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Militancy in Bangladesh

Militancy is one of the major security challenges for Bangladesh. In recent years, it has faced a series of violent attacks by the militants. The militants have targeted individuals and have conducted an organised terror campaign across the country. The existing political and social environment in Bangladesh, presumably, provides some encouragement to the militants to operate in the country. This paper discusses the political and social dimensions of militancy in Bangladesh.

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Introduction

Militancy is one of the most critical challenges faced by Bangladesh. In a 2016 survey by *Bangla Tribune*, 13.8 per cent people believe that the threat of militancy needs to be addressed by the government of Bangladesh. Seventy per cent of the people were of the opinion that it is a major threat to the country.² Across the country, the survey found that fighting terrorism was the fourth most important issue for the government, behind political

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² “Terrorism a big threat, but not a top priority”, *Dhaka Tribune*, 8 February 2016. <https://www.dhakatribune.com/uncategorized/2016/02/08/terrorism-a-big-threat-but-not-a-top-priority>. Accessed on 26 June 2018.

stability, holding national elections and economic development. A total of 4,950 individuals were interviewed in the opinion poll.³

In recent years, due to measures taken by the Bangladesh government, there has been a considerable decline in the number of militant attacks in the country. One such measure was the implementation of the Anti-Terrorist Act and the Anti-Money Laundering Act in 2009. Second, the Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime unit was set up under the Dhaka metropolitan police in 2016 to counter the militants' operations and to arrest them. As a result of such acts and operations, there has been a decline in the number of militant attacks in Bangladesh. For example, in 2016, 30 militant attacks took place,⁴ while in 2017, the number of such attacks declined to 12.⁵ However, it still remains a significant challenge for the Bangladesh government.

The roots of the militancy in the country can be traced to ethnic polarisation between the Bengalis and non-Bengalis (popularly known as the Urdu speakers or Bihari Muslims) during the liberation war of Bangladesh in 1971. In East Pakistan (present-day Bangladesh), almost all Urdu speakers were against its separation from the Western part and sided with the Pakistani establishment. The members of the Jamat-e-Islami (popularly called as Jamat), comprising mostly the non-Bengalis, unleashed violence against ethnic Bengalis. It was led by Professor Ghulam Azam.⁶ A similar group, al-Badr, was launched by the Islami Chhatra Sangha,⁷ the student wing of the Jamat-e-Islami. The Muslim League set up its own armed group, al-Shams, to suppress the demands for the liberation of Bangladesh.⁸ In the ethnically-polarised war, even the innocent Urdu-speaking people were attacked by members of the mukti-bahini (Liberation Army) and other Bengali groups. For example, more than 300 non-Bengalis were persecuted by Bengali extremists in Chittagong. The community faced more

³ Ibid.

⁴ "Bangladesh Timeline - Year 2016", South Asia Terrorism Portal, <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/bangladesh/timeline/2016.htm>. Accessed on 26 June 2018 (Data compiled by Roshni Kapur).

⁵ "Bangladesh Timeline-Year 2017", South Asia Terrorism Portal, <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/bangladesh/timeline/2017.htm>. Accessed on 30 July 2018 (Data compiled by Roshni Kapur).

⁶ Sikand, Yoginder S. (2013) "The Tablighi Jama'at". In Guhatakurata, Meghna & Schendel, Willem van (ed) *The Bangladesh Reader: History, Culture, Politics*. London & Durham: Duke University Press. pp. 336-344.

⁷ Islami Chhatra Sangha is the predecessor of the Islamic Chhatra Shibir. The latter was formed in 1977.

⁸ Sikand, Yoginder S. (2013) "The Tablighi Jama'at", op. cit.

attacks after Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, leader of the Awami League, was arrested by Pakistan's head of state, General Yahya Khan.⁹

In the post-liberation period, instead of bridging the differences between the ethnic groups, these differences were used to pit one group against the other. Besides the Bengali versus non-Bengali tension, the other ethnic groups in Bangladesh were also affected by developments in the country. Groups such as the Garos, Chakmas and Santals also participated in the liberation war of 1971 but their efforts were not fully recognised by the Bengali nationalists of the country.¹⁰ This exclusivism, especially of the Urdu-speaking Bangladeshis, caused ethnic polarisation in post-liberated Bangladesh. Gradually, the existing ethnic polarisation, along with the dissemination of the ideals of the Wahhabism,¹¹ provided a breeding space to militancy.

Rise of Radical Islamic Groups in Bangladesh

After the liberation of Bangladesh in 1971, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman became the first president of the country. He banned the Jamat-e-Islami and the other groups which had collaborated with the Pakistan army during the liberation war of 1971. On 15 August 1975, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was assassinated. In a quick succession, Khondaker Mostaq Ahmad (15 August 1975 to 6 November 1975) was appointed as the President of the country. He was succeeded by Justice Abu Sadat Mohammad Sayam (November 1975 to April 1977).¹²

In April 1977, General Ziaur Rahman (1977 to 1981) became the head of the state. During his term in power, General Rahman faced three coup attempts and several rebellions organised by both political right and centre-left forces.¹³ To overcome their challenges, General Rahman attempted to appease the religious groups. He enacted the Political Party Regulation Act to clear the way for Bangladesh Jamat-e-Islami and other like-minded groups to

⁹ Ibid & Ishtiaq Ahmed (2014). *The Pakistan Military in Politics: Origins, Evolution, Consequence*. New Delhi: Amaryllis Publication.

¹⁰ Riaz, Ali, (2016) *Bangladesh: A Political History since Independence*. London: I B Tauris & Co Ltd, p186.

¹¹ Wahhabism was founded by Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab. This promotes an ultraconservative form of Islam which its believers call "true Islam". From the Middle East this variant of Islam has spread to the other parts of the World.

¹² After the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the Bangladesh military took charge of Bangladesh. For a brief period, they ruled from behind the curtains.

¹³ Riaz, Ali, (2016) *Bangladesh: A Political History since Independence*, op. cit.

participate in the political activities of the country. A series of amendments were made in the Constitution to change the nature of the Bangladeshi state. The word “secularism” was deleted from the Preamble and Article 8 of the Constitution. A sentence, “absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah” should be “the basis of all actions”, was inserted through the Second Proclamation Order Number 1 in 1977. The words “Bismillah-ar-Rahman-ar-Rahim” (In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful) were also inserted above the Preamble to the Constitution.¹⁴ During Rahman’s tenure, Ghulam Azam returned to Bangladesh from his exile.

General Rahman was assassinated during his visit to Chittagong in 1981. He was succeeded by another military man – General Hussain Mohammad Ershad (1982 to 1990). Like his predecessor, General Ershad also used Islam to consolidate his rule. He declared Islam the religion of the state. He made Islamiyat (Islamic religious studies) a mandatory subject for students from Grades 3 to 10. His cabinet also had Abdul Mannan and Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury. Both had collaborated with the Pakistani army during the Bangladesh liberation war of 1971.

In the 1980s, changes were visible not only in the politics of Bangladesh, but also in the society, which was passing through a difficult social transformation process. A new version of Islam (mainly Wahhabism) was silently replacing the centuries-old Sufistic Islam,¹⁵ practiced by the Bangladeshis. It is not clear whether the politics of the country reflected the ongoing social change or vice-versa. However, a symbiotic relationship developed between politics and the society. This new version of Islam was vernacular in nature. Soon after its introduction, it became popular in the rural areas, especially among the lower middle class and people living below them. Its spread was possible because of several reasons:¹⁶

1. There was a return of Islam in the public life in Bangladesh during successive military rules.

¹⁴ Majumder, Shantanu (2016) “Secularism and anti-Secularism”. In Riaz Ali & Rahman, Mohammad Sajjadur *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Bangladesh*. Oxon & New York Routledge, p 40-51.

¹⁵ “Terror in Dhaka: Fundamentalism Spreads its Deadly Wings”, Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury, 4 July 2016, *ISAS Brief No 439*. https://www.isas.nus.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/media/isas_papers/ISAS%20Brief%20No.%20439%20-%20Terror%20in%20Dhaka%20-%20Fundamentalism%20Spreads%20its%20Deadly%20Wings.pdf. Accessed on 7 May 2018.

¹⁶ Schendel, William Van ((2009) *A History of Bangladesh*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p 253.

2. There was an inflow of global ideas of Islamic decorum which percolated into the society by the migrants returning from the Middle East (West Asia) where an extremist and ultraconservative version of Islam was on the rise by late 1970s.

3. The emerging middle class of Bangladeshis found solace in these new Islamic values.

4. Many Bangladeshis who were disgusted by growing public corruption found Islamic virtues to be more suitable to overcome them.

Under the influence of this version of Islam, many males and females started giving up their ‘Bengaliness’ and became attracted to the ‘pure’ Islamic dresses and culture.¹⁷ Since the 1980s, this ‘new Islam’ has been visible in the streets of many Bangladeshi cities and villages. A large number of females wear burka (clad) over their sarees,¹⁸ and some lungi¹⁹-tied males can be spotted with a skull cap on their head.²⁰

Both political appeasement and social transformation enabled the Islamists to develop a constituency in Bangladesh. This helped them to win seats after democracy was restored in the country in December 1990. In the general elections of 1991, the Bangladesh Jamat-e-Islami contested in 221 of the 300 seats open for direct elections. It won 18 seats and secured 12 per cent of the popular vote.²¹ Due to its tactical alliance with the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), the Bangladesh Jamat-e-Islami gained two additional seats from the 30 indirectly elected seats for women. In 1996, the Bangladesh Jamat-e-Islami won three seats and eight per cent of the total polled votes. In 2001 elections, it secured four per cent of the votes and won 17 seats.²² Years later, before the 2014 general elections, due to its ideology, the Bangladesh Jamat-e-Islami was banned by the Election Commission of Bangladesh from contesting the polls.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ A female garment wore by women from the Indian subcontinent.

¹⁹ A long fabric wrapped around the waist. This is used by a large number of males in the Indian subcontinent and also in Indonesia and Malaysia.

²⁰ Schendel, William Van (2009) *A History of Bangladesh*, op. cit.

²¹ “The Jamaat Factor in Bangladesh Politics”, Jyoti Rehman. *Kafila*, 13 March 2013. <http://kafila.org/2013/03/13/the-jamaat-factor-in-bangladesh-politics-jyoti-rehman/>. Accessed on 23 December 2014.

²² Ibid

During the years 2001 to 2006, the Bangladesh Jamat-e-Islami, while in power through an alliance with the BNP, occupied the country's social welfare ministry. This ministry controls the activities of many well-funded non-government organisations in Bangladesh. This period also witnessed the rise of the Islamic Bank as the third largest bank of Bangladesh. Most of the members of the bank were affiliated to the Bangladesh Jamat-e-Islami.²³

In 2006, after the end of the BNP's term in the government, a caretaker government,²⁴ under Dr Ijajudin Ahmed, assumed power in the country. This government was supposed to hold general elections in the country. However, the situation became tense between the caretaker government and the political leaders. To establish peace in the country, a state of emergency was declared by the government. Ijajudin's decision was supported by the Bangladeshi military. During the emergency, most of the political leaders, including Sheikh Hasina, leader of the Awami League, were imprisoned. In 2008, there was a political reconciliation between the political leadership of the country and the military. As a part of that reconciliation, a general election was held in 2009. The Awami League-led alliance won and formed the government. The party also won the successive general election in 2014.

In the last nine years, the government of Bangladesh, under Prime Minister Hasina, has taken steps to tackle the issue of militancy in the country. However, like many other militancy-affected countries in the world, Bangladesh too is struggling to find a concrete plan to deal with the militants.

Militant Groups and their Tactics

At present, some of the most notorious militant groups active in Bangladesh are Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh, Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh, Harkat-ul-Jihad-Islami, Hizb-ut-Tahrir, Hefazet-e-Islam, Jund At-Tawheed Wal Khilafah and Ansarullah Bangla Team. There are some lesser known groups such as Jaish-e-Muhammad, Jadid al Qaeda and Shahadat-e

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ In 2011, the Bangladesh parliament passed the 15th amendment to the Constitution. This abolished the need for having a Care Taker Government to hold free and fair elections in the country. Sheikh Hasina's government took the step because of the experience the Prime Minister had during a Caretaker Government under Dr Ijajudin Ahmed. However, the opposition parties see it as a ploy to interfere in the electoral process of the country.

Al-Hikma. Harkat-ul-Jihad-Islami-Bangladesh was formed in 1992 by Bangladeshis returning after fighting against the former Soviet army in Afghanistan in the 1980s.²⁵ It was formed by Maulana Abdus Salam. After its formation, the group established contacts with the Pakistan-based militant groups.²⁶ In later years, the Afghan Taliban became its source of guidance.

Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh was founded in 1998 by Abdur Rahman. The group's objective is to impose an extremist interpretation of Islamic law on Bangladesh. It was banned in February 2005. Soon after the ban, it carried out a well-coordinated bomb blast in August 2005. The base of that operation was in Jamalpur district in Mymensingh province of the country.²⁷ Following the blasts, arrests were made and a new legislation was enacted by the government which led to the execution of six convicts. Unlike most of the other militant groups, Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh recruits not only the youth, but also the entire family, including women members.²⁸

For most of the militant groups, the targets are secular and liberal individuals. Politically, they target the Awami League leadership because of the party's political ideology. An early attempt to assassinate Hasina was made in 1989 by the members of the now defunct Bangladesh Freedom Party.²⁹ In 1999, the liberal poet, Shamsur Rahman, was attacked by members belonging to the Harkat-ul-Jihad-Islami-Bangladesh. In 2000, Hasina was the target of members of the Harkat-ul-Jihad-Islami. Attacks were also carried out on people celebrating cultural festivals not sanctioned by the Islamists. For example, in 2001, a bomb exploded amidst the crowd celebrating Bengali New Year. The programme was organised by a cultural organisation called Chhayanot.³⁰

In recent years, there is a shift in the militant groups' targets. Instead of popular personalities of Bangladesh, they target ordinary citizens who promote or support liberal values. On 27

²⁵ Ali, S Mahmud (2010) *Understanding Bangladesh*. New Delhi: Foundation Books, p 290.

²⁶ Bashar, Iftekharul (2015) "India's key role and South Asia's security concerns". In Gunaratna, Rohan & Woodall, Douglas (ed). *Afghanistan after the Western Drawdown*. London: Rowman & Littlefield, pp 51-62.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ "Countering Jihadist Militancy in Bangladesh". *International Crisis Group*, 28 February 2018. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/bangladesh/295-countering-jihadist-militancy-bangladesh>. Accessed on 11 May 2018.

²⁹ "11 Jailed For Assassination Attempt On Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina", *NDTV 24X 7*, 29 October 2017. <https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/11-jailed-for-assassination-attempt-on-bangladesh-pm-sheikh-hasina-1768580>. Accessed on 18 April 2018.

³⁰ Schendel, William Van (2009) *A History of Bangladesh*, op. cit., p 208.

February 2015, an atheist blogger, Avijit Roy, was hacked to death in Dhaka. Roy was a Bangladesh born citizen of the United States (US) and the founder of a blog, Mukto Mano (Liberated People). On 30 March 2015, a second blogger, Washiqur Rahman, was stabbed to death for his progressive blogs. Niladri Chattopadhyay, who was a Gonojagron Manch (Platform for Popular Uprising) activist, was another blogger hacked to death in Dhaka in August 2015. Ansar Al Islam (Helpers of Islam) took responsibility for Niladri's murder. Then, in 2016, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender rights activists Xulhaz Mannan and Mahbub Rabby Tonoy were hacked to death.

The militant groups have also targeted foreign citizens working or on tour in Bangladesh. In 2015, an Italian citizen, Cesare Tavella, was killed in Dhaka. A few days after Tavella, Hoshi Kunio, a Japanese citizen, was shot at in Rangpur on 3 October 2015. Both attacks attracted the attention of the international community towards the increasing occurrence of militancy incidents in Bangladesh.

However, the most daring operation carried out by the militants in Bangladesh was on 1 July 2016 when seven fully armed militants stormed into Dhaka's popular eatery, Holey Artisan Bakery, and took about 60 people as hostages, mostly foreigners. The area was cleared after a joint operation launched by commandos from the Bangladeshi army, navy, special weapons and tactics teams, the elite Rapid Action Battalion and the paramilitary Border Guards Bangladesh. In that operation, two policemen and six militants were killed, and one militant was captured. The militants killed nine Italians, seven Japanese, three Bangladeshis and an Indian hostage.³¹ In a follow-up operation to the hostage crisis, it is believed that Bangladeshi security officials killed about six to eight militant leaders between July and December 2016.³² After the July attacks, the Bangladeshi security officials have begun using the term "neo-Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen" for the obscure members of the Islamic State (IS) which they believe are active in the country.³³

Soon after the July 2016 attack, debate raged on media portals across the world over the indulgence of home-grown versus trained outsiders. Later, it was found that the two local

³¹ "Bangladesh Café Attack: Indian among 20 killed in Dhaka's night of terror", Shubhajit, Roy, *The Indian Express*, 3 July 2016. <http://indianexpress.com/article/world/world-news/bangladesh-cafe-attack-indian-among-20-killed-in-dhakas-night-of-terror-2890521/>. Accessed on 5 July 2016.

³² "Is Bangladesh winning the war against militants?", Subir Bhaumik, *BBC*, 4 April 2017. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-39477330>. Accessed on 20 April 2018.

³³ "Countering Jihadist Militancy in Bangladesh' *International Crisis Group*", op. cit.

militant groups, Ansar-al-Islam and Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh, which involved in that attack, had external connections. Ansar is believed to have an allegiance to Al-Qaeda, while Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh claims itself to be a representative of the IS in Bangladesh.³⁴

The Bangladeshi militant groups have managed to develop networks with like-minded groups active in different parts of the world. This has helped them to seek shelter, operate from outside Bangladesh, generate funds or hatch a plot and get out of the country. In 2014, two of Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh members engaged in hatching a plot to assassinate Hasina were arrested by Indian security agencies. Then, in June 2016, eight Bangladeshis working in Singapore were arrested for planning to carry out attacks in Bangladesh. They were said to be from the IS in Bangladesh. They admitted that they had plans to join the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant or the Islamic State.³⁵

There are also media reports about Bangladeshi citizens fighting with the IS members in the Middle East. The number of these Bangladeshis varies. According to the police chief of counter-terrorism operations, Monirul Islam, since June 2017, about 20 Bangladeshi have tried to enter Syria to join the IS. About 38 Bangladeshi have tried to join the other terrorist agencies. Some media reports put the number around 50.³⁶ The IS has even recruited female members from Bangladesh in its network. In February 2018, Monirul Islam revealed that a Bangladeshi national, Momena Shoma, who was arrested in Australia after stabbing a man, had links with Bangladeshi IS fighters in Syria.³⁷ It is believed that most of the Bangladeshi fighters in the Middle East have entered into the region after being radicalised through online propaganda by the radical groups.³⁸

³⁴ ‘Bloody End to Dhaka Hostage Crisis’, *The Daily Star*, 2 July 2016. <http://www.thedailystar.net/online/security-forces-begin-offensive-end-hostage-crisis-1249219>. Accessed on 22 April 2018.

³⁵ “8 Bangladeshi men detained under Singapore’s ISA for planning terror attacks back home”, Zakir Hussain, *The Straits Times*, 3 May 2016. <http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/8-bangladeshi-men-detained-under-singapores-isa-for-planning-terror-attacks-back-home/>. Accessed on 17 April 2018.

³⁶ “How many Bangladeshis have joined IS?”, Nuruzzaman Labu, *Dhaka Tribune*, 28 June 2017. <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/crime/2017/06/28/many-bangladeshis-joined/>. Accessed on 11 May 2018.

³⁷ “Police: Momena was in contact with foreign fighters in Syria”, Nuruzzaman Labu, *Dhaka Tribune*, 16 February 2018. <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/crime/2018/02/16/momena-foreign-fighters-syria>. Accessed on 11 May 2018.

³⁸ “How many Bangladeshis have joined IS?”, op. cit.

Support to the Militants

This section will explore the factors that have given support to the militants and militancy in Bangladesh.

First, the identity-based ethnic differences between the Bengali and non-Bengali exist even after decades of the liberation war. A large number of the Urdu-speaking Bangladeshis live in squalid camps. Most of them are regarded as stranded Pakistanis living in Bangladesh. Only in 2008, after they won a legal battle in the High Court, around 140,000 Biharis, who were born in Bangladesh were granted citizenship rights.³⁹ However, they still face identity-related violence. One of the latest incidences of violence against them was at Kalshi in 2014 when an ethnic Bengali leader from the Awami League, with the help of the local police, led an attack against the non-Bengali population of the area. Nine people were killed in that attack. Theoretically, structural discrimination against a group leads to the feeling of alienation among some members of that social group. In some cases, this political and social alienation is easily exploited by the militant groups.

Second, the setting of the International Crimes Tribunal-2 in 2009⁴⁰ under the International Crimes (Tribunal) Act No XIX of 1973 has aggravated tensions between those who support different narrations of the liberation war of Bangladesh. The tribunal was set up to try the perpetrators of the violence during the liberation war. Ghulam Azam was the first to be charged by the tribunal for running and orchestrating pro-Pakistan militias during the liberation war.⁴¹ He was sentenced to 90 years of imprisonment. However, he died of a heart stroke in 2014. Another high profile conviction was that of Abdul Quader Molla in 2013 who was initially sentenced to life imprisonment for killing 344 civilians among other crimes.⁴² His sentence, in particular, did not satisfy a large number of Bangladeshis. A protest started against the judgment delivered by the tribunal. The people's furore, including the demand to ban Bangladesh Jamat-e-Islami, grew into what is popularly known as the Shahbagh

³⁹ “Bangladesh Citizenship Rights Divide Biharis” Azad Majumder *Reuters* 20 May 2008. <https://www.reuters.com/article/idINIndia-33670320080520>. Accessed on 30 July 2018.

⁴⁰ The first tribunal to look into the war crimes was constituted in 1973. Tribunal-2 has remained non-functioning since 15 September 2015. See ‘About ICT BD’. <http://www.ict-bd.org/ict1/>. Accessed on 6 June 2018.

⁴¹ “Bangladesh war crimes trial: Key accused”, *BBC*, 4 September 2016. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-20970123>. Accessed on 20 April 2018.

⁴² Ibid.

movement. The rallying cry of the protestors was *fanshi chai* (we demand hanging).⁴³ Under the pressure of the movement, on 17 February 2013, the Bangladesh parliament passed a bill to amend the International Crimes (Tribunal) Act of 1973. The amendment has a provision to appeal against the order of an acquittal or sentencing by the tribunal in the Supreme Court of Bangladesh. Under the amended law, the government made an appeal against the life sentence given to Abdul Quader Molla. On 17 September 2013, the Supreme Court accepted the appeal and sentenced him to death. A series of judgements against the war criminals by the tribunal has widened the divisions between the Bengali and non-Bengali ethnic groups.

Third, the support to the militant groups in Bangladesh is also due to their ideology and political objective. According to RESOLVE Network survey conducted by C Christin Faire and Wahid Abdallah in April 2017, the “higher income groups tended to support JMJB [Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh] and Da’esh [IS] for the implementation of Sharia globally.”⁴⁴ The survey also showed that the “the respondents in the subset with more education were more likely to support the assassination tactics employed by Ansarullah Bangla Team against the noted publisher.”⁴⁵ Surprisingly, the number of women respondents supporting the militant groups was more than the percentage of male respondents. According to the survey, “47 percent of women from this [the] subset of respondents expressed support for the [militant] group’s goal to implement Sharia; only 17 percent of men took the same position. Female respondents were also more likely to support the violent means of the attack.”⁴⁶ A total of 4,067 respondents participated in that survey.⁴⁷

Fourth, in Bangladesh, there are two types of madrasahs (Islamic seminaries): Aliya (or Aaliyah, which is ‘the highest’ in Arabic) and Qawmi (the public). Aliya is run by the state and is modelled after the Calcutta Madrasa (later Calcutta Aliya Madrasa) in colonial India. The Qawmi Madrasahs are supported through private donations and are not regulated by the Bangladesh Madrasah Education Board. They are modelled after the Deoband Madrasah. Often, many of these madrasahs, especially under the latter category, come under the scanner

⁴³ Riaz, Ali, (2016) *Bangladesh: A Political History since Independence*. London: I. B. Tauris & Co Ltd, p 185.

⁴⁴ Fair, Christin & Abdallah, Wahid ‘Islamist Militancy in Bangladesh Public Awareness and Attitudes’. *RESOLVE NETWORK BRIEF NO. 4*, September 2017. https://resolvenet.org/system/files/2017-09/ RSVE_04BangladeshBrief_MilitantSupport2017.pdf. Accessed on 7 June 2018. P 11.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p 12.

⁴⁶ Ibid, p 10.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

for disseminating radical religious ideologies. In 2005, when 450 bombs were exploded in sequence, the intelligence agencies of the country identified 233 madrasahs where military training took place.⁴⁸ At the university level, Islami Chhatra Shibir⁴⁹ has its presence in both public and private universities of Bangladesh.

Fifth, most of the militant groups depend on external support for funds. In its study, the US Senate committee found that two Bangladesh-based banks, Islami Bank Bangladesh Ltd (IBBL) and Social Islami Bank Ltd (SIBL), were lenders to various terrorist activities. The report found that the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank Corporation had supplied US dollars to IBBL and SIBL. Saudi Arabia's Al Rajhi Bank was also involved in suspicious transactions. It was also found that Lajnat-al-Birr-al-Islam, also known as the Benevolence International Foundation, is a contributor to the terror-related activities.⁵⁰ In order to check such financial transactions, Bangladesh promulgated the Money Laundering Prevention Act, 2012. Under this Act, an Anti-Money Laundering Department was established in Bangladesh Bank. The Act also set up the Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit to check money laundering and other illegal financial transactions.⁵¹

Sixth, more than banks, it is the support from the charity groups which provides life to the militant organisations. This form of support is both from within and outside the country. In the past, many charity organisations, such as the Jeddah-based International Islamic Relief Organisation, Al-Haramain Islamic Foundation and the Kuwait-based Revival of Islamic Heritage Society, have funded Bangladeshi militant groups and their operations.⁵² The militant groups receive money through the hawala banking system.⁵³ This hawala system,

⁴⁸ Islam, Md Shamsul (2011), "Political Violence in Bangladesh," in Riaz, Ali & Fair, Christine C. (ed) *Fair Political Islam and Governance in Bangladesh*. Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2011, pp 27-45.

⁴⁹ It is a student organisation of the Bangladesh Jamat-e-Islami. The members of this organisation have participated in almost all violent processions carried out by the Jamat.

⁵⁰ "Islamic Banking and Terror Financing in Bangladesh", Dipanjan Roy Chaudhary, 18 October 2015. <http://defence.pk/threads/islamic-banking-and-terror-financing-in-bangladesh.208395/> on 18 October 2015. Accessed on 24 May 2016.

⁵¹ Money Laundering Prevention Act 2012. http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/bangladesh/document/papers/Money_Laundering_Prevention_Act_2012.pdf. Accessed on 31 May 2017.

⁵² Ali Riaz & Bastian Jessica (2011) "Islamist militancy in Bangladesh". In Riaz, Ali & Fair, C. Christine (ed) *Political Islam and Governance in Bangladesh*. New York: Routledge, pp 153-166.

⁵³ Cochrane, Paul, "The Funding Methods of Bangladeshi Terrorist Groups", Combating Terrorism Center, May 2009, Volume 2, Issue 5.

which does not require any form of licensing or registration, has been misused for money laundering and running financial operations by the militant groups.⁵⁴

Finally, often, the militant groups are influenced by the developments in other parts of the world. The US military activities in Afghanistan and in other countries in the Middle East are viewed as an attack on their religion. In this region, the Bangladesh military is a part of the Islamic Military Alliance. This alliance was formed in December 2015 to fight against the Islamic radicals in the Middle East.

Conclusion

Over the years, discrimination due to differences practiced by the state and society against different group resulted in the issue of alienation in Bangladesh. In some cases, this sense of alienation has been exploited by the militant groups to increase their numbers. Also, in an ethnically-polarised society like Bangladesh, individuals belonging to a minority identity group have been forced to join the militancy by self-appointed representatives of the ‘own’ group.⁵⁵

Despite Bangladesh government’s efforts to address the issue of militancy, it remains a major challenge. It has been further complicated in this age of media, and information technology and communications. Various kinds of technologies are being used by the groups to indoctrinate the youths. For example, after July 2016 attacks in Dhaka, the Bangladesh government feared that hard-line views on the channel, Peace TV, would radicalise the youths in Bangladesh.

The Bangladesh government has made some efforts to address the issue of militancy in the country. However, it needs to adopt more concerted and concrete measures instead of piecemeal efforts. Otherwise, the militancy has the potential of severely impacting the

⁵⁴ Looney, Robert, “Hawala: The Terrorist’s Informal Financial Mechanism”, *Middle East Policy Council*, Volume X, Spring 2003, Number 1. <http://www.mepc.org/journal/hawala-terrorists-informal-financial-mechanism>. Accessed on 17 April 2018.

⁵⁵ See Webb, Matthew & Wijeweera, Albert (eds.) (2015). *The Political Economy of Conflict in South Asia*. London & New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

country's socio-economic and political landscapes as well as its relationships with the neighbouring countries and the wider region.

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