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Paper*

**Terror sans Frontiers:  
Islamic Militancy in North East India**

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Program in Arms Control, Disarmament,  
and International Security

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

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# Terror sans Frontiers

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## Islamic Militancy in North East India

*Jaideep Saikia*

Ford Fellow

*With a Foreword by Lt. Gen. (Retd.) S.K. Sinha, PVSM, Governor of Jammu & Kashmir*

Program in Arms Control, Disarmament, and International Security  
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign  
July 2003



*To the memory of my father*



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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Jaideep Saikia is a security analyst from Guwahati, India. He went to school at the Rashtriya Indian Military College in Dehra Dun, India and received his BA and MA degrees from St. Stephen's College, University of Delhi. He is the author of *Contours: Essays on Security and Strategy* (Guwahati: Sagittarius Print, 2001) and *Lyrics from the Amygdala: A Collection of Poems* (Calcutta: Cambridge India, 2003), and editor of *Development Challenges in India: Assam Faces the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Delhi: Omsons Publication, 2002). Saikia has also authored over two dozen papers on ethnic and religious insurgencies in South Asia in edited academic collections and journals such as *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*; *Faultlines: Writings on Conflict and Resolution*; *Aakrosh: The Asian Journal on International Terrorism and Conflicts*; and *Border Affairs*.

The present study has been completed under the aegis of a Ford Foundation fellowship, which Saikia was awarded for the year 2003. The research on Islamic militancy in North East India was conducted at the Program in Arms Control, Disarmament, and International Security (ACDIS) at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, the findings of which are published in this *Occasional Paper*. The author can be contacted at <jaideepsaikia@rediffmail.com>.



## ABSTRACT

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The “little wars” in North East India have been waged primarily on ethnic lines, with almost every insurgent organization owing its natal charts to a distinct ethnic identity. Indeed, the various insurgent charters and assertions too have been characterized by agendas that are determined by the ethnic substratum that sired each movement.

The insurgency situation in North East India, however, is beginning to witness a unique phenomenon, which could well introduce a different order of extremism than has traditionally been known to exist. Islamic militant activities have begun to proliferate in the region with an urgency that could well have not only a motivation to usurp the separatist mantle from the ethnically based insurgent movements which have been flourishing in the region, but also with a conspiracy to further an agenda which has religious fanaticism and division as important coordinates. This conspiracy seems to be gaining ground particularly after Operation Enduring Freedom and the “detalibanization” of Afghanistan, when active remnants of al-Qaeda and the Taliban reportedly entered Bangladesh, which abuts North East India. The region is also heir to myriad subterfuges by the Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) of Pakistan and the Directorate General of Field Intelligence (DGFI) of Bangladesh, intelligence agencies that are beginning to expand their aid to North East insurgent organizations by including Islamic groups in the region. Indeed, this has been compounded by the fact that the present government in Bangladesh seems to be not only sympathetic to the separatist movements in North East India, but is also purportedly turning a blind eye to the fundamentalist engineering which is currently underway in the Islamic republic.

Matters have not helped the situation with the state of Assam in North East India having not only a sizeable Muslim population, but also a long and porous border with Bangladesh, which has a predominantly Muslim population. Indeed, the population of four geo-strategically positioned districts of Assam has become one of Muslim majority—a reported consequence of the illegal migration from erstwhile East Bengal, East Pakistan and now Bangladesh. Recent reports have also indicated that the ISI and the DGFI are reportedly encouraging the illegal influx with an eye to carving out a *Brihot Bangladesh* (Greater Bangladesh) in the region. The Islamic militant movements in the region are also finding an organized parish in the illegal migrant population whose ideology and socio-religious commitments continue to be informed by experiences from across the border, which has grown in magnitude as a result of the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA)—the most prominent, ethnic separatist movement in Assam—jettisoning the lofty ideals by which it took birth, in order to become a willing hostage of the ISI and the events and factors which are in play in Bangladesh and in the neighborhood.



## FOREWORD

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I first met Jaideep Saikia in 1997, on taking over as the Governor of Assam, and was struck by his understanding of the problems connected with the ongoing militancy in his home state of Assam, which was at its peak at that time. I immediately decided to utilize his services in formulation and implementing policies to counter the militancy that was raging. Over and above his primary duties, Jaideep would go out on patrols and operations with the Army, to get a feel of the counter-insurgency operations on the ground. He also frequently wrote on security matters, as also prepared documentaries, organized national level seminars, etc.—these measures helped in bringing about an attitudinal change among the people of Assam. This became a shining example of winning the hearts and minds of the people and thereby isolating the militants. Thus we managed to win the battle of insurgency despite the sanctuaries available to the militant cadres across porous borders with both Bhutan and Bangladesh, where they remained beyond the reach of our security forces. Jaideep was also assigned to study the militancy in Jammu and Kashmir, and participate in security conferences in various places in India and abroad. Currently, he is in the United States as a Ford Fellow at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

This very well researched monograph by the author deals with Islamic militancy in North East India. This needs to be studied in the context of a continuing demographic influx with communal overtones taking place in the region and the long-standing design of merging Assam with Bangladesh.

The unabated influx of illegal migrants from Bangladesh poses a serious national problem for India. The Union Home Minister of India stated in the Parliament on 6 May 1997 that there were over ten million Bangladeshi illegal migrants in the country. It was estimated that over four million of these had come into Assam and the others had gone to the remaining states of the country. So far as Assam is concerned, almost one hundred percent of these immigrants happen to be Muslims. In the absence of effective measures to check this influx, the number of illegal migrants may now have increased substantially from the figures given out in 1997.

Communal politics started in the Indian sub-continent in the early years of the twentieth century with the formation of the All India Muslim League at Dhaka. A demand was made for Bange-Islam, merging Bengal and Assam. This was well before starting a movement for Pakistan in the West. While Bengal was a Muslim majority province, Assam was a marginally Hindu majority province. The population of undivided Bengal was about ten times more than that of Assam. The merger of these two provinces would have meant Assam getting engulfed by Bengal and the entire region becoming a large Islamic bloc. Lord Curzon, the then Viceroy of India, following the Imperial policy of Divide and Rule, announced the Partition of Bengal on communal lines in 1905. This led to the start of a widespread national movement, which became the starting point of our political struggle for freedom. In 1911, the British Government yielded and annulled the Partition of Bengal. Apart from communal politics having its beginnings in this region, violence as an instrument of politics also started in this part of the country. Jinnah's Direct Action Day ignited the Great Calcutta Killings of 1946 followed by the massacres and atrocities in Noakhali. This was the beginning of the Partition holocaust resulting in millions getting killed and millions forced to flee their homes.

The influx of population from North Bengal into Assam started from the nineteenth century. The hard-working Bengali Muslim peasant contributed to reclaiming virgin land and putting it to the plough, thereby increasing food production in Assam. This helped in the economic development of the region. However, this influx started becoming a torrent and the British Census Superintendent of Assam in the 1931 census report for Assam compared it to an invasion by an army of ants. He expressed grave concern about the indigenous population getting engulfed by the land hungry peasants from North Bengal. With the introduction of provincial autonomy under the Government of India Act of 1935, this large-scale movement of population got linked to political considerations. Assam alternated between Congress and Muslim League governments. During the Muslim League government of Sir Mohammad Saadullah in Assam, a concerted effort was made to encourage the migration of Bengali Muslims by settling them on government land on the plea of helping in the "Grow more food" campaign. The cabinet Mission Plan of 1946 had provided for three groups, one each for Hindu and Muslim majority provinces and the third group comprising Muslim majority Bengal and Hindu majority Assam. Both the Congress and the Muslim League accepted the Grouping Plan but the leader of the Congress party in Assam, Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi, raised the standard of revolt. He rightly perceived that this grouping would lead to Assam becoming a part of East Pakistan. Mahatma Gandhi supported Bordoloi and the Grouping

Plan got shelved. Frustrated in the design to incorporate Assam into East Pakistan, Pakistanis and now Bangladeshis continued to nourish hopes of somehow acquiring Assam. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in his book *Myth of Independence* wrote, "It would be wrong to think that Kashmir is the only dispute that divides India and Pakistan. One at least is nearly as important as the Kashmir dispute, that of Assam and some districts of India adjacent to East Pakistan. To these Pakistan has very good claims." Even Sheikh Mujib-ur-Rahman before the formation of Bangladesh in his book *Eastern Pakistan: Its Population and Economics* wrote, "Because Eastern Pakistan must have sufficient land for its expansion and because Assam has abundant forests and mineral resources, coal, petroleum, etc., Eastern Pakistan must include Assam to be financially and economically strong." At seminars in Bangladesh and in the writings of intellectuals in that country, a case is often made for free movement of labor along with goods across international borders as part of the globalization process.

It is unfortunate that the problem of illegal migration from East Pakistan, and now Bangladesh, has not been tackled by India in an effective manner. For considerations of vote bank politics, some political parties have been encouraging this influx. B.K. Nehru, a cousin of Indira Gandhi, who was Governor of Assam in the late sixties wrote, "The East Bengal Muslim was the main vote bank of the Congress party in Assam. Chaliha (then Chief Minister of Assam) doing as he did from the days of the freedom struggle, was governed by the value of that time. He placed the national interest above those of the party. But the High Command thought otherwise. The party interests were paramount. Chaliha was ordered to stop the nonsense forthwith. This was of course welcomed by the Government of Pakistan. It had always pretended, as Bangladesh does now, that there is no migration from its territory to Assam. In this statement there is as much truth as there is in Pakistani denial about its direct involvement in Kashmir."

The Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act passed by the Indian parliament during the Congress regime in 1984, not only provides Indian citizenship to illegal migrants from Bangladesh who infiltrated into Assam from 1947 to 25 March 1971, but also facilitates further such illegal migration. This act applies only to Assam and not the rest of the country, which is governed by the Foreigner's Act, in line with similar provision in other countries of the world. In the case of the IM (DT) Act, the onus of proof is on the state to prove that an individual is not an Indian citizen, whereas in the case of the Foreigner's Act, it is for the concerned individual to provide proof of his Indian citizenship. To enable the Police to initiate action against a suspected illegal migrant, a report has to be filed by at least two citizens residing in the area of the same Police Station as the alleged migrant and a sum of Rs. 10 deposited with the report. Unlike in the case of the Foreigner's Act, the Police do not have any powers of search and arrests. Even after conviction by a lower tribunal, an illegal migrant is allowed a grace period of thirty days for filing an appeal before the higher tribunal during which he cannot be arrested. Thus, there is ample scope at different stages for an illegal migrant to vanish or get lost. No wonder the IM (DT) Act, on the plea of safeguarding the minorities from harassment, has become a great facilitator of illegal migration. Since 1983, 300,000 cases were initiated under this act and only 1,500 ended in deportation.

Lt. Gen. Jameel Mahmood, the then GOC-in-C, Eastern Command told me in 1992 that unabated illegal migration from Bangladesh into Assam and Bengal had been posing a serious problem for our national security. He said that he had repeatedly spoken to the CPI (M) Chief Minister in West Bengal and the Congress Chief Minister of Assam, that unless they took special measures to prevent this, the map of India in this region may have to be redrawn. I later found that he had also stressed this point in the Civil-Military Conference on 12-13 February 1993 and had sent his views on this issue to the Army Headquarters under his letter No. 103610/GS (I) Adm/CMLT of 3 March 1993.

As Governor of Assam in 1998, I submitted a comprehensive report to the President of India on illegal migration from Bangladesh, in which among other recommendations, I urged the repeal of the IM (DT) Act. This was welcomed by the bulk of the people of Assam including some eminent Assamese Muslims like the highly respected, octogenarian, Prof. Asghar Ali, former Principal of Cotton College, Guwahati and former Director of Public Instruction of Assam. However, most of the minorities and political parties pursuing vote bank tactics were up in arms against me. The National Democratic Alliance government in the Centre was in agreement with my views and even included this point in the President's address to the Parliament in 2000. However, the political arithmetic in the Parliament did not permit the repeal of this act. Public interest litigation on this issue has remained stuck for years with the Supreme Court. As things stand, neither political nor legal remedy is in sight, while the influx of illegal migrants continues unabated.

The ULFA movement in Assam began on the basis of an anti-foreigner stance directed against immigrants from Bangladesh. Over the years, ULFA abandoned its ideology, bartering it away for support from Bangladesh and the ISI of Pakistan. Their anti-foreigner ideology has now got converted to an anti-outsider stand against non-Assamese Indians. This has been one of the contributory factors for the ULFA losing support.

We also need to take note of the developments that have been taking place in East Pakistan and now Bangladesh. In 1947, Hindus constituted 27 percent of the population of East Pakistan, which got reduced to 14 percent by 1991 and is now less than 10 percent. The plight of the minority community has been vividly brought out by Taslima Nasreen in her book *Lajja*. She has incurred the wrath of the fundamentalists and stands banished from her home country. There was some hope that under Sheikh Mujib-ur-Rahman, Bangladesh would emerge as a secular state. Those hopes got lost with his assassination and assertion of power by fundamentalist elements. A formal declaration during the rule of Ershad made Bangladesh an Islamic Republic. Pro-Pakistani elements that had been against the Mujib-led freedom movement are now in seats of power in Bangladesh. During the five-year rule of Sheikh Hasina, the daughter of Mujib-ur-Rahman, the extremist outlook or anti-India sentiment had mellowed down a little. With her defeat, things have come back to square one. There was a spurt in atrocities directed against Hindus during elections in 2001 and after. It is unfortunate that in spite of India's role in liberating Bangladesh in 1971 or India accommodating Bangladesh on the use of the Ganges water, by signing the Farakka agreement and settlement of the Chittagong Hill Tract controversy, there has been no reciprocation from Bangladesh. On the other hand, the genocide and atrocities by Pakistan during the Bangladesh war seem to have been forgotten. People in Bangladesh do not now appear to remember the mass killings of Bangladeshi intellectuals in Dhaka by the Pakistan army. This genocide was enacted to destroy the guiding hands behind the freedom struggle. Islamic fundamentalism and the urge for establishing Islamic rule have become all powerful influences in Bangladesh.

Islam is a religion of peace but some misguided Muslims have been distorting all the canons of this great religion. Global Islamic terrorism is a negation of the high values of Islam. After the attack on the Twin Towers in New York on 11 September 2001, the world realized the danger it poses to civilized society. India has been combating the menace of terrorism for a long time. It must be appreciated that only a small fraction of Muslims are terrorists and the vast majority are peace loving and respect human values. Yet it is an unfortunate and undisputed fact that most terrorists in the world are Muslims. India is a country with the second largest Muslim population in the world and has suffered most from Islamic terrorism.

By highlighting the activities of fundamentalist elements in the North East, Jaideep has done well to focus attention to the grave threat it poses to our national security. The geo-strategic importance of Assam in the North East is very significant. Today western Assam in the district of Dhubri has over 70 percent Muslim population, who are mostly Bangladeshis. Dhubri, adjacent to the tenuous Siliguri corridor, is of vital importance, as its loss will snap the only land-link between the entire North Eastern land mass and the rest of the country. It is imperative that we as a nation take effective measures to stop the large-scale demographic influx from Bangladesh and do not ignore the lingering urge for *Brihot Bangladesh* (Greater Bangladesh). Our large Muslim population needs to take up cudgels against the misguided jihadis. Both the central and the state government must go all out to stop the demographic influx in the North East. Our decision makers must effectively deal with the illegal migrants, the fundamentalists and the terrorists, whose shadow looms large over North East India and threatens our national integrity. Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty.

Raj Bhawan  
Srinagar

LT. GEN. (RETD.) S.K. SINHA, PVSM  
Governor of Jammu & Kashmir





## EDITOR'S NOTE

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It has been a pleasure to work with Jaideep Saikia in transforming his manuscript into a published monograph, and I am honored that he has asked me to write this editor's note. The journey to this completed ACDIS *Occasional Paper* was arduous but rewarding, one that involved the participation in some form of many individuals. It was characterized, however, especially by the author's dedicated commitment to his project over the course of six months here at the University of Illinois. On several occasions I witnessed him burning the midnight oil or laboring on weekends when the pleasant summer weather no doubt beckoned him to partake of more leisurely activities.

Noted French author André Gide explained, "To read a writer is for me not merely to get an idea of what he says, but to go off with him and travel in his company." While working closely with Jaideep, certainly I have traveled with the author in a literal sense—to destinations ranging from Washington, D.C. to Chicago to "Amish country" in the corn and soybean fields of East Central Illinois. However, I have also traveled with him figuratively to his native land, acquiring newfound knowledge of the region of North East India—its customs, its languages (including expanding my meager Hindi vocabulary), and particularly through efforts on this manuscript, its complex ethnic, religious, political, and social problems. At the same time—and this meaning, no doubt, Gide also intended—I have had the privilege to learn about the personality, psychology, and emotions of a remarkable human being with a very different background and set of experiences from my own.

The author and I encountered numerous examples of linguistic and cultural differences that indicated why it was imperative to have some measure of collaboration on the present work. There were too many to mention all of them, so I include a few anecdotal instances here for illustration. Thus, for example, while an Assamese would bring his tiffin to the office, an American would carry his lunchbox. An Indian might "turn a Nelson's eye" to a problem, but stateside that same eye would be blind. Whereas in Guwahati one counts in lakhs, in Urbana-Champaign the same measure is taken in hundreds of thousands. In other words, there was no shortage of opportunities for us to compare the nuances of "British"—or more specifically Indian—English versus American English diction, spelling, and grammar. Saikia conscientiously strove to tailor his material to an American readership, with the Chicago Manual of Style and my input at his disposal. He considered questions like how best to include the quotations of texts not written by native speakers of English, such as when he quotes the published aims and objectives of the United Liberation Front of Asom or provides excerpts of Assamese newspaper accounts. We have presented such quotations verbatim in this *Occasional Paper*, unless otherwise noted.

While poring over the minute details of the manuscript copy, we have also had occasion to discuss the history and geography of the region of South Asia, and the unique situation—past and present—of North East India. At times during our discussions of drafts (both in tête-à-tête meetings and through communications scribbled in the margins of dog-eared typescript pages), I have challenged Jaideep's interpretations of the facts or even badgered him about the credibility and accuracy of certain sources. This interaction, in my opinion, represents the humble contribution of the editorial process to an author's work, and not—as a less thick-skinned writer might have been inclined to conclude—any perceived measure of the work's merit or earnestness. Saikia deferred to my "vitriolic red pen" and manic insistence on citing references with a healthy mixture of seriousness and good humor. I have tried to apply my own perception as to the role of the editor, believing that my place is neither to censor what has been written, nor to prescribe how or what an author writes about a given subject. Rather, I see it as the editor's responsibility to lend an ear to the author and also, as it were, a third eye. I hope and believe that Jaideep views me neither as a taskmaster nor as a nuisance, but as a colleague on level footing—disparate backgrounds, differing approaches to problems, and of course the necessity for observing deadlines aside.

In reading and re-reading multiple drafts of the present work, I have been impressed by the author's strong convictions, but no less so by what I detect as the subtle expression of vulnerability. The writing is informed by experience more in the front-line security milieu than the secluded ivory tower. It reflects the concerns of someone who—like the rest of us—has the images of the jets crashing into the Twin Towers and the aftermath at "Ground Zero" permanently embedded in his memory. When Saikia surveys the current situation in his homeland of Assam, and indeed the rest of the world, he grimly but boldly reaches the conclusion that we face the reality of terror sans frontiers. Having a world where borders are not necessary is undoubtedly too much to

wish for in the foreseeable future. At the least, then, one hopes that through attempts like this *Occasional Paper* to analyze both the scenarios that breed violence out of differences and the manifestations of that violence, humanity can achieve conditions where it is possible to have frontiers sans terror.

Champaign, July 2003

MATTHEW A. ROSENSTEIN, PH.D.  
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The author wishes to thank Lt Gen. (Retd) S.K. Sinha, Governor of Jammu & Kashmir for his gracious foreword—one which he wrote despite his extraordinary commitments in Srinagar, Jammu and New Delhi; Prof. Clifford Singer for not only making the present research possible but also for his constant encouragement; Dr. Matt Rosenstein for painstakingly perusing the many drafts and dotting the i's and crossing the t's and in the end of it all writing a detailed editor's note—indeed, but for him the *Occasional Paper* would not have seen the light of day; Becky Osgood for graciously—and with her all-weather pleasing personality—preparing the edited version for final publication; George Sibley, US Consul General in Calcutta and Alison Moylan of the United States Department of State for ascertaining that the author did not leave the United States without completing his research; R.N. Mathur, A.B. Mathur, and Khagen Sarma of the Indian Police Service for their valuable feedback about the situation in Assam and the region; Bertil Lintner, Subir Bhaumik, and Taj Hashmi for making available their academic papers on Bangladesh, and Bertil for the exclusive interview he gave; Lt. Col. Dwight Roblyer, USAF for being more than a next room neighbor at the Armory where the research was conducted; Sheila Roberts, Jessica Moyer, and Brandon Kuehl for making the author's stay in Champaign-Urbana a very memorable one; Prof. Stephen P. Cohen, Dr. Bruce Hoffman, Pradyut Bordoloi, J.P. Saikia, Subhash Das, and Dinesh Deka for their kindness; and finally thanks are due to the author's mother, Pranati Saikia, for bearing his absence from their home with fortitude.

The author also wishes to thank the numerous sources that have provided him classified documents and information during his research. As they wish to stay anonymous, the author is not at liberty to express his gratefulness by name.



## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

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AASU: All Assam Students' Union  
AGP: Asom Gana Parishad  
ARNO: Arakan Rohingya National Organization  
ATTF: All Tripura Tiger Force  
BIM: Bangladesh Islamic Manch  
BJP: Bharatiya Janata Party  
BNP: Bangladesh National Party  
BSF: Border Security Force  
CHT: Chittagong Hill Tracts  
DGFI: Directorate General of Field Intelligence  
FEER: Far Eastern Economic Review  
HUJI-B: Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami of Bangladesh  
HuM: Harkat-ul-Mujahideen  
ICS: Islamic Chatra Shibir  
ILA: Islamic Liberation Army  
ILAA: Independent Liberation Army of Assam  
IM (DT): Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals)  
IOJ: Islamic Oikyo Jote  
ISFI: Islamic Security Force of India  
ISI: Inter Services Intelligence  
ISS: Islamic Sevak Sangh  
JEI: Jamaat-e-Islami  
JIC: Joint Intelligence Committee  
JKLF: Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front  
JUUEH: Jamaat-ul-Ulema-e-Hind  
LITF: Liberation Islamic Tiger Force  
LTTE: Liberation of Tamil Tigers of Elam  
MFO: Muslim Fundamentalist Organization  
MLTA: Muslim Liberation Tigers of Assam  
MULFA: Muslim United Liberation Front of Assam  
MULTA: Muslim United Liberation Tigers of Assam  
MVF: Muslim Volunteer Force  
NDA: National Democratic Alliance  
NDFB: National Democratic Front of Bodoland

NSCN: National Socialist Council of Nagalim

NWFP: North West Frontier Province

OIC: Organization of Islamic Countries

ORBAT: Order of Battle

PLA: People's Liberation Army (Manipur)

PoK: Pakistan-occupied Kashmir

POTA: Prevention of Terrorist Act

PS: Police Station

PULF: People's United Liberation Front

PVSM: Param Vashisht Seva Medal

RAW: Research & Analysis Wing

RSS: Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh

SIMI: Students' Islamic Movement of India

SIO: Students' Islamic Organization

ULFA: United Liberation Front of Asom

UNPO: Unrepresented Nations and People's Organization

URPA: United Reformation Protest of Assam

USRA: United Social Reform Army

VDP: Village Defense Party

## PROLOGUE

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*On the southeast of this country [Assam] herds of wild elephants roam about in numbers, therefore in this district they use them principally for war. Going 1,200 or 1,300 li (about 20 miles) to the south we come to Samatata [present day Bangladesh].*

Hiuen Tsang (Chinese traveler to medieval Assam in 643 AD)<sup>1</sup>

North East India has been witness to a range of ethnic insurgencies since India's independence in 1947. Whether it has been the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (NSCN),<sup>2</sup> the All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF)<sup>3</sup> or the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB),<sup>4</sup> ethnic components of the region have sought to wage "little wars" in order to assert their various identities. Indeed, even a cursory look at some of the insurgent charters will determine the genesis of most of these "little wars" to be ethnic assertion.

Pre-and post-independent India's history has geo-located North East India as a region of immense significance in South Asia. Indeed, according to this author, the region can be considered the epicenter of South Asia, with not only a "strategic encirclement"<sup>5</sup> by other nations, but also by an ethnic and religious mix that has active cross-border linkages. As a matter of detail, the region's bill of health is to a significant extent determined by the surrounding nations, with even the ethnic insurgencies owing their natal allegiance to trans-border affiliations. While the structures of *Nagalim* (Greater Nagaland) and *Swadhin Asom* (Independent Assam) were initially carved out in Mytkyina and thereabouts in present-day Myanmar, the fortunes of organizations like the ATTF and the NDFB rest on places such as Tarabon in Bangladesh and Sandrup Jongkhar in Bhutan. Indeed, "as the crow flies the region is closer to Hanoi than to New Delhi,"<sup>6</sup> and determinedly—despite the best efforts to reiterate and establish ancient commercial and emotional linkages with the Indian heartland—North East India continues to be defined by the "strategic encirclement" to which it is heir.

"Strategic encirclement" has provided North East India with not only a staging ground for the ethnic insurgencies that abound in the region but—as would be inevitable—characteristics that are unique to the areas in which the insurgencies first began to foment themselves. In particular, while the NSCN's modes of operation have a distinct Kachin flavor to them, the *Prachar Patras* (publicity material) of the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA)<sup>7</sup> has—despite the inherent contradiction<sup>8</sup>—begun to address illegal immigrants from Bangladesh as "people of Assam of East Bengal origin" and have sought to justify the role of the migrants by stating that "all the laboring masses are our friends and the main motive force of our freedom struggle."<sup>9</sup> While it seems that the grant of safe havens by Bangladesh to the leaders of the ULFA<sup>10</sup> has been an important factor in its turnaround, the demographic compulsion that presently grips Assam too has forced the ULFA to reconsider the proud aims by which it was sired. Indeed, this contradiction in ideology that is being witnessed in the ULFA (which is one of the strongest ethnic separatist movements in Independent India) is a signature of the primary phenomenon of abdication of ethnic ideologies that seems to be gaining ground in the region.

The eleventh day of September 2001 irrevocably altered the security scenario in North East India. The proponents of left-wing insurgency (which eggs on most of the ethnic-separatist assertions in the region) will have to either redefine their agendas in order to cross swords with the "eastward surge of the jihadi"<sup>11</sup> or, as has been seen to be the case with the Maoists of Nepal, break bread with constituents that sustain religious extremism. In India's eastern seaboard—the areas that abut North East India—1971 was a turning point. The two-nation theory of the 1940s and the one that brought about the dismemberment of India was found to be fallacious; and it seemed that culture had over-ridden religious concerns which had governed the balkanization of united India and the grouping of East Bengal to Pakistan. However, fanatical elements in the newfound nation began a course of action that was less culturally zealous than the concerns that had led to the severance of Pakistan.

In today's Bangladesh, the Bangladesh National Party of Khaleda Zia is in power with a four party alliance, together with the Jamaat-e-Islami, Islamic Oikyo Jote, and the Jatiyo Party (M). The political arithmetic has brought Bangladesh to what can be termed as a furtherance of the Islamic agenda.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, reports have also indicated the formation of a Freedom Party that has *rajakars*<sup>13</sup> as important constituents. The slogan *Amra hobo*

*Taliban, Bangla hobe Afghan* (we will be the Taliban, Bangladesh will become Afghanistan) has been carried into rural Bangladesh. The growing Islamization of Bangladesh has direct consequences for the secular space of North East India that it strategically borders, and characterizes an atmosphere that is ripe for the growth of Islamic militant activities in the region. This growth has become more of a possibility as a result of the demographic changes that are occurring in the region as a result of the mass movement of people from Bangladesh. Recent reports have indicated the formation of “cells” inside Assam by the ISI,<sup>14</sup> wherein ten to twenty persons (owing affinity to the illegal migrants from Bangladesh) are grouped to form “modules” that are equipped with money, ideology, and arms. Intelligence reports state that such “modules” are designed to act as “sleepers” in order to be activated at some future moment for terrorist activity, or even religious riots. The enormity of the problem, moreover—and again according to intelligence reports—has given rise to new social formations such as the *Sema-Miyas* (progeny of the Sema Naga tribe of Nagaland who are wed to Bangladeshi migrants).

As an interesting aside, it is noteworthy to mention the checkered history of North East India that has known movements of people from a variety of regions. Whereas the rulers of medieval Assam—the Ahoms—came from across the Patkoi mountain range and the Irrawady River from the Shan states, the forebears of the present caste Hindus came from Kanauj in the Indian mainland. It will be of interest to note that Assam’s social mosaic has a mix which includes Muslims who had accompanied not only the invasions of the region by the Mughals, but also additional Muslims who were imported as painters, artisans and architects by the Ahom rulers. Indeed, the state has known two chief executives who were Muslims.<sup>15</sup> Socio-cultural affinities used to override religious considerations. The secular space of the present, however, has been compromised in light of the developments that are beginning to take place, and with the illegal migrants positioning themselves as a majority in four geo-strategic districts of Assam. Moreover, although the indigenous Muslims of Assam continue to remain loyal to the secular fabric of the region, the *agent provocateurs* among the illegal migrants from Bangladesh with active aid from the ISI and DGFI could engineer situations that could adversely affect communal harmony in the region.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> As cited in Sir Edward Gait, *A History of Assam*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Guwahati, India: Lawyer’s Book Stall, 1992). Although this book, quoted verbatim here, explains that 1,300 *li* equate to approximately twenty miles, available conversion charts would seem to indicate that 1,300 *li* actually translates into roughly four hundred miles.

<sup>2</sup> The NSCN—with its two factions, Isaac-Muivah and Khaplang—is the primary Naga separatist organization in the state of Nagaland in North East India. Both factions have now ceased hostilities and are presently engaged in protracted negotiations with the government of India.

<sup>3</sup> The ATTF is the primary ethnic separatist organization based out of the erstwhile princely state of Tripura that was included in the Indian Union after the country’s independence. Tripura is also the state whose original ethnic population has been reduced to a minority as a result of mass exodus from what was initially East Bengal, then East Pakistan, and now Bangladesh. The aboriginal Tripuri population constitutes only about 33 percent of the state’s total population today.

<sup>4</sup> The NDFB is an important separatist organization in Assam that is seeking to carve out an independent state for the Bodo plain tribal people of the state.

<sup>5</sup> North East India is strategically bordered by Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, and Myanmar. Along with Nepal—situated slightly afield near the Siliguri corridor—five nations “encircle” the region, making it the only region in South Asia to be so situated.

<sup>6</sup> Sanjoy Hazarika, *Strangers of the Mist: Tales of War and Peace from India’s Northeast* (New Delhi: Penguin India, 1994).

<sup>7</sup> The ULFA is the primary separatist organization in Assam.

<sup>8</sup> The ULFA was the spawn of the Assam agitation against illegal migrants from Bangladesh. It rose to prominence as the militant manifestation of the movement.

<sup>9</sup> The phrase “illegal migrant” is used in this *Occasional Paper* as an operational definition. One encounters the term on a regular basis in India. A more detailed explication of the phrase as it pertains to the Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act follows in Chapter One in the sub-section entitled “The IM (DT) Act.”

<sup>10</sup> Most of the important ULFA leaders—including the Chairman, the Chief of Staff, the Foreign Secretary (the General Secretary of the organization is incarcerated in the country), et al. are based out of Dhaka and Chittagong in Bangladesh. The Prime Minister of Bangladesh has also gone on record in calling the ULFA “freedom fighters.”

<sup>11</sup> The de-talibanization of Afghanistan has resulted in the entry of both the Taliban and al-Qaeda elements into India via Pakistan. The attack on the Indian parliament in December 2001 and the US Information Service (USIS) in Calcutta in January 2002 by the Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT) and the Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami-Bangladesh (HUJI-B) respectively are being



seen as signal manifestations of the “eastward surge.” There is, however, some debate about the Calcutta attack, with US officials attributing it to miscreants seeking “revenge” on the policemen on duty in front of the USIS.

<sup>12</sup> According to Alex Perry of *Time* magazine, the Foreign Minister of Bangladesh has stated that it was better to have the fundamentalist groups inside the government, looking out. See “Deadly Cargo,” *Time Asia*, 21 October 2002.

<sup>13</sup> *Rajakars* is a term used to denote Pakistani loyalists, especially during the Indo-Pak War of 1971.

<sup>14</sup> The Inter Services Intelligence of Pakistan has been operating in North East India since the 1960s. For a full exposition of the history of the intelligence agency’s operations in the region see, Jaideep Saikia, “The ISI reaches East: Anatomy of a Conspiracy,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 25, no. 3 (May-June 2002): 185-197.

<sup>15</sup> Md. Saadullah was Premier (as he was known then) for a tenure first between 1 April 1937 and 4 February 1938. He was at that time a member of the Muslim Party and headed a coalition ministry that came into being after the 1935 Government of India Act. His second tenure as Premier began on 5 February 1938 and continued until 18 September 1938. He once again headed a coalition ministry—only this time around, he had joined the Muslim League. Syeda Anwara Taimur was the Chief Minister of Assam between 6 December 1980 and 28 June 1981. She headed a Congress (I) ministry during the Assam agitation years.



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CHAPTER ONE  
The Crescent Waxes Eastward

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*As for the Musalmans who had been taken prisoner in former times and had chosen to marry here, their descendants act exactly in the manner of the Assamese, and have nothing of Islam except the name; their hearts are inclined far more towards mingling with the Assamese than towards association with Muslims...*

As chronicled by Shihabuddin, who accompanied Mir Jumla in his invasion of Assam in 1662—quoted in “A History of Assam,” by Sir Edward Gait

### **Gait’s Description of Assam**

A description of Assam and the history of its ever-changing landscape are best introduced—for the purpose of this *Occasional Paper*—by a western observer, Sir Edward Gait (1863-1950) who served in Assam as a British member of the Indian Civil Service and penned his history of Assam in 1905.

...Assam is in many ways a country of exceptional interest. Hemmed in, as India is, by the sea on the southeast and southwest, and by the lofty chain of the Himalayas in the north, the only routes between it and the rest of Asia, which are practicable for migration on a large scale, lie on its northwest and northeast confines. The so-called Aryans, and many later invaders, such as the Greeks, the Huns, the Pathans, and the Mughals, entered India from the north-west while from the northeast, through Assam, have come successive hordes of immigrants from the great hive of the Mongolian race in Western China...

...Prior to the advent of the Muhammadans the inhabitants of other parts of India had no idea of history; and our knowledge of them is limited to what can be laboriously pieced together from old inscriptions, the accounts of foreign invaders or travelers, and incidental references in religious writings...

...Another claim to notice is supplied by the circumstances that Assam was one of the few countries in India whose inhabitants beat back the tide of Mughal conquest and maintained their independence in the face of repeated attempts to subvert it...<sup>1</sup>

### **Muslims in Assam**

Historical accounts date the presence of Muslims in Assam to about 1198 AD and thereabouts,<sup>2</sup> when Bakhtiyar Khilji defeated Lakhshmaniya<sup>3</sup> and soon embarked on a “filibustering expedition to the north.”<sup>4</sup> Indeed, historical records are replete with mentions of Muslim invasions of Assam and the “seven and a half century”<sup>5</sup> history in which the legacy of Muslims in Assam is steeped.

Edward Gait seems to regard the Muslims in Assam as unfit for any significant professional qualification. He writes thus:

The Muhammadans who were taken prisoner in this war [April 1532, when Turbak with thirty elephants, one thousand horses, and a large park of artillery, as well as a great number of foot soldiers, invaded Assam] were settled in different parts of the country. Tradition says that they at first were ordered to cut grass for the king’s elephants, but were found quite unfit for this work. They were next employed as cultivators, but their ignorance of agriculture was so great that they carried mud to the paddy seedlings instead of ploughing land and planting the seedlings in it. They were then left to their own devices, and took to working in brass, an occupation that their descendants, who are known as Morias, carry on to this day.<sup>6</sup>

In contrast to Gait’s assertions, the Ahoms who ruled over Assam for over six hundred years<sup>7</sup> and during whose rule most of the Muslim invasions took place, seemed to have invited Muslim professionals from Bengal to undertake architectural and other such projects.<sup>8</sup> According to M. Kar, the Ahoms “encouraged men from other parts of the country to settle in Assam, provided their introduction was of advantage to her. They included artisans, draftsmen, weavers, accountants, scholars and saints, both Hindus and Muslims.”<sup>9</sup> And, although it

would seem that Kar's version<sup>10</sup> is contrary to Gait's version of the usefulness of the Muslims in their new found home, the documentation is clear about the fact that Muslims in Assam found a place of pride in the Ahom kingdom. Kar writes:

Many Muslims were appointed in the several departments of the state for deciphering and interpreting of Persian documents, carving inscriptions on copper plates and other metals, minting of coins, embroidery work, painting, carpentry, sword and gun making, manufacture of gun powder, tailoring and weaving. As useful members of the community they were recognized by the Ahoms as citizens but of a lower status. No outsider could aspire to rise high in the Ahom court. The Ahoms allowed the Muslims to follow their own faith. Some of the Muslim religious leaders known as Dewans were granted revenue free lands generally called pirpal lands, to settle on. Thus, long before the beginning of the modern history of Assam, Muslims had formed a permanent part of Assam's society though their number cannot be determined.<sup>11</sup>

Therefore, while it is not a matter of any speculation that the Muslims were an integral part of the Assamese society long before the British began to administer the region, historians seem to have made a distinction between the Muslims who came into Assam during the course of the various invasions and settled in the region—adopting the socio-cultural predominance that the region was heir to—and the “modern Muslim immigrants” who made their way into the Brahmaputra and the Barak Valleys.<sup>12</sup> And, in all fairness, it must be recorded that the indigenous Muslims of Assam have far more in common with her Hindu counterparts than Muslims from elsewhere. Moreover, subterfuges that have had religion as an important factor have not in any manner compromised the age-old bonhomie that continues to exist between the Assamese of all walks of life.

### **Illegal Migration into Assam**

Indeed, it was only during the early twentieth century that movements from districts in Bengal such as Mymensingh, Pabna, Bogra, and Rangpur began to assume the dimensions of large-scale influx that eventually was to become a matter of great socio-economic controversy affecting almost every aspect of Assam's existence. A British Census Superintendent wrote the following account in 1931:

Probably the most important event in the province during the last twenty five years—an event, moreover, which seems likely to alter permanently the whole future of Assam and to destroy more sure than did the Burmese invaders of 1829, the whole structure of Assamese culture and civilization—has been the invasion of a vast horde of land hungry Bengali immigrants; mostly Muslims, from the districts of Eastern Bengal sometime before 1911 and the census report of that is the first report which makes mention of the advancing host. But as we now know, the Bengali immigrants censused for the first time on their char islands of Goalpara in 1921 were merely the advance guard—or rather the scouts—of a huge army following closely at their heels. By 1921 the first army corps had passed into Assam and had practically conquered the district of Goalpara... Where there is wasteland thither flock the Mymensinghians. In fact, the way in which they have seized upon the vacant areas in the Assam valley seems almost uncanny. Without fuss, without tumult, without undue trouble to the district revenue staffs, a population which must amount to over half a million has transplanted itself from Bengal into the Assam valley during the last twenty five years. It looks like a marvel of administrative organization on the part of the government but it is nothing of the sort; the only thing I can compare it to is the mass movement of a large body of ants... it is sad but by no means improbable that in another thirty years Sibsagar district will be the only part of Assam in which an Assamese will find himself at home.<sup>13</sup>

According to M. Kar, the total Muslim immigrant population in 1911 was 258,000 in the plains and 6,000 in the hills.<sup>14</sup> The historian has written about the growth in Muslim population in Assam in the early nineties in a telling manner:

The number of Muslims in Assam, except Sylhet, had risen from 503,670 in 1901 to 1,279,388 in 1931; thus in thirty years, the increase was more than one hundred and fifty percent, which, of course, included natural growth of population. Of the total, about half were women and children. The total number of Muslims in the Brahmaputra Valley in 1941 was 1,696,978 against the total Hindu population of 3,222,377. The bulk of them constituted more than fifty percent of the number of Hindus and were clearly immigrant Muslims.<sup>15</sup>

A plethora of literature exists about the immigration of Muslims into Assam and the demographic changes that the ingress entailed for Assam. Many contemporary writings have even sought to politicize the issue by seeking to blame both the British and the Congress Party for the problem. Whereas some historians<sup>16</sup> have sought to accuse British administrators of the ilk of Sir Charles Elliot, Chief Commissioner of Assam from 1881 to 1885, for first alluding to the availability of large areas of untouched alluvial land into which peasants from Bihar and Bengal could be settled, the Congress Party has been pilloried for encouraging the influx for the political leverage which it purportedly provided the party. Indeed, present day analysis seems to hold that the Congress Party has largely been to blame for the enactment and sustenance of the controversial Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunal)—IM (DT)—Act of 1983, which certain observers feel is responsible for the continuing influx of illegal migrants from Bangladesh. This perception is of course also due to the fact that parties that have sought to raise the banner of protest against the illegal influx have been traditional foes of the Congress. Indeed, in the last elections to the Assam Legislative Assembly in 2001, the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP)<sup>17</sup> allied itself with the Bharatiya Janata Party, which is in power in New Delhi. This led to a polarization of the communities in Assam, and even the traditional Muslim votes of the AGP shuffled to the Congress Party, which eventually won the 2001 elections. However, one aspect that underwent a metamorphosis of sorts was that the nomenclature “Bengali Muslim” came to be increasingly interchangeably used with “illegal migrant.” Writing about the British policy almost a century later, the noted social scientist Sanjib Baruah writes thus:

Immigration to Assam thus began as a consequence of the colonial conquest. Once Assam became a part of British India, it came to be perceived as a part of the (pre-partition) pan-Indian economic space. Colonial policymakers saw Assam as a land frontier that needed more settlers and actively pursued policies to encourage immigration.<sup>18</sup>

A bit later in his text, Baruah comments:

In retrospect, the way colonial officials addressed the ‘problem’ of Assam’s low population and made the case for Assam as a land frontier makes interesting reading. For it was not as if Assam’s population density was unusually low compared to many other parts of the world. But colonial officials associated a low population with a degree of demographic stability that goes with being at an ‘advanced stage of civilization’—allegedly very unlike the conditions that prevailed in Assam. Yet they had difficulty explaining Assam’s low rate of population increase in terms of Assam’s ‘primitiveness.’<sup>19</sup>

Whatever the reality, the fact of the matter is that a century of immigration has succeeded in converting Assam and thereabouts into a curious cauldron of ethnic and religious tension, a scenario which found its culmination in 1979 when the students of Assam began their six year long agitation against the inclusion of illegal migrants in the voters list.<sup>20</sup>

The Assam agitation against illegal migrants can be hailed as one of the most important movements in South Asia. Spearheaded by the students of Assam under the leadership of P.K. Mahanta, the agitation—reminiscent of India’s struggle for independence led by Mahatma Gandhi—unified all sections of Assamese society into a mass movement. It was moreover a largely peaceful agitation with an inherent democratic content. Indeed, Udayon Misra has written:

Though reservations have been expressed by social analysts and scholars about the democratic content of the Assam movement, yet given the scale of people’s participation in it, it must be said that there was a great degree of national content in it. Had it not been for its wide popular base, the movement would not have been able to sustain itself against such severe state repression for five long years. The Assamese middle class no doubt played the leading role in the agitation; but its success was ensured because of the strong degree of support it received from the rural masses, both Assamese and tribal. The “civil disobedience” programmes, the “Janata curfews”, the oil blockade and finally, the boycott of the 1983 polls would not have been possible if the rural population of Assam had not overwhelmingly responded ...<sup>21</sup>

If the death on 28 March 1979 of Hiralal Patwari, Member of the Indian Parliament from Mangaldoi, can be said to be the efficient cause of the Assam agitation, then the observation of S.L. Shakhthar, the then Chief Election Commissioner, during a meeting of electoral officers in Ootacamund on 24 October 1978 can be said to be the necessary cause. Indeed, the Chief Election Commissioner had said:

I would like to refer to the alarming situation in some states, especially in the North Eastern region, wherefrom reports are coming regarding large-scale inclusions of foreign nationals in the electoral

rolls. In one case, the population in 1971 census recorded increases as high as 34.98% over 1961 census figures and this figure was attributed to the influx of a large number of persons from foreign countries. The influx has become a regular feature. I think it may not be a wrong assessment to make that on the basis of increase of 34.98% between two census, the increase would likely to be recorded in the 1991 census would be more than 100% over the 1961 census. In other words, a stage would be reached when the state may have to reckon with the foreign nationals who may in all probability constitute a sizeable percentage if not the majority of population in the state.<sup>22</sup>

Although Shakhdar's assessment about foreign nationals constituting a majority is far from becoming a reality, the fact of the matter is that the Census of India, 1991 (Religion) of Assam<sup>23</sup> has shown a majority in Muslim population in four districts of Assam.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, according to the Census, Muslims constitute 28.43 percent of the population in the state. But what is the number of illegal migrants in the population?<sup>25</sup> Once again, a variety of both numbers and interpretations have come to the fore with scholars and analysts of various hues commenting on the matter from their own stations of bias.

Monirul Hussain has written very poignantly about the number game:

The Assam movement was apparently started in order to stop the participation of foreign nationals in Assam's electoral process and [to push for] their deportation from Assam. Therefore, the number of foreign nationals is crucial to determine the extent of foreigners' infiltration to Assam. Though the movement continued for six long years from 1979-85, yet none from the leadership could very precisely ascertain the number of foreign nationals living in Assam illegally. Fantastic and inconsistent figures were cited in the press and various other platforms of the movement. The estimated number of foreign nationals in Assam ranged from 2 lakhs to 77 lakhs...the fantastic numbers provided by the leadership of the movement and their supporters and collaborators in the press served two distinct purposes simultaneously: (1) it deepened sharply the fear of the Asamiyas of losing their numerical dominance in Assam and their identity; and (2) it also made the Bengalis and the neo-Asamiya groups suspicious of the real motives of the leadership of the movement because such inflated figures which they provided must have included many Indians in the category of foreigners. This confusion created by wild estimates sharpened the division between Asamiyas and the Bengalis on the one hand, and between the Asamiyas and the neo-Asamiyas on the other. The fear of the Bengali and the Na-Asamiya Muslims was compounded when the Asamiya bourgeois press repeatedly identified the Bengali and the Na-Asamiya Muslim inhabited areas as the area of Bangladeshi nationals...<sup>26</sup>

Recent reports in the print media have stated that the "unabated infiltration from across the border has hit the economy of Assam, with the Central Government holding the alarming growth of population at the rate of four percent (as against the national average rate of growth of 2.3 percent) as one of the factors responsible for the economic slowdown."<sup>27</sup> In related reports, the print media has lamented the problem of illegal migration by stating "more than 750 Bighas of land of villages Dumabari, Lathitila, Baraputhiri and Karkhanabuthini of Patharkandi revenue circle of Karimganj district is under the possession of Bangladesh. This was disclosed by the Minister of State for Home Rockybul Hussain in reply to a question by Moni Lal Gowala in the (Assam) State Assembly today"<sup>28</sup> and that "the (Assam) Government has so far spent an amount of Rs 12, 89,28,385 on the tribunals set up under the Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act but only 1501 foreigners have been deported from the state under the provisions of the Act."<sup>29</sup> Indeed, the IM (DT) Act that was enacted by the Indian parliament to detect and deport illegal migrants is a piece of legislation that has a direct bearing on the issue of illegal migration. This *Occasional Paper* will consequently examine it.

### The IM (DT) Act

Enacted by the Indian Parliament on 25 December 1983, the IM (DT) Act "provide[s] for the establishment of Tribunals for the determination, in a fair manner, of the question whether a person is an illegal migrant to enable the Central Government to expel illegal migrants "from India and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto."<sup>30</sup>

A close reading of the IM (DT) Act—even in the opening paragraph of the Act Objective—reveals that the terms "illegal migrant" and "foreigners" have been used in an almost interchangeable manner. Indeed, in Clause 3 of Chapter 1 of the act (Definitions and Constructions of References) it is stipulated that the term "foreigner" has the same meaning as in the Foreigners Act, 1946;(31 of 1946)," whereas the term "illegal migrant" means a

person in respect of whom each of the following conditions is satisfied, namely: (i) he has entered into India on or after the 25<sup>th</sup> day of March 1971, (ii) he is a foreigner, and (iii) he has entered into India without being in possession of a valid passport or other travel document or any other lawful authority in that behalf.”<sup>31</sup>

In other words, an illegal migrant as envisaged by the IM (DT) Act is a foreigner as defined by the Foreigners Act of 1946, and over and above that is defined to mean what has been stipulated above as (i) and (iii). And, of course, the stipulation in (ii) is ambiguous because even a foreigner who has entered India “without being in possession of a valid passport or other travel document or any other lawful authority in that behalf” will be deemed an illegal entrant (not necessarily a migrant). So, the structure of the definition is such that it is in effect the very first stipulation of “entering India on or after the 25<sup>th</sup> day of March 1971” that seems to be the issue. And this is important because the act relates primarily to Assam—“having come into force in the state of Assam on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of October 1983.” Indeed, the IM (DT) Act—for all its other weighty nuances—is essentially a by-law, a metamorphosed version of the Foreigners Act of 1946.

This author encountered popular criticism of the IM (DT) Act during his hosting of a television chat show way back in 1999 for Doordarshan. The chat show brought together D.N. Bezboruah, Editor of *The Sentinel*, Wasbir Hussain, Consulting Editor of *The Sentinel* (then the Editor of *The North East Daily*); and Pradyut Bordoloi, then the Congress Party Spokesman and today the Minister of State (Independent), Forest, Government of Assam. The criticism of the IM (DT) Act came by way of primarily the Editor of *The Sentinel*. The concerns that are of a serious nature are:

- 1) The IM (DT) Act facilitates immigration rather than prevents it
- 2) The IM (DT) Act is a “piece of legislation” which makes it impossible to detect and deport illegal migrants
- 3) Under the act, the onus of establishing nationality rests not on the illegal migrant, nor even on the Government, but on the private individual who must pay a fee to lodge a complaint and do so under a stipulated jurisdiction
- 4) Immigration laws of most civilized countries (the number forty was quoted) bear the following characteristics:
  - a) They are not kind to the immigrant
  - b) The onus of proving citizenship, etc. rests on the immigrant
  - c) Deportation is swift. Great Britain was quoted as an example where the deportation process takes only ten days
- 5) No country in the world has two immigration laws

As for the effectiveness of the IM (DT) Act, the following may be enumerated:

- Cases examined (since 1983): 300,057
- Cases sent to tribunal for detection: 60,000
- Illegal migrants detected: 10,563
- Illegal migrants deported (since 1983): 1,501

Equally emphatic is the following argument in favor of the repeal of the IM (DT) Act: one does not go about perverting the existing act (The Foreigners Act of 1946) in order to protect the minorities, especially with an act that was pushed through behind the backs of the people of Assam (the General Elections of 1983 were boycotted by a majority of the Assamese electorate and consequently Assam “did not have any representation in the Indian Parliament”). But, the political parties who presently speak of the repeal of the IM (DT) Act cannot accept a serious follow-through, as the current arithmetic in the Indian Parliament disallows it, unless a joint sitting of both Houses of the Indian Parliament debates the issue.<sup>32</sup> And this is so despite the fact that the Indian Cabinet approved a draft bill for repealing the act on 6 May 2003, whereby all cases pending in the IM (DT) tribunals may be tried afresh under the Foreigners Act of 1946. The draft bill was tabled in the Indian Parliament on 9 May 2003. While welcoming this move, critics have expressed their skepticism about the intention to repeal. An editorial commented thus:

It appears that the post September 11 developments in the aftermath of the attack on the World Trade Center, the December 13 attack on Parliament,<sup>33</sup> the February stand-off between the BSF [the Indian Border Security Force] and Bangladesh Rifles over 213 infiltrators on the Indo Bangla border and the growing belligerence of the Begum Zia government in Bangladesh have all contributed to the NDA<sup>34</sup> decision. Other factors like the pressure of the state BJP [Bharatiya Janata Party] unit keeping in view the coming general elections also played a part... The muted reaction of even the All Assam Students' Union to the BJP-led government's decision is understandable considering the fact that the proposed Bill to repeal the IM (DT) Act would have to be passed by Parliament. Considering the opposition to the Bill by the Congress, Left parties and other like-minded parties, the Bill may have to be passed like the POTA [Prevention of Terrorist Act] bill by a joint session of Parliament, in view of the majority enjoyed by the Congress in the Rajya Sabha ...<sup>35</sup>

### Governor's Report

The most scathing—and perhaps the only official—attack of the IM (DT) Act and the illegal migration has come from Lt. Gen. (Retd.) S.K. Sinha, PVSM, a former Governor of Assam when he sent a report to the President of India on 8 November 1998 about *Illegal Migration into Assam*. The report, which was the first comprehensive statement—in recent times—about the danger that faced Assam as a result of the illegal influx, has five chapters and a summary of recommendations. This *Occasional Paper* will re-produce certain important paragraphs of this unique document.

Enumerating the historical background in the chapter *Migration into Assam*, the Governor had written:

Failure to get Assam included in East Pakistan in 1947 remained a source of abiding resentment in that country (Pakistan). Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in his book, *Myths of Independence* wrote, "It would be wrong to think that Kashmir is the only dispute that divides India and Pakistan, though undoubtedly the most significant. One at least is nearly as important as the Kashmir dispute, that of Assam and some districts of India adjacent to East Pakistan. To these Pakistan has very good claims."

Even a pro-India leader like Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in his book, *Eastern Pakistan: Its Population and Economics*, observed, "Because Eastern Pakistan must have sufficient land for its expansion and because Assam has abundant forest and mineral resources, coal, petroleum etc., Eastern Pakistan must include Assam to be financially and economically strong."

Leading intellectuals in Bangladesh have been making out a case for "lebensraum" (living space) for their country. Mr. Sadeq Khan, a former diplomat wrote in Holiday of October 18, 1991, "All projections, however, clearly indicate that by the next decade, that is to say by the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Bangladesh will face a serious crisis of lebensraum...if consumer benefit is considered to be better served by borderless competitive trade of labour, there is no reason why regional and international cooperation could not be worked out to plan and execute population movements and settlements to avoid critical demographic pressure in pockets of high concentration...A natural overflow of population pressure is there very much on the cards and will not be restrainable by barbed wire or border patrol measures. The natural trend of population over-flow from Bangladesh is towards the sparsely populated lands in the South East in the Arakan side and of the North East in the Seven Sisters side on the Indian subcontinent..."

Pointing out the contributory factors for the illegal migration, the report states:

Illegal migration into Assam has been taking place primarily for economic reasons. Bangladesh is the world's most densely populated country with a population density of 969 per square per kilometer. The growth rate of population in that country is 2.2 percent and its population is growing at the rate of 2.8 million per year. Each year nearly one third of Bangladesh gets inundated by floods, displacing 19 million people. 70 million people constituting 60 percent of the population live below the poverty line. The per capita income in Bangladesh is 170 dollars per year, which is much lower than the per capita in India...

Holding forth on the consequences of the illegal influx, the Governor enumerates three points:



The dangerous consequences of large-scale illegal migration from Bangladesh, both for the people of Assam and more for the nation as a whole, need to be emphatically stressed. No misconceived and mistaken notions of secularism should be allowed to come in the way of doing so.

As a result of population movement from Bangladesh, the spectre looms large of the indigenous people of Assam being reduced to a minority in their home state. Their cultural survival will be in jeopardy, their political control will be weakened and their employment opportunities will be undermined.

This silent and invidious demographic invasion of Assam may result in the loss of the geo-strategically vital districts of Lower Assam. The influx of illegal migrants is turning these districts into a Muslim majority region. It will then only be a matter of time when a demand for their merger with Bangladesh may be made. The rapid growth of the international Islamic fundamentalism may provide the driving force for this demand. In this context, it is pertinent that Bangladesh has long discarded secularism and chosen to become an Islamic state. Loss of Lower Assam will sever the entire land mass of the North East from the rest of India and the rich natural resources of that region will be lost to the nation.

The problem of immigration and the Assam agitation that it sired have been the subject of a variety of interpretations. While most of the popular ones have sought to decry the illegal migration and have hailed the agitation against illegal migration as a seminal movement in the cause of the indigenous Assamese people, certain observers have interpreted the movement against illegal migrants in a manner that has not portrayed the agitation in a very chivalrous light. Such interpretations have documented the movement as one motivated by Hindu chauvinism and one which was consequently responsible for the alienation of the Muslims. Indeed, in the opinion of the author of this *Occasional Paper*, the polarization of the populace in Assam is to at least some extent responsible for the growth of militant Islam in the region. And this is so despite the fact that most indigenous Assamese Muslims have remained steadfastly patriotic to Assam and India. This *Occasional Paper* wishes to record instances by which this alienation is said to have occurred.

### **An RSS Conspiracy?**

H.N. Rafiabadi speaks of the Assam movement as an agenda of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a right-wing Hindu party. Concluding his work on the Assam movement he writes:

The Assam Movement was initially a mass agitation against the infiltration of foreigners, particularly the Bengalis into the land of Assam. According to the leaders of the Movement they were not only eroding the cultural identity of Assam but also posing a serious threat on both the political and economic fronts. The indigenous tribals and the Muslims of Assam were part of the Agitation. However, during the course of the Agitation an unhealthy development took place which severely affected both the Agitation and the Accord, the intrusion of communal forces like the RSS and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad which gave this genuine mass agitation a communal turn.<sup>36</sup>

Indeed, writing about the "RSS policy in Assam," Rafiabadi writes:

The RSS policy on Assam was spelt out at a meeting of the organisation's National Council at Nagpur, where it was resolved that the identity of different groups in the State of Assam could be preserved only if Assam remained predominantly Hindu. Voice was raised that the Hindus in Assam were reduced to a minority by both infiltration and proselytization. It was resolved that it was essential that Assam remained a predominantly Hindu majority area as that alone would ensure that the identity of each group was maintained, and they would form a common bond between Assam and the rest of the country. The resolution sympathized with the Assamese and those Hindu refugees whose interests had been harmed by undefined or ill-defined concepts of identity, sub-nation and foreign nationals. The RSS council regretted that Hindu refugees settled in Assam in 1950 had been dubbed as foreigners.<sup>37</sup>

Writing further about the process of alienation, Rafiabadi states:

The anti-Muslim attitude of the Assam movement was evident from the very beginning. But for a long time the hot heads of Assam were deceiving the outside world dubbing the Bengalis as foreigners. In the name of an anti-Bengali agitation, these Assamese upper caste Hindu communal youth attacked Muslims in what came to be known as the "Nellie massacre" in which thousands of Muslims including children by the hundreds were killed. From then onwards this anti-Bengali agitation revealed its true

saffron robe; it was nothing but an anti-Muslim agitation and Muslims included were not Bengali Muslims but Assamese Muslims as well.<sup>38</sup>

Whether the Assam agitation is an RSS conspiracy—as has been alleged—is a matter that will have to await further investigation. Indeed, the Chief Minister of Assam, Tarun Gogoi has—on the occasion of his government’s second year in office—accused the one time student leaders of the agitation by terming the agitation as a ploy to grab power.<sup>39</sup> While the politician’s statement that the Assam agitation—where countless lives were lost—was a mere ploy of the agitation leaders is an issue which cannot be easily accepted, the fact that the anti-foreigners movement in Assam polarized the Hindus and the Muslims to a considerable extent is also not in doubt. The RSS—and the right-wing Hindu agenda that it promotes—in all probability could well be responsible for attempting to turn the movement into an anti-Muslim one. This assessment seems to be supported by a recent statement of the RSS All India Prachar Pramukh, Shrikant Joshi. Speaking during the course of his travel in Assam, the RSS leader reportedly stated that “the Bengali Hindus coming from across Bangladesh should be accorded refugee status and they should be allowed to exercise franchise in India, whereas the Muslims crossing over to India from the neighboring country should be driven out as infiltrators.”<sup>40</sup> Indeed, in the babel of voices, the only organization that seems to have held onto the original problem of illegal migration from Bangladesh is the AASU. And, the premier student body is effectively doing so without communalizing the issue. The statements which were made by its leaders in the wake of the placement of the IM (DT) repeal draft bill, that political parties should not politicize the issue, is testimony to its apolitical veneer—and this is so, despite the fact that few among many in the AASU have used the organization as a springboard for a political career.

An attempt has been made in this section to describe the history of the problem of illegal migration with which Assam is faced. This has been done by illustrating the history of the Muslims in the state, as well as by documenting the various coordinates that make up the present debate. Indeed, an understanding of the history of the problem is important not only to situate the problem in space and time but also in order to arrive at a better comprehension of the problem of Islamic militancy in the region, the genesis of which is shrouded in the checkered history of Muslims in the region. But, how exactly did the plan—fuelled by the alienation as has been seen above—get underway? What became of the militant manifestations of the Assam agitation as was characterized by the birth of the ULFA?

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Sir Edward Gait, *A History of Assam*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Guwahati, India: Lawyer’s Book Stall, 1992).

<sup>2</sup> Available history of the Muslims in North East India is restricted primarily to the present geographical boundaries of the state of Assam. Consequently, this *Occasional Paper* will refer to Assam (unless otherwise specified) in its examination of the subject.

<sup>3</sup> Lakhshmaniya was the last king of the Sen dynasty of Bengal. See Gait, op. cit.

<sup>4</sup> See Gait, 34, especially the footnote that states “the story of Muhammad Bakhtiyar’s invasion of Tibet is told in the *Tabaqat-I-Nasiri*.”

<sup>5</sup> M. Kar, *Muslims in Assam Politics* (Delhi: Omsons Publications, 1990). Kar mentions the earliest Muslim attempt to enter Assam forcibly to have occurred in 1205, when Bakhtiyar Khilji led an invading army into Assam.

<sup>6</sup> The ordinary Muslims of Assam—according to Sir Edward Gait—call themselves *Garia*, an indication of their claim to have come originally from Gaur, the ancient Muhammadan capital of Bengal. The word *Moria* may be derived etymologically from the way in which they fashioned their wares by beating; *mariba* means “to beat” in Assamese.

<sup>7</sup> The Ahoms who came to Assam from across the Irrawady River and the Patkoi Mountains in present-day Myanmar ruled Assam from 1228 AD to 1838 AD.

<sup>8</sup> The Talatal Ghar (the royal barracks) at Sibsagar in Assam was built by Ghanashyam, a Muslim convert from Bengal. The exquisite *Hastirvidyarnava*, the Ahom treatise on elephants, was the product of two Muslims, Dilbar and Dosai.

<sup>9</sup> Kar, *Muslims in Assam Politics*, 5.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. Kar quotes S.K. Bhuyan from his *Tungkhungia Buranji, or, A History of Assam, 1621–1826 A.D.* (Guwahati: Dept. of Historical and Antiquarian Studies in Assam, 1968).

<sup>11</sup> Kar, *Muslims in Assam Politics*, 5.

<sup>12</sup> Brahmaputra is the principal river in Assam. Barak is a river in Assam’s Cachar region.

<sup>13</sup> S.C. Mullan, ICS, Census Superintendent of Assam, quoted in the Governor of Assam’s report to the President of India on *Illegal Migration into Assam*, 8 November 1998.

<sup>14</sup> Kar, 8, cites Kingsley Davis, *The Population of India and Pakistan* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1951), 119.

<sup>15</sup> Kar, *Muslims in Assam Politics*, 12.

<sup>16</sup> For example, see Kar, *Muslims in Assam Politics*, 8.

<sup>17</sup> The AGP is the regional party in Assam who rode to victory in 1985 on the anti-foreigner plank and was formed by erstwhile members of the All Assam Students' Union, and the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad, who themselves spearheaded the agitation against illegal migration.

<sup>18</sup> Sanjib Baruah, *India Against Itself: Assam and the Politics of Nationality* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1999).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>20</sup> The Assam agitation against illegal migration began on 8 June 1979 and concluded on 15 August 1985 when the Assam Accord (Memorandum of Settlement) was signed in New Delhi. The signatories to the Memorandum of Settlement were P.K. Mahanta, President, All Assam Students' Union (AASU); B.K. Phukan, General Secretary, All Assam Students' Union; Biraj Sharma, Convenor, All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP); Smt P.P. Trivedi, Chief Secretary, Government of Assam; and R.D. Pradhan, Home Secretary, Government of India. The Memorandum was signed in the presence of Rajiv Gandhi, Prime Minister of India.

The Memorandum of Settlement states the clauses relating to the Foreigner's Issue in the following manner:

- 5.1 For purpose of detection and deletion of foreigners, 1.1.1966 shall be the base date year
- 5.2 All persons who came to Assam prior to 1.1.1966, including those amongst them whose names appeared on the electoral rolls used in the 1967 elections, shall be regularized
- 5.3 Foreigners who came to Assam after 1.1.1966 (inclusive) and up to 24 March 1971 shall be detected in accordance with the provisions of the Foreigners Act, 1946 and the Foreigners (Tribunal) order 1964
- 5.4 Names of foreigners so detected will be deleted from the electoral rolls in force. Such persons will be required to register themselves before the Registration Officers of the respective districts in accordance with the provisions of the Registration of Foreigners Act, 1939 and the Registration of Foreigners Rules, 1939
- 5.5 For this purpose, Government of India will undertake suitable strengthening of the governmental machinery
- 5.6 On the expiry of a period of ten years following the date of detection, the names of all such persons which have been deleted from the electoral rolls shall be restored
- 5.7 All persons who were expelled earlier, but have since reentered illegally into Assam, shall be expelled
- 5.8 Foreigners who came to Assam on or after 25 March 1971 shall continue to be detected, deleted and expelled in accordance with law. Immediate and practical steps shall be taken to expel such foreigners
- 5.9 The Government will give consideration to certain difficulties expressed by the AASU/AAGSP regarding the implementation of the Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunal) Act, 1983

<sup>21</sup> Udayon Misra, *The Periphery Strikes Back: Challenges to the Nation-State in Assam and Nagaland* (Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 2000), 132.

<sup>22</sup> Shakhddhar was quoted in *Asom Jagriti* 1980: 2-3. Cited in Monirul Hussain, *The Assam Movement: Class, Ideology and Identity* (Delhi: Manak Publications, 1993), 102.

<sup>23</sup> The Census of India (2001) Religion is yet to be declared.

<sup>24</sup> Barpeta, Dhubri, Goalpara, and Hailakandi constitute the four Muslim majority districts in Assam.

<sup>25</sup> The Governor of Assam in his report to the President of India on *Illegal Migration into Assam* has quoted Indrajit Gupta, a former Indian Home Minister, who stated in the Indian Parliament on 6 May 1997 that there were ten million illegal migrants residing in India. Further, the Governor's report quotes a Home Ministry/Intelligence Bureau source quoted in the 10 August 1998 issue of *India Today* and gives the breakdown of illegal migrants in different states as follows:

West Bengal: 5.4 million  
 Assam: 4 million  
 Tripura: 8 million  
 Bihar: 0.5 million  
 Rajasthan: 0.5 million  
 Maharashtra: 0.5 million  
 Delhi: 0.3 million

<sup>26</sup> Hussain, *The Assam Movement*, 102.

<sup>27</sup> "Influx Hits State's Economy," *Assam Tribune* (Guwahati), 14 March 2003.

<sup>28</sup> "Bangla Occupying over 750 Bighas of Assam Land," *Assam Tribune* (Guwahati), 11 March 2003.

<sup>29</sup> "Rs 12 Cr Spent to Deport 1501 Migrants," *Assam Tribune* (Guwahati), 12 March 2003.

<sup>30</sup> The Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act, 1983. Available online, South Asia Terrorism Portal, <[http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/states/assam/documents/actsandordinences/the\\_illegal\\_migrants\\_act.htm](http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/states/assam/documents/actsandordinences/the_illegal_migrants_act.htm)> (accessed on 10 March 2003).

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> The BJP-led ruling coalition does not have a majority in the Rajya Sabha (Upper House) and would consequently need to convene a joint session of both houses of the Indian Parliament to muster the numbers in order to pass the bill.

<sup>33</sup> On 13 December 2001, suspected terrorists belonging to the Lashkar-e-Toiba attacked the Indian Parliament.

<sup>34</sup> The NDA is the BJP-led ruling National Democratic Alliance in India.

<sup>35</sup> "Repeal of IM (DT) Act," *Assam Tribune* (Guwahati), 9 May 2003.

<sup>36</sup> H.N. Rafiabadi, *Assam: From Agitation to Accord* (New Delhi: Genuine Publications & Media, 1988).

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>39</sup> "Anti-foreigners Stir Was Ploy to Grab Power: Gogoi," *Assam Tribune* (Guwahati), 20 May 2003.

<sup>40</sup> "Demographic Change Threat to State: RSS," *Assam Tribune* (Guwahati), 18 May 2003.

*Paresh Barua has a four-room apartment in a three-storied building in Dhaka's Green Road. The apartment is on the top floor of the building. In the ground floor there is an air-conditioned grocery shop called "Rahman Traders" and opposite the building is a pathological clinic called "Skylab."*

As revealed by John Barua, ULFA cadre during interrogation after his arrest

### **Birth of the ULFA**

The United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) was formed on 7 April 1979—some two months before the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) observed its first twelve-hour strike on 8 June 1979 to protest against illegal migration into Assam. Therefore, although the ULFA did not come into existence as a result of the Assam agitation<sup>1</sup>—as generally understood—the fact of the matter is that it has its roots in the same socio-political space that engendered the agitation. Consequently, it was formed as a militant manifestation of the movement against illegal migration. Indeed, the commonality of agenda with the AASU led the ULFA to draw its initial sustenance from the student organization. Writing about the cohesion in the ranks of the ULFA and the AASU, Udayon Misra states:

The fact, however, is often overlooked that right from the inception, the ULFA maintained close links with the AASU and the AGP, occasional differences notwithstanding, and during the first few years most of the ULFA recruits were drawn from the ranks of the AASU. Though today the ULFA seems to have moved away from its original plank of Assamese nationalism to a position where it speaks for the "people of Assam," yet its main appeal springs from the idea of some form of regional nationalism where all those who have made Assam their home would be bound together by a kind of overall Assamese ethos. In a revision of its earlier stand on "denationalization" of the different ethnic communities, the ULFA now extends its support to the struggle of the different ethnic minorities in the state and views such struggles as part of the greater struggle for an independent Assam.<sup>2</sup>

Assam of the late seventies was a curious mix of heady politics, chauvinism, and regionalism. The ULFA grew out of the birth pangs of the common Assamese sentiment of the period. This is so despite the fact that at no point in time can the ULFA claim to have had more than 10 percent of support from the populace. The ULFA—indeed the four<sup>3</sup> men who swore the organization into existence—simply took upon itself the task to decree for the Assamese people. Characterizing the relation between the Assamese populace and the ULFA, Sanjiv Barua, a noted political scientist, refers to the term "intertextuality." Explaining the meaning of "intertextuality" in an interview, Barua states:

Literary theorists use the term "intertextuality" to talk about the complex ways in which one text (e.g., a story, a poem or a film) is related to another text. The term allowed me to get out of the simple-minded question of how many Assamese supported Assam's independence. Because while the answer to the question may be less than 1 percent, it would not explain ULFA's influence. The point is that issues that ULFA raised were connected (in complex ways) to issues that had been central to Assamese mainstream social discourse.<sup>4</sup>

The ULFA's aims and objectives—save the ultimate step of secession—work out as a super-set of the demands for which the AASU and the unarticulated voice of the general populace have been clamoring. Ire over illegal migrants from Bangladesh was a paramount consideration in 1979, the year of the ULFA's birth.

While it is not exactly known as to when the ULFA penned its "aims and objectives" and "qualification for membership," or whether the present form is an appended version of an earlier rendering, the fact of the matter is that the very first clause in the membership criteria left the door open to all nationalities. This clause expansively states that a member "must be a permanent resident of Assam. However, volunteers from other countries will be recognized conditionally."<sup>5</sup> It is interesting to note that the ULFA does not preclude the permanent albeit technically illegal migrant from Bangladesh—the express target of its natal ire.

In the ULFA's "aims and objectives," however, the following is expressed:

The people of Assam confronted with the aforesaid problems such as influx of foreigners and massive exploitation of its natural resources and determined as national identity problem after summing up them. Against the gross injustice for sheer survival as a nation, as a people and as individuals, the people of Assam many times launched democratic and unarmed peaceful movement. However, India ruthlessly suppressed and crushed them ignoring the value of democratic movement. Especially in 1979, democratic and unarmed peaceful movement against the influx of foreigners and economic exploitation, the occupation force of India killed seven hundred unarmed agitationists where the majority were teenage students. Though the people of Assam and leadership of the struggle have a strong stand for peaceful and amicable solution of the conflict, India has always been trying to force a military solution... thus the unarmed peaceful movement against the influx and economic exploitation transformed to an armed national liberation struggle.<sup>6</sup>

Although mention has been made of the “unarmed peaceful movement against the influx of foreigners” and the sacrifice which was made by the students during the agitation years in its “aims and objectives,” the ULFA soon began to renege on its founding ideologies. This has found expression in not only the organization’s latter day silence on the question of illegal migration from Bangladesh and the general debate that surrounded the question of the influx,<sup>7</sup> but in its proclamations as well. According to Samir Das, the ULFA redefined the concept of Assamese by stating that “the Assamese (Asamiya) are a people of all communities, the mixture of people who are determined to work for all-round progress of Assam.”<sup>8</sup> According to Das this meant that “the scope of the concept no longer remains restricted to those who speak Assamese as their mother tongue. Obviously, the immigrants from Bangladesh being the largest group of immigrants are ‘an indispensable part’ of the revised notion of Asamiya.”<sup>9</sup>

Indeed, in another portion of the ULFA document, the redefinition is final with a complete abdication of the central idea that gave it birth. It reads thus:

The contribution of the people of East Bengal origin in Assam towards increasing the state’s economic output is indeed noteworthy. It is this community, which produces the state’s vegetables, mustard, sesame and 82 per cent of the total jute. This is the main group of peasants who can produce plenty out of small areas of land... We would like to state here for everybody’s information that the movement led by the All Assam Students’ Union and Gana Sangram Parishad from 1979 to 1985 is viewed by the ULFA as one based on emotion.<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, the ULFA of the day has not only jettisoned their ideology but seems to have—if a reading of its recent writings are anything to go by—gone one step further by replacing illegal migrants from Bangladesh with illegal migrants from India. So, while it seems to be acknowledging the fact that Assam is in the throes of a demographic reconfiguration, the ULFA provides a completely different reason for the problem. In an editorial in its newsletter it states:

The Indo-Assam conflict is a classical example of the socio-political chaos created by the influx of Indian aliens of this category... According to the recent study conducted by the Omeo Kumar Das Institute of Social Change and Development (OKDISCD), the size of the migration from India to Assam was 15,76,738 till ’91 and it is continuing... the Indian aliens have been desperately trying to establish their own culture and language taking Assam as a part of their homeland, like an extended Jamindari. The people of Assam who have a distinguished cultural identity are threatened necessarily by the social behavior of the Indian aliens and their size... Though it seems to be very unfortunate to express that occupation India is tactically using these aliens to shatter our demography, to hybrid our unique cultural identity and waiting to impose Indianism after crushing all these elements of identity upon a rootless nation. Tripura was made the first laboratory to test such a political onslaught against an independent nation and positive result was accumulated. Fearing the size and capacity of the great Assamese nation, India has been administering different reagents to slice it and to reign comparatively upon small ethnic groups and communities with the help of these aliens near future... India should stop such notorious policy of occupation for the well being of its own people before the time is over. People of Assam will take the resort of anything necessary to secure its own identity, culture and demographic structure.<sup>11</sup>

Although what egged on the ULFA’s present program in order to distort history is not immediately known, the author of this *Occasional Paper* wonders whether it has anything to do with the statements that the Bangladesh Government has been repeatedly making about the non-existence of illegal migrants in India. Is it

that the ULFA has sought to interpret the preliminary findings of the Omeo Kumar Das Institute of Social Change and Development's study as that stemming from an influx of illegal migrants from India in order to placate some foreign agency which is trying not only to deny the presence of illegal foreign migrants on Indian soil, but also hide an agenda which is even more conspiratorial? Is it that the ULFA was pressured to do so? It is difficult otherwise to understand the reason for the ULFA's blatant substitution of the word "Indian" for "Bangladeshi."

An examination of the mechanisms by which outside forces from Bangladesh and Pakistan are attempting to promote Islamic militancy in Assam must take into consideration the abdication of ideology by one of the most important ethnically based militant organizations in the region, the ULFA, an organization—as has been seen—which came into existence as a foil to the illegal migration from Bangladesh. This is particularly so because it provides an insight into the engineering by which fundamentalist forces are arraying themselves in the face of the demise of ethnic movements. After all, the abdication by the ULFA of its own founding ideology seems to be a unique phenomenon—a militant movement that came into existence to protect the rights of an indigenous people has done a complete about-face in order to endanger its original parish—and ULFA members are allying themselves with the same people they want to oust from Assam. Few parallel developments to this engineering have been witnessed in the history of militant movements. It is, therefore, important to analyze the character of this phenomenon.

Has the ULFA sought to ally itself to the newfound agenda as a matter of mere expediency? Has it given up their earlier cause because of geo-political compulsions that they perceive have gripped Assam? What are the ULFA's practical considerations for its turnaround? The discussion that follows for the remainder of Chapter Two enumerates several possible reasons.

### **Geo-political considerations of the ULFA**

The theoreticians in the ULFA have kept their ears to the ground and have acknowledged the importance of expanding their parish to the migrant community that has been illegally entering Assam from Bangladesh. Indeed, it seems that one of the very first considerations seems to be that the problem of illegal migration is just too profound for cudgels to be taken up against it. The Census of India (Religion) 1991 has shown that Assam has four districts that have Muslim majority and five others as constituting almost 35 percent of the population. And, although the 2001 Religion census is yet to be declared, an independent analysis that was conducted seems to show that there has been a sizeable growth in population among Muslims in Assam. It records that as a community the Muslims had registered an increase of 16.7 percent growth in 2001 as compared to the 1991 figures. The district-wise figures are:

District	Muslim Population
Dhubri	70.45 %
Goalpara	50.18 %
Bongaigaon	32.74 %
Barpeta	56.07 %
Morigaon	45.31 %
Nagaon	47.19 %
Karimganj	49.17 %
Hailakandi	54.79 %
Cachar	34.49 %

Although the main constituency of the ULFA continues to be the lower middle class Assamese, it has little option but to expand its base by including the illegal migrants from Bangladesh who are almost one hundred percent Muslims. This seems to be true despite the fact that only a very few cadres of the ULFA are Muslims and the ones which were initially in the organization have left in order to join the Muslim Liberation Front of Assam, Muslim Liberation Tigers of Assam, and other Muslim fundamentalist organizations. However, the shuffle of Muslim cadres from the ULFA has by no means indicated that the ULFA is shying away from taking up Muslim interests. Indeed, it is only suggestive of the fact that the Muslim militants are becoming more pronounced in their agenda and are clearly drawing up a line.

Another episode of interest is that the ULFA is now reportedly tutoring the “intending infiltrator” in Assamese so that the absorption into the Assamese population is quicker. This information—according to the *Hindustan Times, North East* (New Delhi) of 6 June 2002—was revealed by some illegal migrants to forest officials in Assam during an eviction drive. According to the report, the ULFA runs a school in Bangladesh that reportedly teaches Assamese to people from Bangladesh who are desirous of illegally migrating into Assam. Although this report has not been verified by other sources, the fact that such a possibility may exist cannot be denied. This is primarily because of the presence of the ULFA in Bangladesh. And, therefore, a school on the aforesaid lines could well be in existence, run by members of the ULFA, not as a matter of organizational policy but for the personal expediency of some selected cadres. The demographic compulsions of Assam, therefore, seem to have influenced the ULFA’s agenda in a crucial manner.

### **The External Hand**

The ISI of Pakistan—along with the DGFI of Bangladesh (who reportedly liaise actively on the old-tie network<sup>12</sup>)—have undertaken important missions in India’s North East. Assam—with its unique social mosaic—has provided the intelligence agencies of these two countries with a good opportunity to bleed India “with a thousand cuts.” Consequently, they have undertaken important operations in Assam. Although primary research has indicated that the operations in Assam have been conducted in order to tie down the Indian military to the region from their primary role in Kashmir, recent developments have clearly shown that a larger game plan of destabilization and balkanization seems to be underway as well. This conspiracy has come to light in recent years, especially after the arrest of ISI-sponsored agents in the heart of Assam’s capital. Before this *Occasional Paper* examines how the ISI has influenced the ULFA, it will profile the Pakistani intelligence agency.

### **The ISI of Pakistan**

A British army officer of Australian origin, Maj. Gen. R. Cawthome, a one-time Deputy Chief of Army Staff, General HQ, Pakistan Army (1948-51), established the Directorate of the Inter Services Intelligence of Pakistan in 1948.<sup>13</sup> President Ayub Khan included in its role duties pertaining to the safeguarding of Pakistan’s national interests, monitoring opposition politicians, and sustaining his rule in Pakistan.

The ISI is mandated with the task of gathering external and internal intelligence; coordination of intelligence functions of the three armed forces; and surveillance of its cadre, foreigners, the media, politically active segments of the Pakistani society, diplomats of other nations stationed in Pakistan, and also Pakistani diplomats abroad. It is also tasked with the interception and monitoring of communication and the conduct of covert operations inside Pakistan and abroad.

Headquartered in the Pakistani capital of Islamabad, a Lieutenant General of the Pakistan army heads the organization. The ISI reportedly has a total of about 10,000 officers and staff members, a number that does not include informants. It has six divisions, each headed by a Deputy Director General with the rank of a Major General in the Pakistan army.

The ISI is of paramount importance at the joint services level. Its importance stems from the fact that it is in complete charge of all covert operations outside Pakistan. The agency also reportedly supplies weaponry, advice, training and other forms of assistance to separatist groups in Kashmir as also to the ones waging a war with the Indian state to liberate North East India.

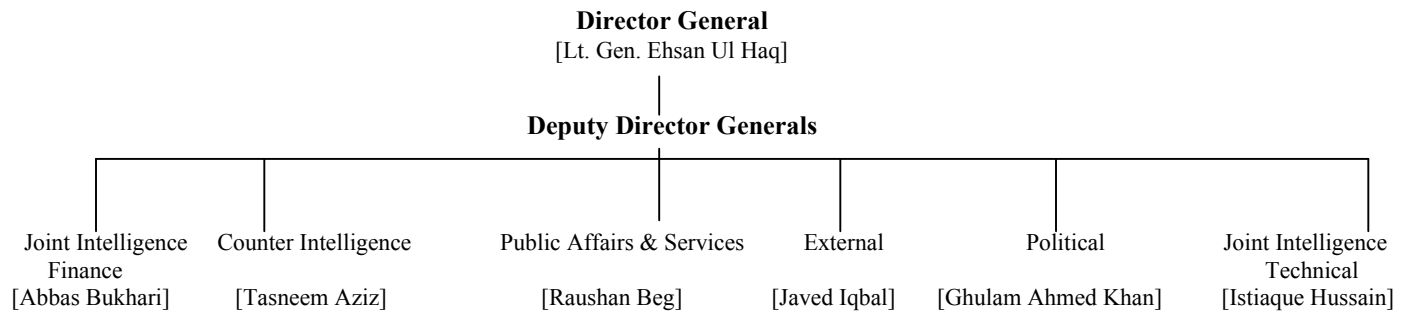


The 1965 Indo-Pak war provoked a major crisis in intelligence. The war revealed the inefficiency of the intelligence agencies that were until then devoted to domestic investigative work. Ayub Khan set up a committee headed by Yahya Khan to examine the working of the agencies.

The ISI has been deeply involved in domestic politics and has kept track of the various incumbent regime’s opponents. Before 1958 and the imposition of Martial Law, the ISI reported to the Commander-in-Chief of the Army. When Martial Law was promulgated in 1958, all intelligence agencies fell under the direct control of the President and Chief Martial Law Administrator.

The Pakistani intelligence agency is presently engaged in covert support to the militants fighting against the Indian security forces in Kashmir. “Operation Tupac” is reportedly the name for the three-part action plan for the liberation of Kashmir, initiated by the late President Zia Ul Haq in 1988 after the failure of “Operation Gibraltar.” According to a report compiled by the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) of India in 1995, the ISI spent about Rs. 2.4 crore every month to sponsor its activities in Jammu and Kashmir. Although all groups reportedly receive arms and training from Pakistan, the pro-Pakistani groups are reported to be favored by the ISI. At least six major militant organizations, and several smaller ones, are operating in Kashmir. Their force strengths are variously estimated at between 5,000 and 10,000. They are roughly divided between those who seek *azaadi* (independence) and those who support accession to Pakistan. The oldest militant organization, the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), had spearheaded the movement for an independent Kashmir. But the JKLF has fallen from the ISI’s grace and powerful pro-Pakistani groups—the Hizbul-Mujahiddin, the Lashkar-e-Toiba and the Jaish-e-Mohammad—have stolen its thunder. According to press reports, several hundred fighters from Afghanistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and other Muslim countries have also joined some of the militant groups or have formed their own *tanzeems* (organizations).<sup>14</sup>

### The Order of Battle of the ISI



\* The North East India desk is manned by a Lt. Col. Abdul Hamid Gilani

One aspect, however, which must be kept in mind, is the tendency among a section of the Indian media and intelligentsia to over-stress the ISI factor. And, while it is not in doubt that the Pakistani intelligence service has infiltrated a number of areas in India, and are consequently responsible for the “prairie fires” that are raging, it has become somewhat of a habit to blame the ISI for everything that ails India. ISI-criers in India must contend with the fact that discretion is the better part of both valor and wisdom. Thus, attribution of responsibility to the ISI in every case is unsound. In the words of a retired Pakistani Admiral whom this author met on 17 June 2003 at the Cooperative Monitoring Center in Albuquerque, New Mexico during the course of a lecture this author was delivering, “I had no idea the ISI is so efficient.”

### The ISI and ULFA

On 6 April 2000, the then Chief Minister of Assam, Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, delivered the first comprehensive report in the Assam State Assembly after almost a yearlong engagement with the ISI-sponsored cell inside Assam. The placing of the report, of course, had to await the breaking up of the Pakistani intelligence agencies

network in the state. On 7 August 1999, the Assam Police achieved a major breakthrough and arrested four important leaders of the network in Guwahati. The police also arrested twenty-seven other persons belonging to different Islamic militant groups. The important people who were arrested were: 1) Md Fasih Ullah Hussaini alias Hamid Mehmood alias Khalid Mehmood of Hyderabad (Sind), Pakistan; 2) Md Javed Waqar alias Md Musaffa alias Md Mehraj alias Abdul Rahman; 3) Maulana Hafiz Md Akram Mallik alias Musaffa Hussain alias Atabullah alias Bhajjan alias Abdul Awal of Mukam Shahwali village of Jammu and Kashmir; and 4) Kari Salim Ahmad alias Abdul Aziz alias Sadat of Mehilki village of Muzafarnagar of Uttar Pradesh.

The Chief Minister of Assam's report to the State Assembly—while seeking to provide comprehensiveness to the nature and degree of the ISI threat—was primarily a synopsis of the events that had occurred in the period following the 7 August 1999 arrests of the thirty-one people. In the period following the 7 August 1999 arrests, according to the report the state police had unearthed the modus operandi of the foreign agency. According to the sixteen-page report (which included mug-shots and profiles of the main accused) the activities of the ISI are mainly in the following areas:

- Promoting indiscriminate violence in the State by providing active support to the local militant outfits.
- Creating new militant outfits along ethnic and communal lines by instigating ethnic and religious groups.
- Supplying explosives and sophisticated arms to various terrorist groups.
- Causing sabotage of oil pipelines and other installations, communication lines, railways, and roads.
- Promoting fundamentalism and militancy among local Muslim youths by misleading them in the name of *jihad*.
- Promoting communal tension between Hindu and Muslim citizens by way of false and highly inflammatory propaganda.

Intelligence reports made available to this author have also indicated that the ISI had sought to smuggle in sixty kilograms of Research Developed Explosives, or RDX, into Assam. This was attempted in the month of August 1999 when the ISI decided to unleash Operation *Tehsad* in North East India. The motivation was to destroy the area's oil industry and surface transport. The ULFA was to be supplied the RDX. The ISI gave the ULFA the first installment of the explosives by which they could begin their operations—four explosions took place in three days on rail tracks and trains.

The second consignment was left in the care of two Harkat-ul-Mujahideen cadres at the Sat Gombuz mosque in Bangladesh's Rajshahi district. The Assam police, however, managed to eliminate Babul Ingti, an ULFA cadre, in an encounter and was able, thereafter, to locate the whereabouts of the rest of the RDX. An Assam police team infiltrated into Rajshahi through West Bengal (with the help of the West Bengal Police) and having got the password from Waqar (which was Kandahar), the team managed to get thirty-two kgs of explosives from the Harkat-ul-Mujahideen and returned to Bengal through the Birsa corridor in Malda. Operation *Tehsad* ended in failure and oil installations could not be hit. However, on the orders of the ULFA Chief of Staff, Paresh Barua, the Volcano unit of the ULFA later destroyed the Thekeraguri oil depot near Jagiroad in Assam.

Reports have also indicated that the Assam police have in its possession evidence to show that the top ULFA leadership is in close touch with certain officials of the Pakistani High Commission in Dhaka. The ULFA leaders have also been traveling to Pakistan regularly for training, indoctrination, and consultation. According to the Chief Minister's report, confessional statements of many ULFA leaders including the organization's Vice Chairman, Pradip Gogoi, have stated that the Pakistani officials in their High Commission in Dhaka arrange passports for the ULFA in various Muslim names. The Chief of Staff of the ULFA, Paresh Barua, for instance, travels to Pakistan under the name Kamarudin Zaman Khan, an alias he has been provided with by the ISI.

The ULFA-ISI nexus had, in fact, begun way back in the early 1990s. A list (culled by the Special Branch of the Assam Police) of some of the early events and meetings that had taken place between the two organizations is provided below.

- In November 1990, the ULFA decides to send Munin Nabis and Partha Pratim Bora alias Javed to Bangladesh to contact the ISI at Dhaka for arranging supply of arms and ammunition. They were instructed to set up a base camp in Bangladesh.
- Munin Nabis sets up a base camp in Dhaka in 1990 with the help of a Col. (Retd.) Faruque of the Bangladesh Freedom Party and Gani Shapan of the Jatiyo Party. Nabis rents a house at Mogbazar in Dhaka.
- Munin Nabis assumes the name “Iqbal” and contacts Samsul Siddique, the Second Secretary in the Pakistan Embassy at Dhaka. Contacts with the ISI are established through Siddique.
- Munin Nabis visits Pakistan to negotiate with a terrorist group headed by a Mustafa Ali Jubardo for the impartment of training to ULFA cadres on payment.
- The Vice Chairman of the ULFA, Pradip Gogoi, visits Dhaka in January 1991 and contacts an ISI officer called Mr. Haque. Gogoi signs an agreement for the impartment of training to ULFA cadres. He also meets there another ISI officer, a Mr. Jalal.
- After the agreement with the ISI, Munin Nabis calls a group of ULFA members for training in Pakistan in April 1991. Pradip Gogoi accompanies a six-member group to Islamabad for training with the ISI.
- Hari Mohan Roy alias Rustar Choudhury of the ULFA, along with ten other ULFA cadres, undergo training in camps organized by the ISI in Pakistan in 1993. Hari Mohan Roy obtains a passport under the name of Jamul Akhtar, son of Akhtar Hussain of Bangladesh.
- According to a recorded statement of the renegade ULFA leader, Lohit Deury, the ULFA’s Foreign Secretary, Sasadhar Choudhury, had passed on information of the Indian army formation location in Assam to the ISI in Kathmandu.

The ISI had also organized training for the ULFA cadres in association with the Directorate General of Field Intelligence of Bangladesh at a camp located thirty-five kilometers west of the Karnaphulli Hydro-electric project in the Chittagong Hill Tracts in 1993. A retired Bangladesh army officer, Brig. Joimullah Khan Choudhury, supervised the training. The ISI had reportedly also imparted specialized training to forty-eight ULFA cadres in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir along with the Muslim United Liberation Front of Assam. Furthermore, there is also evidence to suggest that the ISI is activating the border areas in Nepal for relocation of some of the militant camps, especially after the presence in Bhutan has become a problem. The ULFA along with the NDFB have reportedly already set up camps in Jhapa, Tapejung, and Panchthar in eastern Nepal.

The ULFA’s links with the Sipahi-e-Sahiba was highlighted in a correspondence between a one-time head of the Special Branch of the Assam Police and the Joint Director (North East) of the Intelligence Bureau, India. The letter stated:

Intelligence input received recently indicates that ULFA has got links with Sipahi-e-Sahiba of Kabul Afghanistan, which is also funding the outfit for its training programme in the training camp in Halowaghat in Mymensingh district of Bangladesh as well as for the purchase of arms. A letter written by Commander-in-Chief of the Sipahi-e-Sahiba of Kabul Afghanistan to Commander-in-Chief, Terik-e-Jihad, Chokoria, Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh on 08-08-2000 indicates that a sum of Rs.80 lakh has been sent to the bank account no. 804856 of Islamia Bank, Chittagong to meet the expenditure of ULFA training camp located at Halowaghat and also to buy heavy arms for the outfit.

Another documentary evidence is a letter written by Jamaat-e-Islami chief of Bangladesh addressed to the General Secretary, MULTA which indicates that Jamaat-e-Islami of Pakistan has sent a sum of Rupees 8 Lakh through Jamaat-e-Islami of Bangladesh for assistance of MULTA in carrying out their struggle of establishing Muslim legal rights.

Another intelligence input received indicates that in order to run the training camp at Halowaghat, ULFA has recently opened two new bank accounts (i) Account No: 205341 in Islamia Bank, College Road Branch and (ii) Account No: 543708 in A.B. Bank, Medical Road Branch in Mymensingh District in Bangladesh. Reportedly ULFA is trying to establish a very profitable business of computer hardware and software in collaboration with Fema International, a Swedish computer company and

they have made all preparations for opening up a software network sometime in the month of September 2000 in Sabar about 30 Kms away from Dhaka...<sup>15</sup>

The Pakistani misadventure in Kargil brought out into the open the ULFA-ISI nexus.<sup>16</sup> According to the Indian army operating in Assam, the ULFA was involved in the passing of information of troop movements to and from Assam to the ISI. The ULFA was also allegedly pressured by the ISI to make anti-Indian statements—primarily supporting the liberation of Kashmir.

It has also been reported that the genocide perpetrated by the ULFA during the closing months of 2000 when they began to systematically target Hindi-speaking Assamese was planned by the ISI.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, intelligence reports have suggested that members of Bangladesh based Jamaat-e-Islami's student wing, the Islamic Chatra Shibir, operated along with the ULFA to perpetrate the acts of terror.

The ULFA has, however, denied any links with the ISI. It stated in its fortnightly newsletter:

Dismissing the continuous accusations of New Delhi and its occupation forces, ULFA Chief of Staff, Mr. Paresh Barua said that the ULFA is not a creation of the ISI. In a press release issued on November 3, Mr. Barua said that ULFA was born on the basis of genuine historical injustice in the womb of "Mother Assam", ULFA never danced, not in the present time or would dance in future to the tunes of the ISI or somebody else... The alleged link of the ULFA with ISI and other foreign agencies is only a heinous conspiracy of New Delhi, aimed at nullifying the legitimate liberation struggle of the people of Assam.<sup>18</sup>

One important aspect, however, which must be mentioned about the ULFA, is the refusal of most of the ULFA's 28<sup>th</sup> Battalion cadres to bow to the dictates of the ISI and destroy the oil installations situated in Upper Assam. The 28<sup>th</sup> Battalion<sup>19</sup> is situated in Upper Assam and most of the cadres of the battalion have grown up with the oil fields and the installations. As a result, when the ISI wanted the ULFA to attack the oil installations in Upper Assam, the 28<sup>th</sup> Battalion cadres disagreed. However, the non-compliance was short-lived and the ULFA fired a mortar shell onto a refinery in Upper Assam's oil town of Digboi on 8 March 2003 and inflicted considerable damage. The ISI has clearly won the "Upper Assam restraint" round, and analysts are of the opinion that the ULFA is completely in the control of the Pakistani intelligence agency.

### **Paraphernalia in Bangladesh**

Another consideration that could be facing the ULFA is the established paraphernalia it has in Bangladesh. Indeed, Bangladesh—along with Bhutan and Myanmar—is a country that houses the ULFA's training and liaison camps as well as its safe houses. Moreover, it is in the Bangladeshi cities of Dhaka and Chittagong that the leaders of the ULFA permanently reside. Also, most arms consignments that are dispatched to the ULFA from the Orient are conduited through Bangladesh, especially via the port city of Cox's Bazaar. The ULFA, moreover, seems to have a working relationship with the Bangladesh government and the present Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Begum Khaleda Zia, is well disposed towards them and is reported to have publicly called the ULFA—as well as other North East militant groups—freedom fighters during her term as the opposition leader of Bangladesh. This seems to be so, despite the fact that the ULFA General Secretary, Anup Chetia, was arrested in Dhaka on 21 December 1997, along with ULFA cadres Lakhi Prasad Goswami and Babul Sarma at a rented house at Mohammadpur in Dhaka on charges of illegal possession of a satellite phone among other material. Chetia is incarcerated in a Dhaka jail. However, Bangladesh has not consented to extradite the incarcerated ULFA leader to India, where he is sought for a number of criminal cases.<sup>20</sup>

Recent Indian intelligence reports have also indicated that there are as many as 155 militant camps in Bangladesh which train and house militants from North East India. A news report has stated:

Notwithstanding Bangladesh's denials, India has given a list of 155 terrorist training camps operating at various places in that country, many with the help of ISI and Al Qaida and asked it to shut them down, reports Press Trust of India. While conveying its concern over the support by some fundamentalist organizations of Bangladesh to North East terrorists, India at a recent high-level meeting has also sought deportation of 85 insurgents from the neighboring country... "We have information that ISI activities directed against India are on the rise in Bangladesh. ISI men along with Al Qaida operatives are imparting training at several of the camps," they said. They said that reports suggest that sophisticated weapons are being smuggled into India from various places in Bangladesh

including Cox's Bazaar, Sylhet and Chittagong and ISI operatives are playing a key role in this... Even terrorists operating in Jammu & Kashmir are also being sent via the Bangladesh border because of it being a more porous frontier than the western border...<sup>21</sup>

The Indian Ministry of Home Affairs some years ago published a booklet called *Bleeding Assam*,<sup>22</sup> where it stated that the leaders of the ULFA are running lucrative businesses in Bangladesh and are living a life of luxury. And, although at least this *Occasional Paper* will not seek to comment on the veracity or otherwise of such reports (independent inquiries made by the author seem to support that it is not the case that the ULFA leaders are living a life of luxury in Bangladesh), the fact of the matter is that the ULFA has invested a sizeable amount of the money which it receives or extorts from the business houses and the people of Assam into certain commerce making ventures in the erstwhile East Pakistan. And this is particularly true of the ULFA Chief of Staff who resides in a house adjacent to the Egyptian Embassy in Dhaka that belongs to a legislator of the Jatiyo Party. Indeed, Paresh Barua has also been known to stay in Old Dhaka's Segun Bagicha that is near the Shaji Exports, which is widely believed to be the front office of the ISI. The enigmatic ULFA leader also stays in a DGFI safe house in Dhaka's Mirpur cantonment. Therefore, unless Paresh Barua is traveling to Bhutan, Pakistan or South East Asia, he is a permanent resident of Bangladesh, and with the full knowledge of the Bangladesh authorities. The *Far Eastern Economic Review* Senior Writer, Bertil Lintner, who has documented the subterfuges in Bangladesh in a very comprehensive manner, has stated in an exclusive interview to this author (see below) that the leaders of the ULFA move around in Bangladesh escorted by the DGFI, the Bangladesh intelligence service. Analysts have opined on the protection that is constantly provided to the ULFA leaders in Bangladesh. While it seems that attempts have actually been made on the life of Paresh Barua, the ISI-DGFI nexus keeps him and some other important ULFA leaders under constant protection (surveillance), as they fear that they might leave Bangladesh in order to return to India and surrender. The ULFA of the day has no free agency and its policies and actions are wholly determined by the ISI and the DGFI. However, the fact that the ULFA Chief of Staff's life is in constant danger is not a matter that is in any doubt. Indeed, five attempts have been made on the life of Paresh Barua:

- 1) The first attempt was made in Bangladesh's Chittagong Hill Tracts (Khagrachari) on 16 December 2000. The son of the headmaster of Paresh Barua's home village in Upper Assam, Jeraigaon was killed in the attack. Chakma groups were utilized for the operation.
- 2) The second attack was outside the Basil Leaf Restaurant, Dhaka on 3 March 2001. Paresh Barua's financier, known as "Rumi Bhai," was killed. The services of the Dhaka underworld "Seven Stars" were commandeered for the operation.
- 3) The third attack was mounted in the house of former Jatiyo Party legislator, Abdul Qashem, whose house is the third house from the Egyptian embassy. Explosives were utilized for the purpose and once again the "Seven Stars" were enlisted to carry out the attack. A surrendered ULFA cadre, Senapati—who earlier had been sent to the ISI School in Muree in Pakistan—was involved.
- 4) The fourth attack was in Dhaka's Segun Bagicha—in front of the Cosmos Travel office where Paresh Barua reportedly runs a travel agency along with Khalek-ur-Zaman. Reports indicate that he had come to collect money when the attack took place.
- 5) The fifth attack was reportedly mounted on 27 May 2003 at Bangladesh's Uttara Model town. According to isolated reports, an Ehsan Ali—a DGFI captain detailed to guard the ULFA Chief of Staff—was seriously injured, while Paresh Barua experienced injuries to his leg. The ULFA Chief of Staff was reportedly meeting a Col. Salam and a Dhaka businessman, Ataur Rehman Babu. Unconfirmed reports have attributed the attack to the ULFA Operations Commander, Raju Baruah, but this is yet to be borne out by facts. In an interview with Paresh Barua, which was conducted by Subir Bhaumik, the ULFA Chief of Staff has stated that the attribution of responsibility to Raju Baruah is an attempt by the Indian intelligence to divide the ULFA. However, recent enquiries made by this author seem to suggest that much has been made of the 27 May attack. Paresh Barua was apparently not hurt and he even reportedly spoke to the former ULFA Publicity Secretary, Sunil Nath, on the night of 28 May. The ULFA Chief of Staff seems to be looking for opportunities to draw attention to himself.

Most of the ULFA camps in Bangladesh about the All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF) camps in Tarabon, Satchari, and Fatikchhari. And, although this *Occasional Paper* will discount the large number of North East

militant camps in Bangladesh, as the government in New Delhi has set out to do,<sup>23</sup> it has certain irrefutable evidence that both training and liaison camps belonging to the ULFA are in existence in Bangladesh.

The interrogation report of an arrested ULFA cadre, John Barua, makes for interesting reading. This *Occasional Paper* will reproduce sections relating to Bangladesh.

On the subject's travel to and in Bangladesh, the report states:

... On 8 October 2001, the subject along with Nayan, Suraj, Bitupan, Lebu and Dipjyoti reached the Sherpur Bus Stand after about one hour of traveling by a "tempo."<sup>24</sup> After about six-seven hours' journey by bus they reached Dhaka via Nakla, Phulpur, Mymensingh, Trishal, Bhaluka, Sripur and Tongi. Thence by auto rickshaw they reached Elephant Road by passing through Kataban, Mogbazar, Phakirapul, Stadium Market and Dhaka University. At the tri-junction of Elephant Road and Kataban there is a flower shop called "Pushpanjali" and there are some shops selling aquariums. From this tri-junction, a by-lane goes to the left which when taken for about 100 meters comes upon a building complex... before reaching this complex taking the right by-lane, one reaches a butcher's shop with glass walls. The next shop is a Public Call office [telephone booth] called "Asif PCO" which is owned by an ULFA cadre, "Lt." Pranjit Saikia...

... Paresh Barua, Chief of Staff of the ULFA has a four-room apartment in a three-storied building in Dhaka's Green Road. The apartment is on the top floor of the building. In the ground floor there is an air-conditioned grocery shop called "Rahman Traders" and opposite the building is a pathological clinic called "Skylab." Paresh Barua stays in this apartment with his wife Bobby Hazarika alias Anwara Begum<sup>25</sup> aged 37-38 years and their two sons Arindam aged 8 and Baby aged 5. Paresh Barua uses a Calora 1000 cc car, which is of Japanese make. The color of the vehicle is coffee brown and Sahidul alias Kalita of Mirza,<sup>26</sup> an ULFA cadre drives the car... the children of Paresh Barua address their parents as Ammi and Abbu<sup>27</sup> and speak Bengali and are accustomed to Muslim culture and tradition... Paresh Barua, Pranjit Saikia, Drishti Rajkhowa and Sahidul go and play football in Dhaka's Sansad Bhawan every morning from 5 AM to 8:30 AM...

... On 30 October 2001, the subject along with Lebu alias Suraj Sikdar went to the Satchari joint ATTF-ULFA camp, which is located in Habiganj district's Maulavi Bazaar sub-division. The camp is located inside the Satsoo Tea Estate and is behind the Tripuribasti... Every month about Rs. 30-40,000 are spent for the maintenance of the camp. Pranjit Saikia receives extorted money from Assam from time to time and gives the money to "Sgt. Maj." Salim of Tinsukia<sup>28</sup> as per requirement... ULFA has procured huge numbers of sophisticated arms and ammunition from foreign countries with the extorted money and has stored these at a hideout in Chittagong. Paresh Barua and the ULFA Foreign Secretary, Sasadhur Choudhury, procured the arms. "Lt." Amar Singh of Golaghat is in charge of the arsenal... the subject has received the following consignment of arms:

On 8 November 2001: 8 Sniper Rifles

On 20 November 2001: 10 AK 81 Rifles

On 20 November 2001: 10 .56 Pistols...

John Barua has given detailed information about the ULFA paraphernalia in Bangladesh including the training that is imparted to its cadres. However, the revelations of a ULFA cadre, Dwipamani Kalita, alias Seema Biswas, who surrendered before the Assam Police on 20 April 2003 are particularly interesting.<sup>29</sup> This is because of the fact that the cadre—a lady—was responsible for some of the mortar attacks that were taking place all over Assam in the recent months and had flummoxed the authorities. Dwipamani Kalita was responsible for two mortar attacks, which were carried out in the heart of Assam's capital city, Guwahati.<sup>30</sup> The *Occasional Paper* reproduces here relevant portions of Kalita's interrogation report in toto because it gives a first hand account of the ULFA agenda and paraphernalia in Bangladesh.

On 6 April 1998, I [Dwipamani Kalita] joined the ULFA and underwent arms and guerrilla training at the Enigma B camp in Bhutan under the Operations Commander Capt. Raju Barua. Afterwards, I took part in several operations under Lt. Lal Deka, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Dristi Rajkhowa and Sgt. Maj. Subhash Sarma in the East and West Garo Hills, Goalpara and Dhubri districts.

While I was taking shelter in the houses of Biraj Koch, Moni Koch and Dipak Koch of village Puthimari under Garobadha Police Station in West Garo Hills, Subhash Sarma told me that the Chief of Staff, Paresh Baruah has summoned me and Sgt. Dilip Roy of Bongaigaon (later killed on 4 April 2003) to go to Bangladesh on a matter of great urgency. We were to leave for Bangladesh under the guidance of an elderly (55 years) Rava person—some Bangladeshi people were also to assist us in reaching the destination. On the way to Bangladesh I was to identify myself as Rojana Begum and Dilip Roy as Islam Uddin. We were not allowed to carry any Indian articles, even wristwatches were not permitted in order to avoid detection.

On 2 September 2001, at about 3:30 PM Dilip Roy and I—on being guided by the elderly Rava man—left Puthimari by a Maruti van and at about 4:30 PM reached near Baghmara. We walked for about 45 minutes and met a Bangladeshi couple. They were waiting for us with a foreign car that looked like an Ambassador's car. We all boarded the car that proceeded slowly for about 20/25 minutes. We crossed the Indo-Bangladesh border and reached Halowaghat. From Halowaghat we proceeded along a paved road. After a non-stop journey, we reached Narayanganj in the morning and after walking for about 30 minutes by a kutcha<sup>31</sup> road we reached the house of a bearded Muslim man. The elderly Rava man told Dilip Roy and me that we were to work as per direction of the house owner.

Dilip Roy and I were accommodated in a room of a concrete house. In another room there were two NDFB and two NSCN (K) [National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Khaplang)] activists. The house owner had asked us not to talk with one another.

On 23 September 2001, at about 1 in the afternoon Paresh Barua along with Lt. Ram Gogoi of Dibrugarh, and Khagen Choudhury and two Bangladeshis came to the place and remained there for about 4 to 5 hours. Paresh Baruah told Dilip and me to obey the instructions of the house owner and not to ask any questions. He also told us that we would be given some special training.

After about 5 days in the evening Paresh Baruah along with his driver ULFA activist Khagen Choudhury and one Bangladeshi youth came to our shelter. Lt. Dibyajyoti Mahanta also came with him. Paresh Baruah told Dilip and me that from the next day we would be given training for some days by some persons as arranged by ULFA and that no ULFA member would be with us during the training.

As far as I recollect, on 30 September 2001, at about 5:30 in the morning, two vehicles came to our place. The two NDFB, the two NSCN (K) cadres, Dilip Roy and I boarded one of the vehicles while five other persons boarded the other vehicle. The five persons looked like Army personnel who could speak Bengali. After crossing Faridpur at about 8:30–8:45 AM we reached a place that was said to be Misnupur. At Misnupur we were blindfolded. Then by the same vehicle we proceeded for about 30 minutes and reached a camp where there were about 10 to 15 houses.

The five persons of the other vehicle imparted training with respect to handling and operation of RPG-7 and 60 MM mortar. RPG-7 can be fired from 400 to 500 meters and 60 MM mortar can be fired from a maximum of 1600 meters. At about 9 PM we came back to our shelter place in Narayanganj.

Again on 1 October 2001 we went to the training camp, underwent training and came back. We carried our lunch boxes with us. Thereafter, we were given training on alternate days. We underwent training at Misnupur for 14 days in all. On the last day of the training we had range practice and I fired 12 shells from 60 MM mortar while Dilip fired 3 shells from 60 MM mortar. Due to non-availability of ammunition we could not fire the RPG-7.

The NSCN (K) and NDFB cadre underwent training for only seven days. I do not know their names.

From the language spoken by the instructors one could guess that they were non-Bangladeshi and could be Urdu speaking people. They were smart like army personnel.

During the course of the training Paresh Barua visited us at the training camp. His second visit was on the day of firing. Lt. Dipjyoti Mahanta, driver Khagen Choudhury and two Bangladeshi people who might be from the intelligence department also visited us.

While the mortar training was going on, Sgt. Maj Phanindra Medhi alias Lebu took me and Dilip Roy to a place called Parbatipur in Dinajpur district on alternate days for imparting unarmed combat and

other training. The training center was located inside a jungle surrounded by concrete wall. It is a permanent training center having provisions for obstacles etc. It took us about five and a half hours to reach Parbatipur from Narayanganj.

Lebu had taught martial arts to Dilip and me along with about 50 to 60 Bangladeshi youths of the age groups 25 to 30 years. We were taken to Parbatipur for about 10 days. In addition to this Lebu taught us about different firing positions of a pistol, AK-56, AK-81.

On 1 November 2001 we completed our training.

The ULFA's geo-political compulsions, its connection with the ISI, the organizations paraphernalia in Bangladesh, and indeed, the entire process by which it has abdicated its ideology, has, therefore, only expedited the fundamentalist agenda which is being engineered in Assam. And although it may be said that the ground was already fertile for the growth of Islamic movements in Assam as a result of not only the illegal influx into the state from Bangladesh but also because of the dynamics that egg on Islamic fundamentalism of the day (especially after 11 September 2001), the fact of the matter is that a strong ethnic movement such as the ULFA would have stood in the way of the fundamentalist progress had it not reneged on its founding principles.

But 2003 is not 1979, and even as the ULFA approaches its silver jubilee year, its tryst with violence continues. Indeed, the atmosphere in the North East (with the two factions of the NSCN ceasing hostilities and talking to the Government of India) has not had a mellowing effect on the ULFA leadership, which (if reports are anything to go by) seem to feel that the Naga groups are being worn out by a succession of talks, and would, consequently, not receive anything from New Delhi. Indeed, every time the Naga talks end in stalemate, Paresh Barua has been reported to use the occasion as brownie points over his more talk-seeking political wing cadres. Commenting on New Delhi's peace process in the North East, an editorial in the ULFA's newsletter observes:

Time has paced another decade since the capitulation of the Mizo freedom movement. The environment of the surroundings of occupation India is also not as healthy as the past eras. So it will be a futile try for Indian government to solve the ongoing conflicts according to the style of Mizoram. Military pressure will not work specially in case of ULFA to compel it to sit across table. ULFA has already withstood rigorous Indian campaigns and ready to cope against all possibilities with the help of armed resistance may be best ever than anytime.

Hence, what ULFA proposes India is to deal all the conflicts in the region formulating a declared political common minimum strategy rather than playing a cat and mouse game. ULFA doesn't have any quest to be a party of such a worthless Indian endeavor. The preconditions of ULFA are set as assurances of guarantee to confirm sincerity of occupation India beforehand. India should better understand that a political solution doesn't necessarily mean capitulation...<sup>32</sup>

Moreover, even Paresh Barua has now begun to bow to ISI dictates for the destruction of oil installations, etc. The restraint with which he had sought to override such assertions have ended, and the ULFA Chief of Staff is aware that his organization is now completely at the mercy of the foreign intelligence agencies—the ISI and the DGFI. Indeed, certain analysts have opined that the ISI-DGFI will not hesitate to assassinate Paresh Barua if he turns out to be a loose cannon—the increasing reliance with which the ISI-DGFI are presently beginning to utilize the Islamic groups in Assam seem to be indicative of this danger. The alien chaperons of the ULFA will never let Paresh Barua return to India in order to surrender.

An important factor in the chessboard of Islamic militancy in the region is Bangladesh. The erstwhile East Pakistan—liberated by India in 1971—is presently undergoing a metamorphosis. Indeed, as Bertil Lintner of the *Far Eastern Economic Review* opines:

A revolution is taking place in Bangladesh that threatens trouble for the region and beyond if left unchallenged. Islamic fundamentalism, religious intolerance, militant Muslim groups with links to international terrorist groups, a powerful military with ties to the militants, the mushrooming of Islamic schools churning out radical students, middle-class apathy, poverty and lawlessness—all are combining to transform the nation.<sup>33</sup>

The once moderate Islamic Bangladesh, founded on the the principles of democracy, secularism, socialism and Bengali nationalism, is today in the throes of forcible conversion—with far reaching ramifications not only for the region but also for the world, which is yet to recover from the effects of 11 September. The next chapter will examine how this conversion is manifesting itself in the erstwhile East Pakistan.



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Misra, *The Periphery Strikes Back*, 133.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>3</sup> The ULFA was midwived by Arabinda Rajkhowa, the Chairman; Paresh Barua, the Chief of Staff; Pradip Gogoi, the Vice Chairman; and Anup Chetia, the General Secretary, and was formed in Assam's Sibsagar on 7 April 1979.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Sanjiv Barua in *Asia Source*, available at <[http://www.asiasource.org/news/special\\_reports/assam.cfm](http://www.asiasource.org/news/special_reports/assam.cfm)> (accessed 27 March 2003). Barua is a Professor of Political Science at Bard College in Annandale at Hudson, New York.

<sup>5</sup> The ULFA Home Page. See <<http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/Congress/7434/ulfa.htm>> (accessed 18 July 2003), especially the section on *Qualification for Membership*.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* See the section on *Aims and Objectives*.

<sup>7</sup> In the late 1980s, the ULFA began to woo the illegal migrants as a possible parish for their agenda. A novel method that was exhibited in the media of the period was by way of offering them "Tamul-Pan" (the traditional betel-nut which is offered to honored guests in Assam).

<sup>8</sup> ULFA pamphlet entitled *Asombasi Purbabangeeya Janagosthilo Ulfar Ahvan* (ULFA's call to the groups from East Bengal living in Assam), quoted in Samir Das, "Assam: Insurgency and the Disintegration of Civil Society," *Faultlines: Writings on Conflict and Resolution* (New Delhi) vol. 13.

<sup>9</sup> Das, *op. cit.*

<sup>10</sup> Misra, *The Periphery Strikes Back*, 142.

<sup>11</sup> *Freedom* [newsletter of the ULFA], vol. 5, issue 10, 15 May 2002. See the editorial "Indian Aliens and Demographic Collapse."

<sup>12</sup> The army officers who man the ISI and the DGFI have similar backgrounds, since most of the senior Bangladeshi army officers received their commissions in the inner echelons of the Pakistani military academies. Certain officers, consequently, continue to maintain a cordial relationship with one another.

<sup>13</sup> For a brief introduction to the ISI, see Federation of American Scientists, *Intelligence Resource Program*, <<http://www.fas.org/irp/world/pakistan/isi/index.html>> (accessed on 12 March 2003).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> The letter, No.SB.IV/724/2000/85, is dated 7 September 2000.

<sup>16</sup> P.V. Ramana, "'Networking' the Northeast Partners in Terror." Available online at the South Asia Terrorism Portal, *Faultlines*, <<http://www.satp.org/satporgrp/publication/faultlines/vol11/Article6.htm>> (accessed on 24 March 2003).

<sup>17</sup> See Assam & the Northeast, *Timeline 2000*, <<http://www.axom.faihw.com/timeline>> (accessed on 5 April 2003).

<sup>18</sup> *Freedom* [newsletter of the ULFA], vol. 3, issue 21, 15 November 2000.

<sup>19</sup> The ULFA has three active armed battalions. The 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion is stationed in Bhutan and is responsible for the defense of the Sukhni based ULFA General HQ, the 709 Battalion is in Bhutan's Kalikhola; and the 28<sup>th</sup> Battalion is presently in the Myanmar Naga Hills, although it was originally stationed in Assam's Dibrugarh district. For a complete exposition of the ULFA organizational structure see Jaideep Saikia, *Contours: Essays in Security & Strategy* (Guwahati: Sagittarius Publication, 2000).

<sup>20</sup> Indeed, it seems that the ULFA General Secretary is being held in Dhaka because of some understanding that the ULFA Chief of Staff has with the Bangla authorities. In any event, Sigma Huda, the wife of Najmul Huda, a Barrister—who is also a minister in the Bangladesh National Party government—and *Odhikar*, a Dhaka based NGO, are fighting for the release of the ULFA General Secretary. The non-existence of an extradition treaty between Bangladesh and India has prevented Chetia's expatriation from Bangladesh. Indeed, the ULFA's General Secretary who had in 1997 sought to represent the organization in the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in Geneva—as a John David Salomar—has been seeking asylum in Bangladesh. On 24 September 2002, a Dhaka court sentenced Chetia and two of his associates to a seven-year prison term.

<sup>21</sup> "India Seeks Closure of 155 Ultra Camps in Bangladesh," *Assam Tribune* (Guwahati), 12 May 2003. Also see "Ultra Camps in Bangladesh" (editorial), *Assam Tribune* (Guwahati), 14 May 2003.

<sup>22</sup> The booklet did not, however, provide the name of the publisher. The Ministry of Home Affairs name came to the fore only as a rumor.

<sup>23</sup> New Delhi's number of 155 camps probably takes into account every liaison, transit, and temporary camp. In the opinion of the author, the number of full-fledged militant camps (all North East groups) is about twenty-five. However, the Muslim fundamentalist organizations have separate camps.

<sup>24</sup> The author has altered the language of the interrogation report without altering fact and content in order to make it more readable. "Tempo" is probably the local term for a motorized three-wheeler, also known as auto-rickshaws in India.

<sup>25</sup> Note that Paresh Barua's wife—an Assamese Hindu—has taken on a Muslim alias in Dhaka.

<sup>26</sup> Mirza is the name of a place in Lower Assam.

<sup>27</sup> *Ammi* and *Abbu* are Muslim forms of address for mother and father.

<sup>28</sup> Tinsukia is a place in Upper Assam.

<sup>29</sup> Addressing newsmen, Khagen Sarma, Inspector General of Police (Special Branch), Assam revealed that the Assam Police had achieved a major breakthrough in the mortar attack cases in Guwahati city following the surrender of hardcore ULFA militant Dwipamani Kalita alias Sima Biswas alias Moina alias Sima Sonowal, who fired the mortars in Dispur capital complex and Ambari area of the city...Khagen Sarma revealed that the plan to launch mortar attacks to create chaos and show the outfit's strength was hatched in Bangladesh. Only four top leaders—Paresh Barua, Raju Baruah, Drishti Rajkhowa and Ram Gogoi—were aware of the plan...See "Top Woman ULFA Cadre Surrenders," *Assam Tribune* (Guwahati), 21 April 2003.

<sup>30</sup> The ULFA has carried out four mortar attacks in Assam since October 2002. The first attack was carried out on 27 October 2002 when Dwipamani Kalita fired two shells from the Dispur Law College onto the Capital complex in Dispur. Three cars were damaged in the attack. On 25 December, the same ULFA cadre fired six shells from an abandoned railway line near Guwahati's Ambari killing three and injuring nineteen others. Cadres of the ULFA shelled the Indian Air Force Station in Guwahati on 23 February 2003 and inflicted damage to the airmen's mess. On 8 March 2003, the ULFA fired mortar shells onto the Digboi Oil Refinery and set fire to a 5,000 kiloliter petrol tank.

<sup>31</sup> A *kutch* road is an unpaved road, common in South Asia.

<sup>32</sup> "Peace & Inter-relationship" (editorial), *Freedom* [Newsletter of the ULFA], vol. 7, issue 10, 15 May 2003.

<sup>33</sup> Bertil Lintner, "Bangladesh: A Cocoon of Terror," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 4 April 2002.

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**CHAPTER THREE**  
**Events in the Neighborhood**

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*Amra hobo Taliban, Bangla hobe Afghan* [we will be the Taliban, Bangladesh will become Afghanistan]  
Islamic fundamentalist slogan in present-day Bangladesh

### **Islam in Bangladesh**

Although it is assumed that with the formation of Bangladesh in 1971, a nation-state based on the principles of “secularism,” “democracy,” “socialism,” and “Bengali nationalism” was established, a little known fact is that the first seed of Islamization was sown by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman himself—the man who was primarily responsible for the severance of the country from Pakistan and the principal architect of the state principles which founded the new nation. This, according to J.N. Dixit, a former Indian Foreign Secretary and pioneering envoy to the newly established state, was due to the Bangabandhu’s<sup>1</sup> apprehension that members of the Mukti Bahini<sup>2</sup> and the Mujibnagar Government<sup>3</sup> were becoming too powerful inside his regime and that he had to take steps to assert Bangladesh’s independent identity by distancing his country and himself from India. Dixit writes:

...a metamorphosis in the social and political scene of Bangladesh had occurred, first because of Mujib’s own lack of conviction about transforming his country into a genuine secular-democracy and, second, because he had consciously allowed re-induction of pro-Pakistani and anti-liberation elements into Bangladesh’s politics, civil services and armed forces. He adopted such a strategy in order to reduce the influence of political leaders and armed forces personnel who were actively involved in the freedom struggle. My assessment is that he hoped to ensure supreme power for himself by counterbalancing and playing of these two groups against each other in the domestic political processes...with the passage of time, Bangladesh became an Islamic republic. It must not be forgotten that the first step in the direction was taken by Mujib himself who attended the OIC [Organization of Islamic Countries] summit conference in Lahore in 1974. Whosoever came to power in Bangladesh had to fulfill two stipulations for surviving in power: first, that he or she should maintain a certain amount of distance from India and second, the person should confirm the Islamic identity of Bangladesh.<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, the Muslim identity of present-day Bangladesh was sought to be established way back in 1901 and 1947 when the British first divided Bengal and then the sub-continent on distinct Hindu-Muslim lines.<sup>5</sup> And although a sizeable Hindu population had continued to reside in East Bengal and consequently East Pakistan, Hindu migration to India was also continuing and had gradually increased as a result of the growing anti-Hindu feelings in the country after the partition. The phobia towards Hindus of the pre-partition days that had metamorphosed into Indophobia in 1947 (certain secular Bengali Muslims had expressed their opposition to the anti-Hindu rhetoric by seeking to proclaim Bengali nationalism, which had briefly gained in ground after the liberation of Bangladesh) continues to mark an average Bangladeshi’s perception of the other. The ruling Bangladeshi class had realized this soon after the formation of Bangladesh and consequently made successive attempts to project not only the anti-India stance of the country, but also its Islamic innards, which came to be the basis of anti-India rhetoric in the subcontinent.

Another theory that has been forwarded for the Islamization of Bangladesh is the failure of successive governments in the country, beginning with that of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Attributing the Islamization of the polity to the failure of Mujibism, a scholar writes:

The abysmal failure of Mujibism to alleviate poverty and restore law and order eventually led to the Islamization of the polity. The failure of the “welfare state” forced a large section of the underdogs to cling to Islam either as a means to escape from the harsh reality or to achieve their cherished Golden Bengal through piety, Islamic justice and egalitarianism. Without having substantial changes in the living condition—around 50 percent of the population still living below the poverty line—the tide of Globalization in the post-Cold War period has not reduced the Islamic fervor of the people. The obsolescence of socialism/communism as an alternative to “illiberal democracy” and autocracy in the Third World since the early 1990s and the sudden rise in the intensity of Islamic resurgence and “Islamic” terror globally in recent years have further intensified Islamism in Bangladesh.<sup>6</sup>

However, to keep to a description of the historical process, the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the military coup of August 1975, the process of Islamization of the fledgling state grew in magnitude and the military rulers of the post-Mujib era systematically purged the founding ideals one by one. And, therefore, even as Gen. Zia-ur-Rahman amended the constitution and replaced “socialism,” “secularism,” and “Bengali nationalism” with “social justice,” “absolute faith in God almighty,” and “Bangladeshi nationalism,”<sup>7</sup> he also had “In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful” inserted in Arabic in the preamble of the Constitution.<sup>8</sup> Lt. Gen. H.M. Ershad, who took over in March 1982, went a step further. Despite the fact that he was known as no puritan (he was notorious for his corruption and promiscuity<sup>9</sup>), Ershad amended the Constitution in June 1988 and introduced Islam as the state religion. And, almost by default—as Ershad was never sincerely committed to Islam—Bangladesh was on the road to Islamism.

Noted Bangladesh observer and Eastern India British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) Correspondent, Subir Bhaumik writes:

Both the country’s military rulers, Gen Zia-ur-Rahman and Hussein Mohammed Ershad, were not only instrumental in rehabilitating the pro-Pakistani fundamentalist parties and personalities in politics but were responsible for eliminating the heroes of the freedom struggle from positions of responsibility and power. Gholam Azam, the hated Naib Emir of the Jamaat-e-Islami, who had publicly opposed the liberation of Pakistan and joined the Pakistan army with his followers in the mass carnages in 1971, was allowed to return to Bangladesh. President Zia restored his citizenship and passport and he was permitted freedom of political activity. Now, President Zia-ur-Rahman was no Pakistani collaborator. He was one of Bangladesh’s great liberation war heroes, a sector commander of the liberation army, Mukti Bahini, and the first to formally appeal to all Bengalis to stand up to the Pakistani atrocities with weapons. But while Zia hanged such liberation war heroes like Col Abu Taher, the man who had helped him to come to power, he provided legitimacy to fundamentalists and pro-Pakistani collaborators like Gholam Azam.<sup>10</sup>

While Zia began to appease the anti-liberationists, Ershad—who had not even been in the liberation war—purged the senior echelons of Bangladesh life of all freedom fighters. Ershad replaced them with people who had served the Pakistan army in 1971 and had subsequently sought repatriation to the new-formed Bangladesh army, exercising the clause to opt-out, which was available to Bengali armed forces personnel after the liberation of East Pakistan. Indeed, almost all the new recruits into the Bangladesh army and the country’s premier intelligence agency, the Directorate General of Field Intelligence (DGFI), were drawn from the families of the *rajakars* and fundamentalist politicians. According to one report, the son of Gholam Azam too was inducted into the Bangladesh army and has reportedly risen to the rank of a Brigadier.<sup>11</sup>

Ershad, moreover, introduced prohibition<sup>12</sup> and the *zakat*.<sup>13</sup> He declared Friday as a weekly holiday. And when India constructed the Farakka barrage across the Ganga river, which flows into Bangladesh, Ershad invoked Islam in his anti-India rhetoric by stating “it is being said today that if we do not get water from Farakka the northern and southern regions of Bangladesh will turn into deserts. I want to remind everybody concerned that Islam was born in the desert, but Islam did not die. Islam could not be destroyed.”<sup>14</sup>

Although the intention of invoking Islam by the military rulers was to ensure the sustenance of power, the crescent ensemble was slowly making its way into the innards of Bangladeshi society. This was so despite the fact that Ershad was overthrown in December 1990 by the combined political forces of the Awami League,<sup>15</sup> the Bangladesh National Party, and interestingly, the Jamaat-e-Islami.<sup>16</sup>

### **Jamaat-e-Islami**

The Islamic resurgence in Bangladesh can be said to have begun with the resurfacing of the Jamaat-e-Islami. Indeed, as Subir Bhaumik writes, the “revival of the Islamic fundamentalist forces in Bangladesh was manifested in the re-emergence of the Jamaat-e-Islami as a small but well-knit political party...the Jamaat and the Islamic Oikyo Jote have strong financial backing of organizations such as the Rabitat al Islami of Saudi Arabia. With such assured fund flows, these parties run a wide network of Madrassas (Islamic schools), Ibnsena hospitals and Islamic banks covering the whole country.”<sup>17</sup>

Because of its collaborative role in the Bangladesh liberation war, the Jamaat was able to return to legitimate politics only after the assassination of Sheikh Mujib-ur-Rahman in 1975, and as has been seen even joined hands with the pro-liberation Awami League in the movement against Ershad. Indeed, the anti-Ershad

movement gave it legitimacy for the first time, and according to a prominent secular intellectual, the Jamaat's position was further legitimized when the Awami League went into a tactical parley with the Jamaat to keep it away from the Bangladesh National Party (BNP) for electoral-tactical considerations before the 1996 elections. And, of course, the Jamaat allied with the BNP in the 2001 elections that defeated the Awami League. Therefore, whatever its role and alliances, the Jamaat is today in a position of reckoning and it has emerged as the third largest political party in Bangladesh.

The changing fortunes of the Jamaat-e-Islami in the political space of Bangladesh are interesting when the circumstances of its ostracization in the aftermath of the liberation war are considered. A scholar has vividly documented the anti-liberation agenda of the Jamaat.

The events leading up to the creation of Bangladesh had critical implications for the future of Islamic groups in East Bengali Muslim society. Not the least of these was the active involvement of staunchly pro-Pakistani Islamic groups within East Pakistan in the killing of large numbers of Bengali freedom fighters, particularly the intellectuals who were the guiding force behind the liberation struggle. Most actively involved in these killings was the Jamaat-e-Islami. Led by Gholam Azam, the Jamaat openly collaborated with the Pakistani forces in their attempt to crush the Bengali freedom movement. During the war itself, Gholam Azam shifted his base to West Pakistan, from where he directed his deputy, Abbas Ali Khan, to form the *rajakars*, the dreaded paramilitary outfit whose task was to identify and kill freedom fighters. A similar group, *Al Badr* was launched by the Islamic *Chatra Shibir*, the students' wing of the Jamaat-e-Islami...<sup>18</sup>

Indeed, the return of the Jamaat to the land where they were once hated as anti-liberationists has had far reaching ramifications. It has signaled the revival of old linkages between Bangladesh and Pakistan and its bid to promote an anti-India stance has brought to the fore a fundamentalist agenda which is both anti-Hindu and anti-India.

### Anti-Hindu Movement

The anti-Hindu movement was well in evidence since the partition of India and the formation of East Pakistan. A series of laws were enacted in Pakistan (and later on in Bangladesh) by which the Hindu community has been marginalized. An enumeration of the highpoints by which the marginalization took place will be appropriate at this juncture.

- The East Bengal Evacuees (Administration of Immovable Property) Act of 1951: Under the aegis of this act, the Hindus were allowed to take with them—on their movement to India—a negligible portion of their movable assets. Land and other immovable assets were administered under the act, which meant that the land that was left behind was taken over by the state.<sup>19</sup>
- During the 1965 Indo-Pak war, a law called the “The Defense of Pakistan Ordinance” was promulgated to “ensure the security, the public safety, interest and the defense of the state.” This was succeeded by a regulation, which was called “The Enemy (Custody and Registration) Order II of 1965.” Under the regulation, India was declared an enemy, and the regulation allowed “enemy” lands (which for all practical purposes were those of the Hindus) to be appropriated by the state.<sup>20</sup>
- During the 1971 liberation war, the Hindus were considered to be the enemy, a “fifth column” for India and were consequently mercilessly targeted. Indeed, in a statement on 1 November 1971, US Senator Edward Kennedy wrote:

Field reports to the US Government, countless eye-witnesses, journalistic accounts, reports of international agencies such as the World Bank and additional information available to the subcommittee document the reign of terror which grips East Bengal (East Pakistan). Hardest hit have been members of the Hindu community who have been robbed of their lands and shops, systematically slaughtered, and in some cases, painted with yellow patches marked “H.” All of this has been officially sanctioned, ordered and implemented under the martial law from Islamabad.<sup>21</sup>

- After the liberation of Bangladesh, a new law—the “Vested and Non-resident Property Act” of 1974—was enacted whereby the properties left behind by the Pakistanis and the erstwhile “enemy properties” were amalgamated, and although the principal aim was to appropriate the Pakistani-

owned properties as well as properties which had belonged to the Hindus who had fled the country during the liberation war, in practice the act was liberally used against the Hindu community.<sup>22</sup> According to the US State Department Country Report on Human Rights Practice, 4 March 2002, “approximately 2.5 million acres of land were seized from Hindus and almost all of the 10 million Hindus in the country were affected.”

However, the atrocities that were committed during the 1 Oct 2001 elections outdid all earlier manifestations. Indeed, a pogrom was engineered against the Hindu community in Bangladesh, primarily for three reasons. The most important reason was the elections of 2001 that brought the BNP-led four-party alliance into power. The Hindus have been traditionally thought of as supporters of the Awami League; in this instance supporters of the BNP, the Jamaat, and the Islamic Chatra Shibir wanted to express their ire for the support that the Hindus had shown for the League. Another reason for the pogrom is that it was deemed that attacks on Hindus would not only “counter” the “attacks on Muslims in India,” but would clearly state the new government’s anti-India stance. Indeed, in the aftermath of the attacks several protests were made in India. The third reason was that by attacking Hindus (considered to be the traditional rival of Muslims in the Indian sub-continent) the perpetrators were publicly exhibiting their Islamic color.

The pogrom was spread over fifty-seven of Bangladesh’s sixty-eight districts, and according to a report 613 cases of violence were witnessed against the Hindus.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, even a case of state complicity seems to be gaining ground, with the government denying any knowledge of such incidents in the beginning. Later, under pressure from the media and sundry other sections, it admitted the occurrence of some violence but only one police inspector was temporarily suspended for negligence of duty towards the minorities. As for the judiciary in the country—responding to a petition filed by the *Ain O Salish Kendra* (a human rights organization)—the Supreme Court of Bangladesh issued a rule *nisi* on the government to show cause as to why action should not be taken to protect the minorities. Writing about the atrocities on Hindus in 2001, scholars are of the opinion that although the traditional mode of grabbing land, house properties, shops and establishments and, in a word, wealth of any kind has remained the same, there has been some difference in the ways and means of committing it. Writing about the method, some scholars have opined:

The sole reason is not, however, political or economic. But a clear fomentation by the religious fundamentalists, according to a well chalked out blueprint. It is evident from the pattern of atrocities that religious cleansing of the Hindus is the primary goal. The underlying policy is *jane maaris na ijat maar* (don’t kill them, rape their women) so that they are compelled to leave Bangladesh gradually and slowly out of mental agony. There will be adverse reaction and India may not view it lightly if they are driven out in one go and the progressive elements in Bangladesh,<sup>24</sup> though small in number might try to resist it.<sup>25</sup>

### **Amnesty International Report**

In its December 2001 report on the atrocities committed against Hindus in Bangladesh, Amnesty International provided the following information:

The current wave of attacks against the Hindu community in Bangladesh began before the general elections of 1 October 2001 when Hindus were reportedly threatened by members of the BNP-led alliance not to vote, since their vote would be cast for the Awami League. The backlash after the elections was systematic and severe...

Human rights organizations in Bangladesh believe over 100 women may have been subjected to rape. Reports persistently allege that the perpetrators have been mainly members of the BNP or its coalition partner Jamaat-e-Islami...

A college student was reportedly raped in front of her mother at her home in Azimnagar, Bhanga, Faridpur. The attackers reportedly entered her home on 6 October at about 9 PM, ransacked the house, looted valuables and raped the student before leaving the house...

A schoolgirl was reportedly gang-raped in Delua, Ullapara, Sirajganj on 8 October. Attackers entered her home, ill-treated members of her family, took her outside and raped her...

Two Hindu women were reportedly raped in front of their husbands on 11 October in Khanzapur Upazila in Gournadi, Barisal. The attackers reportedly came at night, knocked on the door and told the

family that they should leave the area because they had voted for the Awami League. Then they reportedly tied up the husbands and raped the women...

The killing of prominent members of the Hindu community appears to be connected to the current wave of attacks on Hindus. On 16 November, Gopal Krishna Muhuri, Principal of Nazirhat College in Chittagong, was shot dead at his home... police reportedly arrested at least two teachers and colleagues of Gopal Krishna Muhuri on 17 November in connection with his murder. They were allegedly linked to Jamaat-e-Islami, a party in the coalition government...<sup>26</sup>

### The Case of Taslima Nasreen

The secular space of Bangladesh was compromised in other ways as well. The arrests of progressive elements, such as the moderate journalist Shahriyar Kabir and teacher-activist Professor Muntassir Mamoons, for documenting and speaking out against the atrocities committed on the Hindus were preceded by a *fatwa* (Islamic edict) against Taslima Nasreen, a Bangladeshi physician, columnist and author.<sup>27</sup> A price of five thousand dollars was put on her head by Bangladesh's "holy men" after she wrote a novel *Lajja* [Shame] which was based on the plight of Hindus in Bangladesh. Under pressure from the fundamentalists, even the government brought criminal charges against her for defaming the Muslim faith. Thousands of people demonstrated daily demanding her death. Nasreen fled Bangladesh and sought refuge in Sweden. Today she lives a life of exile in France.

Her syndicated newspaper column had sought to draw the public's attention to the atrocities that are committed against women in Bangladesh. One such column spoke of the execution of a twenty-one-year-old woman in 1993 at the behest of the local *mullah* who had declared her second marriage a violation of the Islamic laws. As punishment, the *mullah* gathered the villagers and—burying the young woman waist deep in a pit—exhorted the gathering to stone her to death. Nasreen's interview to the *New Yorker* of 12 September 1994 makes poignant reading:

Why shouldn't I write about what I've seen? I'm a doctor, remember! Do you know what's it like to see a woman crying out in the delivery room when she gives birth to a girl, terrified that her husband will divorce her? To see the ruptured vaginas of women who've been raped? The six-and-seven year olds who have been violated by their fathers, brothers and uncles—by their own families? No, I will not keep quiet. I will continue to speak out about these women's wretched lives.<sup>28</sup>

Awarded the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought in 1994, Nasreen says in the interview that "if the progressive forces in our country don't unite, if they don't stand up to the fundamentalists, then there's no question the fundamentalists will have won."

### Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (Bangladesh)

Indeed, fundamentalism seems to have won the first round in Bangladesh. And, the *Sipahis* (soldiers) of Allah—the Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami of Bangladesh (HUJI-B)—are arraying themselves to foist *Nizam-e-Mustafa*—or Islamic rule—in the erstwhile East Pakistan.

The HUJI-B was formed in 1992 with the active aid of Osama Bin Laden and is headed by Shawkat Osman, alias Maulana Farid, of Chittagong. According to the US State Department, the HUJI-B has "at least six camps in Bangladesh."<sup>29</sup> Quite like the Jamaat-e-Islami and its militant students' wing, the Islamic Chatra Shibir, the HUJI-B's primary base is the southeastern part of Bangladesh and includes the border with Myanmar. The outfit also calls themselves the "Bangladeshi Taliban."<sup>30</sup> Writing about the genesis of the HUJI-B, Subir Bhaumik states:

This writer has always argued that without a favorable overground support base, no underground organization can survive for long. The Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami was founded by some of the Bangladeshi volunteers or Mujahideen just after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. Initially it functioned as a wing of the Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami-al-Alami, which was formed in 1980 to drive out the Soviets from Afghanistan. The Bangladeshi Mujahideens functioned under the parent body until the Soviets left Afghanistan. Thirty-four Bangladeshi Mujahideens died in the war against the Soviets—one of them, Abdur Rehman Farooqui, who is widely believed by Indian and Bangladeshi intelligence as the founder of the Bangladesh wing of the HUJI as a separate entity from the Pakistani

HUJI created by Qari Saifullah. Presently, the HUJI in Bangladesh is headed by Maulana Farid... This writer had the unique opportunity to know one of the Maulanas who run the HUJI. In the interest of protecting his identity as a prized one, it will not be possible to disclose his name and location or even his position within the organization. The overbearing attitude of the Afghans and the Arab Mujahideen and their “racist attitude” towards their Bangladeshi co-religionists fighting shoulder to shoulder had upset this Maulana and that had made him open to me. I have known his family for years. As the Soviets were withdrawing from Afghanistan, Osama Bin Laden is said to have called Farid and Farooqui and advised them to go back and create a Dar-ul-Islam in Bangladesh. My friend (and source) was present at this meeting. Osama is said to have told the Bangladeshi Maulanas that though largely a Muslim country, “your Muslims are not practicing Islam in the true spirit and need to change...”<sup>31</sup>

Indeed, the Osama links were cemented in 23 February 1998 when Fazlul Rahman, leader of the “Jihad Movement in Bangladesh” of which HUJI-B is a party, signed the official declaration of *jihad* against the United States. The other signatories to the declaration included Ayman-al-Zawahiri, the leader of the Jihad group in Egypt; Abu Yasir of the Egyptian Islamic Group; Sheikh Mir Hamzah, Secretary of the Jamaat-e-Ulema-e-Pakistan; and bin Laden himself.<sup>32</sup>

The HUJI-B of the early nineties had not, however, bared its fangs. Unfettered by the first Khaleda Zia government, it sought to work quietly, expanding its recruitment base and armory. Indeed, it was only in 1996—and with the coming to power of the Awami League and Sheikh Hasina—that the HUJI-B came into its own. The author had earlier documented the anti-Sheikh Hasina operations of the HUJI-B in his book *Contours* and a paper in *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*.<sup>33</sup> Relevant portions are reproduced here:

But to be fair to the Bangabandhu’s (Sheikh Mujib-ur-Rahman) daughter, it must be said that she can do pithy little in the face of the Islamic resurgence, which is threatening her re-election in 2001. And she did say so—although in not so many words—during the course of a BBC interview on July 28, 2000. Sounding a grim warning to her countrymen over the perils they faced from right-wing Islamic fundamentalists, Sheikh Hasina’s statement also pertained to the discovery of 76 kilograms of explosives at the site of her public address at Gopalganj districts’ kotalipara on July 24, 2000... who was responsible for engineering the attempt? According to the Superintendent of Police, Gopalganj, Md Jashimuddin, a Mufti Abdul Hannan masterminded the July plot. Hannan had allegedly received training in Peshawar and had reportedly even fought in the Afghan war. He is a member of the Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami’s Central Committee and is the group’s Amir of the Gopalganj unit. He belongs to a family of rajakars or Pakistani collaborators and his uncle Munshi Sher Ali was killed by the freedom fighters after the liberation of Bangladesh. Hannan returned to Bangladesh after two years in Afghanistan and was thereafter engaging students in myriad Madrassas in the use of fire arms and in the manufacturing of explosives devices...<sup>34</sup>

The HUJI-B was bent on assassinating Sheikh Hasina because she was considered to be not only a person of secular credentials but also one who was soft on India. Indeed, the Awami League government had taken a series of steps to bring about normalcy between Bangladesh and India. Long festering disputes like water sharing and the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) problem were sought to be resolved.<sup>35</sup> The Awami League government was also making serious attempts to address India’s concerns about North East Indian militants using Bangladesh. Moreover, railway links that were disrupted since the Indo-Pak War of 1965 were restored, and a new direct bus between Dhaka and Calcutta was also started.

But the HUJI-B’s subterfuges (with the active aid of the Pakistani intelligence agency, the ISI, and fundamentalists in the DGFI, the Bangladesh intelligence agency) continued to dog Sheikh Hasina’s rule, and it was becoming quite clear that the HUJI-B, the ISI and other fundamentalists were bent on seeing her defeat.

Subir Bhaumik has written about the conspiracy to assassinate Sheikh Hasina in a revealing manner:

Western and Indian intelligence claim to have unearthed a plot by former Bangla military officers—involved in the coup of 1975—to assassinate Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wajed... On 7 March this year, retired Colonel Khondakar Abdur Rashid, seven of his comrades-in-arms in the 1975 coup as well as a Pakistani intelligence officer, reportedly met at Breda, 60 miles from Amsterdam. The venue was a restaurant owned by A.K. Mohiuddin, an absconding accused in the Sheikh Mujibur Rahman assassination case. The would-be assassins have apparently been quite dogged in the pursuit of their objective, as the following list of their efforts testify. Two years ago, they



tried to hijack a Bangladesh Biman aircraft from Kolkata. When that attempt foiled, they tried to hire a LTTE<sup>36</sup> suicide squad to assassinate Sheikh Hasina, Mujib's surviving daughter. Sources in Bangladesh National Security and Intelligence (NSI) reveal that the deal with the LTTE fell through when Rashid failed to transfer the promised 10 million US \$ to a LTTE front in time. Thereafter, a bombing attempt against Sheikh Hasina at Kotalipara in her Gopalganj constituency was planned, but failed when police discovered 76 kg of explosives barely 300 yards from the podium where the prime minister was to address a rally. . . . It is believed that the Breda meeting was intended to revive the plot. A Colonel of the Pakistan's ISI, Shoiab Nasir, who attended the meeting reported back to his boss, Brigadier Riaz, Deputy Director General (Operations) and their telephone conversation was intercepted by Dutch intelligence. The Israeli Mossad and the Indian R&AW have major operations in Holland to monitor the activities of West Asian and Kashmiri as well as North East rebel groups, which come to attend the meetings of Unrepresented Nations and People's Organization (UNPO) based there.<sup>37</sup>

According to one source, it was the Freedom Party of Bangladesh (headed by the coup leaders of 1975 who assassinated Sheikh Mujib-ur-Rahman) that had initially sought to utilize the services of the LTTE suicide squad.<sup>38</sup> Sheikh Hasina's determined pursuance of the trial of her father's assassins had brought about the urgency in the Freedom Party and it had joined hands with the HUJI-B in their resolve. Indeed, it was the Freedom Party that had first raised the slogan *Amra hobo Taliban, Bangla Hobe Afghan* (we will be the Taliban, Bangladesh will become Afghanistan) and had also sought to hijack the Bangladesh Biman aircraft (that Bhaumik refers to above) in order to secure the release of their comrades, Col. Farooq Rahman and Maj. Bazlul Huda.

The events of 11 September 2001 and the US "war on terror" redefined the role of the fundamentalists in Bangladesh. Whereas ethnic militant organizations in South Asia such as the LTTE, the National Socialist Council of Nagaland, and to some extent the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) were showing caution in the aftermath of the events of 11 September, the Islamic militants were getting more active. Recruits from the *Madrasahs* were plenty and the US-led coalition against Afghanistan was uniting the Islamic hordes. And even as another Islamic militant organization, the Lashkar-e-Toiba, stormed the Indian Parliament on 13 December 2001, the HUJI-B was planning their attack on the United States Information Service in Calcutta. Indeed, on 22 January suspected militants of the HUJI-B shot policemen on duty in front of the US facility in Calcutta.

### Fundamentalists Ahoy!

In the aftermath of the events of 11 September 2001 and the US-led attack on Afghanistan, Islamic militant groups in Bangladesh took out protest marches against the United States and publicly burnt the US flag. Writing about the events, Bertil Lintner of the *Far Eastern Economic Review* states:

For example, Maulana Ubaidul Haq, preaching to hundreds of thousands of people, including cabinet ministers, at the national mosque in Dhaka, condemned the US war on terrorism and called for a jihad against the Americans. "President Bush and America is the most heinous terrorist in the world. Both Americans and Bush must be destroyed. The Americans will be washed away if Bangladesh's 120 million Muslims spit on them," the cleric snarled in an address marking the Eid-ul-Fitr Muslim festival in December (2001).<sup>39</sup>

The *Far Eastern Economic Review* (FEER) was banned in Bangladesh and Bertil Lintner was pilloried for his writing. It seemed as if the legacy that had begun with the banning of Taslima Nasreen's book *Lajja* was continuing. Truth—or at least free speech—was being trampled upon in Bangladesh of the day.

Nevertheless, facts have a way of getting out, and another bombshell came by way of a *Time* magazine article six months after the *Far Eastern Economic Review* story had surfaced. The story "Deadly Cargo," with a Chittagong dateline, was written by Alex Perry and contained information about the presence of al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Bangladesh.<sup>40</sup> Written in a laid back narrative style, Perry's article began by stating that "signs abound that Bangladesh has become a safe haven for Islamic jihadis—including Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters fresh off the boat from Afghanistan."<sup>41</sup> Excerpts of the article are provided below:

The *Mecca* had the usual rusted rigging and smoke-blackened stern. And the crew too was like most others working off Chittagong: pure *Rohingyas*—stocky Muslim refugees from western Burma. Only the thick salt marks on the *Mecca's* bow hinted that it was ending a voyage longer than most fishing trips. But this was Chittagong, South Asia's premier hub for pirates, gunrunners and smugglers. . . . For

nine months the exact nature of the *Mecca's* cargo or the shipments' eventual destination remained unknown. But there were clues. Port workers that night said they saw five motor launches ferry in large groups of men from the boat wearing black turbans, long beards and traditional *Islamic salwar kameez*. Their towering height suggested these travelers were foreigners, and the boxes of ammunition and the AK-47s slung across their shoulders helped sketch a sinister picture. Then in July, a senior member of Bangladesh's largest terrorist group, the 2000-strong al-Qaeda-allied Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (HUJI), told *Time* the 150 men who entered Bangladesh that night were Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters from Afghanistan. Three senior Bangladeshi military sources also confirmed this was the case... Indeed, one Bangladeshi newspaper last month even quoted an unnamed foreign embassy in Dhaka as saying Osama bin Laden's No. 2, Egyptian Ayman al-Zawahiri, had been hiding out in the country for months after arriving in Chittagong (last week, in an audio message that authorities have tentatively authenticated, al-Zawahiri warned of further attacks against the US vowing that it will not go "unpunished for its crimes")... The HUJI source and the portworkers who saw the *Mecca* arrive claim that the man who greeted the new arrivals was a major in the DGFI. The major checked the visitors in by name and led them to a fleet of SUVs lined up on the docks, add the portworkers. A spokesman for the DGFI denied knowing that members of al-Qaeda had ever set foot in Bangladesh. He even denied that the major existed, although diplomatic registration records show the officer is a long-standing member of the service and was stationed in Calcutta in the mid-1990s...<sup>42</sup>

Alex Perry's article also spoke of the arrest of four Yemenis, an Algerian, a Libyan and a Sudanese in Bangladesh's Uttara district on 24 September 2002. The men, Abu Nujaid of Libya, Sadek Al Nassami, Abu Sallam, Abu Umaya and Abul Abbas of Yemen, Abul Ashem of Algeria; and Hassan Adam of Sudan were reportedly involved in arms training at a Madrassa in Dhaka which was being run by Al Haramain, a Saudi Charitable organization. According to Perry, Indonesia's al-Qaeda "super snitch" Omar-al-Faruq told the US Central Intelligence Agency that Al Haramain was the foundation that was being used by bin Laden to funnel money to him from the Middle East.

The Bangladeshi presence in the al-Qaeda network has been corroborated by other sources as well. In a televised interview to CNN in December 2001, "American Taliban" fighter John Walker Lindh spoke about the linguistic divisions of the al-Qaeda directed *ansar* (Helpers of the Prophet Muhammad) brigades, which were Bengali, Urdu, and Arabic—a revelation that is suggestive of the fact that the Bangladeshi contingent in al-Qaeda was considerable.

Holding forth on the safe haven that Bangladesh was becoming to Muslim militants from the continent, Perry writes thus:

Today, southern Bangladesh has become a haven for hundreds of jihadis on the lam. They find natural allies in Muslim guerrillas from India hiding out across the border, and in Muslim Rohingyas, tens of thousands of whom fled the ethnic and religious suppression of the Burmese junta in the late 1970s and 1980s. Many Rohingyas are long-term refugees, but some are trained to cause trouble back home in camps tolerated by a succession of Bangladeshi governments. The original facilities date back to 1975, making them Asia's oldest jihadi camps. And one former Burmese guerilla who visits the camps regularly describes three near Ukhia, south of the town of Cox's Bazar, as able to accommodate a force of 2,500 between them. The biggest, he claims, has 26 interconnected bunkers complete with kitchens, lecture halls, telephones and televisions concealed beneath a three-meter high false forest floor that stretches between two hills. Weapons available for training there include AK-47s, heavy machine guns, rifles, pistols, rocket-propelled grenades and mortars. Mantraps and mines, which can be triggered by spotters hiding in tree houses, protect approaches to the camps...<sup>43</sup>

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 US diplomat stationed in India told this author that the similarity of reports by Lintner and Perry can be attributed to a circularity of reporting—one writer simply borrowed another's sources.

### Bertil Lintner Speaks Out

This author—during the course of his research—wrote to Bertil Lintner and sought an exclusive interview for the *Occasional Paper* with the writer on the matter.<sup>44</sup> The interview is reproduced below:

Q. How are you reacting to the criticism that your assessment of the “Islamic resurgence” is not correct and that it may even be motivated by vested interests including a reported close proximity to Indian intelligence agencies?

A. When critics say “vested interests” they usually mean the opposition Awami League. We even got a letter to FEER from someone in Bangladesh claiming that I had been “driven around in Dhaka in Sheikh Hasina’s private car.” This is absolute nonsense. I went around Dhaka in what’s called “baby taxis,” or, in India, auto rickshaws. Or, I walked. I have never met Sheikh Hasina, or any other leader of the Awami League. But when I came back to Thailand, I faxed a list of identical questions to the Awami League and the BNP because I wanted to have some kind of official response to my findings. Neither party replied to my faxes. And no Indian, or other, intelligence agency ever helped me obtain any information about the situation in Bangladesh. These unfounded allegations are libelous and I would not hesitate to sue anyone—and that includes the Bangladesh government and papers such as *Holiday* claiming that I have been “motivated by vested interests.” I am a professional journalist and I am proud of it.

Q. What are your sources of information in Bangladesh and outside the country on which you base your reports/papers?

A. 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 Bazar and Teknaf in 1984. I have sources in that 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.

[Bertil Lintner sent the author another email on the matter of his sources after he sent his first interview]

Here are excerpts from an email I received several months ago from a very trustworthy source in Ukhia.

The reason I am inspired to write you is, I found some undoubtful truth in your report about the Muslim trainee terrors near Cox’s Bazar. I am a permanent resident of a village 30 km south of Cox’s Bazar town near Ukhia and I live in a forested hilly village, which become unlivable place recently. There are some mud house near one km of my house which is surrounded by hills in 3 sides. Last two years, hundreds of unknown young armed people living there who used to wear Taliban look uniforms. Nobody in our village knows them and no one knows where they come from. Though they never attacked us, but several nights they come to our village with the threat that they will kill us if we inform anything about them to police or government people. We are a minority Hindu group live here, so we don’t dare to inform police to save our life. And communication is very bad here, from the highway it is about 8 km inside. For that reason no govt forces ever enter here.

Q. Certain important US Govt functionaries have said that recent reports of the rise of fundamentalism in Bangladesh by Alex Perry and you are as a result of a “circularity of reporting.” How do you react to this view?

A. The United States needs a new, more professional ambassador in Bangladesh. I have never met Alex Perry and don’t know him at all. Mary Ann Peters’ [US Ambassador to Bangladesh] uninformed utterances are irresponsible and solely aimed at pleasing one of the few Muslim allies the US has, or at least, thinks it has. Just look at the White Paper on terrorism that the Singapore government released on 7 January this year. It clearly establishes a link between the Jemaah Islamiyah (which is part of the al-Qaeda network) and groups in Bangladesh based near the Burmese border.

Q. In what manner has the membership of the Jamaat-e-Islami and the Islamic Oikyo Jote in the ruling coalition aided the fundamentalist charter of Bangladesh?

A. Very much so. It's a big step away from the principles on which Bangladesh was founded in 1971, i.e. Bangla nationalism and secularism. Jamaat was against Bangladeshi independence and for Pakistan.

Q. Do you have any information about the existence of North East Indian militant camps in Bangladesh?

A. It depends how you define "camps." Yes, they are there, and in fairly large numbers, but I'm not certain that the places where they are staying can be called camps. ULFA cadres, including some of its top leaders, are staying in and around Chittagong and near Sylhet in the north. Smaller Muslim groups from NE India are also staying in Bangladesh.

Q. Is it true that some of the North East Indian militant organizations are being aided by the government in Bangladesh?

A. Yes, definitely. The leaders always move around escorted by (and protected by) DGFI operatives.

Q. Do you have some details about the Bangladesh Islamic Manch?

A. On 10-11 May 2002, nine Islamic fundamentalist groups, including HUJI, met at a camp near the small town of Ukhia south of Cox's Bazaar and formed the Bangladesh Islamic Manch (Association). The new umbrella organization also includes one purporting to represent the Rohingyas, a Muslim minority in Burma, and the Muslim Liberation Tigers of Assam, a small group operating in India's northeast. By June, Bangladeshi veterans of the anti-Soviet war in Afghanistan in the 1980s were reported to be training members of the new alliance in at least two camps in southern Bangladesh.

Q. Do you have any evidence of al-Qaeda presence in Bangladesh?

A. Yes, absolutely. HUJI, which is closely connected with the DGFI (especially Maj. Gen. Sadeq Hussain Rumi, chief of operations of the DGFI who is very close to Begum Zia's brother, retired Maj. Syed Iskander). Rumi is the mastermind of the smear campaign against me, including death threats and obscene letters. Hundreds of al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters were sent by ship from Karachi to Bangladesh after the fall of Kandahar in late 2001, and several eyewitnesses saw them arrive and being bussed down to "secret" camps near Ukhia, with the help of the DGFI.

Bertil Lintner also provided this author a comprehensive list of the main fundamentalist groups in Bangladesh and the Order of Battle of the HUJI-B along with names of their training camps. The author has included these items in Appendix Three and Four.

### **Al-Qaeda Perches in Bangladesh**

A list of al-Qaeda camps/safe houses in Bangladesh, however, was not provided either by Alex Perry or Bertil Lintner apart from cursory references to Chittagong, Ukhia, and even Dhaka. An extensive search during the author's research at the University of Illinois has unearthed a list of such places along with the number of cadres. These have been made available to the author by a reliable source.

- Thirty to thirty-five al-Qaeda cadres are staying at Mona Tola Qaumi Madrassa, P.S. Madhabpur, District Habiganj.
- Thirty to thirty-five al-Qaeda cadres are staying at Panchori and Manikchora Madrassa complex, District Khagrachari, CHT, Bangladesh.
- Five members under instructor Md. Zainuddin Khan are staying at Chunarughat Qaumi Madrassa, P.S. Chunarughat, District Habiganj.
- Ten to twelve cadres are staying at Islampur mosque, Companyganj, P.S. Byani Bazar, District Sylhet.
- Twenty to twenty-five cadres are staying at Lakertala T.E. Masjid Complex, District Sylhet.
- Fifteen to sixteen cadres are staying at Robir Bazar Tilagram Madrassa Complex, P.S. Kolaura, District Moulvi Bazar.

The prognosis for Bangladesh, therefore, is not a very healthy one, with not only al-Qaeda and the Taliban entering the once secular land of Qazi Nazrul Islam and Jibananda Das with impunity, but also the establishment reportedly aiding the fundamentalist agenda.<sup>45</sup> This aid is not merely a result of the fact that the Jamaat-e-Islami and the Islamic Oikyo Jote are members of the ruling coalition. Bangladesh's intelligence service and the armed forces too are no longer secure.

### Islamization of Bangladesh's Armed Forces

This paper has already shown that allegations are rife about the DGFI's role in the al-Qaeda landings. One does not have far to seek to find the reason for the susceptibility of the DGFI and the Bangladesh armed forces to the influence of Islamic fundamentalism. An analysis of the Bangladesh armed forces' predilection for the crescent ensign will show that this aspect is ingrained in the force. The author attempts to explain by way of the following enumeration.

- The armed forces of Bangladesh is the most important “political party” in the country.
- Bangladesh has been ruled by military dictators for almost fifteen years—about half of its existence as an independent country.
- Two important political parties, the Bangladesh National Party and the Jatiyo Party, were formed by Gen. Zia-ur-Rahman and Lt. Gen. H.M. Ershad, respectively.
- The Bangladesh armed forces—as is also the case with politico-bureaucratic, professional, and student constituents—continue to be divided on pro-liberation and pro-Pakistani lines. Today, the pro-Pakistani lobby has gained an upper hand.
- The initial manpower of the Bangladesh armed forces consisted of repatriated personnel of the Pakistan army—the erstwhile East Bengal Regiments—and freedom fighters of the *Mukti Bahini*. The formative years of the Bangladesh armed forces must have been one which witnessed great personal and group tension as a result of the divide.
- The senior Bangladesh armed forces personnel had—until recently—served the Pakistani army under Ayub Khan, and, therefore, their formative years were accustomed to the doctrine of military rule in Pakistan. According to one estimate, most of the 400 officers of the rank of Major and above belong to the repatriated cadres from the Pakistan army and find themselves at ease with military rule.
- The bulk of the rank and file of the Bangladesh armed forces are drawn from the economically backward and rural areas of the country. Consequently they are susceptible to the influences of Islamic fundamentalism that are prevalent in such areas. The systematic subversion of the Pakistan armed forces and the ISI by Islamic fundamentalism is an important pointer in this direction.
- Both Gen. Zia-ur-Rahman and Lt. Gen. H.M. Ershad—as has been seen—have leaned towards Islam in their quest to seek political legitimacy. Indeed, Islam is an important political weapon.
- The Bangladesh armed forces view the Pakistani armed forces as co-religionists, and many senior Bangladeshi officers have shared inter-personal relationships with the Pakistan armed forces officer cadre. The pan-Islamism factor also draws heavily on the relationship, which thrives despite the genocide and atrocities that were committed by the Pakistani armed forces in Bangladesh.
- The Bangladesh armed forces are anti-Indian armed forces and they view Islamic fundamentalist terror as a good weapon against India. Commenting on the anti-Indian forces sentiment among the Bangladesh armed forces, an observer writes “the Bangladesh army has been incensed by the poor treatment it had received from the Indians during the liberation war; it felt that the Indian army deprived it of victory by intervening in the conflict; it resented the expropriation of captured Pakistani military equipment by the Indian army and saw the Jatiyo Rakkhi Bahini as an Indian inspired force to ensure Indian domination of post-liberation Bangladesh.”<sup>46</sup>

With a possible subversion of almost all important institutions in Bangladesh, the climate is ripe for it to be transformed into what Subir Bhaumik terms the “second front of terror.”<sup>47</sup> However, at least this *Occasional*

*Paper* concurs with Bertil Lintner that “the process is not irreversible.”<sup>48</sup> But, if the process with which fundamentalism is forging ahead in the erstwhile East Pakistan continues without let or hindrance, it will soon not only compromise the country, but the region as well.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was popularly known as the *Bangabandhu* (Friend of Bengal).

<sup>2</sup> The Mukti Bahini were East Pakistani guerrillas who fought alongside the Indian armed forces in the war of liberation of Bangladesh.

<sup>3</sup> The Mujibnagar Government headed by Syed Nazrul Islam was formed on the Indian border. According to J.N. Dixit—in his *Liberation and Beyond: Indo-Bangladesh Relations* (New Delhi: Konark Publishers, 1999)—Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who was incarcerated in West Pakistan, felt cheated out of his role in the independence movement and was consequently wary of the role of the Mujibnagar Government members in the post-liberation political scenario of Bangladesh.

<sup>4</sup> Dixit, *Liberation and Beyond*, 249.

<sup>5</sup> Bengal was partitioned by the British in 1905. The partition was annulled in 1911 after widespread protests. The India Independence Act of 1947 partitioned undivided India into India and Pakistan. The Muslim majority areas of Punjab and Bengal were divided to join Pakistan.

<sup>6</sup> Taj Hashmi, “Islamic Resurgence in Bangladesh: Genesis, Dynamics and Implications” (paper presented at the “Religion and Security in South Asia” conference organized by the Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, Honolulu, 19-22 August 2002).

<sup>7</sup> Taj Hashmi writes in “Islamic Resurgence in Bangladesh” that “one may argue that Bangladeshi is inclusive of the different non-Bengali minorities; nevertheless the term highlights the Muslim identity of the country, differentiating its Muslim majority Bengalis from their Hindu majority counterparts in West Bengal in India.”

<sup>8</sup> The Proclamation [Amendment] Order, 1977, *Bangladesh Observer*, 23 April 1977.

<sup>9</sup> As many as twenty-one charges were brought against Ershad, the former President of Bangladesh, in 1991, of which nineteen related to corruption. Ershad was convicted for illegal possession of arms and received a ten-year prison sentence. In February 1992, he was convicted of corruption and received an additional three-year sentence. After serving five years in jail, he was released on bail by the supreme court in January 1997 and resumed active political life as head of the Jatiyo Party. However, he was returned to prison between November 2000 and April 2001, again as a result of the original 1991 corruption charges, and also was accused of being involved in the murder of an army general. After a four-and-a-half month self-exile in London, he returned in February 2002 to Dhaka, where he continues his political career. Ershad’s troubles with the law are well documented. See, for example, Moazzem Hossain, “Ershad Returns to Face Trial,” *BBC News*, 16 February 2002, <[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/1824592.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/1824592.stm)> (accessed on 1 April 2003).

<sup>10</sup> Subir Bhaumik, “Bangladesh: The Second Front of Islamic Terror” (paper presented in the International Seminar “Terrorism and Low Intensity Conflict,” Jadavpur University, India 6-8 March 2002).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> This was especially interesting as Ershad was particularly fond of wine.

<sup>13</sup> *Zakat* is the Muslim religious tax of 2.5 percent of one’s income.

<sup>14</sup> Maniruzzaman Talukder, *Bangladesh Politics: Secular and Islamic Trends* in S.R. Chakravarty and Virendra Narain (eds.), *Bangladesh: History and Culture, Vol. I*, (New Delhi: South Asian Publishers, 1986), 71.

<sup>15</sup> The Awami League was the party that had championed the cause of greater autonomy for East Pakistan. It was also the party that formed the first government in independent Bangladesh, headed by Sheikh Mujib-ur-Rahman. Sheikh Hasina Wajed, the daughter of the late Sheikh Mujib-ur-Rahman, is the leader of the League at present.

<sup>16</sup> The Jamaat-e-Islami was formed in 1941 by Abul Ala Mawdudi and was opposed to the creation of Pakistan. Later, during the 1971 Bangladesh liberation movement, it collaborated with the Pakistan army in East Pakistan and its members have consequently been considered to be anti-liberationists. Of late, the Jamaat-e-Islami has adopted an anti-US stance, especially in the wake of Operation Enduring Freedom. It is a member in the present BNP-led four-party alliance; two of its members, Matiur Rahman Nizami and Ali Ahsan Mohammad, are ministers in the Khaleda Zia cabinet.

<sup>17</sup> Bhaumik, “Bangladesh: The Second Front.”

<sup>18</sup> Yoginder S. Sikand, “The Tablighi Jamaat in Bangladesh,” *Peace Initiatives* (New Delhi) 7, nos. 1-3, (January 2001): 85-112.

<sup>19</sup> Abul Barkat, ed., *An Enquiry into Causes and Consequences of Deprivation of Hindu Minorities in Bangladesh through the Vested Property Act* (Dhaka: Prip Trust, 2000).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> *Crisis in South Asia: A Report by Senator Edward Kennedy to the Subcommittee Investigating the Problem of Refugees and Their Settlement*, Submitted to the US Senate Judiciary Committee, 1 November 1971, US Government Press, p. 66.

<sup>22</sup> Barkat, *Enquiry*.

<sup>23</sup> Among the highest instances of violence, Barisal reported twenty-six cases, Bagerhat twenty-one, Bhola seventeen, Rajshahi thirteen, and Faridpur twelve. The report is based on a bulletin published by *Ain O Salish Kendra* in its December

2001 edition, and further based on news reports emanating from ten newspapers in Bangladesh, including *Prothom Alo*, *Janakantha*, *Jugantor*, *Banglabazar*, *Inquilab*, *Dinkal*, *Daily Star*, *Ittefaq*, and *Bhorer Kagoj*. The report covers violence on Hindus in Bangladesh in the period between 15 September 2001 and 27 October 2001. The cases of violence include murder (seventeen cases), rape (sixty-one cases), abduction (thirteen cases), sexual harassment (sixty-four cases), and arson (forty-seven cases).

<sup>24</sup> The BNP government arrested many secular and progressive people including Shahriyar Kabir, a journalist who has sought to publicize abuses against Hindus, on 22 November 2001 after it came to power. Amnesty International called for the immediate and unconditional release of prisoner of conscience Shahriyar Kabir. See Amnesty International, "Bangladesh: Attacks on Members of the Hindu Minority," 1 December 2001. AI Index: ASA 13/006/2001. <<http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGASA130062001?open&of=ENG-BGD>> (accessed on 26 March 2003).

<sup>25</sup> Bimal Pramanik and Mihir Sinha Roy, "The Recent Plight of Minorities in Bangladesh: A Post-Election Scenario" (paper presented in the international seminar "The Recent Plight of Minorities in Bangladesh: A Post-Election Scenario," organized by the Centre for Research in Indo-Bangladesh Relations, Calcutta, India, 28 January 2002).

<sup>26</sup> Amnesty International, "Bangladesh: Attacks on Members of the Hindu Minority."

<sup>27</sup> The first *fatwa* was declared in 1993.

<sup>28</sup> Mary Anne Weaver, "A Fugitive from Injustice," *The New Yorker* (12 September 1994).

<sup>29</sup> United States Department of State, *Patterns of Global Terrorism* (Washington, D.C.: United States Department of State, 2001).

<sup>30</sup> A newspaper report stated that a total of about 3,500 Bangladeshis had been trained in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia to fight in the Afghan war under Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. Later, many of them returned to Bangladesh. About five hundred such trained cadres are said to be active in Bangladesh. The Taliban had reportedly established a liaison office in Dhaka and was publishing a paper by the name of *Jago Mujahid* that was edited by a Mufti Abdul Haque. See "Moderate Bangla worried over Radicals," *Sentinel* (Guwahati), 7 December 1998.

<sup>31</sup> Bhaumik, "Bangladesh: The Second Front." According to Bhaumik his source is now in Bangladesh as a top HUJI-B functionary and had earlier fought against the Soviets in Afghanistan. The meeting between bin Laden and the Bangladeshi *Mujahideen* is said to have taken place at Khost in Afghanistan on 11 February 1989, a few months before Farooqui died while trying to clear some mines in Liza near Khost.

<sup>32</sup> See "International Islamic Front," *South Asia Terrorism Portal*, <<http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/usa/IIF.htm>> (accessed on 11 April 2003).

<sup>33</sup> Jaideep Saikia, *Contours: Essays on Security and Strategy* (Guwahati: Sagittarius Print, 2001); and Jaideep Saikia, "ISI reaches East."

<sup>34</sup> Saikia, *Contours*, 82.

<sup>35</sup> Hasnat Abdullah—the main negotiator of the CHT Accord—has revealed that he was offered a huge bribe by the ISI to scuttle the Accord.

<sup>36</sup> The LTTE are the Liberation of Tamil Tigers of Elam, the main militant organization representing the Tamils in Sri Lanka.

<sup>37</sup> Bhaumik, "Conspirator's Cauldron," *Himal South Asian* (Kathmandu), August 2000.

<sup>38</sup> See "The Plan to Assassinate Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wajed: How LTTE Deal Was Blocked, Suicide Bombers Failed to Explode," *Virtual Library Sri Lanka*, <<http://www.lankalibrary.com/pol/hasina.html>> (accessed on 22 April 2003).

<sup>39</sup> Bertil Lintner, "Bangladesh: A Cocoon of Terror," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 4 April 2002.

<sup>40</sup> In a recent article in *Time Asia*, Alex Perry has reported that "Islamic extremists in Bangladesh may be trying to make a radioactive 'dirty' bomb." In the 16 June 2003 issue of *Time Asia*, Perry writes "On May 30, Bangladeshi police arrested four suspected members of a militant Islamic group, Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen, at a house in the northern village of Puiya. Officers also seized a football-size package with markings indicating it contained a crude form of uranium manufactured in Kazakhstan. Subsequent tests last week at the Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission in Dhaka confirmed the 225-gram ball is uranium oxide—enough to make a weapon capable of dispersing radiation across a wide area if strapped to conventional explosives. A scientist at the commission told *Time* that 23 pages of documents describing how to make bombs were also seized. . . The village of Puiya is known as an area with al-Qaeda sympathies. . ." See Alex Perry, "A Very Dirty Plot," *Time Asia*, 16 June 2003.

<sup>41</sup> Alex Perry, "Deadly Cargo," *Time Asia*, 21 October 2002.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Bertil Lintner, interview by author, Champaign, Illinois, 18 March 2003.

<sup>45</sup> Qazi Nazrul Islam and Jibananda Das were secular poets—before the partition of India—who popularized Hindu-Muslim unity.

<sup>46</sup> J.K. Chopra, *Bangladesh as a New Nation* (Jaipur: Sublime Publications, 2002), 46.

<sup>47</sup> Subir Bhaumik, "Bangladesh: The Second Front."

<sup>48</sup> Lintner, "Bangladesh: A Cocoon."





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**CHAPTER FOUR**  
**In the Name of Islam**

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*We were instructed by the ISI to assassinate Atal Behari Vajpayee and Lal Krishna Advani.*

Abu Bakr Siddiqui alias Abdullah, Surrendered General Secretary,  
Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (Assam Unit)

### **Islamic Militancy in North East India**

Islamic militancy in North East India is a phenomenon that has been shrouded in relative concealment—little is known about it, and even less has been written. When newspapers and journals have sought to write about it, it was primarily as a result of an agenda that had propaganda as the most important reason. An enumeration of the groups, their doctrines, and their orders of battle, too, has not been seriously undertaken. Consequently, most of what has been documented centers around the subterfuges of the ISI in the region and isolated reports about the training of Muslim fundamentalist organizations of North East India (hereafter MFO) in Pakistan and Bangladesh. Indeed, the MFO experience in North East India is unique, because unlike the classic cases of Islamic fundamentalism elsewhere in the world—which are clearly aimed at an audience—the North East Indian breed has shunned publicity and has been almost invisible (save in isolated pockets of the periphery), preferring to quietly work their way into the innards of society.

In North East India, the MFOs have been quite clear that their objectives are to be achieved by recourse to a spread of their ideology. As a consequence, very few cases have been documented whereby they have engaged the Indian security forces, or have carried out acts of sabotage that attract both attention and censure. Also, few cases of extortion have been reported (some districts in the Indo-Bangladesh border have, however, reported a couple of cases) and this seems to be primarily so because most of the MFOs are provided for either by the ISI, or fronts of the ISI and other worldwide Islamic fundamentalist networks. In sum, the activities in North East India of the MFOs are clearly not “aimed at the people watching.”<sup>1</sup> Indeed, a close analysis of their modus operandi has revealed that they are avoiding undue attention and are content with the continual advancement that they are making in the spread of their philosophy. The immediate objective of the MFOs, moreover, is not to take on New Delhi head on in the manner that the ULFA and such other ethnic groups are seeking to do, but rather to further the steady progression towards *Nizam-e-Mustafa*, or even *Brihot Bangladesh* (Greater Bangladesh).

Most MFOs have an existence of about only a decade or so. The most important groups in Assam, for instance, have been formed during the early nineties; indeed quite a few of them were formed after the destruction of the Babri Masjid in the north Indian city of Ayodhya, although murmurs were felt immediately after the massacre in Assam’s Nellie.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, it took the MFOs a while to attract the sentiments of the Muslim youths, the more militant among them being already members of the ULFA. Indeed, it was only in the last couple of years that the shuffle of Muslim cadres from the ULFA to the Muslim United Liberation Tigers of Assam (MULTA), the Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (HuM), the Muslim United Liberation Front of Assam (MULFA), and the other MFOs has taken place. This has been so despite the fact that the ISI had issued clear instructions to the MFOs that they were to work in tandem with the ULFA.<sup>3</sup> Whether the ISI direction was motivated by a need to unify the ULFA agenda (which, as has been seen, had already been hijacked by the Pakistani intelligence service) with that of the MFOs is a matter that will have to await further investigations. The fact that the MFOs were quite content to play second fiddle to the ULFA is not in any doubt. At any rate, the ULFA (as has been seen in Chapter Two) was doing the dirty work for the MFOs. It was aiding the infiltration by including the illegal migrant into its expanded parish, and was even carrying out sabotage activities inside Assam at the behest of the ISI. The ULFA, moreover, has never targeted the illegal immigrant from Bangladesh.

The aims and objectives as displayed in the various documents produced by the MFOs are interesting. Unlike the ethnic militant groups such as the ULFA, the NDFB, or the NSCN, the charter of demands of the MFO does not normally carry a clause of secession from India, though a few have stated goals about the

establishment of separate Islamic homelands. Indeed, most of the MFO demands are perfectly valid. The MULTA demands in Assam, for instance, include:

- Thirty percent reservation in education and employment for Muslims
- Establishment of a Muslim court in Assam
- Reservation of seats in the Legislative Assembly for the Muslims of the Barak Valley

The demands of the Islamic Security Force of India (ISFI) are even more interesting. Among others, it has included:

- To ensure the security of the Muslim community
- To establish flood relief camps in the Muslim dominated *char* areas, and to provide relief to the flood-affected Muslims of the area
- To enforce prohibition in areas which are Muslim dominated
- To enforce capital punishment on foreign aliens who enter India to carry out nefarious activities
- To enforce the IM (DT) Act on illegal migrants who have entered India after 1972

Almost all the MFOs have come into existence as a result of a fear that the administration is not sensitive to the plight of the Muslim community. The instances that are generally quoted in this context are:

- The deletion of names of thousands of Muslims from the Voters list
- The attacks on Muslims by the Bodos in 1994, 1995, and 1996 in order to discourage them from occupying the *char* areas
- Poll violence in Muslim dominated areas during the elections

Indeed, a compendium that has been compiled by this author of the MFOs, their organization charters, orders of battle, and comments has been placed in Appendix One. The compilation, which is the first of its kind, provides a bird's eye view of all the major MFOs operating in the region. A perusal of the compendium will show that most of the MFOs were formed in the 1990s and in the early part of 2000 (except two student organizations, Students' Islamic Organization and the Students' Islamic Movement of India, which were formed in 1985 and 1977 respectively). It will also be seen that apart from the SIMI and the MULTA, which have strengths of 5,000 and 1,500 cadres respectively, most of the MFOs have small strengths; the JEI, for example, has a reported strength of only twenty. However, most of the MFOs have established foreign linkages, with organizations such as the HuM and the MULTA having strong links with the ISI. Furthermore, it will be of interest to note—as the succeeding analysis will show—that although almost all the MFOs have defined objectives and goals, only the MULTA and the HuM have actually carried out militant acts. However, all the MFOs listed in the compendium have carried out religious propaganda and it is not impossible that they could be aiding one another to achieve their goals. The establishment of the umbrella organization, the BIM in Bangladesh, which has the MULTA as an important member, could well be a precursor to a more comprehensive effort to unite all of the MFOs in the region. It is also possible that such unification has already taken place, with MULTA representing the other MFOs in a structure along the lines of the BIM.

Besides the aforesaid MFOs, there are other non-militant Islamic fundamentalist organizations such as the Jamaat-ul-Ulema-e-Hind (JUUEH), which was formed by the Ulemas of the internationally famous Deoband school. Although it claims to be a non-political organization, the JUUEH has sought to mobilize the Muslim (especially the illegal immigrant from Bangladesh) electorate for particular agendas. In the wake of the arrests of the ISI sponsored HuM members, for instance, the JUUEH has sought to politicize the issue, and on 1 April 2000, it organized a mass rally (17<sup>th</sup> Convention of JUUEH) in the heart of Guwahati in a bid to unify the Muslims under one platform. Although the move was with an eye to the general elections, which was held in May 2001, the popular feeling was that it was a sheer “show of strength” to the non-Muslims in Assam.

### **The ISI and the MFOs**

Notwithstanding the variegated nature of the MFOs and their demands, it must be understood that the Islamic militant agenda in North East India did not come about only as a result of the history of the Muslims in the

region. Indeed, notwithstanding Nellie and Babri Masjid, an articulation of the agenda had not taken place until the ISI began to make inroads into the territory. The ISI intention of propping up the MFOs was triggered off by the following considerations:

- To utilize the MFOs as conduits between the ISI and the ethnic militant groups of North East India
- To further an agenda of Islamization in the region
- To facilitate the demographic invasion that is presently underway in the region with massive illegal infiltration from Bangladesh
- To communalize the situation in the region by engineering riots, defiling Hindu places of worship and attacking important Hindu personalities and women<sup>4</sup>
- To carve out—quite like the Bangladesh Islamic Manch agenda—a *Brihot Bangladesh* by including areas of Muslim majority with the present geographical boundaries of Bangladesh

The conspiracy of the Pakistani intelligence agency dates back to the late 1940s. An ISI observer writes:

An area of opportunity occurred in the North East region when the Naga insurgency broke out in the Naga Hills and Tuensang region (now Nagaland). It took some time for Pakistan to realize the possibilities that had opened up for them against India. Having initially established contact with Phizo,<sup>5</sup> Pakistanis started extending material support to the Naga insurgent by 1959-61. Arms and training were offered in the erstwhile East Pakistan. Some instructors were also perhaps infiltrated into the Naga Hills for the purpose. In due course, the responsibility for providing aid and sanctuary to the Naga hostiles passed onto the Chinese. Later with the insurgency in Mizoram erupting another opportunity came the ISI's way and it grasped it with both hands...<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, so serious had been the conspiracy that at least one theory has suggested that Bangladesh was formed in order to thwart a Sino-Pakistani pincer formation that was thought to be gaining ground in the late 1960s. Discounting the theory of merely an Indo-Pakistani enmity that brought about the dismemberment of Pakistan, Subir Bhaumik writes:

A close look at the map of the subcontinent and the growing Sino-Pakistani nexus in the late 1960s would surely convince anyone with a sense of geopolitics and military strategy that in the event of a total war between India on the one hand and China and Pakistan on the other, a determined Chinese drive through Assam or North Bengal could link up with Pakistani forces in East Pakistan and cut off the North East. Two decades after the break up of Pakistan into two countries and the relative stability achieved by the Indian politico-military effort in the North East, Pakistani talk of entrusting (notably from Z.A. Bhutto) the security of East Pakistan to the 'China factor' might, in retrospect, seem to have been without substance. But to an Indian decision maker in New Delhi in the late 1960s, besieged as he was with growing overtly pro-Chinese left radicalism in West Bengal; virulent guerrilla movements in Nagaland, Mizoram, Manipur and Tripura; language riots in Assam; and a number of ethnic insurrections on the doorstep in North Burma, many directly backed by China, Bhutto's threat raised India's worst fears of a Chinese sweep through the region, an eventual link-up with Pakistani forces in East Pakistan, and the secession of the entire North East Indian states.<sup>7</sup>

Quoting a senior Research & Analysis Wing (RAW) source—the premiere Indian external intelligence agency—Bhaumik goes on to say that the late P.N. Banerji, the then Chief of RAW's Eastern division, in a briefing to RAW Field officers at Calcutta in August 1971 had insisted that apprehension of the North East being cut off was primarily the reason for the Indian interest in sustaining the Bengali liberation effort in 1971.

But the absence of the erstwhile eastern seaboard—by way of the erstwhile East Pakistan—has not prevented Pakistan from re-entering the game. Indeed, contrary to what some observers felt, the subterfuges are being pursued with greater enthusiasm, and this time around with the aid of the MFOs, who are well on their way to replacing the ethnic militant movements in the region.

But what is the manner of actual subversion that the MFO has been engineering? Most news reports and writings have focused on the training of the MFOs in Pakistan and Bangladesh, but almost none of them have actually documented the incidents in which the MFOs have been involved (and have been consequently implicated). Reports have also spoken of arrests and surrenders, but once again no open source material has actually documented the cases. And since it is imperative that such documentation be available for an analysis

to get underway, the author enumerates here some incidents in which the MFOs have been involved in Assam. Some other forms of documentation—especially reports pertaining to surrender and consequent revelations—are also put forward in order to fully elucidate the MFO agenda in North East India. The author has done a random selection of the incidents, using the Monthly Situation Report of the Special Branch, Assam Police. The period between June 2001 and May 2002—one calendar year—has been carefully examined.

### **Select Incidents Involving MFOs**

On 14 June 2001, some MULTA militants had congregated at the house of Nur Mohammad Sheikh of Belguri [Golakganj PS]. When the Village Defense Party (VDP) Belguri tried to intercept and arrest them, the MULTA militants ran away to evade the apprehension. However, after a chase, the VDP with the help of the local people apprehended Sahjanal Sheikh, Osman Ali, Jaber Ali, Nur Islam, Nur Mohammad Sheikh and Ali Hussain and beat them up. As a result, they sustained serious injuries and later on Osman Ali succumbed to his injuries. Golakganj PS registered a case and arrested the above MULTA militants.

On 17 June 2001, Bilasipara Police arrested MULTA militant Sahar Ali at Bagaribari.

On 23 June 2001, Agamoni police arrested MULTA militant Matiur Rahman along with a stolen motorcycle.

On 11 July 2001, Gossaigaon Police arrested MULTA militant Atowar Rahman of Village No. 11 Balapara, Kokrajhar District and recovered one country made gun hand grenade from his possession.

On 20 July 2001, Golakganj Police arrested MULTA militant Abdul Hussain and recovered one pistol from his possession.

On 26 July 2001 Bagribari Police arrested four MULTA militants, namely Joynul Abedin, Fulchand Ali, Abul Salem, and Kimuddin Sheikh, when they had gone to the house of Sukur Ali of village Jumpara (Bagribari PS) to collect a ransom of Rs. 10,000. Police also recovered one hand made revolver, four rounds of live ammunition, one empty round, and one hand made bomb from the possession of Fulchand Ali.

On 8 September 2001, the Indian Army handed over to the Gossaigaon PS a surrendered MULTA militant who was fired upon by some unknown miscreants causing bullet injuries to the MULTA militant.

On 16 September 2001, the Indian Army handed over one surrendered MULTA militant to the Sipajhar PS with one air gun, long-range pellets of an air rifle. Some incriminating documents relating to the Islamic Security Force of India were recovered from the possession of the MULTA militant.

On 17 October 2001, the Indian Army handed over one MULTA militant at Kaligaon PS [Darrang] with two hand made pistols and four rounds of live ammunition.

On 29 October 2001, the Gauripur Police picked up two MULTA militants and recovered one hand made AK-47 type gun, one round of hand made ammunition, and two swords from their possession.

On 6 November 2001, the Dalgaon Police/CRPF arrested Omar Ali, Asadulla [both under Dalgaon PS] and Rafiqul Islam [Udalguri PS]. The duo was suspected to have links with the MULTA. The police recovered one local made shotgun.

On 12 November 2001, the Bilasipara Police arrested two MULTA militants and recovered one country made pistol and five rounds of live ammunition, including one hand made ammunition.

On 23 November 2001, the people of village Gunaimari [Bilasipara PS] apprehended one suspected MULTA militant, Abdul Barek, and recovered one hand made pistol with three rounds of hand made cartridges from his possession.

On 1 November 2001, the Indian Army—following a tip off—approached the No. 4 Sialmari Nadi Char area [Mangaldoi PS, Darrang] with a view to nab some ULFA/MULTA militants who were present there. A fierce encounter ensued between the Indian Army personnel and the militants. As a result, two MULTA and two ULFA militants were killed in the encounter.

In January 2002, eleven linkmen of the MULTA were apprehended by the Tezpur Police. Two country made pistols and twenty-eight rounds of .303 live ammunition were recovered from them.

On 8 February 2002, the Gauripur Police arrested MULTA militant, Amzad Ali, of village Tiapara in Dhubri district.

On 15 April 2002, the police apprehended two MULTA militants in Dhubri district who had served a demand letter of Rs. 5,000 in the name of the MULTA to the head master of the Lalmati L.P. School.

On 24 April 2002, the Mangaldoi police recovered some incriminating documents of the ISFI from the house of Chinuar Hussain of Chamuapara in Darrang and arrested him in this connection.

On 30 May 2002, the Rupahi Police open fired on a MULTA militant near Rupahi outpost injuring the militant. The police recovered one country made revolver and two rounds of .38 ammunition from the MULTA cadre.

During the period of study, twenty-four Harkat-ul-Mujahideen militants surrendered before the authorities, as did one MULTA militant.

### **The Incidents—An Analysis**

An analysis of the incidents shows that almost all were apprehensions by the police. The other statistics show that only one armed encounter took place, in which the Indian army shot two MULTA militants. However, the encounter took place alongside the ULFA—which is another pointer in the direction of joint ULFA-MULTA operations inside Assam.

In another incident, the police shot at a MULTA militant. In yet another, a MULTA militant died as a result of a beating he had received at the hands of a VDP. In the entire twelve months, all but one incident related to the MULTA, the lone exception being that of the ISFI. No sophisticated weapons were used by or recovered from the MULTA, and the total sum of money that was sought to be extorted was only about \$300.

Moreover, only one MULTA militant surrendered to the authorities as against twenty-four HuM cadres. Interestingly, not a single MFO of the sixteen-odd recorded MFOs operating in Assam were involved, save the lone Islamic Security Force of India. As a matter of fact, the police arrested the person because ISFI documents were found in his person—it is not ascertained whether he was an active member of the ISFI or was acting merely as a “courier.”

What does the random survey indicate about the MFO movement in Assam, which (apart from Manipur) is the most important MFO inflicted state in North East India?

### **Harkat-ul-Mujahideen in Assam**

The Harkat-ul-Mujahideen is one of the most important MFOs in the Indian sub-continent with cross-border affiliations. It was formed in 1986 in Afghanistan with the objective of waging war against the Soviet Red Army's occupation of the country. After the Russians left, the HuM was utilized by the ISI for subversive activities in Kashmir. The main aim was to liberate Kashmir from Indian control and to merge it with the Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. However, during the late 1980s, the ISI exhorted it to undertake militant activities in Assam, and to that end the HuM has been—by way of their cadres elsewhere in India—recruiting Muslim youths from the districts of Goalpara, Barpeta, and Nalbari of Assam, and have been taking them to Bangladesh and Pakistan for arms and ideological training.

One of the pioneering HuM militants, namely Md. Nanu Mia alias Bilal of Dharmapur PS. Sylhet, Bangladesh crossed over to Assam's Karimganj district in 1989 and worked as a laborer in Silchar. He later shifted to Lutumbai in Meghalaya's Jayantia district where he worked in a coalfield. It was here that he learned about the use of gelatin sticks and explosives. Later, he was instrumental in bringing more laborers from Bangladesh into Meghalaya. He joined the HuM in May 1992 in Delhi after he came into contact with a HuM militant from Kashmir. Moving back to Bangladesh, Md. Nanu Mia became the Liaison Officer to the Abu Syed, Amir, HuM Bangladesh who was stationed in the Jatrabari Madrassa. His prime task was to collect photographs and other details of newly recruited youths coming in from Assam to join the HuM, and arrange passports, etc. for them for their onward journey to Pakistan. The Jatrabari Madrassa located in Dhaka is the hub of all HuM activities in Bangladesh. It oversees all trans-border HuM movements (sometimes it lends its services to other MFOs as well). Most of the border crossings would take place through Saladona Ghat, Dandir

Ghat, Atinda Ghat, etc. from where Bosirhat would have to be reached with the help of a middleman who would have to be paid US \$ 6.

The Harkat-ul-Mujahideen surrenders in Assam merit an examination. Why is it that an MFO with active cross border linkages and alliances in places such as Pakistan and Bangladesh (among other places) would have its cadres surrender in such large numbers? According to the interrogation reports of some of the HuM militants, the conspiracy that was hatched for Assam was quite sinister with a number of youths from Assam being trained in Pakistan. Indeed, according to reports the *Naib Amir* of the HuM in India hails from Assam's Goalpara district and is presently in Pakistan. But, official communiqués have suggested that almost the entire HuM organization in Assam has capitulated to the authorities, an interesting phenomenon for an outfit that grew out of the direct subterfuges of Pakistan.<sup>8</sup> In order to understand this phenomenon, the *Occasional Paper* must retrace its steps back to 1999 when the ISI backed plan to engineer infiltrations and sabotage in Assam and other Indian states came to light. As has been documented in an earlier chapter, the first four HuM militants to be arrested in Assam [10 August 1999] were:

- 1) Md. Fasiullah Hussaini alias Hamid Mahmood alias Khalid Mehmood son of Syed Habibulla and resident of Hyderabad (Sind), Pakistan
- 2) Md. Javed Wakhar alias Md. Musaffa alias Md. Mehraj alias Abdul Rahman Danish resident of Muzafarnagar, Uttar Pradesh
- 3) Maulana Hafiz Md. Akram Mallick alias Musaffa Hussain alias Atabulla alias Bhaijan alias Abdul Awal son of Md. Abdul Aziz of Village Mukam Shahwali, Kupwara, Jammu & Kashmir
- 4) Qari Salim Ahmed alias Abdul Aziz alias Sadat son of Abdul Rashid resident of Village Mehilki, District Muzafarnagar, Uttar Pradesh

The *Occasional Paper* will profile the four for a better understanding of the conspiracy.

#### ***Md. Fasiullah Hussaini***

Md. Fasiullah Hussaini is a HuM militant. After joining the HuM in 1991, he took forty days' arms training at the Pak-Afghan border. In 1993, Fasiullah, a commerce graduate, went to Abu Dhabi where he worked as a storekeeper in Collovino Gulf Petrol Company. After his return to Pakistan in 1998, he rejoined the HuM and underwent explosives training in Manshera, NWFP (Pakistan). In March 1999, a seventy-member group of Mujahideens comprised of the HuM, the Lashkar-e-Toiba, Hijbul Mujahideen, Harkat-ul-Ansar, and al-Fatah made three unsuccessful attempts to cross over to Jammu and Kashmir. Md. Fasiullah was one of the members who were being sponsored by the ISI for carrying out subversion in Jammu and Kashmir. On 15 July 1999, as advised by Fazlur Rahman Khalil, Amir, HuM of Pakistan, Md. Fasiullah traveled to Bangladesh by air. The Amir of HuM, Pakistan had given him \$500 and assigned him the task of blowing up the Leh-Kargil highway and making his way into Kashmir in order to carry out further subversive activities. On his arrival in Dhaka, Md. Fasiullah met two other HuM militants, Akram and Salim. On 21 July 1999, the three of them traveled by air to Sylhet where they were joined by another HuM militant, Musaffa. The four of them crossed over to India via Zakiganj border on 28-29 July 1999 and reached Guwahati, the capital of Assam, on 29 July 1999.

#### ***Md. Javed Wakhar***

Md. Javed Wakhar is a Pakistani HuM militant. He was originally a laborer in Uttar Pradesh's Mansurpur village where he worked until June 1998. A Standard V Madrassa educated person, Md. Javed Wakhar was allured by his cousin Qari Salim to join the HuM. He was told that he would receive a handsome payment if he underwent arms training in Pakistan. On acquiescing, Md. Wakhar accompanied Qari Salim to Delhi and thence to Dhaka via Katihar, Malda (where they visited the Jama Masjid which is located in Uttari Birajpur Mohalla and met Imam Abdul Quddu, who arranged for a guide by the name of Nazir Sheikh to help them cross over illegally into Bangladesh's Nawabganj). On a successive trip to Dhaka, Md. Javed Wakhar along with three other HuM militants—Akram, Salimullah, and Farman—went to Karachi by air, traveling on false documents. In Karachi, they met Hashim, the *Nazim* of the HuM office in Karachi, and eventually reached Batrasi via Islamabad (where he met the Amir of HuM) where he underwent forty days' arms training and fifteen days' explosives training. On 25 July 1999, Md. Javed Wakhar received a phone call from Akram asking him—as per the directions of Qari Salim—to reach Sylhet immediately. On reaching Sylhet, Akram, Qari Salim, Fasiullah, and Md. Wakhar crossed over to Assam on 29 July 1999 and billeted themselves in Hotel Eden in Guwahati's Panbazar.

***Maulana Hafiz Md. Akram Mallick***

Md. Akram Mallick also joined the HuM in a similar manner as the above two individuals. He went over to Pakistan for arms training via Bangladesh. After his return from Pakistan, Md. Akram Mallick accompanied Qari Salim and Abdul Rahman, Amir of the HuM, Mumbai to Rajshahi with a huge consignment of explosives and left it with one Imam Abdul Jabbar. On 29 July 1999, he and three others (mentioned above) crossed over to Assam and took up position in Guwahati.

Md. Akram Mallick also gave information about the training that is imparted to the HuM militants in Pakistan. According to him:

The training was at Batrasi near Mansera in Pakistan's NWFP. The camp-in-charge was a person by the name of Waqqas. The camp consisted of a few tents, an RCC building, and a building with a tin roof. According to Md. Akram Mallick, the training was of the following type:

- Tashisiya: Physical Training
- Jindula: An intensive training course of five to six months' duration which included training in heavy weaponry
- Takhasusad or Barudi: A specialized training of five to six months' duration which included tactics and bomb manufacturing
- Alhadique
- Khasuchi
- Jasuchi

***Qari Salim Ahmed***

Blind in both eyes, Qari Salim Ahmed had worked as a teacher in a Madrassa and then as Alim in Durul Ulum Shawala Madrassa in Jammu and Kashmir's Kupwara district. Traveling to Pakistan, he had met with the Amir of HuM of Pakistan who advised him to organize the HuM in Uttar Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, and Assam. Indeed, Qari Salim was instrumental in the recruitment of many youths into the HuM. During his stay in Dhaka—on his return from Pakistan—Salim received a consignment of explosives—thirty-four kg RDX, nine timer devices, thirty pieces of detonators, three time pencils, and five blasting machines from an ISI operative located in Bangladesh. As mentioned in the profile of Md. Akram Mallick, he took the consignment to Abdul Jabbar in Rajshahi. The explosives were meant for sabotage activities in India. However, a joint Assam-West Bengal Police team intercepted the consignment as it was being smuggled into India on 14 August 1999.

**Harkat Surrenders in Assam**

Six HuM militants who had trained in Batrasi in Pakistan surrendered at Guwahati on March 2001. Nineteen activists of the HuM's (Assam unit), some Pakistan trained, surrendered to Assam Police in August-September 2001. Abu Bakar Siddiqui, General Secretary of the HuM (Assam Unit), also surrendered to the authorities. He had returned to Assam via Bangladesh after taking arms and explosives training in Pakistan during December 1998. In 1998 he had taken some Muslim youths of Assam to the Rohingya Islamic Front training camp in the Arakans for arms training. Indeed, this was the beginning of the spree of surrenders by militants of the organization, which—as explained earlier—has led to almost a total depletion of the HuM in Assam. An interesting aspect in the surrenders is that no arms and ammunition were surrendered.

But does the profile along with the training and the motivation of the HuM explain the surrenders? Some reports have indicated that a few HuM militants were not treated well by the minders in Pakistan (Assamese and Bangladeshis do not match the build of the Pakistanis and Afghans and were consequently derided for their small builds) and this did not go down well with the HuM militants from Assam. Moreover, some of the HuM (even MULTA) militants returning from Pakistan have stated that they were of the opinion that they were taken to Pakistan for training which would aid them in alleviating the sufferings of their fellow Muslims on return. Instead, the ISI and the HuM minders of Pakistan and Bangladesh instructed them to assassinate Indian leaders and kill people of the Hindu community. Among the plethora of disenchantments that normally accompany

surrenders, the ill treatment and the contradictions that they were faced with à la their duties back in Assam were touted as reasons for surrender.

### **MFOs in Assam—A Prognosis**

The author wishes to analyze the aforesaid situation (especially in terms of the random case studies taken) in the following manner:

- Either there is no problem by way of the MFOs in Assam (given that only two groups seem to be marginally active, and one of them is capitulating with mass surrenders), or there is something afoot which does not augur too well.
- After all, what can be the reason for the activity that has been witnessed by way of travel to and from Bangladesh and Pakistan? Is it conceivable that all the training that almost all the MFOs are receiving in Pakistan and Bangladesh are going to seed with MFOs sitting around doing absolutely nothing?
- In the opinion of the author, the events of 11 September 2001 have to some extent quieted the MFO. Indeed, to paraphrase the US President when he commented on al-Qaeda's strikes of May 2003 in Saudi Arabia and Morocco, the MFOs are hiding but not idle.
- MFOs in the Indian sub-continent have been known to change names, etc. in order to elude detection. Indeed, militant groups in Kashmir have been known to disappear immediately after they engineer an operation. Two important Pakistani based groups—the Jaish-e-Mohammad and the Harkat-ul-Ansar—reportedly renamed themselves in March 2003 as Khaddam-ul-Islam and Jamiat-ul-Ansar, respectively. According to a report in the *Khabren*, a Pakistan based Urdu daily, Maulana Farooq Kashmiri and Fazlur Rehman Khalil would continue to remain as chief and secretary general of the Jamiat-ul-Ansar. Now, the Amir of the HuM, Pakistan—whom almost all of the HuM militants from Assam met in Pakistan—bears the same name as the secretary general of the new Jamiat-ul-Ansar (the erstwhile Harkat-ul-Ansar). Is it possible that the mass surrenders by the HuM militants were a precursor to the renaming? Is it that the HuM members (in the aftermath of the arrests, the authorities had profiles of almost all the cadres) wanted to begin a new MFO with a clean slate? Is it at all possible that this was being done in order to hoodwink the authorities into thinking that the HuM is still alive but defunct, while all along recruitment to its new incarnation continues?
- The fact that the MULTA is not surrendering is interesting. The activity of the MULTA can be analyzed in its operational (and otherwise) conjunction with the ULFA and the fact that it is now a member of the Bangladesh Islamic Manch. Is it possible that the MULTA represents other MFOs in Assam in the Manch?
- As aforesaid, militants of the MULTA or any MFO operating in Assam are not engaging themselves in mass scale extortion. The reason, in the opinion of the author, continues to be that the MULTA and most of the MFOs are provided for, by trusts and fronts which conduit monies from the ISI, al-Qaeda, and other such international networks with coordinates in Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran, Sudan, Yemen, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore.
- The MULTA—in comparison to the ULFA or the NDFB—is a quiet militant organization, and the modus operandi—as aforesaid—seems to be not to take on the Indian security forces, but to expand their base as quietly as possible without attracting attention. Nevertheless, their travels to and from Bangladesh and Pakistan for the purpose of training is continuing. A recent news report has stated that a twenty-eight-man team of the MULTA led by its “Second Lt.,” Abdul Jalil, has recently entered Assam after completing a three-month arms training course.<sup>9</sup> The report also mentions that the MFO has purchased as many as fifty-five houses at Hamra Bazar in Sylhet district of Bangladesh for housing the organization's leaders and recruits who visit Bangladesh for arms training.

Indeed, the author will not take anything to be amiss if militants of the MULTA begin to surrender in the manner of the HuM. The HuM network was rendered defunct with the arrests of the important leaders, and, therefore, theoreticians of the HuM and the ISI perhaps thought it was better to surrender the militants (the ones



which could be spared and utilized for spreading a disinformation campaign to the authorities after surrendering) and let an impression be created that the organization has collapsed, rather than have the authorities continue to turn on the heat on the outfit as was done in the aftermath of the August 1999 arrests. “Preserve what one can and live to fight another jihad” seems to be a plausible explanation to the surrenders. The outright capitulation of an organization such as the HuM—with its powerful cross-border connection—does not make sense without recourse to such an explanation.

### Abu Bakr Siddiqui’s Revelation

At any rate, the author has conducted an exclusive interview with the surrendered HuM General Secretary, Abu Bakr Siddiqui alias Abdullah.<sup>10</sup> Relevant extracts of the interview are put forward:

Q. Identify yourself.

A. I am Abu Bakr Siddiqui alias Abdullah. I was the General Secretary of the Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (Assam Unit). I was trained in Batrasi, Pakistan. Md. Fakruddin recruited me in Guwahati. He took me to Bangladesh, and thence to Pakistan. In Karachi (Pakistan), we stayed at the Howrabat Mustafa Masjid, which was the HuM office in Karachi. From Karachi, I was taken to Rawalpindi where I met the leaders of the HuM, Fazlur Rahman Khalil and Farooq Kashmiri. I was taken to Mansera district’s Batrasi where the training camp was located. The name of the training in charge was Waqqas. In Batrasi, I took training for about two months. We returned to Rawalpindi after the training, and were then taken to an ISI training camp. We were taken to the ISI training camp in a covered jeep; we were not allowed to look outside. We trained in explosives in the ISI camp for thirty-nine days...I reached Assam in the month of December 1998. In 2001, I underwent a realization that what we were doing was seditious and, therefore, I decided to surrender and live a normal life.

Q. After you returned from the training, what sort of activities were you involved in?

A. We were engaged in the collection of money, recruitment and in sending the recruits for training as also for receiving them after they return from training.

Q. Did you receive any instructions from the ISI about any specific task?

A. Yes, we were instructed by the ISI to assassinate Atal Behari Vajpayee and Lal Krishna Advani. We were also told to assassinate the Bodo leaders who were responsible for the atrocities on Muslims in Assam.

Q. Describe a day in the training camp in Batrasi, Pakistan.

A. In the morning after the call for the *fazar* prayers, we sat for our prayers. After the prayers we took part in physical training, and after that physical exercise, which was followed by breakfast. After breakfast, we were imparted theoretical classes and on explosives—this continued until noon. After the classes we were given lunch and thence we rested for a while. At 1 PM, we were given lectures on *jihad*. After that we were given instructions on camouflage, firing and crawling. This continued until 4 PM. After a break, we were taken for a long march. We were taken to the mountains and were instructed about survival in the mountains. We were also taught how to convince others about our cause. This carried on until 7 PM.

Q. Did you see any senior ISI official during your stay in the training camp?

A. One senior ISI official had come by helicopter to the camp. But he did not get off the helicopter.

Q. What was the route you took when you left from Assam for Pakistan? And how many persons accompanied you?

A. When we left Guwahati, one Abbas Mastan tore a one-rupee note and gave me one of the pieces and he took the other one. He asked me to go to Dhaka in Bangladesh. So, from Guwahati I went to Dhubri. From Dhubri, I took a boat to Kurigram via Masla Char and Bikurigram. And thence by bus to Dhaka. From Dhaka we took an auto rickshaw to Jatrabari, to the Nunai Madrassa. The Madrassa was a three-story building. There I met a Madrassa teacher by the name of Abu Salem. But, later I found that he was not a teacher, but one who facilitated the travel of people who came from Assam to go to Pakistan. We stayed in the Madrassa for about two months until our papers were ready. In the meantime, I was also sent for primary training to Myanmar’s Zero point, which is in the Arakans and was the training centre of the HuM and the Islamic Revolutionary Force.

Q. How were your travel papers made?

A. Our travel papers were complete within fifteen days. I am convinced that it was done through the Pakistan embassy in Dhaka.

Q. How can you be so certain about this?

A. Because we heard the Pakistani officials confer with the others about our travel, etc.

Q. Did they identify themselves as Pakistani officials?

A. Yes, they did.

Q. What sort of work were you asked to do in Assam after you returned from your training in Pakistan? Were you told to carry out explosions?

A. No, we were not given any instructions about bombings, etc. We were simply asked to enter Assam, take shelter and wait for our strength to grow.

Q. What is the present strength of the HuM in Assam?

A. There are about 300-400 boys in Assam now. In our group of fifteen, save two all have surrendered. After we left, some fresh recruits have been sent for training. Also, we have heard that the Jaish-e-Mohammad and Harkat-ul-Jihad have entered Assam. The strength is now about 400-500 boys. Some *fidayins* [suicide squads] have also come.

Q. The *fidayins* are from which country?

A. They are all from India.

Q. Which state in India?

A. Uttar Pradesh.

Q. What is HuM's relationship with the ULFA? Do they train together?

A. I have not heard about joint training. But, when I was in the ISI training camp in Pakistan, the question of the ULFA had arisen. We were told that we had to obey our seniors—if they instructed us about working together with the ULFA then we would have to. We were also instructed by the ISI that we would have to later on—if the necessity arises—work together with the ULFA.

Q. Are Muslim cadres in the ULFA leaving it to join the MFOs?

A. One Jahangir Hussain Khan had returned with me from Pakistan. He was earlier in the ULFA. Later he joined the HuM. Similarly, a person who was earlier in the ULFA formed MULTA. Muslims cadres in the ULFA are now leaving the group to join the HuM or the Jaish-e-Mohammad.

Q. Were you involved in the conducting of audio-cassettes, etc. from Bangladesh, which contained the speeches of Jaish-e-Mohammad leader Masood Azhar?

A. Yes, I had brought the audio-cassettes. One was Osama bin Laden's speech and four others were Masood Azhar's. I had brought the cassettes with their tapes in reverse order, as if they are damaged. I corrected them here before duplicating and distributing them.

### Marriages and Modules

It is quite clear, therefore, that the motivation of the HuM (as must be that of the other MFOs in Assam) is to gather and grow. The training, the movements, the indoctrination, the recruitments and the caution—all seem to point towards one inevitable objective, to “engulf and devour.” Indeed, as has been seen in the above interview of the surrendered General Secretary of the HuM in Assam, the instructions to the MFOs from their foreign minds are ambiguous (apart from directives such as the ones about the assassination of important Indian leaders), and it is indicated that they are to await not only a position of strength but also an opportune moment. The opportune moment will include the demise of the ethnic militant movements in the region and the demographic change that will soon be upon the region. Reports have already indicated that new social formations called the *Sema Miyas* have come up in Nagaland which are the progeny of the illegal Bangladesh

migrant and the Sema tribe of Nagaland. The NSCN (K)—the group that has ceased its hostilities—has sent out strictures to the Muslim settlers in the Naga inhabited. In a press release on 16 January 2001 it appealed to the Nagas to maintain a strict watch on the Muslim community. The Nagaland Government was blamed for its failure to check the Muslim influx into the state. The organization also issued the following guidelines to the Muslims living in the Naga inhabited areas

- Marriage of Muslims with the local Nagas would not be recognized and violators will be expelled.
- Loud speakers were banned in Masjids.
- The number of Muslims allowed to reside in each region of Nagaland was restricted to 2,500.
- All Muslims were directed to possess identity cards “issued by the Organization.”

But what is even more disturbing are the latest reports that the Inter Services Intelligence of Pakistan are forming “modules” inside Assam, which are comprised of ten to twenty illegal migrants from Bangladesh. These “modules” that are to act as “sleepers” have been given huge sums of money and arms and ammunition, and every so often the ISI minders make trips to ascertain the “readiness” of these “modules.” Although the “modules” have not yet been activated, the role that they are reportedly to play is quite sinister. According to reports that are available, the “modules” on being activated will start a communal riot, act as *agent saboteurs* in a situation, and even target members of the Muslim community in order to arouse communal passion.

### **Al-Qaeda and Assam**

Unconfirmed reports have also spoken about the presence of al-Qaeda in Bhutan and North East India. While it is true that almost all North East militant organizations have established camps in Bangladesh, the report that al-Qaeda has entered Bhutan may not be very reliable as even the ULFA is now in the process of leaving the Himalayan kingdom. However, the presence of al-Qaeda scouts and itinerant cadres in North East India cannot be ruled out. This is particularly so, because reports have suggested that Islamic militant organizations from the region are being trained by the Pakistani intelligence agency, the ISI, and al-Qaeda. A newspaper quotes police and intelligence sources in a recent report.

The Assam Police has enough evidence about the hand of Pakistan’s ISI and Al Qaida in aiding militants of the Muslim United Liberation Tigers of Assam (MULTA)... The ISI has activated a banned terrorist outfit in Bangladesh—Sipahi-e-Sahiba which is providing ideological and combat training to the MULTA... The militants have also smuggled sophisticated weapons into the state (Assam) from a temporary HQ of the ISI set up at a mosque at Hathijan in Cox’s Bazar in Bangladesh.<sup>11</sup>

### **The Role of the Madrassa**

One important source for the MFOs is said to be the Madrassa. Indeed, history attests to the role of the Madrassa in the birth of the Taliban in Pakistan. Madrassas—certain analysts hold—are responsible for the initial training that is imparted to the *jihadi*. And, although whether this is so is a matter that will have to be examined, one aspect concerning the Madrassa is that it has begun to proliferate in a big way in the region, with certain Madrassas in Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat uncovering huge caches of arms and ammunition. The seizures were made in two Madrassas in the above Indian states following an interrogation of six people who were arrested in connection with the attack on the USIS in Calcutta.<sup>12</sup> This has occasioned a serious controversy in India, with Madrassas being looked upon as suspect everywhere. And this is so, despite the fact that the Indian Deputy Prime minister has stated, “Madrassas all over the country should not be accused of fundamentalist activities.”

The fact that Madrassas are proliferating in the region is not a matter that can be contested. Bangladesh, for instance, has about 64,000 Madrassas, perhaps an imperative for an under developed country which has very few modern educational institutions and a huge population. But, Madrassas per se cannot be accused of churning out war machines—they have an important role in providing basic education to the poor Muslim children who do not have the wherewithal for a more specialized and formal education. However, the students who graduate from these religious seminaries have been known to be lured by the fundamentalists, and ill-equipped as they are with little sound education which would allow them a suitable profession, they fall prey to

the attraction of *jihad*. The primers, for example, that are being taught in some Pakistani Madrassas state that the Urdu letter *jeem* stands for *jihad*; *tay* for *tope* (cannon); *kaaf* for Kalashnikovs; and *khay* for *khoon* (blood).

Madrassas in Assam—or elsewhere for that matter—are primarily of two types: a) Hafizia, and b) Kharizia, where religious teachings based on the Koran are being imparted to young children belonging to the Muslim community. In the Hafizia Madrassas, students receive the title of “Hafiz” (Kazi) after completing three years of recitation of the Koran. In Kharizia Madrassas, students receive the title of “Kari” after the completion of the course in two years. After graduating from these Madrassas, the students are qualified for admission into Dar, Deoband (Uttar Pradesh), or in senior Madrassas such as Baskandi in Cachar district and Garigaon in Guwahati. All the Madrassas provide boarding and lodging to the students who are of the age group three to twenty years.

The curriculum at the various levels of teaching in a Madrassa is:

- Senior Madrassa Level (Std V-VII): Diniyat, Fika, Akait, Arabic, Urdu, Hindi, English, General Mathematics, General Science, Social Studies, Modern Indian Language [Assamese/Bengali], Work Experience
- Senior 1-4<sup>th</sup> Year (Std VIII-XI): Koran with translation and explanation, Al-Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), Usool (principles of jurisprudence), Arabic language/grammar, Modern Indian Language, English, Urdu, Tariq (Islamic history with Indian history of Mughal period) and Persian as an additional paper
- Degree Level (1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> Year): Tafsil (explanation of Koran), Hadith, Fiqh, Usool, Arabic, Literary History of Arabs, Persian, Social Studies and Science
- Mumtazul Mahadasin [MM Title Level]: Six Hadith, Tafsil and Islamic History

The State Madrassa Education Board (MEB) recognizes most Madrassas in Assam, and inquiries have not revealed the presence of any teachers from Bangladesh or other countries (teachers have to be recruited as per Assam Madrassa Education Provincialisation Act 1995) in the state. Moreover, the Madrassas are not proliferating at a rate that may not have a correlation with the growth rate. An independent survey of Madrassas and Mosques in Assam was undertaken in 2002. The *Occasional Paper* reproduces the statistics.

#### District-Wise Details of Madrassas and Mosques

	Name of District	Madrassa		Mosque	Growth Pattern of Illegal Madrassas in last five years
		Registered	Unregistered		
1	Barpeta	16	3	497	
2	Bongaigaon	74	--	31	
3	Cachar	49	28	1131	No construction of illegal Madrassas during last five years reported to have taken place.
4	Darrang	60	--	21	No significant increase in the number of Madrassa noticed.
5	Dhemaji	--	1	9	No illegal growth of Madrassas noticed.
6	Dhubri	70	117	741	
7	Dibrugarh	--	4	50	No instance of illegal growth of Madrassas has been noticed.
8	Goalpara	105	19	365	A few Madrassas have grown during last five years to impart

					education to orphan and poor Muslim children in Islam. These institutions have an orthodox outlook.
9	Golaghat	8	82	61	Two active Madrassas in the last five years were established.
10	Hailakandi	48	43	1000 (Approx.)	No illegal Madrassas have come up during the period. Out of the 1000 mosques nearly 500 are small hutments or thatched houses used as mosques in the interior areas.
11	Jorhat	3	4	29	There is no increase in Madrassas in the above-mentioned period.
12	Kamrup	24	3	524	Nil
13	Karbi Anglong	--	2	7	No illegal growth of Madrassas noticed.
14	Karimganj	52	72	1000 (Approx.)	Ten private Madrassas were established during the period.
15	Kokrajhar	11	38	90	
16	Morigaon	32	13	131	Thirty-one Subahi Muktabs have been set up to impart religious education to small Muslim children appointing newly educated Hafiz, Qari, etc.
17	N.C. Hills	--	--	6	No illegal growth of Madrassas noticed.
18	Nagaon	187	96	362	There are no illegal Madrassas in the district.
19	Nalbari	37	--	313	Not available.
20	North Lakhimpur	15	46	50	No illegal Madrassas were established during last five years.
21	Sibsagar	6	--	142	No illegal Madrassas have come up during the period.
22	Sonitpur	13	71	116	
23	Tinsukia	--	14	45	No growth of illegal Madrassas occurred.
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>810</b>	<b>656</b>	<b>6721</b>	

**Registered:** Registered with MEB, Kahilipara, Government of Assam

**Unregistered/private:** Registered not with the Government of Assam but controlled by Madaris Qaumia, Tanzim Nilbazan/Nagaon

An examination by the author has not identified any abnormal growth of Madrassas in Assam, and as is evident from the survey, growth of legitimate Madrassas in Assam does not seem to be giving rise to illegal Madrassas. However, the intelligence agencies in Assam have profiled a few Madrassas in the state that are said to have *dubious distinction*, and it is quite possible that many a Madrassa are being funded by dubious sources, and are consequently providing a feeder stock to the MFOs in Assam. As has been said above, the Madrassa has the ingredients of being exploited by the fundamentalists—and as has been seen there seems to be no dearth of Islamic fundamentalists in Assam today.

### MFOs—A Security Prescription

The MFO profile in Assam can, therefore, be understood as one that merits a cautious watch. Signs definitely abound that point to a serious fundamentalist engineering underway in the region, especially with the sort of growth in Islamic fundamentalism that is being witnessed in neighboring Bangladesh. Indeed, by way of a security prescription, the following points are put forward:

- North East India is an important region in South Asia (in the opinion of the author the region is situated at the epicenter of South Asia) with not only its strategic encirclement but also the Islamic fundamentalist engineering that is taking place.
- Bangladesh can no longer be said to be a moderate Islamic state. The entry of the Jamaat-e-Islami and the Islamic Oikyo Jote into the ruling echelons of the country and the entry of al-Qaeda and the Taliban into the country (with reported Bangladesh government knowledge) are important indicators of this shift.
- The region in Myanmar that is dominated by the Rohingyas is also experiencing resurgence by way of Islamic fundamentalism.
- A serious possibility exists that Islamic fundamentalists in the region are seeking to carve out an Islamic homeland comprised of the present-day Bangladesh and parts of Myanmar and North East India.
- An international awareness is necessary to closely monitor the Islamic resurgence in Bangladesh, Myanmar, and North East India. Indeed, this region—if neglected—has the potential to turn into a new Afghanistan.
- Active efforts must be made to ferret out the linkages between the ethnic militant movements and the Islamic fundamentalists. The US Terror List<sup>13</sup> has clauses (such as Section 212(a)(3)(B), clauses (III) and (IV)) which qualify certain ethnic militant organizations in North East India as terrorist groups. It is now quite clear that the Islamic fundamentalists are trying to usurp the separatist mantle from the ethnic militant movements, and this they seem to be doing with a conspiracy which is insidious because it is achieving the objective by not only piggy-backing onto the existing ethnic militant organizations, but also by seeking to subvert the populace with ideology and subterfuge. The United States must rework its Terror List in order to include groups such as the ULFA into its ambit. The fact that the ULFA and such other groups are not stepping on US interests immediately should not be viewed as tantamount to not doing so in the future. Indeed, the linkages which the ULFA has with the Islamic forces in the region and the ISI-DGFI are well on the way to proving that the ULFA has joined the global club of terror.
- An international fact-finding committee must investigate al-Qaeda's entry into Bangladesh. The location of camps and safe houses of al-Qaeda in Bangladesh that have been enumerated in this *Occasional Paper* may act as an initial guiding factor.
- Camps in Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Myanmar that have been set up by the militant groups waging a war against India must be destroyed. International monitoring of the destruction must be done.
- Camps in Pakistan that train the North East Indian militant—ethnic and Islamic—must be destroyed. International monitoring of the destruction must be done.
- Pakistan must be pressured by the international community into desisting from mounting operations in the region (especially North East India) by way of its intelligence-security agencies such as the ISI.

- A close watch must be kept on the growth and activities of the Madrassas in the region.
- The illegal immigration into Assam from neighboring Bangladesh must be stopped forthwith. The government of Bangladesh must accept this as a reality and take active steps for the return of its citizens who are illegally settled in India.
- The government of India must either activate the IM (DT) Act or replace it with one that is more workable. The politics of certain political parties in India must not be allowed to come in the way of addressing the issue or be used to communalize the issue. Adequate protection must be provided for the indigenous Indian Muslims in the substituted act.
- The work permit idea for migrants from Bangladesh—which was first envisaged by the author in an article in the *North East Sun*, New Delhi—may be considered by an independent body for implementation. The body must have representatives from Bangladesh and India.
- North East India must be declared a “Zone of Peace” by the international community.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Ian O. Lesser, “Countering the New Terrorism: Implications for Strategy,” in Ian O. Lesser, Bruce Hoffman, John Arquilla, David F. Ronfeldt, Michele Zanini, Brian Michael Jenkins (eds.), *Countering the New Terrorism*, (RAND, 1999). Available online at <<http://www.rand.org/publications/MR/MR989/MR989.chap4.pdf>> (accessed on 2 April 2003).

<sup>2</sup> The Babri Masjid—a mosque that had stood in Ayodhya since the times of the Mughals—was destroyed by activists of certain right-wing parties on 6 December 1992. On 18 February 1983, over 1,800 members of the Muslim community were killed in Nellie, a small hamlet in Assam’s Nagaon district.

<sup>3</sup> See the author’s interview of HuM General Secretary Abu Bakr Siddiqui, excerpted in this *Occasional Paper* beginning on page 51. The interview was conducted on 27 December 2002.

<sup>4</sup> Indeed, a senior officer of the Barak Valley district administration of Assam had reportedly informed the then Chief Secretary, H.N. Das, through a letter on 27 July 1994 (No.COM-3/93-94/50) about a group comprising the ISI, the Hezbollah Mujahid of Iran, ULFA and other Islamic fundamentalist groups planning to carry out violence particularly in Hindu villages. The letter to the Chief Secretary also spoke of some new *maulavis* and Muslim youths who were seen taking shelter in Muslim villages, and meetings were being organized “by these people in different places” including Masjids. “These persons usually spend about 3-4 days at one place, then move on; the subject of their discussion is reported to be incitement of terrorism. The letter goes on to talk of a ` fear being fuelled by some recent instances of gang rape of Hindu women and dacoity by Muslims.” See “Govt Was Aware of ISI Activities in ’94, Admits CM,” *Sentinel* (Guwahati), 22 November 1999.

<sup>5</sup> Angami Zapu Phizo, the father of Naga insurgency.

<sup>6</sup> Bhure Lal, *The Monstrous Face of ISI* (New Delhi: Siddharth Publications, 2000), 50.

<sup>7</sup> Subir Bhaumik, *Insurgent Crossfire* (New Delhi: Lancer Publications 1996).

<sup>8</sup> The Pakistani connection in the HuM agenda was further confirmed when Md. Fasiullah Hussaini—in the aftermath of his arrest by the Assam Police—moved the Chief Judicial Magistrate (CJM) of Goalpara for permission to write to the Pakistani High Commissioner in New Delhi to obtain a sum of Rs. 3 lakh for meeting their legal expenses to defend his case. The CJM passed an order dated 16 November 1999, consenting to the prayer and consequently Md. Fasiullah Hussaini wrote to Ashraf Jahangir Qazi, the then Pakistani High Commissioner in New Delhi. Also see the Chief Minister of Assam report to the Assam State Legislative Assembly on “ISI activities in Assam,” 6 April 2000.

<sup>9</sup> “28-man Trained MULTA Gang Enters Assam from B’desh,” *Sentinel* (Guwahati), 22 May 2003.

<sup>10</sup> The interview was conducted on 27 December 2002 in the Special Branch HQ of the Assam Police.

<sup>11</sup> “ISI-sponsored Outfits Training up MULTA in B’desh,” *Sentinel* (Guwahati), 18 May 2003.

<sup>12</sup> “Arms Haul at Madrassas,” *Hindustan Times* (Delhi), 19 February 2002

<sup>13</sup> See US Department of State, *Foreign Terrorist Organizations*, <<http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/fs/2003/17067pf.htm>> (accessed 4 April 2003).





## EPILOGUE

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*In the Fathiyah-I-'Ibriyah it is said that Mir Jumla<sup>1</sup> demanded:*

- i) The cession of all the country up to Garhgaon<sup>2</sup>*
- ii) The payment of 500 elephants and 300,000 tolas of gold and silver*
- iii) A daughter of the king for the imperial harem*
- iv) An annual tribute of fifty elephants*

—As retold by Sir Edward Gait in his History of Assam

Islamic militancy is not a new phenomenon. Indeed, in some sense, the “clash of civilizations,”<sup>3</sup> with which modern academic discourse seems to identify Islamic militancy, began when the Seljuk Turks overran the Christian empire of Byzantium. Islamic militants today view their agendas in Palestine, Kosovo, Kashmir, and elsewhere as a progression of the “holy war,”<sup>4</sup> which was heralded by the conquest of Jerusalem in 638 AD. Therefore, although there is some debate about whether clash-of-civilization theorists are confusing civilization with religion,<sup>5</sup> the proposition that the “Green Menace” of Islamic fundamentalism has replaced the “Red Menace” of communism is not in any doubt. And the “clash” itself—as has been prophesized—is between the Muslim world and the West.<sup>6</sup>

Militants under the green ensign, however, have not been able to unify established Islamic states—with the brief exception of Afghanistan under the Taliban—with their fundamentalist cause. Acting as freelancers in the name of Islam, such militants have sought to establish a confederacy of the faithful in several Islamic countries and communities with the hope that every *Dar-ul-Harb*<sup>7</sup> will soon be replaced with *Dar-ul-Amaan*.<sup>8</sup> But their advocated universal goals have had limited success even within their own parish—leading them thereby to turn to methodologies that do not need a mass following in order to achieve their objectives. Such militants have surfaced when the vulnerabilities of erudition and systemic error have allowed themselves to play accompaniment to ominous design. This convergence of factors is precisely the reason why 9/11 occurred. After all, even in its broadest notion, the most important Islamic militant action in recent times was in the end the handiwork of only a few. To that end, the menacing caliber of a few surviving elements—who are able to escape a counter-militant dragnet—must not be under-estimated.

Militancy fuelled by religious fanaticism is not bound by geographical boundaries. The combative manifestation of Islam has today assumed a global dimension, with foci of operation distributing itself into worldwide cellular formations. Unfortunately, this has been so despite its inability to grow as a mass movement. Such proliferations have gained in momentum particularly after Operation Enduring Freedom, when as a result of the US-led invasion of Afghanistan, important elements of the al-Qaeda–Taliban hierarchy were spirited away into the maze of the global night. It is in the face of such questions that allegations of al-Qaeda entry into Bangladesh convey credibility.

Where, after all, are Mullah Omar, bin Laden, and al-Zawahiri? What, after all, are the reasons—if not the truth—which led two western journalists to report not only the secret entry of al-Qaeda into Bangladesh, but also of the systematic subversion of secular forces in that country? Are all the reports that have emanated from the general area of Bangladesh and North East India about the presence of al-Qaeda (and on the strength of which much of this *Occasional Paper* has been written) fake, fictitious, and false? What about the bombing in Bali? Is it inconceivable that the terror trail from Afghanistan that led to countries such as Indonesia had transit points in Chittagong and Rajshahi? Why are petrified citizenry in Bangladesh’s Ukhia secretly corresponding with western reporters about disturbing alien presence in their midst? Al-Qaeda and the Taliban live, if not in the caves of Tora Bora, then in cities, towns, and villages of South and South East Asia.

In 1971 Bangladesh was a moderate Islamic state. Although the United States had not midwived its umbilical severance from Pakistan (indeed, to the contrary the United States had even opposed it!), the environs that are washed by the Bay of Bengal soon came to be nurtured as the prima donna of Old Glory. Bangladesh could do no wrong, not even with its political upheavals and dictatorships—the latter ending the first time around in assassination and the second time in overthrow and incarceration. The United States was ready to do

business with anyone in Dhaka who curtsied. Resident diplomats in Baridhara and diplomats in residence in Foggy Bottom fell over one another to protect what they thought was one of the few surviving moderate Islamic states. Talk of the al-Qaeda landings, the burning of the US flag, the assembling of a nuclear device—all were met with guarded derision. The United States desperately needed a foil to counter its newest enemy in militant Islam, and Bangladesh was erroneously thought to be the perfect weapon. What the United States has not realized is what this epilogue began by stating: Islamic militant action in recent times has been the handiwork of a few. And Bangladesh with its ever-changing delta has more than enough warrens and marshes to successfully house such a few.

So, how is the road from Kandahar to Chittagong being paved? If it is not from the wake of the M.V. *Mecca*, the ship that reportedly ferried al-Qaeda operatives, it was certainly by the reaffirmation of ties between Bangladesh and Pakistan. In a well-publicized visit to Bangladesh in July 2002 (well after Operation Enduring Freedom was underway), Pervez Musharraf expressed regret at the Pakistani army action in 1971 that had left countless Bangladeshis dead and dishonored. Indeed, if Alex Perry is to be believed, the M.V. *Mecca* had preceded Musharraf's penitent pilgrimage—the *Time* magazine story “Deadly Cargo” broke three months after the Pakistani dictator's visit to what were once the eastern seclusions of Rawalpindi.

How about the ISI? Has its pro-terrorism doctrine in any manner diminished after 9/11 and the replacement of Mahmood Ahmed by Ehsan-ul-Haq? Anti-India operations carried out in North East India and originating from within Bangladesh by the Pakistani intelligence agency do not signify this. The much-publicized Musharraf speech of 12 January 2002 in which he condemned terrorism “under any pretext” has not yielded any tangible results. Indeed, if anything, with the temporary closure of the Afghan bureau of the ISI, it is the defined goal of Brig. Mohammad Yousaf,<sup>9</sup> to create “several Afghanistans” in India, which seems to be making headway. North East India, with its large illegal migrant population and proximity to Bangladesh, makes it an ideal staging ground for the subterfuge.

On the radar screen of global terrorism, North East India is but a faint blip. Many a theoretician of practice and practitioner of theory whom this author met during the course of his research in the United States admitted that they were hearing of the region for the first time.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the topic of research that occupied the author was even derided—how can a region that is so insignificant manifest itself as a future threat to the United States? But the truth of the matter is that North East India is an important geo-political region that has live boundaries with Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, and Myanmar. There are more armed insurrections in the region—which have tested the Indian military might—than there are in the rest of the entire South Asian region. Anecdotal history has even testified to early US interest in the region by way of the CIA's “Operation Brahmputra,” which purportedly sought to sever the region from the rest of India. However, the misfortune of the time is such that the “enchanted frontiers” to which many an American missionary carried literacy, modern medicine and Christianity during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, is being consigned to the flames of anonymity.

Despite its relative insularity, North East India, too, felt the shocks of the fall of the Twin Towers. Indeed, even as the civilized world reeled from the effects of 9/11 and the global war on terror, militant organizations in the region were changing their agendas. Movements such as the ULFA grew more cautious about attacks on innocent people and were to a considerable extent (at least until the end of 2002) quieted by not only US censure of terror but the peace overtures of the LTTE and the NSCN as well. However, this was short-lived. What had started with a bang was ending in a whimper. It soon became clear that the US-led grand alliance against terror was going to be a selective affair. Therefore, even as the question from the US Ambassador to India, Robert D. Blackwill,<sup>11</sup> of whether the ULFA can reach US targets in New Delhi and Calcutta conveyed an important point, the general US disregard for the Indian Deputy Prime Minister's remark that “the epicenter of global terrorism has shifted to Pakistan after the fall of the Taliban in Afghanistan” was indication that natural selection egged on US policy in South Asia. As a result, militant movements in North East India restarted their agendas with a vengeance. Mortar shells flew into air bases, oil installations, and crowded streets of Assam, and the weapons and the training responsible for the attacks—as has been seen—all pointed to Bangladesh. The ULFA had not only changed ideologies but were less cautious about international censure. What occasioned this? After all, the ULFA was known to have punished cadres who had targeted innocent non-combatants in the past. Is it that the leaders of the ULFA—completely in the control of the ISI—have lost all free agency? Are they consequently ordering operations that would not normally meet the organization's ethical norm? What, moreover, is the significance of the ISI instruction to the HuM that the latter “would have to later

on work together with the ULFA?" Has an unholy alliance already been engineered between the MFOs and the ULFA?

Reports have not yet indicated a serious nexus between the ULFA and the MFOs. But for the sole exception of the MULTA, few MFOs are even operating in a manner that can be termed as militancy. Indeed, almost ninety percent of the MFOs are silent, not by the absence of activity but by the presence of non-activity. There exist sixteen well-organized MFOs, complete with distinct objectives, training, and parish, yet only a couple of them are in battle mode.

Is there an Islamic militant movement in North East India? An intricate assembly of organizational structure, training camps, ideology, and weaponry definitely indicate that there is. The fact that the MFOs are coming under the ambit of umbrella organizations such as the BIM, which has professed al-Qaeda linkages by way of the convening HUJI-B, also indicates their links with international Islamic militancy. The prognosis at this point, therefore, is that the "Green Menace" is steadily replacing the "Red Menace" in the region; much of the latter was characterized by the ethnic militant movements with an avowed Marxist-Leninist ideology. Furthermore, if for some reason the MFOs are not openly arraying themselves against the Indian state at the present moment, it is not tantamount to any lesser militant objective on their part. Indeed, it seems that the MFOs are being readied for future action—the establishment of terror modules and sleepers that are to be activated at a future time underlines this fact. At any rate, the absence of proof of cannot be considered proof of absence.

Is the game plan, therefore, to steadily expand the Islamic fundamentalist confederacy into North East India, and thereby take the crucial step in the creation of a greater Bangladesh? After all, the situation is ripe for such a picking. The only militant organization that would have stood in its way—the ULFA—has now been compromised. The demographic march of the loyalist forces—characterized by the illegal migrants—is preparing not only to demand what a former Governor of Assam had sagely termed "a merger with Bangladesh," but also to effect changes in the social formation in the region, as has been seen in the case of the *sema-miyas*. The popular objection that the indigenous people of the region will not allow it is far too facetious at this point to be even considered. Not only are the endangered people in the region—led primarily by the Assamese—disunited over the issue, but they are actually providing sustenance to the illegal migrant who is the source of the threat. In Assam, the movement of 1979-85 of the AASU had helped to crystallize the issue, but once again it was the hypocrisy of middle Assam that threw away the advantage. Today, the illegal migrant constituent is bolder in his claims to the land—he enjoys voting rights and political patronage—and his earlier cautious demeanor about his illegal status has metamorphosed into outright defiance. As the author was once witness to in 1998, an illegal migrant elder in a small hamlet in Assam's Sonitpur district said, "Yes, we are from Bangladesh, we are not going back, do what you will." Today, almost every calling from grocery-selling to masonry, from rickshaw-pulling to domestic help, has been taken over by the illegal migrant. This aspect has been compounded by the ambivalence with which successive governments in North East India have perceived the issue. Indeed, the recent controversy regarding the IM (DT) Act and its repeal has brought to the fore the dramatis personae of the tragedy and their narrow objectives to remain in power. Centrist parties<sup>12</sup> are aligning with the Left to oppose the Right in its battle to right the wrong. In the democracy that is India, debate will ensue about the correctness of one action over another—in Parliament, in living rooms, and in the weary streets. Meanwhile, it will be the hostile alien that will have won, in his agenda of furthering not only Islamic militancy in the region, but terror sans frontiers as well.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Mir Jumla was the Governor of Bengal (which included present-day Bangladesh) in the middle ages. He invaded Assam in 1662.

<sup>2</sup> Garhgaon was the capital of the Ahom kings in Assam. It is presently located in Assam's Sibsagar district.

<sup>3</sup> The phrase has received popular appeal after Samuel P. Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).

<sup>4</sup> The concept of "holy war" or *jihad* was first used not by the Muslims but by Pope Urban II, who called for a "holy war" against the Muslims. The Pope's aid was sought by the Byzantine emperor to fight the Seljuk Turks.

<sup>5</sup> For instance, when Samuel P. Huntington terms India as a "Hindu civilization."

<sup>6</sup> Holding forth on the decline of the West, Samuel P. Huntington hypothesizes that Muslim and Asian countries will align themselves against the West, and there will be some “swing” civilizations, including Japan, Russia, and India.

<sup>7</sup> Realm of war, or non-Islamic states.

<sup>8</sup> Realm of peace, or Islamic states.

<sup>9</sup> Brig. Mohammad Yousaf of the Pakistan army started the Afghan bureau of the ISI. He is also the author of *Bear Trap* (Delhi: Jang Publishers, 1992).

<sup>10</sup> A few, however, of the important think tank leaders in Washington, DC and New Mexico were pleasantly up to date about North East India.

<sup>11</sup> During the course of a conversation with the author in Guwahati.

<sup>12</sup> Tarun Gogoi, leader of the ruling Congress Party in Assam and the state’s Chief Minister, has reportedly said that according to state government estimates, the number of illegal migrants in Assam is 60,000. Editorially commenting on the Chief Minister’s pronouncement, *The Assam Tribune* of 29 July 2003 has written that “for the sake of political interest, no government nor any political party should resort to falsehood at the cost of national security, sovereignty and the identity of the indigenous people...by declaring that there are only 60,000 illegal migrants in Assam as against lakhs of aliens, the Congress government has misled the people.” The editorial also spoke of a RAW report which had stated that 35 percent of Assam’s total population are illegal Bangladeshis, which, according to the editorial, works out to be about 8,000,000.

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**Muslim Fundamentalist Organizations in North East India—A Compendium**

**Muslim United Liberation Tigers of Assam (MULTA)**

Formation: August 1993  
State Headquarters (HQs): Dergaon, Golaghat District, Assam  
Operations group: Madbor Bahini  
Armed wing: Jihad Group  
Leader of Jihad Group: Sahabuddin (A Pakistani-trained militant from Bihar)

***Aims***

To protect the interest of the Muslims in Assam, especially the illegal migrant Muslims from Bangladesh who continue to be its main support base, and to carve out a “rightful place” for Muslims in Assam. The outfit is trying to have a separate homeland in Assam comprising the districts of Nagaon, Dhubri, Kamrup, Karimganj and Hailakandi.

***Main Agenda***

Establish a university for Islamic studies  
Ensure the reservation of 30 percent of jobs in Central and State Govt. services  
Check the deletion of names of Muslims from the voters list  
Provide full protection to the lives and properties of Muslims  
Ensure the allotment of adequate funds for the maintenance of Madrassas and Mosques

***Order of Battle (ORBAT)***

President: Nurul Hussain  
Vice President: Nuzul Haque  
General Secretary: Kamal-ud-Din Ahmed  
Commander-in-Chief: Mathibur Rahman  
Foreign Secretary: Rafiqul Alam  
Publicity Secretary: Shamshul Haque

***Executive Committee Members***

Abdul Khan, Dibrugarh  
Abdul Latif, Jorhat  
Safiqul Hussain, Nagaon  
Siddiq Ali, Silchar  
Tayabullah Khan, Hojai  
Rashul Haque, Nagaon  
Mansoor Ali, Nagaon  
Mammadul Rahman, Nagaon  
Nawab Ali, Hailakandi

***Strength***

Approximately 1,500  
Around 150 cadres have been trained in camps located in Bangladesh and Pakistan

***Camps***

Dhuldhulia, PS Tamarhat, Dhubri  
Dimoru, PS Moirajhar, Nagaon  
Jamaribari, PS Lakhipur, Goalpara  
Sonarghat, PS Golakganj, Dhubri  
Athiabari, PS Bilasipara, Dhubri  
Soparpur, PS Sonai, Cachar

Ballichara, PS Gutigara, Cachar  
 Jalashwar, PS Porapeta Village, Dhubri

### ***Foreign Links***

Inter Services Intelligence of Pakistan  
 Jamaat-e-Islami (Pakistan)  
 Jamaat-e-Islamic (Bangladesh)  
 Islamic Chatra Shibir  
 Sipahi-e-Sahiba  
 Taliban  
 al-Qaeda

### ***Training***

According to one Indian intelligence report a group of thirteen MULTA cadres was trained by the ISI in Bangalmara in North Lakhimpur District. A joint group of 160 MULTA and MULFA cadres underwent three months' training at Chatak and Jayantipur in Bangladesh under the supervision of an ISI Major Nizamuddin Shah and Capt. Iqbal Ali during the end of 1999 and beginning of 2000. A meeting between a MULTA leader, Saifuddin, with ISI agent Lt. Col. Asraf Kazi was also noticed in Jadavpur in the Sylhet District of Bangladesh in Swagatam Hotel in 1999 and beginning 2000. Ishmaq Hussain Siraji, Saidul Islam, and Abdul Qadar of the MULTA obtained visas from the Pakistan High Commission in Dhaka in April-May 2001 for visiting Pakistan and Afghanistan, clearly indicating their links with the ISI. A report has also indicated that al-Qaeda is training the MULTA in Bangladesh, and is channeling arms to the MFO from a temporary HQ that has been set up by the ISI in a mosque at Hathijan in Cox's Bazaar.

Indian intelligence reports also disclose that in the beginning of May 2002, nine Islamic fundamentalist groups met at a camp near the Bangladesh town of Ukhia (south of Cox's Bazaar) and formed the Bangladesh Islamic Manch (BIM). The new umbrella organization—in a bid to expand the Islamic solidarity in the region—has included non-Bangladeshi MFOs such as the Rohingya Solidarity Organization and the Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front from Myanmar. The MULTA is also a member of the BIM. The BIM has declared that its objective is to create a *Brihot Bangladesh* by merging areas of Assam and Myanmar's Arakan province. The BIM has been convened at the initiative of the HUJI-B and is reportedly being chaperoned by the ISI and al-Qaeda. Other important fundamentalist groups from Bangladesh, such as the Islamic Shashantra (Islamic Polity), the Nizam-e-Bangladesh, and Khelafat Majlis, are also members of the Islamic association.

### ***Arms Holding***

9 mm pistols, AK series rifles, etc.

Note: The separate homeland issue is important, as the MULTA does not qualify it by stating whether it is to be a sovereign state or one within the Indian constitution. However, it is assumed that it would be a sovereign state, as the constitution of India does not allow an Islamic state within its ambit. The fact that the "separate homeland" is to be an Islamic state, however, is not explicitly stated, but the parlance that the MULTA is demanding a "rightful place" for the Muslims of Assam and its active liaison with the al-Qaeda and the Bangladesh based fundamentalist groups seems to indicate it.

## **Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (HuM)**

Formation: 1998-99

Area of Operation: Goalpara, Dhubri, Barpeta Districts of Assam

### ***Aims***

To safeguard the interest of Muslims in Assam  
 To fight anti-Muslim forces for the creation of an Islamic state

### ***ORBAT***

Amir/Chairman: Maulana Muslim Ali alias Muslimuddin alias Zuber, resident of Krishnoi District, Goalpara  
 Nyab Amir/Deputy Chairman: Abu Bakar Siddiq alias Abdullah son of Mohammad Muslim Ali of No. 2  
 Larkuchi, PS Mukalmua

Office Secretary: Abdul Kassim alias Usman, resident of Khalidhara, PS Dudhnoi, Goalpara  
 Chief Organizer: Maulana Muhammad Fakruddin alias Akram Master, resident of Barpeta, now living in Pakistan

#### ***Other leaders***

Zakir Hussain, resident of Chandmari, Goalpara  
 Abdul Kasim, resident of Khoridhara Krishani, PS Dudhnoi, Goalpara  
 Moinul Haque, resident of Rampur, Krishnoi, Goalpara  
 Alauddin Ahmed, resident of Puronibazar, Bilasipara, Dhubri  
 Kifayatullah, resident of Bidyanagar, Garigaon, Kamrup  
 Muhammad Tazrul Islam, resident of Mehdirjhar, PS Bilasipara, Dhubri  
 Muhammad Abdul Mukit Chowdhury, resident of Sowajpur Kakaribazar, Karimganj  
 Haji Billauddin Ahmed, resident of Manugram, PS and District Karimganj

#### ***Strength***

Thirty-six activists of the HUM were arrested and surrendered to the Assam police during 1999-2001. The present strength is not known.

#### ***Transit Camps***

Movement towards Pakistan for arms and explosives training at Batrasi and Bakrial, near Manshera, NWFP, Pakistan.

#### ***Foreign Links***

Travel to and from Bangladesh via Koochbehar; stays at Nurani Madrassa, Jatrabari, and Dhaka.

#### ***Training Courses***

Tasia: A forty-day weaponry course for new recruits.

Al-Hadid: A three-month advanced and specialized course in explosives, map reading, etc. Some of the cadres also went for arms training to Vaddi-e-Neliam in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK).

Note: It is reported that Muslimuddin has left the HuM to join the Jaish-e-Mohammad, the group that was reportedly formed by Maulana Masood Azhar. Azhar is the militant who was freed by India in the wake of the Indian Airlines hijacking.

### **Muslim United Liberation Front of Assam (MULFA)/Muslim Liberation Army**

Formation: 1994

Area of Operation: Nagaon, Morigaon

State level Committee with HQs: Moirabari, Morigaon

#### ***Aims***

Separate Muslim state

Demand 30 percent reservation for Muslims in government services and educational institutions

Protection and preservation of Muslim personal law

#### ***ORBAT***

President: Muhammad Rahul Amin

Vice President: Nakibur Rahman

General Secretary: Muhammad Istakin Ali

Asst. General Secretary: Muhammad Joinal Abedin

Organizational Secretary: Muhammad Awazuddin Ahmed

Finance Secretary: Muhammad Rafiq Ali

Publicity Secretary: Muhammad Safiqul Rahman

#### ***Strength***

Around 100

***Foreign Links and Training***

Includes resourceful Muslim businessmen from Bombay and Hojai and some arms from the Gulf as well.

Twelve MULFA members received training in Bangladesh in 2000. Some of them were selected for a six-month guerrilla course under a Taliban instruction camp in Peshawar in April 2000.

A group of fifteen MULFA cadres had gone to Lamuchari Rohingya Training Camp under Naikhingchari PS, dist. Bandarban for arms training in January 2002 under an agreement arrived at between the Rohingya insurgents and the MULFA and the MULFA in 1999. MULFA cadres entered into Bangladesh under the guise of Tabliqis from Dhubri. Of course, ISI links are well accentuated.

Note: MULFA has been renamed the Muslim Liberation Army.

**Muslim Volunteer Force (MVF)*****Background***

Fifteen Muslim youths were selected from different Madrassas in the Lilong, Mayang, Imphal, and Thoubal Districts of Manipur and were sent to Pakistan via Karimganj and Bangladesh to undergo arms training in 2001.

***Aims***

To safeguard the interests of the Muslims in Assam  
To fight anti-Muslim forces

***Prominent Functionaries***

Shah Jahan Ali  
Muhammad Siddiq Hussaini  
Ali Hussain, Mainul Haque  
Muhammad Akbar Ali  
Minazuddin

***Strength***

Around fifty

***Foreign Links and Training***

MVF cadres have been training in Barpeta and Korigram, Rangamati and Jayantipur in Bangladesh.

**Independent Liberation Army of Assam (ILAA)**

Formation: 1990s

One Mustafa Ahmed—a scrap iron contractor in the Oil & Natural Gas Commission, Sibsagar—financed the plan to organize kidnapping for ransom, looting of banks, etc. and also to raise funds to train cadres in Bangladesh and buy arms to carve out a separate country by liberating Assam from India. Mustafa Ahmed is also the Finance Secretary of the ILAA.

***ORBAT***

President: Arif Ahmed  
General Secretary: Muhammad Allilullah Khan  
Foreign Secretary: Moinul Haque  
Chief Commander: Muhammad Mukul Ahmed alias Durlab Hazarika  
Finance Secretary: Muhammad Mustafa Ahmed  
Advisor/Founder: Farid Ahmed

***Executive Committee***

Acting President: Abdul Rahman, Sibsagar  
Acting Vice President: Gorukun Ahmed, Sepon  
Acting Vice President: Faridul Rahman, Sibsagar



Acting Secretary: Mukul Ahmed, Moran  
 Acting Foreign Secretary: Moinul Haque, Dibrugarh  
 Acting Publicity Secretary: Nazir Ahmed, Moran  
 Acting Office Secretary: Ahulah Khan, Sibsagar

***Strength***

Around fifty

***Foreign Links***

Moinul Haque established links with HUJI in the Arakans and in Bangladesh.

The training centers of the Arakans also have instructors from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Afghanistan.

**Liberation Islamic Tiger Force (LITF)**

Formation: November 2001

Support Base: Muslim dominated areas of Dhanpur, Dhupiwala, Kamarbaha and Ootijan of Kamrup and Dhubri

***Aims***

Separate homeland for Muslims  
 Target leaders of Hindu organizations

***ORBAT***

President: Mukti Abdul Hussain

Vice President 1: Sheikh Noozaman, resident of Fakirganj

Vice-President 2: Abdul Barik, resident of Dhubri

Gen. Secretary: Sukurumullah, resident of Dhubri

Finance Secretary: Abdul Rahman, resident of Alamganj

Publicity Secretary: Ibrahim Khan, resident of Golakganj, reporter for daily *Khabar* and *Dainik Janambhumi*

Publicity Secretary 2: Pervez Rahman, resident of Dhubri, reporter for *Pratidin* and *Janambhumi* of Alamganj, Dhubri

District Commander: Nurul Islam of Nagaon

District Commander: Idris Ali, Kamrup

Convener: Mrinal Kudus

***Foreign Links***

Funds from Jamaat-e-Islami, Sri Lanka. Also receives funds from Alamganj Masjid, Dhubri

**Islamic Security Force of India (ISFI)**

Formation: 2000

Engaged in the recruitment of Muslim youths in Lower Assam

Area of Operation: Organization confined to the Bodoland Autonomous Council area, but ISFI is also trying to extend its influence into Cachar

***Aim***

Appeal to Muslim community to unite for Jihad against atrocities by the National Democratic Front of Bodoland and the Bodo Liberation Tigers

***ORBAT***

Secretary: Muhammad Mustaqil

***Foreign Links***

ISFI gets support from al-Qaeda. It also has links with al-Omar, a militant outfit operating from Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, the Hizb-ul-Mujahideen, the Lashkar-e-Toiba and the Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front

### **Jamaat-e-Islami (JEI) (Assam Unit)**

Formation: beginning 1990s, Karimganj

#### ***Aim***

Muslims of India should work jointly against Indian Hindus and the government of India to establish Islamic rule.

#### ***Senior Leader***

Abdul Hakim, resident of Dintapur, Ambarkhana PS and District Karimganj

President: Fakruddin, resident of the village of South Ambarkhana, Karimganj, attached with Tabliq Jamaat since 1990

Secretary: Kashrud Zaman of the village of Inadpur, Ambarkhana, Karimganj

#### ***Members***

Mahibur Rahman, resident of South Ambarkhana Karimganj

Abdul Karid, resident of Dhairokona, Karimganj

Farooq Ahmed, resident of South Ambarkhana, PS and District Karimganj

Abdul Haque, resident of Dintapur Village of Ambarkhana

#### ***Strength***

Twenty

### **Muslim Liberation Tigers of Assam (MLTA)**

(Note: Not to be confused with the MULTA)

Formation: 1990s

Area of Operation: Nagaon and Morigaon

#### ***Aims***

Rightful place for Muslims in Assam

Unite the entire Muslim community and demand a separate Muslim homeland in Assam

#### ***ORBAT***

President: Moon Chowdhary

Vice President: Nazrul Haque

Organization Secretary: Hussain Mubarak

Treasurer: Asif Ali

#### ***Strength***

150

#### ***Foreign Links***

Some of the MLTA have been sent to Bangladesh for training. The MLTA also collects and extorts money from even the Muslims in its areas of operation.

### **United Social Reform Army (USRA)**

Formation: 1990s

Area of Operation: Nagaon, Goalpara, Darrang

#### ***Aim***

To safeguard the interests of Muslims

**ORBAT**

General Secretary: Muhammad Allauddin Sharif  
 Commandant: Muhammad Yusuf Ali  
 Publicity Secretary: Muhammad Akbar Ali

**Strength**

Around fifty

**Islamic Sevak Sangh (ISS)**

Formation: 1990s  
 Area of Operation: Dhubri and Bongaigaon

**Aim**

Safeguard interest of Muslims in Kokrajhar

**ORBAT**

President: Khalliluddin Sheikh  
 Secretary: Muhammad Junbaj Ali  
 Joint Secretary 1: Muhammad Moonraj Ali  
 Joint Secretary 2: Abdul Badshah Mian

**Strength**

Around fifty

**United Reformation Protest of Assam (URPA)**

Formation: 1990s, in Lower Assam for extortion of money

**Aim**

To carry out anti-India propaganda, particularly in the western part of Lower Assam

Note: Maintains a cordial relationship with JEI

**ORBAT**

Commander-in-Chief: Siddiq Hussain, an ex-MULTA leader

**Students' Islamic Movement of India (SIMI)**

Area of Operation: Mankachar and Hathisingmari in Dhubri  
 SIMI is a militant youth front of the Jamaat-e-Islami, with its HQs in Hyderabad. SIMI has bases in Ahmedabad, Aligarh, and Mumbai. It maintains close links with the Islamic Chatra Shibir.

**Strength**

About five thousand  
 SIMI activists trained in Bangladesh are given a grant of Tk 2,000 each.

**People's United Liberation Front (PULF)**

Formation: 1994, with the active support of the NSCN (IM)  
 Area of Operation: Lilong in Thoubal, Jiribum in Tamenglong, Keirak and Ushoipokpi and Turelahanbai in the Imphal District of the Chandel area.

**Aim**

To form an Islamic country in the North East through an armed struggle

**ORBAT**

Chairman: Muhammad Asaf Khan  
 General Secretary: Muhammad Alif Khan  
 Army Chief: Muhammad Amzad Khan  
 Finance Secretary: Muhammad Hassin Khan

**Strength**

Eighty

**Foreign Links**

PULF Assam has armed foreign links with some of the Muslim organizations

**Logistics and Training**

Cooperation with the NSCN (IM). PULF also maintains relations with the HuM in Assam and other MFOs of the North East. It possesses an unspecified number of arms including carbines, sten guns, and pistols.

Note: Intelligence reports have indicated that a move was made in March 1999 to merge the PULF with HuM, but it was apparently not a successful move.

**Students' Islamic Organization (SIO)**

Formation: 1985; has its office at Masjid Road, Paonabazar, Imphal  
 Areas of Operation: Bishnupur district in Mayang and Khurgaon, Imphal in Thoubal district, East of Imphal and West of Imphal

**Aim**

To unite Muslims living in Manipur to achieve political recognition

**Important Leaders**

Muhammad Bhuran, resident of Lilong who migrated to Saudi Arabia in 1992  
 Muhammad Khayum  
 Muhammad Lalaf  
 Muhammad Hussain  
 Muhammad Seraj

**Office bearers**

Chairman: Muhammad Sirajuddin  
 General Secretary: Muhammad Hussain  
 Assistant General Secretary: Tomba alias Khurishat Ali  
 Finance Secretary: Ziryurman  
 Organizational Secretary: Sattar  
 Islamic Affairs Secretary: Muhammad Altaf  
 Welfare Secretary: Rehana Sultan  
 Political Secretary: Karimuddin  
 Chief of Intelligence: Abdul Karim  
 In Charge, Investigation: Yusuf Ali Khan  
 Religious Affairs: Noor Begum  
 Liaison Officer: Muhammad Latifur Rehman  
 Youth Affairs: Allauddin

**Strength**

Approximately three hundred

**Foreign Links**

The organization receives financial assistance from abroad and funds are being channeled via the Grindlays Bank in Guwahati. Muhammad Bhuran remitted about US \$45,000 from Mecca (he has migrated) and Dubai to all the Madrassas in Manipur and Maulvi associations in Lilong during the second week of July 2001 to meet the expenses of Madrassa and students in Manipur.

**Islamic Liberation Army (ILA)**

Formation: 1990s

HQs in Khergaon with another base at Babupara in Imphal, Bandazar at Quakta, Tarf-e-Lahambi, Khergaon, Dimapur, Silchar and Khowal. The ILA is the combined armed group of Islamic Revolutionary Front, Islamic People's Front, and the United Islamic Liberation Front.

**Aim**

ILA is working for the unity of Muslims living in Manipur in order to achieve political recognition. The organization has also decided to work in cooperation with organizations such as the PLA, etc.

**ORBAT**

Chairman: A.P. Khan

Vice-Chairman: Muhammad Helan Khan

Commander-in-Chief: Latif Shah alias Nahatombu

Finance Secretary: Abdul Saifur

Publicity Secretary: Muhammad Saiful alias Alam Khan



**APPENDIX TWO**

**North East Indian Muslim Fundamentalist Organization Camps in Bangladesh**

<b>No.</b>	<b>Name of the Camp</b>	<b>Instructor/In charge</b>
1.	Beguntal Akashi Basti Camp, District Rongpur	Maulana Rustum Ali
2.	Hafizia Madrassa Camp, CHT	1) Maulana Md. Hafeezuddin, suspected ISI agent 2) Isahuddin Khan, Pak National
3.	Halabot Camp, District Kurigram	Not Available
4.	Kharegia Madrassa Camp in Dhalar Char, P.S. Dhalar Char, District Kurigram	Not Available
5.	Borobari Hafizia Madrassa Camp, District Kurigram	Not Available
6.	Nazirhat Darul-Uloom Madrassa, P.S. Nazirhat, District Chattagram	Subedar (Retd.) Abdullah Al Noman
7.	Subid Bazar Camp, P.S. & District Sylhet	Major (Retd.) Yaqub Khan, Baluch Regiment, Pakistan
8.	Shamsher Nagar T.E., P.S. Kamalganj, District Maulvi Bazar	Not Available
9.	Sathiajuri Camp, P.S. Kulawra, District Maulvi Bazar	Not Available
10.	Tillaganj Camp, P.S. Kulawra, District Maulvi Bazar	Md. Quddusuddin
11.	Monu Village Camp, P.S. Kulawra, District Maulvi Bazar	Afzal Jeelani
12.	Teknaf Village Camp, P.S. Ukhiya, District Khagrachari, CHT	Mokaddar Khan (Retd. Pak Army personnel)
13.	Mandolibhug Camp, P.S. Chatak, District Sunamganj	Jahangir Alam (Retd BDR personnel)
14.	Madhupurgarh Camp, District Mymensing	Mahtabuddin and Karimuddin
15.	Tokimari village camp, District Kurigram	Not Available
16.	Dhupadighir Par Madrassa, District Sylhet	Moinuddin (Retd.) Army personnel of Borlekha, District Moulvi Bazar
17.	Laakhachari Camp, Khagrachari Hills, CHT	Md. Miki Abdullah and Ali Md. Rafique (both Nigerian Nationals)





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**Main Islamic Organizations of Bangladesh**

**Jamaat-e-Islami (JEI).** A political party that dates back to the British colonial era, and the (East) Pakistan period (1947-1971). It supported Pakistan against the Bengali nationalists during the liberation war, and most of its leaders fled to (West) Pakistan after Bangladesh's independence in 1971. Its then Amir, or leader, Gholam Azam, fought against the freedom fighters in 1971, but returned to Bangladesh a few years later. In December 2000, Motiur Rahman Nizami, another former pro-Pakistani militant, took over as Amir of the Jamaat. In the October 2001 election, the Jamaat emerged as the third largest party with seventeen seats in the parliament and two ministers in the new coalition government. The Jamaat's final aim is an Islamic state in Bangladesh, although this will be implemented step by step.

**Islami Chatra Shibir (ICS).** Jamaat's youth organization. Set up in 1941, it became a member of the International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations in 1979. ICS is also a member of the World Assembly of Muslim Youth and has close contacts with other radical Muslim youth groups in Pakistan, the Middle East, Malaysia, and Indonesia. One of its main strongholds in Bangladesh is at the university in Chittagong, and it dominates privately run *Madrassas* all over the country. It has been involved in a number of bomb blasts and politically and religiously motivated assassinations. Nurul Islam Bulbul is its current president and Muhammad Nazrul Islam is the secretary general.

**Islamic Oikyo Jote (IOJ).** A smaller Islamic party that last year joined the four-party alliance led by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), which won the October 2001 election. The IOJ secured two seats in the parliament, but did not get any cabinet posts. The fourth member of the alliance, a faction of the Jatiyo Party led by Anwar Hussain Manju, has no obvious Islamic profile.

**Arakan Rohingya National Organization (ARNO).** A political group among Rohingya migrants from Burma, who live in the Chittagong-Cox's Bazaar area, and claim to be fighting for an autonomous Muslim region in Burma's Arakan (Rakhine) State. It was set up in 1998 through a merger of the Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front (ARIF) and the Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO). Within months, however, the front fell apart. The leader of what remains of ARNO, Nurul Islam, is considered a moderate. He also led the ARIF before the merger in 1998.

**Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO).** Following the breakup of ARNO in 1999-2000, three new factions emerged, all of them re-claiming the old name RSO. Traditionally, the RSO has been very close to Jamaat-e-Islami and Islamic Chatra Shibir in Chittagong and Cox's Bazaar. In the early 1990s, RSO had several military camps near the Burmese border, where cadres from the Islamic Chatra Shibir were also trained in guerrilla warfare.



## APPENDIX FOUR

### Order of Battle of the Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami of Bangladesh

#### Central Executive Body

Maulana Nazrul Islam, Amir  
Mufti Maulana Safiur Rahman, Deputy Amir  
Mufti Abdul Hye  
Mufti Manjurul Hossain  
Maulana Niamatullah Farid  
Maulana Baqi Billah  
Maulana Sayeed Abu Taher  
Maulana Samsuddin Kasimi  
Maulana Abu Nasir  
Maulana Fazlu Haq, Amini of Bangladesh Islamic Khelafat Andolan  
Maulana Aatur Rahman Khan, Ex-Member of Parliament of Kishoreganj  
Abdul Zabbar of the Young Muslim League  
Maulana Mohiuddin of the Islamic Morcha

#### Advisory Council

Maulana Mohiuddin Khan, Chief  
Mufti Abdul Hye, Deputy Chief, arrested by Bangladesh police on 8 November 1998  
Maulana Manjur Ahmed, arrested by Bangladesh police on 8 November 1998  
Maulana Fazlul Karim, Peer of Charmonai, chief of the Islamic Shasantantra Andolan  
Peer of Sharsina  
Peer of Fultali, Sylhet  
Mufti Shafi Ahmed, Hathazari Madrassa, Chittagong  
Mufti Taherullah, Patiya Madrassa, Chittagong  
Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad  
Maulana Kamaluddin Zafri  
Maulana Delawar Hossain Saidi  
Maulana Obaidullah  
Prof. Akhtar Farooq  
Maulana Saikul Haddis Allama  
Azizul Huq, Amir, Bangladesh Khilafat, Majlish and Chairman of the Islamic Oikyo Jote  
Mohd. Abdus Mannan, Principal Gauhardanga Madrassa, Gopalganj, Secretary General of the Sarbodaya  
Olema Parishad

#### Khulna Branch

Mohd. Sirajul Haque, Amir  
Mohd. Anisur Rahaman  
Mohd. Sattaruddin Khan  
Kasem Ali

#### Chittagong Branch

Office at Jameyat-ul-Ulum Madrassa, Lalkhanbazaar, Chittagong and Chief Maulavi is Maulana Azharul Islam  
Abdur Rouf, Amir  
Mufti Shaiqur Rahman, Deputy Amir  
Abdul Baset  
Abdul Khaled  
Abu Tarek  
Abdul Hakim  
Amzad Belal  
Obaidur Rahman Khan

Maulana Abdul Quddus

Maulana Mahbul Alam, patron, based at 73, Kusumbagh, Dhoberpahar, near Chittagong

### **Cox's Bazaar Branch**

Maulana Salahul Islam, thirty-six years old, works for an NGO called al-Haramain (a Mecca-based organization) in Cox's Bazaar. Graduated from Riyadh University, reportedly close to the chief of the Karachi branch of the Harkat-ul-Mujahideen.

### **Sylhet Branch**

Maulana Mohd. Abdul Karim, Patron, alias Sheikh-e-Kauria and president of the Sylhet branch of the Jamaat-e-Ulema-e-Islam, Sylhet

Peer of Fultali, Fultali, Sylhet

Juned Ahmed, Biyani Bazaar, Sylhet

Abdul Matin, Biyani Bazaar, Sylhet

### **Jessore Branch**

Maulana Manirul Islam Madani, patron, Viana, Jessore Katwali PS

Mufti Aminul Huq, imam of Railway Station Madrassa, Jessore

Maulana Abdul Hassan Muhaddis (BA from Calcutta University and FAREK [similar to an MA in religious studies] from Deoband Madrassa, Saharanpur, UP, India. Presently employed as principal, Qaumi Madrassa, Jessore. Gen. Secretary of the Jessore branch of the Nizami-e-Islami party in the East Pakistan era.

Maulana Abdur Rouf, fifty years old, originally from Bongaon, West Bengal. Ex-organizational secretary of the Nizami-e-Islami party in the East Pakistan era. Arrested in 1971 for his anti-Liberation movement activities. Now a resident of Barandipara, Jessore.

Mufti Aminul Islam

Abdur Jabbar (retired DSP, Bangladesh Police)

D.K. Baksh (retired subedar major, Bangladesh Army)

### **Brahmanbaria Branch**

Maulana Sirajul Islam, head, Zamia Yunnsia Madrassa, Brahmanbaria

Abdul Karim, leader of the Taliban Mujahids, trained in Afghanistan. There are fifteen Bangladeshi Taliban Mujahids under his command, recruited from and based at Brahmanbaria.

### **Comilla Branch**

Imam of Ibne Tahmina High School, patron, Comilla

Mohd. Ali Akhtar, leader of Taliban Mujahids, Comilla. There are fifteen Bangladeshi Taliban Mujahids under his command, recruited from and based at Comilla.

### **Training Establishments**

Mohiursunnals Madrassa. Knila, Teknaf, Cox's Bazaar (near the Burmese border)

Hathazara Madrassa, Chittagong Sadar

Patiya Madrassa, Patiya, Chittagong Sadar

Jalpaitali and Tetultali, Bandarban District, Chittagong Hill Tracts

Maheshkhali and Garzania Hills in Nykhongchari PS, Bandarban District, Chittagong Hill Tracts

Raniping, Kazir Bazaar and Munshi Bazaar Madrassas in Fultali PS, Sylhet District.

Baluchhera, Cox's Bazaar District (main camp)

Jameyat-ul-Ulum Madrassa, Lalkhanbazaar, Chittagong

Brahmanbaria

Nayapara, Damudia Union, Teknaf, Cox's Bazaar District

Narichha Bazaar, Chittagong District

Rangamati Islamic Complex Madrassa, Rangamati, Chittagong Hill Tracts

Mohmadpur Rahmiya Jamiatul Madrassa, Dhaka

Lalmatia Kaumi Madrassa, Dhaka

Malibagh Kaumi Madrassa, Dhaka

Hajaripara Kaumi Madrassa, Dhaka

Madani Kaumi Madrassa, Dhaka  
Farmgati Kaumi Madrassa, Dhaka  
Gazipur Bormi Kaumi Madrassa



APPENDIX FIVE

Hindu Population in Bangladesh

Year	Hindus in Bangladesh (in %)
1941	29.7
1947	23.0
1961	19.0
1974	14.0
1981	13.4
2002	9.0

**Source:** S.K. Datta, “The Recent Plight of Minorities in Bangladesh: A Post-election Perspective” (paper presented by the former Director, Central Bureau of Investigation, India in an international seminar organized by the Centre for Research in Indo-Bangladesh Relations, Kolkata, 28 January 2002).





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