

Terrorist organizations in Bangladesh and its impact on Indians internal security

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Abstract:

A common definition of terrorism is the systematic use or threatened use of violence to intimidate a population or government and thereby effect political, religious, or ideological change. Terrorism in India, according to the Home Ministry, poses a significant threat to the state. Terrorism in India are basically two types external and internal, external terrorism emerge from neighbouring countries and internal terrorism emulates from religious or communal violence and Naxalite–Maoist insurgency. Terror activities involve either Indian or foreign citizens. The regions with long term terrorist activities today are Jammu and Kashmir, Mumbai, Central India (Naxalism) and the Seven Sister States (independence and autonomy movements). As of 2006, at least 232 of the country's 608 districts were afflicted, at differing intensities, by various insurgent and terrorist movements. In August 2008, National Security Advisor M K Narayanan has said that there are as many as 800 terrorist cells operating in the country. India played a major role in the establishment of an independent Bangladesh in 1971. However, since then, New Delhi's relations with Dhaka have neither been close, nor free from irritants and disputes. In 1975, Bangladesh began to move away from language to Islam as the binding force of Bangladeshi nationalism. This emphasis on Islam, Bangladeshi concerns over India's military build-up, bilateral disputes over shared water resources, smuggling, attacks on Hindu minorities and religious places in Bangladesh, and drug trafficking make for fluctuations in Indo-Bangladesh relations and threaten the security of the region. In recent years, New Delhi has blamed Pakistani and Bangladeshi militant groups for attacks on religious sites, public venues and public transportation in India. The whole of South Asia- India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Maldives, and Pakistan-is going through internal unrest and upheavals due to insurgency movements, ethnic conflicts and religious fundamentalism. Such unrests have a history of crossing national boundaries and leading to inter-state tensions. With regard to India, the unrest is brewing in Indo Nepal border and Indo Bangladesh border. The situation has become grave owing to the development in the chicken neck area i.e the area in and around Siliguri (West Bengal), Assam and the border areas of Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal.

Key Words: *terrorism, violence, nationalism, conflicts*

Prompt refutation by Bangladesh of an intelligence report, saying that Bangladesh has become "a haven for Islamic terrorists in South Asia" as "far from the reality on the ground" notwithstanding, India should weigh the same on its merit. The Bangladesh Foreign Ministry release also said, "We would like to categorically state that the government of Bangladesh

remains firmly committed to the principle of combating terrorism and to uphold the tolerant and non-communal character of the country." The Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS), in its July 2003 report, alleged that besides the (Islamist) radicals in Bangladesh having links with the Al Qaeda, the Government was also unwilling to take action against such elements. Bangladesh has been refuting Indian allegations of terrorist groups operating in the Northeast finding shelter and other logistic support on Bangladesh soil. Significantly, this is not the first time that Bangladesh has surfaced in the Western media as an emerging transit for terrorist groups.

For India, two important factors relating to its internal security merit consideration. For one, the international environment has become a critical element for any country to safeguard its citizens, property and other interests from apparently internal threats. This is due to the transnational linkages of various subversive groups operating against India, including the terrorist groups active in the Northeast and Kashmir, and the left-wing extremist groups, the Naxalites. Secondly, securing national interests from external threats and the maintenance of internal security have become so interdependent that it is increasingly difficult to see the two separately. It is in this context that Bangladesh becomes an important element that could affect India's internal security environment. A pragmatic approach towards Bangladesh is also required on the lines of the current efforts being made by India and a reluctant Pakistan to curtail terrorists' movement and cease fire in Jammu and Kashmir.

Perceptions of Bangladesh becoming a place for Islamist fundamentalists intensified after the United States launched its Operation Enduring Freedom against the Taliban and the Al Qaeda in Afghanistan following terrorist attacks in New York and Washington on September 11, 2001. Media reports suggested that the terrorists fleeing Afghanistan were taking shelter in Bangladesh using the Karachi-Chittagong route. For instance, *The Time* learnt from a senior cadre of Bangladesh's largest terrorist group and an alleged Al-Qaeda-affiliate, Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (HuJI), that in December 2001, 150 Taliban and Al-Qaeda cadres from Afghanistan entered Bangladesh through the Chittagong port area. The report further said, "Three senior Bangladeshi military sources also confirmed this was the case." There were also reports that approximately 50 more terrorists reached Chittagong by boat from Karachi in June 2001. Later, on September 24, 2002, four Yemenis, an Algerian, a Libyan and a Sudanese national were arrested from three houses in Uttara, Dhaka. Incidentally, Paresh Baruah, chief of the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), a terrorist group active in Assam, had been attacked in the same locality on May 27, 2003.

Indian concerns of the existence of terrorist camps in Hobiganj, Maulvi Bazaar, Chittagong and Satchherri districts of Bangladesh, among others along the Indian border, have intensified following such reports. India has pointed out the existence of 100 to 150 such camps to Bangladesh, pinpointing their location. The Camps are allegedly run by terrorist groups active in Northeast India including the ULFA and National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), active in Assam, and the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) and All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF) that are active in Tripura. Besides getting shelter and using the Northeastern border as transit route for illicit arms and drugs trade, these groups are also said to be cooperating closely with the Directorate General of Foreign Intelligence (DGFI), the military intelligence agency of Bangladesh, and the Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) of Pakistan. Following terrorist groups is likely to grow the Royal Bhutan Army's operations against ULFA and other such groups having camps on its soil, Bangladesh as the hub of anti-India.

Besides, there are also speculations of use of Northeastern Indian Territory by Islamist groups as a transit to infiltrate into J&K. ULFA is also said to be a constituent of the Bangladesh Islamic Manch, a united council under HUJI's leadership. Inter-regional linkages of these groups further worsen the internal security situation in India. For instance, beyond its intra-regional linkages, ULFA is also reported to maintain connection with Nepalese Maoists and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. The latter have links with various Naxalite groups alleged to be working towards a compact revolutionary zone from the forest tracts of Adilabad district in Andhra Pradesh to Nepal, traversing the forest areas of Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Bihar. Under these circumstances where the Government is busy calming J&K, Bangladesh could be an important front to ensure greater stability.

Bangladesh's long tradition of inclusive political culture and moderate Islam is increasingly under threat from extremism. 9/11 and the United States War on Terror brought many fundamentalist outfits under the American scanner. These extremists found Bangladesh a soft country, given to easy money laundering, and hence, conducive to establish their base. Further, an unstable social, political and economic setup provided ideal conditions for generating a breeding ground for recruits, support, and safe haven for international terrorist groups. The Indian insurgent groups continue to misuse Bangladeshi territory for sanctuary, training camps, transport of arms, and transit. In 2005, the Government of India had prepared a list of 172 Indian insurgent group camps located along the border areas of Chittagong Hill Tracts, Sylhet Division and Chittagong. In addition, a list of 307 criminals/insurgents was handed over to Border

Security Force (BSF) and Bangladesh Rifles that are supported by Bangladeshi extremist outfits sponsored by Pakistani Inter-State Intelligence (ISI), with money coming from the Gulf. These groups are also said to be cooperating closely with the Directorate General of Foreign Intelligence (DGFI), the military intelligence agency of Bangladesh and ISI.

Further, India has received periodic reports regarding ISI misusing the territory of Bangladesh for their anti-India activity. Bangladesh continues to maintain a policy of complete denial without verifying the details given to them. India has asserted that these insurgents are being supported by Bangladeshi civilian and military intelligence agencies. But, Dhaka counter alleges that anti-Bangladesh elements are operating out of India. India has been regularly taking up these security concerns with Bangladesh at different levels, through diplomatic channels and institutional mechanisms existing between the two countries.

It is estimated that at one point, more than 120 militant groups operated in India's northeast. Various army operations against the militants, and negotiations by the government, led to a relative stability in the region. However, it continues to be a tinderbox. Some of the top Indian militants, active particularly in Northeast India, seeking sanctuary in Bangladesh belong to the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT), All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF) in Tripura, United National Liberation Front (UNLF), the Peoples' Liberation Army (PLA), the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) and the Kanlei Yawol Kanna Lup (KYKL) etc. An Indian army assessment highlights the renewed activities of several fundamentalist organisations in Bangladesh and their impact on the region's overall security. Among others, the report names Jamaat-e-Islami and Islamic Chhatra Shibir, organisations which have maintained an anti-India stance.

Besides, there are also reports of use of the north-eastern territory by Islamist groups as a transit to infiltrate into Jammu & Kashmir. ULFA is also said to be a constituent of the Bangladesh Islamic Manch, a united council under HuJI's leadership. Inter-regional linkages of these groups further worsen the internal security situation in India. For instance, beyond its intra-regional linkages, ULFA is also reported to maintain connection with Nepalese Maoists and the LTTE of Sri Lanka. Maoists have links with various Naxalite groups alleged to be working towards a compact revolutionary zone from the forest tracts of Adilabad district in Andhra Pradesh to Nepal, traversing the forests of Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Bihar and Orissa.

Illegal migration of Bangladeshis, particularly into the North East, has led to massive

uprising and has altered the demographic balance of the region. Better economic prospects, a shortage of local labour and the absence of sufficient mechanism have always been the reasons for this influx. The spurt in official action against illegal Bangladeshi migrants and anti-foreign activism led BK Sharma, Guwahati High Court judge, to comment during his recent ruling: "Bangladeshi infiltrators have not only intruded into every nook and corner of Assam, but have already become kingmakers." Justice Sharma directed the police to detain and deport 49 foreigners, among them a Pakistani citizen, who had appealed against the ruling of Foreign Tribunals. In Assam, state authorities have stepped up their drive to arrest and push back Bangladeshi immigrants and Assamese student groups are busy identifying suspected foreigners and handing them over to the police. Further, unabated illegal immigration of Bangladeshis into Nagaland is emerging as a major problem in the state. Despite their serious demographic, economic, security and political ramifications in the north-east, these developments continue to remain substantially outside the realm of the security discourse in the country. Meanwhile, the Bangladesh government claims that there is not even a single Bangladeshi migrant in India.

The other contentious issue between India and Bangladesh arises from its riparian borders. The Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) signed between India and Bangladesh in 1974, has been implemented, except for three issues: demarcation of 6.1 km. border in three sectors, namely, Lathitilla-Dumabari (3 km in Assam sector), South Berubari (1.5 km in West Bengal sector), and Muhuri river/ Belonia sector (1.6 km in Tripura); exchange of adverse possession; and exchange of enclaves. There are 111 Indian enclaves in Bangladesh and 51 Bangladeshi enclaves in India. Two Joint Boundary Working Group were set up in 2001 to resolve these pending LBA issues. Article 3 of the LBA provides for the people in these enclaves to be given the right to stay on as nationals of the state to which the enclaves are transferred. Therefore, the government has requested for a joint survey/census of the enclaves. According to Bangladesh, however, any joint surveys are extraneous to the LBA provisions and are not a pre-condition to the exchange of the enclaves. The Indian side, however, emphasizes this requirement for border fencing within and up to 150 yards of the international border even as Bangladesh stresses the need to conform to the 1975 border guidelines and to avoid any action that may adversely impact peace and stability in the border areas.

Under the circumstances where India is busy calming its western borders, the eastern border could suffer from greater instability. In 2005, BSF Director General R.S.Mooshahary said "Bangladesh will soon pose a bigger problem than Pakistan... The India-Bangladesh border is more difficult to man than the India-Pakistan border. At the Pakistan border, both the army and

the BSF are deployed, whereas the India-Bangladesh border is manned solely by theBSF.”

Bangladesh considers India as a dominating nation. To increase mutual trust, the opportunities provided can be economic but the challenges are political, i.e., terrorism, fundamentalism and political misuse of religion. To ensure India’s internal security, and to deal with challenges arising from its bordering countries, New Delhi must foster closer linkages with the border population, protect them from subversive propaganda, prevent unauthorized settlements and initiate special developmental programs; It must establish zero tolerance for cross border terrorism from hostile insurgent groups and criminal elements and upgrade policing and effective crisis response teams in major cities. Information sharing and efforts to increase inter-agency coordination, between civil, military, para-military and police force department is also critical.

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