger and break its denial posture. Several terror leaders were apprehended, prosecuted, and given penalties, including death sentences, in 2006–2007. Although there was not been a significant terror strike in Bangladesh since then, terrorist activity is still there as seen by the regular arrests of activists and the discovery of substantial caches of weapons and explosives from their hiding places.

Both the opposition and the government continued blaming each other for the attacks. Even after the government claimed that the opposition was behind the August 21, 2004, grenade attack at an Awami League function in Dhaka that left 21 people dead and AL Chief Sheikh Hasina injured. Between 2006 and 2007, several terror leaders were captured, charged, and sentenced to death. Since then, there has not been a major terror attack in Bangladesh. But terrorist activity is still there as seen by the frequent arrests of activists and the large stockpiles of explosives and weapons that have been found hidden away.

### **3.0 JUSTIFICATION**

Islamic militancy and terrorism go beyond law and order in Bangladesh. Internal relations, socioeconomic development, human and national security, law and order decline, and political stability are also included. It is a global issue. Most Bangladeshi Islamic militant groups are connected to international terrorism. JMB and HujiB are Pakistani and Afghan. They are related to Al Qaeda. Bangladesh has received many international inquiries about terrorism's causes. Terrorist outfits receive financial and weapons training from foreign organisations. They oppose global peace. Bangladeshi religious extremism threatens human rights and public safety. Religious extremism destabilises society. Their ideals are established through bloodshed.

### **4.0 METHODOLOGY**

#### **4.1 Data Collection Techniques**

Different methods of data-collection are used in qualitative research. The most common are interviews, focus group discussions, observational methods and document analysis. A relatively new method is an art-based data-collection method. But, in this paper, the author makes use of descriptive investigation to write.

Multiple methodologies were employed to gather data for this paper. The primary data were secondary analysis. To enhance the reliability and validity of analysing terrorism, data were cross-referenced with several sources, despite the limitations of relying on secondary, official, and biased media sources.

## 4.2 Secondary Data Analysis

Secondary analysis refers to the use of existing research data to find answer to a question that was different from the original work. Secondary data can be large scale surveys or data collected as part of personal research. However, due to a lack of primary material, data were primarily derived from secondary sources, including news stories, books, periodicals, journals, and intelligence papers. Newspapers were combed through for information regarding terrorist groups, including their classifications, numbers, ideology, tactics, operations, funding, and geographic locations. Terrorism and religious militancy are delicate topics for investigations, and gathering all the necessary data can be a real challenge.

## 4.3 Terrorism and Religious Extremism in Bangladesh

The Jamaat-e-Islami, the largest Islamic party in Bangladesh, advocates for a profound societal transformation to establish an Islamic polity in the nation situated in South Asia. According to a political analyst from Bangladesh, the Jamaat's objective is to establish an Islamic state ruled by Shariah law and to wage war against free-thinking Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists.

As argued by S. Harrison (2006), the resurgence of fundamentalist Islamism is not a recent occurrence. Certain prominent political parties acknowledge the influence of religion within the realm of politics. In Bangladesh, where the prevalence of Islam exceeds 80%, there is an observable trend whereby right-leaning political parties emphasise religious matters, particularly in the run-up to elections, in an attempt to garner public support. The author endeavours to examine the correlation between terrorism and religious extremism through an analysis of the motivational elements that drive individuals to join terrorist organisations, the mechanisms of mobilisation they employ to acquire and distribute resources, the organisational frameworks they function under, and the rituals they observe to execute the movement.

The objective of the author is to examine the terrorism movement in Bangladesh in light of its historical backdrop, the characteristics of religious extremism, the underlying causes of terrorism, and the security threat it poses. Except for a handful of notable sociologists, the militia movement as a whole has not garnered significant attention, except from journalistic and intelligence sources. Hegemonic perspectives regard militias as having no historical connection to their predecessors; consequently, the militia movement is generally regarded as a terrorist endeavour. In Bangladesh context, the local and international media outlets and monitor groups portray the militias primarily as being associated with Islamist militancy and transnational or international terrorism.

Eliza Griswold (2005) asserts that Siddiqui Islam, who got himself engaged in Jihad in Afghanistan, intended to implement Taliban-like regulations in Bangladesh, including the mandatory growth of beards for men and the mandatory wearing of burkas [veils] by women. In addition, she also asserts that his organisation, JMJB, was violent and determined, with sufficient moderately armed members to ensure compliance with its rule. Griswold identifies, in addition to his group's jihad in Afghanistan, indirect ties to Al-Qaeda.

Islamist organisations started to emerge by the early 1990s, mostly on the outskirts of the Afghan-centered war. The movement for an Islamic Holy War, or Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (Huji), has been the most significant of these. It is related to Fazlul Rahman, who signed Osama bin Laden's infamous 1998 declaration supporting global, coordinated jihad, which served as the introduction of Al-Qaeda to the wider world. On the other hand, other groups, including Bangla Bhai, have now surfaced and are vying for power.

Griswold (2005) also points out that Mufti Amini has an indirect connection to Al-Qaeda. According to Indian intelligence documents, the mufti is listed as a member of Huji's central committee, which is connected to Al-Qaeda. He would naturally refute this information. He has close friends with the Afghan Taliban. But he refutes this and says that it is better to avoid talking about the Afghan Taliban because they are so often misinterpreted.

Zachary Abuza (2003) focuses on the rise of Islamic radicalism in Southeast Asia, including Bangladesh: Economic inequality, unemployment, corruption, a lack of economic diversity, and a weak political alternative have fueled Islamic extremism. Despite the US re-involvement—a scapegoat for the region's economic woes—and the Palestinians' plight—a symbol of all Muslims' injustices—he concedes that the Middle East conflict affects public opinion in Bangladesh, the world's fourth-largest Muslim nation. Many secular parties and moderate Muslims in Bangladesh share Islamist terrorists' anger at the US.

Abuza (2003) wants to emphasise that Islamism and terrorism are simply two sides of the same coin when he says that both the spread of extreme Islam and terrorism are worldwide problems. In 2003, the scholar propagated a version of the American concept of Islamism and terrorism. However, there are clear inconsistencies in his definitions of Islamism and terrorism. Al-Qaeda was not a terrorist group when it battled the communists in Afghanistan; rather, it was a network created to help outsiders enlist and support the mujahidin in their conflict with the Soviet Union. Is this a result of Al-Qaeda acting as an American ally? When it operated against US interests and backed the Taliban, why was it later classified as a terrorist organisation? Abuza does not address these queries. In his publications, Abuza avoided discussing nature, the agents of religious fanaticism, and strategies for opposing it.

As far as the author is concerned, nobody is talking about how pervasive poverty, lack of education, and unfair distribution of wealth also contribute to terrorist attacks and the resurrection of Islamist movements. Extremists within the Islamic faith violently spread their ideology. Hashmi (2005) expresses his view that Islamic fundamentalism, a dangerous philosophy, must be flourishing in Bangladesh. He asserts that, despite its impoverishment, cultural and political domination by Islamic ethos, and economic backwardness, Bangladesh is not just another Afghanistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, or Pakistan.

There are notable differences between Islamic movements in Bangladesh and movements of a similar nature abroad. The majority of Islamic groups in Bangladesh are rural, agricultural, and representative of the customs and behaviours of the peasantry, who are by nature traditional, fatalist, religious, if not pious, and who frequently turn to religion for support and sustenance as well as identity.

Taj I. Hashmi (2000) expresses his view that there has been a scary rise in militant Islamists in Bangladesh. Their scary actions in rural areas have recently gotten attention from the foreign media, but the process started in 1990. Since 1991, Salish (village arbitration) and fatwa (religious edict) have become popular in rural Bangladesh. He looks into this event and how it relates to the rise of Islamism as a political philosophy and the growth of Islamist parties in Bangladesh, especially questioning the idea that women are mistreated through Salish and fatwas because people in rural areas do not like how modernization is happening and that fatwas are a big way for traditional leaders to fight back against poor rural women.

In this context, the author agrees with Ali Riaz (2009) who comments that several case studies to show how the use of Salish and Fatwa to control women and development groups is an attempt to use traditional local institutions to promote certain ideas about how people should behave and their rights under Islam. These ideas are closely connected to the Islamists' goals. From a historical point of view, Ali Riaz focuses on the politics and ideas of Islamism in Bangladesh. He also argues that since the September 11 attacks, the media and political experts have paid attention to an Islam-inspired movement that is transnational, uprooted, and does not care about borders.

During the 1971 war, Islamists fought with the Pakistani army against Bangladeshi freedom fighters. They are now rising again to create an Islamic state. Ali Riaz again says that all three types of militias—Islamist, left-wing, and ethnic—have the same historical roots and grew up in Bangladesh almost at the same time after the war. But since the 9/11 attacks, the media has focused so much on Islamist groups that other militias, like those on the left and those of different ethnicities, have been almost completely left out of public conversations. The problem of terrorism in Bangladesh has become a big topic for public discussion. The Bangladeshi media and people in general society did a lot to show the different sides of Islamic terrorism. The author learned about different types of terrorism through the columns, such as political terrorism and how it was used in Bangladesh, acts of investigation, normal terrorism, different terrorist events that happened at the time, and especially terrorism done in the name of Islam. The author also wrote about the worst terrorist attacks, such as grenades and bomb blasts, the Islamist revolution in Bangladesh, and other events. The author wanted to give people facts and information about terrorism so that they could make their own decisions.

M. S. Hossain (2005) comments that terrorists damage and destroy places where people live and work, as well as economic, commercial, and social systems. More scary and awful is the fact that they kill innocent people and threaten peace and progress. Hossain describes about very important and current problems related to terrorism in South Asia, mainly from Bangladesh context. His comments are based on different grenade and bomb attacks that have happened in Bangladesh in the past few years. To successfully fight terrorism, the author suggested that law enforcement agencies, the court system, and the administrative machinery should be strengthened, revitalised, reoriented, and reorganised. Hossain indicates on lowering

hunger and the differences between rich and poor. He calls for more democracy in society and for the media to play a bigger role. He has not looked into the conditions of religion, the nature of religious extremism, the bond between religious extremism and terrorism, or ways to fight terrorism, which is a good thing.

Hiranmay Karlekar (2006) investigated Bangladesh's possibility as a terrorist. He states that Bangladesh is a weak state with bad leadership and a weak police force that is easily swayed by Islamist militias like HUJI, JI, and JMB. He likens these groups to the Taliban and compares Bangladesh to Afghanistan under their rule. Bangladesh is more developed, has well-organized political parties, has long experienced democracy, and has a powerful and outspoken civil society. Religious freedom prevails in this moderately Muslim nation. Women are crucial to the nation's politics, economy, society, and culture. (Khan, 2007)

#### **4.4 Religious Extremism and Terrorist Activities beyond Bangladesh**

Academics from all around the world have worked very hard to define terrorism, identify its underlying causes, and establish connections between it and other material and immaterial things. Datta (2007) has presented a thorough analysis of the patterns and major historical themes of terrorism. The well-researched book offers insightful information on several topics, including the challenges associated with defining terrorism, the prevalence of separatist and ethno-nationalist terrorism in the post-colonial era, the internationalization of terrorism signaled by actions carried out by the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), and the rise of religious motivation as a driving force behind terrorist activity following the end of the Cold War.

According to S. A. M. M. Ali (2006), the current definition of terrorism is too limited since it merely presents Islam and Muslims in an unrelated way. The US has taken the initiative to find and destroy any parties that are thought to be engaged in terrorism. In addition to detaining a small number of people on suspicion, the first action was to strike Afghanistan, whose leader claimed ties to terrorists behind the September 11 attacks. In Western nations, it is common to associate terrorism with particular groups that are called militants, extremists, or Muslim extremists.

According to I. Ahmed (2009), such an effort is perceived as focusing on Muslim groups that are ironically accused of being responsible for the September 11 attacks. The US government and most Western media are attributing the World Trade Centre disaster to Islam, which has a detrimental effect on Muslim communities around the world. The United States and some of its allies have voiced worries on multiple occasions since the September 11 attacks regarding Bangladesh's potential to become a significant hub for pro-Al-Qaeda terrorism in South Asia. Numerous local and foreign media outlets, watchdog organisations, and intelligence services have covered Bangladesh's Islamist movement and connected it to the al-Qaeda network.

#### **5.0 CONCLUSION**

An analysis by the Bangladesh Perspective Research Foundation uncovered eleven plausible justifications for radicalism: western imperialism, poverty, inferiority complex, and its consequences. (Hossain, 2005) It has resulted in economies and cultures that are considered second or third-world, ineffective leadership, biased media indoctrination, restrictions on free

speech and thought, Islamic fundamentalists who see it as their duty to eliminate non-believers, a failure by those in power to acknowledge and resolve the problems they have created, deliberate acts by superpowers like TPAJAX, the start of the Iran–Iraq war, and the backing of different factions in proxy wars that have claimed the lives of their citizens in the name of international conflicts. (Lintner, 2002).

Social discrimination against Madrasa students is mostly attributable to their lack of contemporary education and poverty. The report claims that students who attend Madrasas often have negative mental health outcomes, such as an inferiority mentality and a diminished feeling of self-worth. The current social order is intolerable to them because they perceive it as biased against them. (Kabir, 2006) Their vulnerability makes them an easy target for extremists who demand that they alter the current social order, which is both artificial and partial.

The Anti-Terrorism Act, 2009 is an Act passed by the Jatiya Sangsad in 2009 to grant the Government of Bangladesh additional powers to prevent and combat terrorism in Bangladesh. It pursues a value driven foreign policy that promotes peace, democracy, secularism, freedom, human rights, good governance and social justice, a culture of peace and non-violence, inter-faith and inter-cultural dialogues as well as ethnic and religious tolerance to combat extremism. The Bangladesh government believes that terrorism, intolerance and conflicts emanate from a mindset of hatred and intolerance and a culture of peace to create a mindset tolerance, friendship and respect for others would promote greater understanding among peoples and tolerance of differing views. One effective way to address terrorism is, therefore, to promote a culture of peace and unity in diversity. In order to defeat terrorism in this increasingly globalized world, Bangladesh needs more than ever before harmony, understanding and mutual respects for all cultures and peoples and accept their diversities.

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